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OLGA NAZIMOV

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

W. L. GEORGE

THE
MILLS & BOON
LONDON

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED

49 RUPERT STREET

LONDON, W.

Published 1915

70 2100
01907120

961

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TO
MY FRIEND
SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

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These stories have appeared in the *Daily News*, *Chambers' Journal*, *Nash's Magazine*, *The New Weekly*, *The New Age*, *Rhythm*, *The Smart Set*, *The Englishwoman*, and *Vanity Fair*. I am much indebted to the editors of these publications for leave to reprint, which has been requested of them where required. I especially acknowledge the courtesy of the proprietors of *Pearson's Magazine* for permission to reprint "Fate and Her Darling," which was a prizewinner in one of their short story competitions.

The story entitled "Olga Nazimov" was copyrighted in the United States of America in 1914, under the title "The Twenty-three Days of Nazimov"; the story entitled "Knight Gaston" was copyrighted there in 1912.

Most of the short dramas were written in collaboration with my late wife, Helen George.

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OLGA NAZIMOV

I

ALREADY the few passengers had dispersed in groups owning many children who, proudly assured, wrangled for the privilege of carrying hat-boxes, baskets of groceries or of fish. Solitary women passed, also laden with packages, while here and there stalked by a tall and corpulent official in uniform anxious to ignore his umbrella or his fishing-rod. For a moment John Hulder stood looking beyond the broken-down old carriage, in every corner of which, save a little space for him, was piled his neat American luggage. In the blaze of August light, under the crashing purple of the sky, his possessions seemed to stare, the brass bindings of his trunks and their scarlet lettering to have gained violence of colour and of form in the blazing air of the Swiss summer.

Though this was a weekday, Ammenzell was not sleepy as would have been an Italian town. There was an air of business about the little fruit-shop and its show of apricots, peaches and ruddy apples; about the post office with perpetually active doors under the republican scutcheon; about the terrace of the Hôtel de Paris, where sat a few middle-aged tourists before steaming coffee or tall mugs of pale beer. A glow of heat seemed to seize Hulder, to penetrate through the

loose grey flannels to his skin. He had a sensation of well-being, for this heat was less than the one he had just left in Tyrol. And yet it left him so limp that he started when at last the coachman bent toward him a sunburnt old face with an enormous grizzled moustache and asked, "Where does the gentleman wish to drive?"

Hulder did not reply for a moment, for he did not know what he wanted to do. He looked about him, wondered whether he should put up at the Hôtel de Paris or select its rival, the Royal. But both of these, facing south-west, looked intolerably stuffy. In his good, precise French he questioned the coachman, pointing to the little hills above the town.

The driver was not uncertain. Excitedly pointing with his whip, he declared that not much more than a mile off was a wonderful hotel, the National.

"Well," said Hulder briefly, with the sharpness of the irresolute taking a decision, "to the National then."

As he sank down into the dusty cushions, and the horse began to move with immense deliberation, he wondered what he was doing at Ammenzell and what he wanted to do. It did not look like an exciting place. No doubt on Sundays it would be gay enough—if he wanted to be gay.

As brightness fell from the air, Hulder found himself weary. A Bostonian, aged about thirty, he had studied the law because his parents considered that he ought to apologize to the United States for not having to earn a living. His apology made and his parents dead, he had found out little by little that the quiet solitudes of Boston bored him as much as the occasionally feverish agitation of its copper market.

He had found the West too large and too rough, New York too shrill; for a moment the peace of Georgian England transplanted into Louisiana had held him, but only for a moment. In Louisiana he realized by contrast that there was very little room in America for a man with nothing to do. He only wanted to live.

As a natural consequence of this feeling he had sailed for Europe, and had for a while been charmed by the capacity of the older races to do nothing with wonderful, sleepy intentness. And so, for two years, he had progressed round the Continent from London, its Trafalgar Square hotels, its Chelsea salons, to Paris and its hysterical glitter, to sturdy Berlin trying so hard to be vicious and gloomily conscious that it was born respectable. It had not been very adventurous: he had wandered in Spain and encountered nothing worse than insects; he had ridden across the Abruzzi without being held to ransom by brigands and, even in Russia, he had never been suspected of advanced ideas. And so he was a little disappointed in the romance of life as he lay back in the old carriage that now crawled up the hill at less than a foot pace, the horse impatiently biting at the flies, first on his right shoulder, then on his left. Hulder reflected upon this: the double strain in his temperament, this strange desire to take no active part in life, and this hope that something outside him would happen to stimulate that life and make it vivid.

"I don't think it's going to be very vivid here," he remarked aloud to himself. "I ought to have known better than ask that waiter."

This opinion was strengthened as the carriage passed between the elaborate villas of the Geneva

merchants, then over the gaily painted bridge that spanned the little river, by the palisades beyond which were the trim gardens bursting with clematis and night primroses. Yes, that Geneva waiter who, in reply to Hulder's question as to whether there were in the neighbourhood some beautiful country places where it would not be too hot, had named Ammenzell, might have been happy enough here, but—— Hulder sighed. After all, what did it matter? Haste or sloth, it was much the same in the end.

Now they were well above the little town. Turning back, he could see the villas clustering on the slopes down to the edge of the lake. Truculent, among them stood the Château, no doubt the centre of government, and the church with the red-tiled roof and the amazing swelling in the middle of the spire that looked exactly like a large onion. A pleasant place enough, especially that day when no colour could shrink into greyness under the enormous pummelling of the sun.

A turn of the road, a little downhill, the scraping of the brakes—that made Hulder smile, for he was not yet accustomed to drivers who never control a horse by means of the reins—then again flatness, the horse suddenly inspired by insults to arrive in style—the coachman turning in his seat, pointing with his whip toward a large solitary building. Among the rumble of the wheels Hulder could distinguish only the word "National." He nodded languidly, and yet was amused to feel some slight excitement: a new name, a new place, there was always something exciting in that. He smiled, wondered whether this proved him more American than he knew.

Within half-an-hour Hulder was in possession of

his new quarters, a bedroom on the second floor, to which was attached a little sitting-room abutting on a balcony. Far below him lay the valley. Beyond the Château, its girdling dales and the church, which he christened St. Onions, lay the lake, and beyond that, sharply outlined like grey lace, the length of peaks of the distant Alp. A content filled him, for this landscape had nobility. A sense of eternity was about it: he could feel that there had always been an Alp, that the Alp would endure for ever, and for a second he was glad that he had come to Geneva's Sunday playground, to this singular National. For the National was indeed a curious place; its august name notwithstanding, sheds and stables showed that it had once been a farm. Rising a little in the world, it had turned into an inn; then two storeys had been added, four cupolas had been built on the corners, and the whole had been painted a delicate shade of salmon pink relieved at every moulding in vermilion. The front garden, half covered by an awning for bad weather, was occupied by little tables at which, most hours of the day, a countryman in Swiss national costume, a rück-sacked tourist or a forester could be seen slowly eating and drinking. The National was homely, and even its unexpected ostentations, its self-recommendation in the shape of automobile and cycle club boards, failed to make it anything but homely. As the afternoon dragged on, and very slowly the sun began to sink, spreading gold and purple over the mountains and darkening to black the dull waters of the lake, Hulder felt more keenly the oppression of the place.

The inhabitants of the hotel did not seem thus oppressed. There were a good many of them, mainly

women and children sent to take the air while husbands and fathers worked in Geneva until the Saturday afternoon. Long before supper-time, when Hulder had aimlessly gone in and out of the hotel to walk through the steep meadows to the church and to see the abominable frescoes and ornaments of which it was so proud, he had realized this. There was a young girl, in a dress of blue print spattered with bunches of red and green flowerets, in charge of two little girls; there was a newly married couple, she very small and dark, he very handsome, very fair, and showing a strip of milk-white calf above the short grey woollen socks which he wore in fanciful imitation of the Swiss peasant; there was an old gentleman who looked like a retired general and was probably a post office official having a fortnight's holiday; and there were children. Children! The National, Hulder thought, was nothing but a *crèche*. It contained quite twenty children, fortunately quiet, respectable Swiss children who knew that most things were *défendues*, and made no attempt to do them, but, to the end of his stay, Hulder never quite found out to whom they belonged. Some of them, a maid told him within an hour of his arrival, belonged to Madame Pettinger, on the first floor, but as there seemed to be a perpetual circulation of children between the various apartments, and as the Pettingers had but two rooms, it was quite impossible to tell whether the abundant lady housed a dozen of her own or merely held out to all small creatures an affectionate, large red hand.

No, it was not very promising. Quite apart from the fact that the whole of the premises was intimately pervaded by a curious and pungent smell, almost certainly lavender, the supper which was offered

Hulder at seven o'clock was as bad as any he had ever refused in an Italian town. It was worse: in the old days in America, when he was liberal-minded, he had not believed in the fondness of the Swiss for pig; he now had to confess that this was no fable, for the menu of the National seemed compounded entirely with allotropic forms of the animal. Also there was red cabbage, fiercely vinegary. And a fruit tart, the massive dough of which could have served as a rock on which to rear the ambition of a new faith. Alone the perfect iced wine, like pale sunshine, enabled Hulder to get through his meal. His companions at the long table did not amuse him much. He had been placed at this because he was alone. The little tables were occupied by parties, and at his own were mainly the solitaires of the hotel: the old official, a middle-aged couple as large as the Pettingers but childless, two valiantly touristic young men, an elderly lady and, by his side, a young woman to whom he at first paid very little attention, so exasperated was he by the badness of the food, and so hypnotized by the way in which an old gentleman juggled with his knife and pieces of meat.

Suddenly the young woman at his side spoke. He started and as, in reply to the remark he had not understood, he said, "*Pardon?*" he looked at her. He saw a rather strange face, which he vaguely summed up as foreign. He observed very black hair and large, steady grey eyes under high-arched brows. No more, for his neighbour explained that she wanted salt. He handed it to her, observed the great length and fineness of her hands, the skin of which had an unusual dead-white quality. She thanked him, bent down toward her plate, averted her head a little as if

to show that she had no wish to carry the conversation any further. As the dinner went on, very long and not rendered less wearisome by the chatter from every table, and the occasional shrillness of children's voices that came from the amalgamated company of infants whom Madame Pettinger seemed to control, Hulder found himself watching his neighbour and hoping that she would turn her face toward him. He had seen enough to know that hers was an interesting countenance. Little by little, by craning forward and quickly looking sideways, he discovered that there was hardly any colour in the dead white of her cheeks, that her mouth was small, very red, purplish, and rather pouting. But he observed another peculiarity, a very sharply pointed chin, and something which he did not at once realize, but was a Scotch height of cheekbones. A little later in the meal he was able to offer her another condiment, was thanked, ventured to suggest that the room was oppressively hot. She agreed without looking up. And when, a little later, determined to make her look at him, he dropped his napkin and picked it up, apologizing as he did so, the large grey eyes rested upon him only for a moment, and almost as if they did not see him but were occupied with some other object invisible to him, clear to them.

She rose early from the table and, as Hulder's eyes followed her to the window, he was conscious of something peculiar in her attitude. She was rather short, broad-shouldered, full-bosomed; there was about her something reposeful and self-reliant. He guessed her to be twenty-five or six. And now, as she looked through the window toward the darkling sky in which still flamed the last lights of a rutilant sunset, she

seemed concentrated and intent. Quite intimately Hulder knew that she was waiting for somebody, and he was surprised, as his mind leapt to husband or lover, to find himself touched by disappointment. Why should he be disappointed? Why should he be in the least interested in the relations of a casual neighbour?

No doubt, he thought next day, it was because Ammenzell did not appear likely to yield him much interest. There had been a storm in the night, and now it was cooler. He had walked down to the lake, been pestered by boatmen to row or sail; he had read the *Journal de Genève*; he had bought a peach. Nothing had happened, and at lunch the place by his side was empty. Cautious inquiries from the serving-maid drew out that his neighbour's name was Nazimov, that she was a Russian, and that she had that day gone to Geneva to meet her brother who was coming to stay at the hotel. A satisfaction came to Hulder out of these details. A brother, he thought, was better than either husband or lover. Then he laughed at himself; as he walked, puffing at his pipe, through the flower-spangled meadows that lay right and left of the road to Starnois, he told himself not to be a fool. That evening, when again the place beside him was empty, he saw that Miss Nazimov was seated at a little table with a strange, slight young man whose features were as elastic as her own seemed rigid; yet he could not escape his feeling of disappointment. It translated itself into emotion. Often he found himself looking toward the table, but his glance never crossed with that of Miss Nazimov. He could see her lips slowly moving as she talked, but she did not raise her eyes toward him; all that

he could do was to admire the length of the long black lashes that made a shadow on her cheeks. More often his eyes met those of the young man, for these were roving, active, as if his curiosity were continually stimulated, and as if nothing that he saw could satisfy it. Two or three times during dinner he looked at the American, and Hulder was amused, also perhaps a little disquieted by the variations of the young man's expression: most of his glances were casual, but once Hulder thought that the young man smiled at him, while, just before he stood up to go outside and smoke over his coffee, he was sure that he could trace upon his features an expression of extreme malevolence.

It was all, he thought as he went out, rather curious, and therefore rather interesting. He wondered whether these people would not prove disappointing, as so many had done in so many European hotels. Still, he was glad to be even so far interested.

II

“What are you staring at?”

Hulder turned round suddenly at the sound of the high, not unmelodious voice, which he instinctively knew to be that of the peculiar young man. He hardly knew how to reply to the unceremonious question, and his embarrassment was not lessened by the sharp, half-truculent tone in which it had been couched, nor by the young man's strange appearance. He could see him distinctly enough in the strong light of the two lamps which surmounted the gate of the National. He was about the same height as his sister, but much slighter, and Hulder observed,

almost with amusement, that he very closely resembled her: black hair, arched eyebrows, large grey eyes, pointed chin, all the features were alike, but an untidy mass of hair fell over the young man's left eye; a little black moustache continually moved, as if the lip from which it grew were nervously twitching. And the grey eyes were not steady but anxious, questioning. The general impression in the American's mind, one of nervous weakness, was carried out by his companion's unexpected clothing. Over a jacket, which he now saw was velvet, fell the rough folds of a frieze cape; from the loose, soft collar flowed a black silk tie, so untidily knotted that one end had leapt from the waistcoat. And, ridiculous to think, as the young man stood, the coat outspread because his hands were resting on his hips, Hulder was reminded of a large, excited crow.

"Well," repeated the young man, a little angrily, "what are you staring at?"

His French was almost faultless, but still rather peculiar.

"Staring at?" said Hulder vaguely, taking the cigar from his teeth. "I don't know. The moon." He nodded toward the horizon.

The young man took a step towards him, leant against the parapet which separated the garden from the road.

"Ah!" he murmured. "The moon."

For a moment his gaze fixed upon the planet, which hung very low in a dark blue sky, the blue-black sky of the Southern heavens in the late evening. Against this deep screen the moon floated like a brilliant orange lamp, rather as a glowing circle of wedged yellow, orange and salmon pink. Hulder was no

longer looking at the moon, but at the young man rapt in contemplation, as if adoring.

"The moon!" repeated the young man. "Yes, she's worth staring at. She's one of the eternal things. She makes one believe in eternity, because it's so hard to think that one thing can be eternal and not another. It is so difficult to believe in eternity, don't you think?"

"I don't know," said Hulder confusedly. "They teach us that we shall live again and——"

"Tush," said the young man angrily.

"Well," said Hulder, "I haven't thought much about eternity, you see."

There was a long pause, during which a variety of expressions succeeded one another upon the young man's features.

"No," he said. Then, very slowly, "I suppose a man like you wouldn't think much about eternity. You don't need to. No, you don't need to," he repeated more loudly, as Hulder raised a protesting hand to show that he disliked the imputation of thoughtlessness. "You don't need to because death for you is so far away that you never think of it, while I——"

He paused, and Hulder felt disquieted in the presence of impending revelation. The young man's tone changed. Hulder thought of a swerving horse.

"Fiodor Kyrilovitch Nazimov. And you?"

Hulder gathered that the young man had introduced himself.

"John Hulder," he said briefly. "That's my name."

He sought for some commonplace topic, but Nazimov forestalled him.

"John Hulder," he repeated. "Oh, I knew you were English when I saw you. That's why you never think of eternity."

Hulder smiled. "Perhaps the English don't," he said. "But I might, because, you see, I'm American. You're wrong, you see, Fiodor Kyrilovitch."

A smile creased Nazimov's mouth as he heard the familiar appellation. "Oh!" he said. "You know how to address a Russian! You know Russia?"

"Yes," said Hulder, "a little."

"H'm," said Nazimov sulkily, "you know Russia!"

"Yes."

"I suppose you know it like all Americans. Samovars, vodka, Tolstoy, Russian dances, the knout and the Czar——" He suddenly broke into excellent English. "And all that sort of rot."

"Oh!" said Hulder, amused, though his tone was offensive. "You speak English, too?"

"Yes," said Nazimov. "I was in England some years. There was no other place to go to after I had said that the Grand Duchess Antonia dyed her hair, or something like that."

"So you're a Nihilist," said Hulder, laughing.

"One doesn't become a Nihilist because one says that a Grand Duchess dyes her hair," Nazimov replied, laughing, too. "Still, it's very awkward in Russia if one says that sort of thing."

Just as Hulder was opening his mouth to resume the conversation, Nazimov turned away from him and again began to gaze at the high-hung fiery pan of the moon, as if he had forgotten all about the American.

"The moon," he murmured. "Single eye of a cyclops with a dark blue brow—too far away for anything but tolerance, too cold to warm, too selfish

to do anything save steal such warmth as it can from the sun, too feminine to give off any light save that which it reflects from a brighter star—hateful, abominable, loathsome moon.” His tone changed, suddenly became thoughtful. “And yet, there is no moon and no earth, no moon save in the imagination of men who think there are such things. Life is but a dream, the nightmare of some giant sleeping in the void—and I the soul of that giant, wandering while he sleeps, haunted by phantoms and phantasies. It is I, that flying soul, whose distraught imagination creates star and moon and man and Hôtel National for him to dwell in; and when he and I have dreamed long enough, and we awake because I dream no more for him, I, the giant, shall be no more. I, the dreamer, am only a dream.”

He paused, and there was a long silence while Hulder struggled to piece together in his mind such philosophy as remained to him from his college course. He understood Nazimov, and a faint memory of Berkeley came to him, but he was deflected from this purely intellectual exercise by the interest aroused in him by the passion, half of pain and half of anger, that was in Nazimov's voice. And then, quite suddenly, while he was wondering what to reply to the extraordinary tirade, he heard from the hotel steps a cry of, “Fedia!”

Nazimov's features became alert. He cried out something in Russian and, at once, running down the steps, Hulder saw the sister. She came toward them with swift, long steps, and Hulder was struck by her expression, half-anxious, half-angry, by the chiding, disdainful tone in which she addressed her brother, and the dominating, motherly way in which she

wound round his neck and mouth a knitted red and green comforter. She was still, Hulder gathered from her tone, expostulating with him, and Hulder, guessing from Nazimov's thin frame that he was delicate and should not stand in the open at night, threw out a few words of apology. At once the girl turned on him.

"How could you do such a thing?" she asked in French. "Can't you see he's delicate?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said Hulder.

"Sorry!" she repeated scornfully. "I'd have thought that you'd have had more sense than that. Come along, Fedka; you must have something hot and go to bed."

"To bed at half-past nine?" said Nazimov, smiling. "Oh, Olichka, you can't mean that, my first night; and I've been enjoying myself with Mr. Hulder."

"Have you?" said the girl more gently. She threw Hulder a glance in which was less hostility, but merely doubt. "I'm glad you've had a nice talk. But really, Fedichka, you must be careful, and Mr.—Mr.——"

"Hulder," said Nazimov. . . . "This is my sister, Olga Kyrilovna."

She bowed a little stiffly, and for a second Hulder wished that he were not too self-conscious to follow the Russian custom. He would have liked to bend down and kiss that long fine hand. But Nazimov and his sister were not shy. Now that Olga realized her brother's pleasure in the American's company, a change seemed to have come over her. She smiled, and her teeth were beautiful.

It was a peculiar atmosphere they made, these two, as they laughed, nestled against each other, chattered

excitedly in soft, bell-like Russian, or broke into French, or, for his benefit, into English. Olga had apparently forgotten her anger. Her mood had changed swift as the cloud which fled as a film of blue gauze across the molten gold of the moon. But she was still watching over her brother, compelling him to draw close the wings of the cape, and winding more tightly over his mouth the length of the comforter. At last she once more declared that Fiodor must go to bed. As she took him away, they were laughing. And again, an hour later, when Hulder met her in the hall as she carried a glass of hot milk, when he bade her "Good-night," she smiled at him.

"You know," she said confidentially, "Fiodor seems to like you."

"Oh, so do I like him," said Hulder, a little awkwardly, for outspoken emotion disturbed him.

"I'm so glad," said Olga. "You know," she added seriously, "he isn't very well. I must be very careful."

III

It was perhaps because Hulder felt little interest in his fellow-guests that he concentrated upon the Nazimovs. It is true that, on the second day, the retired official had taken him apart to tell him that it was a pity Switzerland had no Bismarck to deal with the Socialists; and Madame Pettinger had asked him whether he was married and had children, adding, as a rider to his reply, some surprised and disapproving remarks because he was neither a husband nor a father. But there was something more appealing,

because more mysterious, about the young Russians. More and more they appeared to Hulder as lovers rather than as brother and sister, and he was not surprised to find that they were twins; their similarity of feature was proof enough. But Olga seemed a mother as well as a sister; while Fiodor liked to leave the hotel with Hulder, or to stand alone at the edge of the creeper-grown quarry near by, there apparently to meditate, Olga was agitated when she did not see him. Suddenly, in the midst of a conversation, her look would wander; she would become curiously thoughtful, brooding; her eyes would shine with entranced intensity. And, quite as suddenly, without even a word of apology, she would leap up from her seat, and Hulder could hear her run up the stairs, or across the gravel in the front garden, as if she were anxious and seeking. And she watched over Fiodor materially as well as emotionally, sometimes to his annoyance, often to his amusement. When she swaddled him up in the comforter, or demanded for him the liver wing of a chicken, or practically lifted him out of his chair and into another because there was a draught, Fiodor would throw his American friend a humorous glance of self-pity. But, on the whole, theirs was a relation of tender intimacy: seldom did they address each other as Olga or Fiodor; it was always Fedia or, more tenderly, Fedichka; and he caressingly called her Olichka, sometimes, in a soft, melting voice, Olusha. The Russian diminutives, expressive of all grades of love, dallying or anger, were their everyday language. Tender they were, both of them, though sometimes combative and angry, when it was the contemptuous Fedka or Olka came, sharp and vengeful.

Hulder was now their chosen companion. On the third morning Fiodor came to him, laid upon the table two beautiful long hands, and gazed at him with immense, pathetic grey eyes. Hulder looked up, smiling, waiting for some poetic thought, and Fiodor said—

“This place smells like a dustheap; come with us into the town.”

Before Hulder could reply, Olga joined them. Her face was impassive, but she looked at her brother, at his animated eyes, and a sweet, slow smile lit up her features. They walked down the hill, those three, Fiodor talking all the time, ramblingly, sometimes profound, then suddenly commonplace, but always nervously intent.

“See, there are the mountains, there just beyond the pines, blue to-day—no, grey-blue like the wing of a heron—that’s the Wetterspitze—three thousand metres high, so Baedeker says.” He laughed. “Why don’t they label the mountains—with their height and” (a wicked smile at Hulder) “with their price delivered post free in New York State?”

“Oh, we don’t buy mountains,” said Hulder; “we’ve got as many as we want.”

They laughed together. Fiodor stuck to his point. “Our mountains are more historic than the Rockies. Don’t laugh, Hulder; one of your millionaires will buy the St. Bernard district one day and transplant it to Ohio, and build a house on it and call it Napoleon Villa.”

Then, before Hulder could reply, Fiodor was being jocular at the expense of little Ammenzell, which they were now entering. All three, that morning, felt very young, ready to be amused by the villas of the Geneva

merchants, their extraordinary roofs copied from those of pagodas, and the delightful alliance of the Swiss chalet with the Spanish colonnade. Indeed, it was a humorous district, for one very rich merchant had been carried away by his business instincts: at the wrought-iron gates of his summer palace, beyond which spangled rose bushes and passionate clematis fought for predominance, some ungovernable impulse had compelled him to put up a large board advertising that his name was Holtzen, and that his bath fittings were the greatest in the world.

The talk was all Fiodor's, for Hulder tried vainly to draw Olga into conversation; in his presence she seemed to want to remain silent. She was courteous, she replied, she smiled, but it could not be said that she talked. Eye and hand, she was bound to her brother, and tactfully so, for when, at a short hill, she murmured to Fiodor, "Give me your arm, Fedia," Hulder observed that, unobtrusively, she did not hang upon that arm, but supported it.

They shopped. At the bootmaker's there was a cheerful scene, for Olga, who wanted sandals, found it quite impossible to fit her long, arched foot into the shoes destined for the ladies of Geneva. Not a shoe that was not three sizes too broad, if it fitted her length! And she smiled a little proudly when Hulder suggested that none save a bootmaker who had made for greyhounds could hope to fit her slenderness.

They bought those things that tourists need: picture postcards, newspapers, cigarettes of a special brand for Fiodor. Hulder would have been filled with satisfaction if, at the post office, something had not happened. Quite suddenly, in the midst of the sunlit street, Fiodor stopped. He choked; his face

reddened, and then, with his sister's arm about his shoulders, he was coughing, coughing horribly, as if the spasm tore at something deep in his body. While his eyes still stared, Olga pressed her handkerchief against his mouth. For a moment Hulder lost sight of the convulsed face as Olga's strong shoulders turned towards him, but he had time to see, when at last the coughing subsided, that there was blood upon the handkerchief.

Hulder stood by them, anxiously. Fiodor threw the American a very soft smile, said something in a whisper which made Olga's features into a rigid white mask.

"What?" asked Hulder. "What do you say, Fiodor Kyrilovitch?"

Olga raised her hand, but already and quite loud, Fiodor, still smiling, had said, "143."

"Hush! Hush!" came Olga's low voice. "For shame, Fedichka, how can you say such things? It isn't true."

"It is true, Olusha," murmured Fiodor, "but what does it matter? Come, Hulder, I'm strong enough to walk up the hill."

As the American accompanied them towards the National, he was wondering and charmed. Puzzled by this incomprehensible figure, 143, and the effect it had, he was charmed by the glowing tenderness that had been in Olga's voice. He could not shake off the impression, even though, in half-an-hour, he was playing a game of billiards with Fiodor. He played well, the Russian badly. Olga, her hands folded in her lap, watched them from a window, smiling, her gaze upon the American, very gentle and responsive to every one of her brother's words. But Fiodor was

quite outclassed. Already Hulder had made thirty-five to his eight. The young Russian flung down his cue and, without a word, walked away. In the same minute Olga stood up, and Hulder went up to her with a smile upon his face, as if inviting her to sympathize with him because her brother was behaving like a naughty child. But he drew back in amazement: Olga's mouth had set into a straight line, her black eyebrows into a savage knot; giving him but a single look of contained rage, she turned her back upon him.

IV

As an overladen ship that tumbles groaning from the crest to the trough of waves, the strange friendship progressed. Had these three not been intellectually isolate among the tourists, it would have suffered disaster, so angry and uncertain was the intercourse that built it. Hulder was never easy with the Russians: nothing told him that some chance word would not arouse their rage or, worse still, a crooning fondness translating itself into prayers that he would forgive. The atmosphere was hectic, and his friends were mantled in mystery; shockingly, Fiodor had, on the previous night, seen him come towards him upon the road, then, with a high, crackling laugh, cried out "141," and rushed away towards the quarry.

The incomprehensible figure bit into Hulder's imagination. The original "143" was now "141"—and two days had elapsed. He groped for significances, for some object Fiodor aimed at, attainable only with the efflux of time. But he doubted his own capacity to follow into some unguessed cavern the

will-o'-the-wisps of Fiodor's thoughts. And now, still anxious, but too well-bred to question him, he lay upon the moss in the little wood, at the feet of the young Russian, who sat propped up against a tree-trunk.

"How beautiful it is!" he said at last.

Indeed, all things were beautiful in that minute, the tall, slim trunks of the pines, gilded and empurpled with sunshine, the brown-violet bed of needles, the patches of flowered meadows, yellow-green, that rolled up to a distant hill. And the silence, seldom pierced by the call of a bird. His long hands languid upon the moss, his eyes high-raised, Fiodor seemed not to have heard. But he replied, relevantly enough—

"Beauty—the great anodyne! Immortality, absolute, therefore beautiful . . ." His voice sank into a murmur as if he thought aloud. "Yes, true enough, naught save two anodynes to this long disease they call life—philosophy and art: philosophy that transcends life, and art that illumines it. Life might be lived if . . ."

The murmur became a cry; his face was convulsed. "If it were true!" he shouted. "If there were anodynes! Liar! Do you hear, Hulder! Schopenhauer is a liar; there are no anodynes. Listen," he went on, speaking quickly, low, as a child revealing a secret: "there are no anodynes for life unless you imagine there are anodynes. There is nothing that makes life bearable except the illusion that one enjoys it. It is in our hands to dream as we will, and to dream well is what they call happiness. For there is no happiness, but only dream. What do you dream, Hulder? What is your nightmare?"

"Fiodor Kyrilovitch!" cried the American, fright-

ened, for beads of sweat flecked the young man's brow. But Fiodor did not seem to hear. In a high, angry voice, he spoke to himself.

"Ah, you dare not reply; you're only the underman, little grovelling creature tied up by views. You believe in a God, nationality, the drawing-room; you know what is right and wrong! Fool, fool, all convictions are prisons! You say you know life is real: that of itself makes it unreal. For, man, you're dying—don't you see, dying as I speak. Can't you sniff the scent of death in every birth? That is the anodyne, the only one, the certainty of death, the only certainty . . ."

He paused, and Hulder could see that his body shook with excitement.

"Fiodor Kyrilovitch," he said gently, laying his hand upon the young man's arm, "do not speak like that. It's absurd. You're too young."

"Young!" cried Fiodor. "I, a second of space, young! Hulder, I'm only a passing mood of the life force, a puff of the great wind. A million years ago I was alive: minus a million years old, that was my age. Oh, we're old, you and I, travelling to here from so far a star, and we're dying on to an unconscious life!"

"To an unconscious life!" repeated Hulder. "Yes, that's true. We shall be, and we shall not know."

"But," screamed Fiodor, with tortured face, "how can you bear it? How can you? To die—to rot, yes, I'll suffer that; but to be blotted out, not to know—I can't."

"Can you not hope?" murmured the American.

Fiodor shook his head.

"Not often. Sometimes, when I know what I am,

the little atom which will join with other atoms to make the overman, I am content. Oh, some must die, those who serve and fail, the common men, the servants and the drones; but we, who feel, strive, lust, achieve, we must live, for we are life. We are the essence, we the aristocrats, we are God. And yet, in other minutes, I know that my body must go, that I cannot hope to outlive it. And soon we must face it, you and I."

"Perhaps not soon," said Hulder.

"Ha, ha," laughed Fiodor, "140, ha, ha! What fun! Schopenhauer says it would make us angry to see a day slipping away unless we were assured of eternity. Oh, what rot! What rot! And Nietzsche's secret of a good life being that we should live dangerously! We do, don't we, with death in our train? Argument and precept, falling like arrows shot at a stone wall . . ."

For a moment Hulder was terrified, for Fiodor's incoherence suggested mania, and he shook with merriment as he raved. Suddenly the Russian became serious.

"Do you read Fichte?"

"No."

"*Anglais!*" said Fiodor contemptuously. But his face changed; he listened.

Below them in the wood they heard a call: "Fedia! Fedia!"

"I'm here, Olia!" cried Fiodor, and as he stood up remarked: "She mustn't find me sitting on the ground." He smiled; he had shed his anger and his irony, was suddenly a mischievous child.

Slowly Olga came up the slope. As she threaded through the trees, a short, strong figure in white, a

new interest awakened in Hulder. For, her white face sun-gilt and a transient flush upon her cheeks, she came supple as a hamadryad escaped from the prisoning tree. And she smiled. As she drew nearer, hidden, then visible, then half veiled by close-growing trunks, more definite, then elusive, she was a creature of the forest, one of those silent things for whom speaks the souging night wind. As she held up a thermos flask, Hulder knew that his smile was stupid, his heart a-beating.

"Fedichka," she said, "you forgot. Your milk."

"Oh, no more milk," said Fiodor pettishly. "I hate milk."

"You must drink it," replied Olga soberly, as she unscrewed the cap and poured out the milk that was hot and steaming. "Come." She held up the cup.

"No," said Fiodor obstinately.

"Drink," she murmured. She raised the cup to Fiodor's lips, and an ache of delight went through Hulder: her brother stood upon a little mound; she had to raise her arms, and, in the white blouse, her body was close-moulded and the sun made radiant the curves of her deep bosom, while her teeth shone in the full smile of her pale face, pitifully tender, passionately adoring.

"Oh, women . . ." moaned Fiodor. Then, with a humorous smile, he drank.

"Again," she whispered. Obediently he drank once more. He wiped the white froth from his lips and said—

"Tyrant. Like all women. Don't you think so, Hulder?"

"I don't mind a woman's tyranny," said the American; "it is a gentle yoke."

He looked at Olga, thrilling a little at the soft intentness of her eyes.

"A gentle yoke?" said Fiodor more acidly. "No yoke is gentle. Shrouded in velvet, it is still a yoke."

"There I have you, Fiodor Kyrilovitch. If it is velvety you don't know it's a yoke—and it ceases to be a yoke. Your own theory."

Fiodor frowned. What was this strange tightening of Olga's mouth? But he smiled, he laughed, confessed his defeat: whence came the soft curving of Olga's lips?

"True," said Fiodor; "you have scored, Hulder. But that doesn't show you're right. It only shows I'm inconsistent: and none but a fool is always consistent. You know I'm right, at the bottom; only you're an American, therefore a sentimentalist."

Hulder protested, Fiodor interrupting, Olga listening seriously. At last only did Hulder manage to state his view.

"Yes, I know what you think. You think we Americans are so busy making money that when we do see our wives, between office hours, they seem wonderful and we make fools of ourselves over them. We do, sometimes, but there's something else, Fiodor Kyrilovitch: an idea that woman is the representative of nature, the fount of the race, while man is only her defender and her helper."

"One man can keep thirty women in a harem," scoffed Fiodor.

"Yes—and we need only one man, but thirty women. We need women more, and that is why we prize them higher. Even their weakness is a claim."

For a moment, as Hulder found Olga's eyes intent upon him, he felt that a link was forging, that this attitude of mind, new to a Slav, drew her to him. But at once Fiodor burst out laughing.

"Weakness! The twentieth century and talk of woman's weakness! Good God, read a little biology, and you'll find that woman is stronger than man, only her strength has been in abeyance. And now she's trying to come to the top again, to smother us in sentimentality, to suck our blood while we sleep, to enslave us by desire into serving her. Harems! Yes, that might save us yet—bars and padlocks and armed guards. Oh, not guards against other men, but guards to prevent women from harming us, drugging, deceiving us. Woman should be bought and sold. And when she has played her part as a mother, let her do the field work and all the other work of the world."

"And we men?"

"No work for us. Work's for woman; that's all she's good for."

"But," said Hulder, acid, though Fiodor shook with excitement, "if we do no work we shall decay, and then women will certainly win."

"No! Let men have learning, women their ignorance. We can hold them then as we, the aristocrats, hold the fool masses of the people. And let us keep the arms—keep the arms," he shouted; "ride, hunt, shoot, fight, and fear none."

Hulder started back, for Fiodor's face was inflamed, and yet he thought the Russian ridiculous in his rage, in his mouthings so ill-suited to his weakness, his racked body.

"Fedia!" cried Olga fearfully.

"He's a fool," growled Fiodor. A sudden change came over Olga's face.

"How dare you excite him?" the girl cried. Her cheeks became brick-red.

Fiodor stamped. "Why don't you hold your tongue?" he screamed.

"Fedia! Fedia!" Olga shouted. Then to Hulder, "You don't know what you're talking about."

Hulder stood amazed as the two turned upon him: Olga heated, hoarse with fury, stigmatizing him for an idiot, a liar; Fiodor tearful and spitting insults. Then, quite suddenly, there was silence. Fiodor drew a hand over his wet forehead.

"What have I said?" he muttered. Then, in a low voice, "I have been rude. Unjust. Oh, I am hateful! Forgive me!"

He flung himself on his knees, seized Hulder's hand. "Oh, don't hate me, don't hate me," he groaned. "Only a hundred and forty——" The American was for a moment paralyzed, for Fiodor was kissing his hand, and now Olga, too, had thrown herself at his feet: he felt her hot lips upon his hand.

"Get up, both of you," he shouted. This was too great a madness. He drew them to their feet. "Get up; of course I forgive you."

The Russians stood before him, trembling, wet-eyed. Simultaneously they each took one of Hulder's arms, began to walk with him towards the road. Then Olga said—

"Let me give you a little milk. Oh, do let me give you a little milk."

"No, thanks," said Hulder stiffly. Then, understanding her impulse, he added, "I'm not thirsty," and softly pressed her arm against his body.

"I wish you'd have a little milk," said Fiodor.

"He won't," said Olga sorrowfully. "I'm afraid he won't."

V

Too great a madness? No, not yet. For two days, inevitable reaction from an intimacy too rich in incident, Hulder held a little aloof from the Russians, contented himself with nodding as he passed Fiodor, who sat reading in the sun; and he checked his desire to speak to Olga, though the grey eyes signed to him, reproachful and appealing. He struck up acquaintance with the two touristic young men, accompanied them to Starnois, where there was a dangerous rock to climb; as he talked with them of the scenery, of the respective merits of French and German wine and answered endless questions as to salaries and conditions in America, he had to own to himself that he was bored, missed the fierce stimulus of Fiodor's speeches. He was obstinate, however. Bent on giving the Russians a lesson, he went to Geneva for the day, there to yawn before the pictures in the museum, to scoff at the cheap impressionism of the *Ecole Libre*, and to wander silent and friendless, so long that in the end he re-entered with pleasure the train that took him to Ammenzell. Yes, he was bored; and when, later in the evening, Madame Pettinger became arch, suggested that she knew why a single gentleman went to Geneva, while the honeymoon couple giggled and the young girl in the print dress fixed upon Hulder wide, intelligent eyes, he felt incomprehensibly irritated by the cheapness of these

people. He had seen, felt too much in a week to tolerate fools.

And so he was glad when, the next morning, Fiodor drew near, head a little bent and of manner gentle, to ask whether he would come for a sail with him and his sister. It was warm, though a steady breeze blew from the west; opposite the Hôtel de Paris a little crowd wrangled and bargained for the sliders and the family boats; grandmothers were lowered into the capacious sterns, and from the station platform a long line of tourists passed over the bridge to the pier, where waited the steamer that was to make the round trip through Possentour and Holle. The sun hung high. As Hulder laid his hand upon a brass fitting of the boat, he exclaimed, for it burned him. And the Russians laughed, all the unease gone. As the boatman, high-seated on the stern, steered the little craft through the traffic, past the baths where the timid were noisily plunging in the shallow water, Hulder felt a great relief. The motion of the sailing boat, as it hugged the wind, smooth and deceptively swift, its veerings, light as those of a bird, as it tacked, under his eyes the flying green water that broke into strings of flashing emeralds at the bows, and the rising shore where clustered Alstanches round its modern castle, here indeed were beauty and peace. Olga sat by his side, Fiodor in the bows. They were silent, for soon they had left far behind the busy front of Ammenzell, saw it only as a row of little pink and white splotches; the boatman, seeking wind, had steered for the centre of the lake, and about them spread in heavy silence the dark green water that murmured only when some tiny wave broke against the side.

"It is beautiful," said Hulder.

There was a long pause. Then Fiodor murmured—

“Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.”

And again there was silence. Indeed, for three hours, they hardly spoke at all. It was not only that they were watchful of the endless succession of woods growing close to the sedge-lined banks, of tree-crowned rocks and ruins garlanded with ivy; some unity had come to them, a unity based on Fiodor. For Olga's eyes often turned to him, and without a word she would readjust upon his shoulders the falling cape; and Hulder mingled with the blue and green vision of sky and water the picture of her firm, broad neck, her long hands, so white and blushing coral at the tips. Hungrily, he filled of her beauty, and was surprised to find in himself no jealousy, the male jealousy that cannot bear the fondness of woman when given to another. As the lovely lips smiled upon Fiodor he felt no pang, perhaps because, often, the grey eyes turned humid towards him and engaged him in some complicity to protect the brilliant weakling who joined them. “You and I,” said the eyes, “we must please him. We must be patient, you and I, you know.” It was wonderfully intimate and thrilling to him, absurdly grateful and sacred, so much that it brought its own reaction, that he looked away, tried to wonder what industry fed that factory upon the hill, called himself a sentimental American.

Hulder was not sentimental. He was of that quiet, calm breed that has little use for exuberant emotion. Cool, logical and a little hard, he was preoccupied with his own life, was not very much more than most men the axis of his world, but more consciously so.

Clear-eyed, he looked for happiness. He had loved, once and unfortunately, then in a looser spirit, here and there as chance would have it, in American and European cities; but buried deep in him was the conviction that the woman would yet come who would call from him something noble and thus make him noble. He looked at Olga's soft eyes, wondered and was afraid.

But the three shook off their languor and their tension. The lunch at Holle, at a little table under flowering horse-chestnut trees, was light and gay. Fiodor challenged Hulder to a drinking duel and was restrained with difficulty by Olga, who now laughed and even told one of those comic Jew stories that always delight a Russian audience. They ate too much; Hulder confided a little of his early struggles to avoid work in the United States; Fiodor became reminiscent of days at Moscow University and ended by boasting what a great man he was, while Olga indulgently laid upon his friend the soft, slow smile that meant "You and I." And, in the afternoon, in the moist grass of the meadows, they found a few white and purple flowerets that were like wild hyacinths.

But, when again they entered the boat, something in the air had changed. Suddenly the heat had fallen, and Olga anxiously swathed Fiodor's neck in the comforter. The boat scudded before the freshening wind; the boatman was more intent, for the air was fitful; continually they passed through pockets when they made hardly any headway, emerged into zones where, for a moment, the sail flapped wildly as the broken wing of a wounded bird. And, at intervals, struck by a squall, the boat heeled over, lay to the water,

the gunwale flush with the hissing lines of shimmering foam. As the twilight darkened, caps of grey cloud formed upon the hills. Olga had come close to her brother, thrown one arm about his shoulders; she was calm, calmer than Hulder, who disliked the strained sound of the rigging, the fierce dips of the sail towards the brilliant little points of the waves, purplish in the sunset. But Fiodor was not calm: his eyes shone; he muttered.

"Black waves," he said, "mirrors of the night before it dawns——"

"Hush, Fedia, hush."

"Why should I? Earth or water, it's all the same. Equally they bury men. Yes," he cried, as if an intoxication seized him, "sooner or later they take us, as they will take me."

Swiftly he tore from Olga's arm. He was on his feet, clinging to the mast, despite the boatman's warning cry.

"Sooner or later!" screamed Fiodor. "What does it matter—137 or less?"

Olga, too, cried out as the boat heeled over, but already Hulder had clutched at the Russian, dragged him down; and now he held him in his arms. For a moment a glint of rage had come into Olga's eyes, but she grew soft as she listened. Hulder murmured to Fiodor, gentle, almost crooning—

"Don't be afraid, Fiodor Kyrilovitch; the water will not take you. See, I'm holding you. Feel how warm I am! Could anything harm you now?"

The Russian's eyes lost their wildness. His features relaxed

"Oh," he whispered, "this is good." Soon he was

lying passive in the sheltering arms, his head pillowed on his friend's broad breast.

Swiftly on sped the grey and mauve streamers of twilight, shade eating at the whiteness, and gold upon the hilltops to purple dying. Hulder, the thin form in his arms, conscious only of motion, had forgotten Olga. But, as the lights of Ammenzell twinkled in the night, something was impulsively thrust into his hand; it was another hand. The long, slim fingers closed round his in an intimate clasp that joined the two cold palms. He turned. In the darkness he saw Olga's eyes bathed in a soft radiance.

VI

Hulder knew that he loved. Again, inconceivably, absurdly, because a waiter had told him that he would like Ammenzell, because he had been too aimless to differ, because two Russians, one of them stricken in body, had travelled a thousand miles to a second-rate hotel on an obscure hill—preposterous that by chance the woman should come. Was love a sort of roulette? Would his heart have remained empty for ever if he had chosen the Hôtel de Paris? Perhaps, unless the love passion be truly blind and the same day (who knows?) other eyes had opened. But, absurd or not, Hulder loved Olga, and all the more because, illogically, love thrives best in an atmosphere of paradox.

He knew that he loved her when she thrust her hand into his, when the thrill of the contact ran up his arm, transmuted the iciness of the clasp into a blood rush all incendiary in quality. He had said nothing, but held the hand, ground it savagely, felt a ring

under his fingers and fiercely, cruelly pressed it into the cold flesh. As he looked at Olga he knew that he hated her, wished to destroy her—aye, to sacrifice her, body and soul, as a burnt offering to his love of her. For the sex conflict was on him, thawing his snows. He had to make war now, to conquer; without this there could be no joyful peace. Olga had not resisted; indeed, she had returned the clasp as if begging him to hurt her, to set his imprint upon her—to connect her in a wild trinity of passion with the boy whom he held fast against his breast.

But it was love, too, this cruelty. Hulder had stood face to face with her at the gates, the lights streaming upon his comeliness, his small head, his short-cropped, curly hair; he seemed to her so steadily blue-eyed, so square-chinned, big and reliant as a rock. For a moment she had wondered whether he could help her. She had wanted to cry out—

“Oh, save him, save him! He is my brother, myself, my love. Dispel his wildness, restore his body, give him strength—and I am yours, your lover, your servant, your squaw, to toy with or beat or kill.”

But Olga had held herself in too many years, too much schooled herself into calmness so that Fiodor might be soothed. All that she could do was to look up at Hulder humbly, tell him who they were.

“We are twins,” she said. “Our parents are dead, and Fiodor was studying law at Moscow. But—one lung was touched; we went to Crimea where there are vines. It was no good—one lung was destroyed—we travelled everywhere: Davos, the Italian coast, Algiers; everywhere it was too high or too low, or too hot—the sweats of night—oh, my God, oh, my God!” She hid her face in her hands. Then, more assured;

"So we came here; the doctors said that this was not too high, but sometimes——"

"Sometimes?" asked Hulder gently, drawing her hands down.

"The other lung, too." Her face was now livid. "Sometimes I think——"

"Oh, Olga!" Hulder, still holding her hands, drew her towards him. She did not resist, for now she talked feverishly. Her self-control gone, she told everything. They were free, they had money, but she feared Fiodor was dying. And worse, he knew. Some doctor, some brute, some fool, in Lucerne she thought, had given way to him, told him he had only six months to live. He counted the days—one by one.

"Ah!" cried Hulder, understanding at last. "That's why he said 137—137 days."

"Let me go!" snarled the girl. As she tore herself out of his grasp Hulder saw the mask of a fury, and shrank away.

But, next day, she came soft, as if she had given herself by giving her confidence. Stronger indeed was her faith, for that day again it was the will of the American saved Fiodor from ending his dance of death. It was he thrust away the young man, snatched from his hands the steering-wheel of the motor-car into which he had beguiled them. All had gone well, but at the top of Starnois hill Fiodor had suddenly put on speed, and with a cry of "135" headed straight for the down grade. While Olga sat limp at the back of the car, she had watched as a prey for which wild beasts fight the struggle for the wheel—heard the quiet, hurried "Let go, Fiodor," of the American, the horrible, steady proclamation of her brother's numbered days. She had sat, hands grip-

ping the sides, while the car miraculously swayed through a curve—felt herself rocking—seen a white wall towards which she seemed to travel swift as a flying spear—and then her brother had been struck in the face before her eyes—she had fainted.

She sat up upon the grass. The two men knelt trembling by her side.

“Fedia!” she cried; drew him down, kissed his cheek. Then her face set. “You!” she said savagely to Hulder. “You struck him! You dared——”

“To save him.”

“Oh!” She staggered to her feet. “Oh, I am mad! You struck him—I hate you, loathe you. No, you saved him. I owe you his life. Oh, forgive me.”

She flung herself at Hulder’s feet. He laid a hand upon her shoulder. She shrank away. “How dare you touch me with your murdering hand?”

And again, in constant alternation of feeling, she had come to him. With every mood of her brother she had changed in her attitude to the American, as if some mysterious correspondence of feeling were established between them. It was an uncertain, dangerous companionship, and Hulder wondered why he tolerated it, why he bore with what he now believed to be madness in the young man; though he wondered, he knew; only he would not acknowledge the truth too readily. This mother passion in Olga had stimulated in him something more profound than the ever-fiercer attraction of her; as she stood or walked by his side a desire began to gnaw at him, until he had to knot his hands together for fear he should publicly seize her, bend back the white pillar of her neck and crush under his the pouting, purplish mouth, but he knew that a streak, all mental that one, pierced

through and coloured the fury of sense. He wanted her love, and the tenderness of her, to have her lightest caress, to have her for sister, companion, friend as well as lover.

For she was as a broad river flowing slowly between low banks. And even when in spate she had her majesty.

Fiodor, humble and for a while conquered, as if he were a woman, as if male strength had daunted him and made him joyous, had walked the road with Hulder, his arm about his neck. Soon Olga had come to them, and the moon had shed upon them a pale green radiance. She had allowed Hulder to take her arm; then, unrebuked, to slide his hand along her forearm, hold her hand, under cover of the night to play, one by one, half purposeful, half sportive, with the long, lax fingers she yielded him. Hulder stood linked to two parallel emotions, as if in the grip of some composite force that acted and reacted through two elements. He was as a cork floating in a bowl of water that communicated with another; if water were poured into the first bowl he rose in the second. And for him there were no local storms. One night, when a discussion of the Slav temperament involved him, when he praised Dostoievsky, only to be told that this literary bungler tried to drive a three-horse chariot, but harnessed one of his steeds to the tail, when once more Fiodor was contemptuous and angry, Olga snatched away her hand.

And yet, next morning, Fiodor wept in his bed, prayed that his American friend might bring him his breakfast and talk to him. Then Olga came, half commanding and half entreating. Without challenge she laid both hands upon the American's arm.

"I can't go on," thought Hulder; "I don't know what I'm doing."

Indeed, he hardly knew how to hold those two. He had not before known love and friendship as hair shirts, nor had he known them to rush as dragons across his path. At school, at college and in later years, friendship had slowly blossomed for him; acquaintance had warmed into something closer; then confidence had been given and reciprocated; dreams and hopes had shyly come out of concealment, and then, sometimes, intimacy had arisen, a community of feeling and desire; but never before, in less than a fortnight, had he found himself forced into a close relation with strangers, a relation emotional on the one side and on the other passionate. Everything that he felt was contrary to American practice and to American tradition, for neither Olga nor Fiodor had eluded him; the young man had revealed himself at once as fierce, half desperate and certainly hysterical. He had allowed his new friend to understand his distresses, and Hulder knew that Fiodor knew that he knew the secret of his malady. Himself thoughtful and intuitive, he was capable of grasping something of the tumultuous emotions which racked Fiodor's decaying body and threatened to shake it to pieces as over-powerful machinery slowly loosens the plates of a small ship. He guessed very well the origin of the ferocity with which Fiodor viewed his fellows; it was not surprising that the beauty of sky, flower, woman and beast should arouse in the heart of the young Russian, together with a powerful æsthetic delight, an unbearable hatred.

Hulder was not surprised when, quite suddenly, Fiodor told him that he hated the world because it

would survive him, that he hated lovers because they would still love when he was rotting, that he hated beauty, and joy, and gaiety, because these things were eternal, and that if he believed in any God he would pray to Him to let him live so long that about him, as the sun slowly lost its heat and the internal fire of the earth died, he might see the ice gaining upon the land, the flowers wither, the fog obscure the sun until it was no more than a poor yellowish disc which he might outstare. He wished to see man become again what man had been when he emerged from the ape: a creature without intellect, dominated by nothing save its passions, incapable of feeling love, ambition or hope, capable only of understanding those things that the beasts understand: fear, lust, hunger and cold, until at last he might see man crouching, naked and hideous, in a stone cave, and his mate no longer scented, playing Puccini, and dressing in Paris, but now no more than the brute with long hair whom her master might beat or kill. At last, he might, as the cold gripped closer the ball of the earth, assist at the death agony of the last man. And then in the desert, when the earth was dead and no more in space than another moon, he would gladly give up life, for he would have been the last of mankind, the greatest of the aristocrats.

Yes, he understood. For indeed it is not easy to conceive the earth without oneself. None can fill the gap left by one's disappearance. One does not disappear—one changes; and belief in God and survival is, after all, only a certainty that one carries within oneself a spark of defined essence, which means that one will not merge into the Godhead: no, more arrogantly, man hopes to merge God Himself into his own

immense and terribly vivid personality. Belief in the future life is blasphemy in disguise. It was not wonderful, thought Hulder, that a dying man, such as Fiodor, should blaspheme: who, more than a dying man, had a right to curse earthly life?

It was not, however, upon Fiodor that most of Hulder's thoughts dwelt. Little by little, as by a tide that slowly rose, obliterating the foreshore, he had been absorbed by Olga's personality. At first mysterious, hardly comprehensible, it had struck him merely as self-centred, expectant and brooding; he had thought that she lacked vitality, merely existed as some beautiful flower of the field. But he had changed his metaphor, begun to realize her more as a spreading tree under which a man could shelter from the sun. He had discovered her as a creature with a single passion, as twin of body to her brother, also twin of soul. All that was in Fiodor she, too, contained: his fierceness, his love of the beautiful, his sweetness, all the intolerable conflict of spirit and sense that made him up. But these currents of her ran under a placid surface: she was potential where her brother was actual. Those furies when Fiodor was displeased with him, they were Fiodor's furies at one remove, and her smiles were smiled by Fiodor through her mouth. On the day when Hulder knew that he loved her he was indeed disturbed by a new sense: if she was Fiodor in woman's form, through her he loved Fiodor or both of them; and he loved them inextricably as if he had conceived a comic, a tragic passion for the Siamese twins. It was ridiculous, and yet it was wonderful, for that day, when for the first time he held Olga's hand, he could hardly divest himself of the feeling that some maleness had crept into the girl's features;

he almost expected to see falling over her left eye an untidy mass of black hair.

Fiodor wished, that afternoon, to be alone, so they had left him sitting upon a bench on a hillock, reading an unexciting English novel, his cape wrapped about him and the red and green comforter so closely wound about his neck that all that could be seen of him was a rather pinched yellow nose and two brilliant eyes. He looked, more than ever, like an anxious and excited crow. He had promised to go home as soon as the sun went down, and now together, in the heat of the day, Hulder and Olga walked away, passing the garden of warring clematis, towards the lake. When they reached the banks and saw the water shining dully like molten lead under a haze of heat, Olga clasped her hands together, bent her head. In that moment she was all languor, and Hulder wondered where, when far from her brother, all that energy which she devoted to the maintaining of his life lay dormant. He did not, however, very long watch the play of the wind on her black hair; he was too active in mind to remain thus quiescent.

"Shall we take a boat?" he asked.

"If you like," said Olga.

Slowly he pulled out toward the middle of the lake. Olga, half sitting, half lying against the cushions, seemed abandoned and lax as Hulder sculled almost unaware of the rhythmic movement of his body. He wondered what thoughts coursed under that low white brow, and he was stung into desiring those thoughts should be thoughts of him, for she was very beautiful as she thus lay. The sun, striking beyond the brim of her straw hat, had found gaps between the black strands of hair that fell low upon her forehead, and

patterned her features with a queer criss-cross of dark lines that threw into relief the dead whiteness of her skin. Eyes closed, eyelashes making shadows upon the high cheeks, mouth a little open as if in some momentary weakness appealing for strength, long hands, lax and languid as bending sprays of fern. And joined with this weakness, this woman softness of her, was the incongruous woman's strength of her broad shoulders, of the strong curves of her breast, deep flanks and slim hard-knit limbs under her flimsy skirt. She was beautiful, intolerably: as a woman, fierce bearer of passion, and yet sweet, weak toy, hard-handled by another's pain.

As he pulled, Hulder wanted to tell her that he loved her, for he had not done so yet though he had touched her and though her lips had been upon his hand. He wanted slowly to ship the sculls, to kneel, to throw himself by her side, draw her hands to his cheeks and, his face hidden on her breast, to murmur the avowal of his passion. Yet he was so surrounded, so saturated by the atmosphere of the common curse they bore, that when at last they spoke, it was this he said—

“I wonder what Fiodor is doing?”

There was a silence and then, suddenly, Olga said—

“Do not let us talk about Fiodor.”

Very slowly the significance of this stirred the American, and, with a beating heart, he slowly turned the bows of the boat towards the shore where, near Alstanches, the trees came down to the water to drink. Olga had opened her eyes, and now, grey and immense, they stared into the sky above Hulder's head, stealing from the heavens a little of their purple radiance. They did not speak, either of them, as silently and swiftly

Hulder urged the boat towards the shore. Soon they slid within the shelter of the willows that hung about them their tender green curtain, their drooping twigs. The willows stooped, firm-planted in the earth, towards the water, here and there caressing it with twig or leaf, as if tree and water were wedding. Soundlessly, as a swan moving stately upon a pond, the boat passed under the interminable arch that the trees made as they succeeded one another along the line of the shore; slower and slower came the strokes of the sculls, and closer and closer was the air about them as grew the sense of solitude and of the unity of two. Hulder found that his strokes were losing their power, his arms moving more slowly until, by almost imperceptible degrees, the boat stopped before the wall of giant bulrushes that grew across the water in steep plantation.

Careless of the sculls which floated on the dead water, Hulder slid from his seat. Again his heart was beating and some keen disappointment worked in him because still Olga seemed unaware of him. She seemed so aloof, so remote from him, that his uncertain purpose again wavered, that he felt tempted so to remain in the cool shadow of the branches, to fill his eyes with all this beauty about him, and with that to be content. The beating of his heart accorded ill with the languor that was upon him, a languor that with every second seemed to gain upon him, to press down his limbs with soft, velvety but leaden hands. He wished that this state might last for ever, wondered a little whether it had always been. And yet there was anxiety in him.

Suddenly Olga looked up, fixed her eyes upon his. She did not speak or smile, but there was a softness

in her look which Hulder did not analyze because he did not mistake it. Almost unconsciously he bent forward, slowly slid from his seat towards the girl and then, without intent, he was by her side, outstretched, and he had taken Olga's hand, drawn her arm round his neck. His head resting against her, he softly drew her hand to his cheek and then, very softly, pressed his lips into the warm palm. Olga did not resist, nor was there in the contact of her hand any sign that she felt or desired the caress. Her eyes were closed now, and for a very long time those two stayed, very close and linked, conscious of their nearness to each other, and yet perhaps of something unsaid, that must by and by be said, that would more truly link them. As they lay, side by side, Hulder knew himself invaded by a content he had never before known, as if this girl were by her quiescence, by the calm protectiveness of her, giving him that rest and security which he had never found in the common turbulence of passion. He was conscious less of her than of the fact of her, as he might have been conscious of the purple vault which he could glimpse through the branches of the trees. With her arm about him, inactive but strong, he was as a child at its mother's breast.

They had lost the sense of time, and time fled. It was Olga first knew that something of the oppressiveness of the heat had gone, guessed that upon the dull waters the shadows were lengthening.

"We must go," she murmured.

Hulder, still in his dream, did not reply. Suddenly, a closer sense of life filled him, for Olga's fingers had acquired some new and purposeful energy. He felt them move upon his cheek, softly caressing. They dwelt about the strong hard line of his shaven chin;

with smooth, firm tips they pressed into his cheek. And, at last, it was the whole of Olga's hand that had drawn his head closer to her, so close that against his ear he could feel the steady beating of her heart. Within him an activity seemed to quicken. Seizing her hand, he turned and very close looked into eyes that met his, grave and tender. His mouth moved, he wanted to speak and could not, for too much was rushing out of his most intimate being, too great was his desire to tell her he wanted her, needed her, was her master and her slave, would be her conquest and her conqueror.

He held her in his arms and, though they did not speak, they knew, both of them, that they needed little more besides this etheric communication. Even his hunger for her lips had vanished in Hulder's dumb, passionate desire for self-expression. He wanted her now more than her lips. Olga understood. Without pushing him away, she sat up in her seat, still looking into his eyes, then very gravely—

“We must go.”

Without a word Hulder released her, and as he did so she gave him a long, slow smile, a smile more confident and linking, because a smile accomplice, than would have been a caress.

Again began the rhythmic swing of the sculls. Full-stretched upon the cushions as the sun went down, Olga was bathed in the dying brightness of its gold.

But once they reached land and the charm was broken by a brief quarter of an hour under the little red and white umbrellas of the floating tea place, Olga was no longer merry, no longer insisted upon feeding with cake the numerous dogs which went begging about the tables. She changed. Something urgent

began to pervade her manner, as if the life that an hour before had been so remote, when she lay under the willows, had seized her again and was again beginning to dominate her. She was anxious.

"We must hurry," she said. "We have been away too long. I wonder what Fedia has been doing? Perhaps"—and a note of fear was in her voice—"perhaps he has not gone back to the hotel when the sun went down."

She started up and Hulder had to pull her down to her seat.

"Oh," she cried, "he's so imprudent. We must go. We must go."

And all along the road she was silent and hurried. Hulder had to stretch to their utmost his long limbs to keep pace with her swift, nervous paces; upon the flat she ran heedless of his protests and assurances that doubtless all was well with her brother. And she was breathless when, at length, she leapt up the steps of the National, ran up the stairs. Hulder followed, and laughed aloud as Fiodor met them upon the first landing, book in hand, quite calm, smiling, wearing not only the cape but even the comforter. But he was charmed as he saw the change upon Olga's face. Hardness and anxiety had gone. She blushed faintly in her delight as if, in her mother soul, day had dawned.

"Come upstairs into my room," said Fiodor. "There's an hour before dinner. I have talked to nobody to-day, and that's bad for me, isn't it, Olichka?"

"You talk too much," said Olga, with mock severity. "That's why you talk such nonsense."

"Nonsense or not," said Fiodor good-humouredly,

"I must talk. I'll let any doctor have my life," he added grimly, "but not my tongue. Come along, Hulder."

The American followed him into his room, and at once Fiodor began to talk as if indeed three hours of silence had been more than his restless spirit could bear.

"Do you know," he said excitedly, "last night I had a dream! A terrible, a wonderful dream! Listen." He whispered, very quickly, "I wanted to tell you this morning and then changed my mind. Listen: three elephants came slowly, one behind the other, and each had a wreath of peonies upon his head, and behind were more elephants, and yet more elephants. I couldn't see them, and I knew they were there—and upon the first elephant rode the figure of Death, upon the second elephant an angel with your face, upon the third elephant was Madame Pettinger." He laughed. "Wasn't it funny—because, among all the elephants I couldn't see, I knew there were baby elephants."

"Madame Pettinger's baby elephants," said Hulder, laughing.

"Perhaps," said Fiodor seriously, as if he had not meant his "Wasn't it funny?"

"Listen; it isn't finished. The three elephants began to trumpet all together, and I could understand. They were calling to the invisible elephants behind, and this is what they were calling: 'Elephants, old elephants, young elephants, where are you, O elephants?' And then, from very far away, came a faint trumpeting: 'We are dead, and we are unborn. It is all the same.' Then an organ-grinder began to grind and the elephants began to dance, and I heard Madame Pettinger say, 'Hurry, Maria, with the coffee.' But

it wasn't Madame Pettinger calling; it was another elephant, a very little white one, and, as soon as the word 'coffee' was spoken, that one, too, began to trumpet and to cry out: 'Where are you, O elephants, old elephants, young elephants?'

"And then, very far away, came the low trumpeting as they answered: 'We are in the National eating sausage.' But I knew it wasn't true—and yet I believed it—because I seemed to know that there was nothing true. . . . What are you laughing at?"

Hulder had thrown himself back in his chair, and was laughing aloud. It was not only that the dream struck him as absurd; he, too, had had these curious dreams where the material mingled with the fantastic, but Fiodor's tragic seriousness struck him as irresistibly funny.

"What is there to laugh at?" Nazimov repeated. "It isn't funny; it's significant."

"Are you going to read your future from dreams, Fedia?" said Hulder.

"My future?" said Nazimov contemptuously. "Of course not. The future needs no reading; the future is death. Dreams tell us something, don't you know?"

"Yes, they tell us something about indigestion."

"Tush," cried Fiodor. "How can you talk like that? You don't dream when you are awake, even if you have got indigestion. It's your other self speaking, your foreconscious self."

"Foreconscious?" said Hulder, puzzled.

"Yes, the foreconscious self in the subliminal plane. Don't you understand? Have you never heard of Freud—of psycho-analysis—of Jung of Zurich?"

Hulder looked at him, blankly, but Fiodor had for-

gotten him and was expounding at length the Freud method. He was so excited, he spoke so fast, that Hulder could gather only roughly that dreams released a self, of which we were not conscious, located between our conscious self and our unconscious self. That was the foreconscious self. If we could analyze it by the method of free association between patient and operator, by questions evoking responses, we could discover early mental lesions, old, painful impressions upon the brain, to which were due our phobias, blind fears of trifles and our inhibitions, those incapacities to do or to bear.

"Yes," Fiodor cried excitedly, "the dream is the key. Thus, when we lie defenceless in the arms of night, our secret hidden soul comes forth, all seared and torn by life. Oh, I'm glad I dreamt—I so seldom dream. That dream shall be read." His excitement grew. "I'll go to Freud; he shall read me. He shall make me see the things I fear." His smile became beatific. "And I shall fear no more."

"Why not?" asked Hulder.

Fiodor looked at him with gleaming eyes. "Why not? You say, 'Why not?' But then," he cried gleefully, "you understand? You believe?"

"Oh, well," said Hulder. "Why not try?"

Fiodor's expression became sour. "Oh," he said, "empiricism, that's all." Then, after a pause, "*Anglais!*"

Hulder laughed. He was amused when Fiodor, looking for the most stinging insult he could think of, called him an Englishman. But Fiodor did not mind. Even half-agreement was enough to satisfy him. Already he smiled again.

"Oh, yes, you've your doubts, and no wonder. One

always has one's doubts before one knows; but you're not afraid, are you? You're American; you like the new. Oh, you are a wonderful people, accepting, open-eyed, the good and the bad." His excitement grew. "And you, Hulder, you're wonderful, so calm, so resolute, and you always know what I mean, though I know it's difficult. It's my fault; I am difficult. Perhaps I'm mad sometimes, and there you are, always ready, always indulgent. You know what I mean. You do, you do," he cried. "You're the only one who has ever known."

"I tried," said Hulder.

Fiodor seized his hand. "Yes, I know." Then, very seriously, "I did not think there could be elective affinities between men, but there is one between you and me, is there not?"

"Yes," said Hulder gravely, and, as he spoke, thought of Olga.

"Elective affinity," Nazimov repeated. "Hulder, we have a common ego, you and I." His grasp tightened. "Will you be my blood-brother?"

"Of course I will, Fedia," said Hulder.

Nazimov gave a little cry of delight, and at once Hulder found himself a party to an extraordinary scene. Nazimov took a glass from the washstand, filled it with water. Then, opening a penknife and pushing up to the elbow the sleeve of his velvet coat, he dug the blade into his thin arm: there was a little spurt of blood which he caught in the glass of water. Then, mutely, he held out the knife to the American. Hulder hesitated. Unconsciously he recoiled. He had heard vaguely the details of this barbarous rite, and was willing enough to subject himself to it, but the knife, all bloody, was an unpleasant object. Under

Fiodor's burning eyes he drew his scarf-pin, gingerly grazed his wrist, and pressed out a few drops of blood into the glass.

A cry escaped him, for Fiodor had gulped down one half of the contents, and now, with a rigid, maniacal expression upon his face, was holding out the remainder to him. Evidently he was to drink his share. At that moment a thrill of horror ran right through the American's body, for the mixture, he knew, was all animate with bacteria. To humour Fiodor, yes; to risk consumption, no; and yet he shrank from offending the young man in whom, with every second of hesitation, fury seemed to grow. But the fear was too great.

"No," he said briefly. "That is not the custom of my country. Our blood has mixed; we are blood-brothers; but I will not drink."

There was no reply, but, with a swift movement, Fiodor threw the blood-tinged water into his face, half blinding him and, in the same second, as Hulder closed with him, he heard a crash against the wall which showed that Fiodor had also thrown the glass at his head. For some seconds they wrestled silently, for Hulder had no breath to spare in restraining a strength that was all mania, while from Fiodor came only a series of low animal growls. Quite suddenly he collapsed, and Hulder threw him down on his back upon the bed. For some time Fiodor remained quiescent in his grasp, but still glowering, his spirit untamed in his weak body; then little by little his features returned to normal. The look in his eyes became soft. When at last Hulder released him his face was twisted in agony. He slid to his knees, seized the American's hands. "Forgive me," he muttered. "I'm a dog."

I'm uncivilized, a barbarian. Oh, yes, yes," he cried, as Hulder tried to speak, for he was now anxious to abase himself, "I am a Hun, I am not a Westerner at all. I am a savage. You are the people of the West, the people furthest from the beasts. Oh, forgive me, forgive me."

His voice broke and there were tears in it. The sobs grew, rose up from his throat, tearing, choking little sobs which, as they increased in intensity, blended into a horrible, continuous moan.

Hulder stood paralyzed in his grasp, unable to think of anything to do or say. And, at that moment, the door opened; Olga came in. She did not look at Hulder. As if impelled by some automatic device, she ran to the kneeling figure, seized it by both shoulders, lifted it on to the bed and at once, as she bent over Fiodor, her voice was soft and crooning. She begged him to tell her what had happened, what had been done to him, and many times she pressed kisses upon his tear-stained cheeks. She rocked him in her arms until, little by little, Fiodor's moans became less loud, until at last they ceased, and he remained pale and exhausted, his head upon her breast.

In that silence Hulder spoke. "I'm very sorry," he said.

Olga looked up at him with an air of surprise as if just aware of his presence.

"Sorry!" she repeated, and her eyes lit up as if she realized his connection with Fiodor's state. "What have you been doing to him?" she snarled. "What have you said? You've insulted him! How dare you insult him? Go away, go away; I don't want to see you. Go away," she cried, louder, and the soles of her

feet began to tap as if she, too, were near the hysterical line.

After a second's hesitation Hulder thought it best to obey. His knees seemed to fail him when he went, so intense and racking had been the little incident, and so wounded was he by its sequel.

The evening dragged out. Hulder thought he would leave Ammenzell, abandon these madmen, find some place where there would be peace. But he did not know where to go. Perhaps he did not want to go. And he remembered Olga's eyes, the glow in them when she was angry, almost as wonderful as their humid tenderness when she melted to him. He would go, but could not.

At eleven o'clock that night, when he was sitting on his balcony and about to go to bed, he heard in the stillness, coming through the open window, a conversation in Russian, in excited tones. He did not understand, but when at last, quite suddenly, there came pealing through the night the same set of words, maniacally screamed, he knew what was happening: it was Fiodor calling in despair the dwindling account of the days he had to live.

VII

Fiodor fell in love. He had been alone down into the town to buy cigarettes. At the shop where he usually bought them there were that day none of the brand which he affected. Still muffled in his cape, with the comforter hanging loosely about his neck, he walked quickly through the narrow streets. The sun was streaming upon him; he was warmed and gay.

He stopped before a little shop where, behind a large show of porcelain pipes, of picture postcards and photograph frames, were stacked packets of cigarettes. Across the showcase was painted in large letters the name of the owner, Treitzen. He went in. The jangling little bell brought to the counter a girl. Smiling, she bent towards him, but Fiodor did not speak. With burning, hungry eyes he analyzed every detail of her, the plaited flaxen hair, the soft blue eyes, the perfect pink and white of her cheeks and neck, and the wonder of her little teeth set in very red, rather full lips that smiled at him humbly and yet very tenderly, as if capable of expressing only the gentleness of love, almost motherly. She bent a little further forward.

“*Monsieur désire?*”

Fiodor did not reply, for her movement had brought out in her arms and breast gracious curves which promised the woman a beauty greater than was given the girl. Staring at her, he yearned for her, felt as if some call were issuing from his body towards hers. She was still smiling as, hoarsely, he said—

“What is your name?”

“*Elise, Monsieur,*” she replied, and was as calm as if his question were the ordinary preliminary to a purchase.

“*Elise,*” he repeated. “It’s a beautiful name, and you are beautiful.”

The girl blushed; from her forehead to the edge of her low-necked blouse she was as a rose petal.

“You are beautiful,” Fiodor repeated.

Then, leaning a little forward, his eyes fixed upon hers, which quite frankly met his, as if too innocent to be afraid, he said, “I love you.”

Elise looked away. "*Mais . . . Monsieur!*" she murmured. She was confused, but not displeased.

The sun had brought out some colour in Fiodor's pale cheeks; his black hair was ordered that day and, though slight of figure, he, too, was beautiful.

"I love you," Fiodor repeated, and without any hesitation he slid his hands forward, took those of the girl, who but faintly resisted him, bent across the counter, drew her towards him so that her half-averted face rested against his cheek, and kissed her upon the lips.

VIII

Fiodor was gay; Fiodor was exuberant. His conquering tread raised the dust upon the white road and, as he walked, he sang light little mazurkas, scraps of operas, and even two or three bars of the old Russian ballad, "Over the river, the soft, flowing river, bends the weeping willow."

Upon the steps of the National stood Hulder, rigid, prepared to be offended still, but Fiodor had forgotten: what was sympathy or blood brotherhood to a lover? He seized the American's hands.

"Oh, Hulder," he cried, "I'm so happy, I'm so happy. Isn't everything wonderful? See, there's a hawk in the sky." He pointed to a tiny speck hovering high above. "The hawk, he'll get his quarry soon, and I—oh, Hulder, I want to dance." He ground the American's hands in a hard clasp and then bounding up the steps of the hotel, was gone.

"Another change," thought Hulder. "Still, a welcome one." Indeed, it was a welcome change, for an hour later, when he arrived for lunch a little late, at

the small table which he shared with the Nazimovs, he found a new Olga waiting for him; no longer the mouthing, fierce Olga of the previous night, but one who greeted him with a smile soft as velvet.

Fiodor did not hide his secret. There seemed no reason why he should, and if there had been he could not have resisted sharing with them his intolerable delight. Each one in turn was told the details of the adventure and other details as they came. He hid nothing, neither the impulse that had come upon him nor the way in which he had succumbed to it. It seemed to him natural that he should respond so swiftly to the girl's appeal, that he should recognize without any of the little shamings and coquetries which make up human intercourse the fact that, as he looked into Elise's eyes, a new shaping had come to his destiny.

"Isn't it just a little—sudden?" suggested Hulder.

"Sudden!" cried Fiodor. "Of course it's sudden. Isn't a thunderclap sudden? Doesn't a mushroom come up in a night? And does the crocus hesitate when it thrusts up through the soil its little white and purple sheath?"

"True enough," said Hulder. "But then you forget: the storm has piled up for a long time, while the crocus and the mushroom grow very long under the soil."

Fiodor looked at him contemptuously. "And do you really think," he said, "that love doesn't pile up and grow? Why, love amasses in every one of us for days and weeks and years. Amasses and concentrates until, almost at bursting point, it rushes forth into the open like the devil, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

“Indeed!” said Hulder, still sceptical. “Then your love is impersonal? It burst forth and Elise happened to be there, and you’re going to eat her? Good heavens, Fiodor, one hour’s delay and it might have been Mrs. Pettinger your devouring lion encountered. What an escape for both of you!”

Fiodor shrugged his shoulders. “*Anglais!*” he said. But he was too happy to remain offended. Newly a lover, he had to persuade all men that he was a lover. More than that, he wished all men to be lovers, so that his passion might thrive in an atmosphere where all worshipped as he.

“Hulder,” he said gravely, “you’re only pretending not to understand. You, too, you know it. The great adventures of life are like dragons that lie in hiding by the side of the road; they rush out upon you suddenly, stand across your path and bid you fight. There’s no time for delay then, and you know when your time has come.” He bent upon the American eyes that seemed curiously lucid. “You, too,” he repeated, “you know.”

And Hulder was silent, for at that moment Olga’s eyes suddenly met his and, with a shock, he realized that this was true: he, too, almost as soon as Fiodor, he had known. And he wondered whether Fiodor also knew his secret, or whether the egotism of the invalid was so great that he was unaware of anything that passed outside his immediate mental circle.

All that day Fiodor talked to him, wildly, without end, to Olga almost as continually, but with the note of caution which a son would adopt towards his mother, of Elise and Elise’s charms. “She is like the peach, the peony, and the white of the lily chases upon her cheek the jealous colour of the rose; her hair

is like a ripple on the lake when the sun gilds it; her mouth is like a bow carved in the flesh of a pomegranate . . . and shy and tender is she as a fleeting doe—as a fleeting doe anxious to be slain. And, bending, she is like a reed in the embrace of the wind . . .”

His melancholy lifted. He was intoxicated with the new wine poured into the old bottle of his life.

“She is everything I’ve been waiting for, the sweetness, the softness and the calm. And she is the love hunger and the sting of love. She did not resist me, for why should she? Was I not the one for whom she had waited her eighteen years, and those thousands of years during which she was in the making? I adore her; I’m drunk of her.”

Indeed, he was drunk of her and, as Hulder considered him, his grey eyes darker in their wildness and his black hair matted over his left eyebrow, his little moustache trembling with the intensity of his feeling, he felt anxious, afraid of this new passion so strong in its uprush, and so daunting. It was as if Fiodor, cold in the shadow of death, had suddenly been reanimated by the promise of life, and yet, knowing this promise to be false or transient, had sworn to draw from life all he could while he could, to gather while he might the roses of lips, and all this was so wild, so strange, because the gravedigger hung so close behind the ringer of the wedding bells.

Hulder went to Olga, spoke a few of his fears.

“He is very excited,” he said, when Fiodor had disappeared, evidently to walk up and down before Treitzen’s windows to catch a glimpse of Elise.

“Are you surprised?” asked Olga.

"No, of course not. But still, whatever he says, it seems so extraordinary."

"Yes," said Olga gravely. "He always is extraordinary—it's amazing, you see—she's not even a girl of his own class."

"I don't say that matters much, but still——"

"But still," said Olga, with a rather ironic smile, "but still it does matter, and yet you don't really think it matters."

"No," said Hulder. "After all, it doesn't matter. Love, like God, has no respect of persons."

For a moment, as their eyes met, they achieved unity, and there trembled upon Hulder's lips the avowal of his own passion, for he, too, was inflamed by this atmosphere which Fiodor was creating, anxious to follow his example, but the disquiet in him was too great to allow him to express himself just then. He had another preoccupation, that of Fiodor himself, because the rigidity of an almost New England conscience made him feel responsible for what was happening.

"There is something else," he said, "that troubles me. His—his state of health."

"Well?" said Olga, rather harshly.

"I don't want to exaggerate, but still—you know what I mean."

"I don't, or rather I do. And what has that got to do with it?"

"Surely," said Hulder, "you must see what I mean. The girl doesn't know—how ill he is." He looked sideways at Olga, rather anxiously, fearing an outburst, but apparently she was taking the discussion as if it affected a general question.

"No," she said, "of course the girl doesn't know, and she mustn't."

"Mustn't?" cried Hulder. "But really it isn't quite fair."

"Fair?" said Olga vaguely, the idea of fairness evidently a little foreign to her. "I'm not talking of that. But don't you think it splendid that Fiodor should be so happy?"

"But the girl, the girl!" cried Hulder.

"Well, what of the girl?" asked Olga, quite placid. "I'm talking of Fedia."

Hulder was silent for a moment, realizing that Olga saw no side save that of Fiodor. But still he had to make another effort.

"I see what you mean," he said. "But he can't—marry her!"

"Marry her?" said Olga, surprised. "Of course he can't marry her, but why should he?"

"He—he——" faltered Hulder. "If he can't marry her, then surely it can't go on."

"Why not?"

"It'll make her so unhappy if she doesn't know; if she's in love with him—which I can hardly believe—she'll break her heart when she finds out."

"That's quite possible," said Olga coldly. But a glowing warmth came into her voice. "Don't you think it splendid that Fiodor should be so happy?"

Hulder surrendered. He knew that he had made no impression at all upon Olga's point of view, which was soft as the tenderest flesh where she loved, steel-hard towards the rest of the world. Though he had failed, he felt closer drawn towards her. A tigress, perhaps, but had she not lain very close in his arms? And would it not be wonderfully warm and heartening if it were he, the object of that passion so capable of concentrating itself upon one creature to the exclusion

of all others? And yet his conscience bade him intervene between the fresh young girl and the consumptive, perhaps the madman, who threatened the safety of her body and soul.

Very shyly, that night, he spoke to Fiodor, only to be met by a mixture of blank incomprehension, as in Olga, and of rhapsodies on the perfections of the new love. He dared not, for fear of a scene and the crying of a fateful number of days, speak quite plainly. It would not have mattered much if he had, for Fiodor, intoxicated with his new delight, had forgotten death, glimpsed immortality. One little thing, though, Hulder did: remembering the scene in the boat, not many days old, he suggested to Fiodor that he had better not take the girl upon the lake, for he had a terrifying vision of Fiodor, suddenly overwhelmed by the fear of impending death, deciding to forestall its blow, and to go to it in the arms of his beloved. Artfully, he suggested to Nazimov that he was liable to catch cold upon the lake. He rallied him, told him Elise would have no use for him if he blew his nose all the time. But Fiodor laughed and replied—

“I’ll catch no cold now, Hulder. I couldn’t: *La fortune favorise les amants*. Nothing can touch me.”

As he spoke there was such a glow of youth and health in his face that, for a moment, Hulder wondered whether indeed this were new life, whether Elise’s love could perform a miracle denied the doctors. And then, realizing himself as helpless, he felt that events must take their course. Elise must take risks, and if she took them with closed instead of with open eyes, that could not be helped, for another sharp scene with Olga had followed upon his attempt to induce Fiodor to avoid the lake.

Olga had suspected in him a desire to step in between Fiodor and his happiness. She had come to him with that close knot in her eyebrows which Hulder knew and feared.

"How dare you interfere?" she asked. "What has it to do with you?"

Hulder once more stated his case.

"Don't be ridiculous," said Olga. "That day in the boat he was nervous, upset. It was nothing, just an accident."

"It might happen again," said Hulder gravely.

"It will not happen again; he's too happy."

"Yes," said Hulder, "he is happy." And there was a little longing in his voice. Olga's next words were less harsh, but still firm.

"You must not deny Fiodor pleasure," she said. "Both of us, we must do what we can."

And Hulder felt a little shame because so many of his scruples vanished when this woman, whom he feared and loved, said "both of us." It was ignominious, he knew, that he should be a party to such an adventure; allow such things to be done as might be done because he himself was held captive by a passion. In that minute he knew that he would have sacrificed Elise and every other woman in the world, if only Olga had once laid upon his cheek her slim, white fingers. A party to a conspiracy, to a conspiracy, perhaps, to destroy a young life. Yes, he was that; inactive yet, but consenting, because he had inextricably wound in the thread of his life among those two other threads that at all moments became one thread until, in his bewilderment, he was part of some hideous, thrilling trinity.

A consenting party—then an active one, for Fiodor,

prosecuting his suit and animate of love, still suffered enough from his physical weakness to need a helper as well as a confidant. Soon it was Hulder walked down the steep hill into the village to buy sweets which Fiodor gave to Elise, and it was Hulder went into the shop and bought cigarettes, so that Fiodor might not too much be noticed of old Treitzen as he sat in the back room, peacefully smoking his long porcelain pipe. It was Hulder who whispered to Elise the hour of the assignation which Fiodor made for the day in the fields on the road to Starnois. All through he was conscious of something abominable in his rôle. When he thought more coolly of it he saw himself as a separate figure : a tall, good-looking young man, in modish grey flannels, leaning across the counter and talking to a young girl with fair hair and rosy cheeks, who was herself another ghost. For the figure was not he, it could not be he, this assistant to an insane romance, who could look unmoved upon blushes that went as flying, rosy clouds across a milk-white skin, and be so cold and so base as not to cry out while he might, "Take care ! You are in deadly peril. Draw back while you may."

And he hated himself more as the days went and he knew that he was happy in his abjection, for the happiness of Fiodor created in Olga a state of mind by which the accomplice benefited. Very near now were the fruits of his complaisance. More than ever he longed for them, and every day, because he longed for them more, he hated himself more. Through his love of the Russian girl Hulder found running a streak of hatred and fear, as if she held him by some vile magic. But though he rebelled against the spell he knew that he was glad.

He was glad even in Fiodor's happiness because a little he had a hand in it. Every day now Fiodor went to the fields on the road to Starnois. Treitzen kept no close watch upon his daughter, and so, every day in the afternoon, under the golden shower of the rays of the sun, she went quickly, a slim figure with eyes averted and a little guilty because she had a secret, to join her lover under the shadow of a big fir tree, where the rivulet that meandered towards the lake was spanned by a white bridge. There she would sit upon the short grass that the heat had charred brown, her fingers busy with some knitting, while every minute her eyes would rove, glad and a little furtive, to see whether Fiodor were coming. And every day he came, quick stepping, his cape thrown across one shoulder, his black moustache combed at a gallant angle, with his hair flying in the wind, and about his thin frame the jauntiness of a musketeer. He would throw himself upon the grass by her side, draw her hands to his face, and talk to her wildly, endlessly, of life and love, and all the things that made beauty. She spoke but little, for she did not always understand. But, as she looked deep into the fierce eyes that devoured her, she was glad. For all this whirl of words, this periphrase, these allusions to writers and philosophers unknown to her, bore towards her the same message; it did not matter to Elise what Fiodor said: his words, set together, were her Song of Songs. And when, at last, suddenly pausing in his harangue, Fiodor seized her by both arms, drew her down and kissed her lips as if he would destroy her in a caress, she was all gladness, conscious only of a desire to be all his because she loved him and had forgotten the world.

And so, gaily on. Fiodor spoke no more of anodynes for life; he needed no longer philosophy and art; for he had found love, the anodyne which contains all others. Once he even proclaimed that optimism alone made life vital. He had forgotten Schopenhauer; almost he had forgotten all those other philosophers who had so ill reconciled him with his speeding fate. Suddenly he seemed to love all things. He called the dogs upon the road to caress them; he played gentle games with Madame Pettinger's children; he allowed the old official to tell him what Bismarck would have done to the Socialists. As his life opened as a flower, a new life seemed to come into Olga. She, too, now, could be all gaiety. She had abandoned the armour of fierce reserve with which she had protected herself against a hateful world. She, too, now, hated none, despised none and, as if Hulder, because he was the accomplice, were the engineer of her brother's happiness, she bent towards him as if already she were his. And Hulder, slowly drifting, came at last to the point where he and Olga were to meet. It was night. Fiodor, content and babbling, had been put to bed early and, as a child over-excited at a party, had gone to sleep as soon as his cheek touched the pillow.

Alone, Olga and the American went out into the moonlight, passed the hotel, the villas and their lighted windows, into the wood where they could not see each other, but were conscious only of their nearness. Then into a clearing where was a bench which the crescent moon silvered. As they sat down Hulder was thrilled with memory, for he knew that upon this bench a hundred lovers had carved their interlaced initials. For a long time they did not speak, but looked into

the black void of the little valley above which the crests of the hills glowed in the moonlight. Round them the silence was complete, for the cattle had been called home and stirred not in their byres. They had a sense of the everlasting, and Olga, perhaps, would not have moved; but there was in Hulder something male and restless: silently he took her hand. She did not resist. Half unconsciously he laid his arm about her shoulders, drew her to him in one wild, intoxicating moment, knew that she had not drawn away, indeed that she had come closer, laid her shoulder against his. Then, still more wonderful, that her head had fallen upon his breast and that his lips were buried in the thick, scented masses of her hair.

He spoke, hardly knew what he said, knew only that he was trying to express his longing for her; the interminable length of a waiting which had lasted so little and yet been so heavy, so torn and racked had he been by all it held. Olga did not reply, save by a contented little sound as he drew her yet closer to him, and his strained lips, descending from her hair, found her closed eyes. For some seconds they sat, close-linked, thrilled and yet languid, together.

Olga opened her eyes, looked deep into his.

"I love you," murmured Hulder. "Do you love me?"

Olga did not reply, but, with a sudden movement, flung an arm about his neck, drew his head still closer, and swiftly, violently kissed him upon the lips, filling all his body with the shiver that ran through hers, taking, in her caress, possession of him, together giving and taking.

Still linked, but less closely, they spoke.

"I'll follow you to the end of the world," said Hulder.

"Yes," whispered Olga, "follow me, follow us, love us!"

"I am yours," he said.

"And I am yours."

"Will you marry me?"

"As you wish. In free grace or in marriage, I am yours."

The words shocked and yet thrilled him. Free or bound, she was his. Incredibly, it was true. All doubts, base, incongruous, swept away, and the moon veiled the while by the night of her hair. He bent down and felt as if he were falling, interminably falling into a depth as his eyes came nearer to her open eyes and conquering, conquered, he pressed kisses upon her lips.

IX

Days of love unwinding as a feverish scroll; love, fleeting in the high airs, borne on the rosy wings of the flamingo; passion soaring on the pinions of the eagle and below, in these abysses above which none save birds can dwell, four pale servants of Zarathustra, four souls intimately linked to one another, bound by impalpable and tangled threads, joyous in conflict, suffering in unity, together welded as four fighting beasts.

It seemed to Hulder sometimes as if the weakest of the four were the keystone of that arch upon which their relations were built. Though secure in Olga's love, and though now, for him, she was all sweetness, he was conscious that, were it not for Elise, Olga would

not have been his. That she loved him, he knew. Not only had she said so, but, bolder than more Western women, abler, too, perhaps, to look deep into herself, she had told him what it was made her love him.

"I like your bigness, and your strength," she had said. "And all that short-cut, fair, curly hair. Your calmness, too. What would you say if, suddenly, the Wetterspitze were to fall into the lake?"

"I don't think I should say anything," said Hulder.

"There!" Olga laughed and clapped her hands. "That's exactly what I thought you'd do."

"One day there is the Wetterspitze, and the next day it is gone. What else is there to say about it?"

"Oh, you are wonderful, wonderful, you American people. Sometimes I think you are finer even than the English: quite as strong and not so stupid."

"You don't think we lack emotion?" asked Hulder.

"No, of course not," cried Olga, "but you're not like us; you don't let it run about the gutter. You are there, with your reserves and all the strengths that you might use." Her tone became appealing. "And you will use them, these strengths, won't you—for me and Fiodor? Oh, we need you so badly, both of us, and you love Fiodor. You do, don't you?"

"Yes," said Hulder, drawing her close.

And as he did so a strange feeling came to him. She needed him, needed his strength, his calm, his resourcefulness, needed them for herself and for Fiodor. Of course she was welcome and he, too, poor creature, racked by passion and the fear of death. But, indefinably, he felt disappointed because it almost seemed as if he were not alone with Olga, as if, when together they sat in the sun, the tenuous shade of another fell across and distorted the outline of their

own shadows. But he was weak and he knew it, for in this minute, when he held Olga in his arms, held her close, and was all shaken with the powerful thrill of her nearness, he forgot. Between them was no shadow now, no shadow he could perceive, and yet, even as he kissed her lips, this shadow that he could not see was indefinably about them in the form he held, in the fragrance of Olga's breath.

And now it was not only one shadow, but two shadows: a phantom couple in attitude recalling his own with Olga. He loved, was loved, and Fiodor loved, was loved. Together the loves had come about, as if twin. And Olga and Fiodor were twins, were one. An indestructible connection seemed to exist between them all, as if he had given himself to Olga who brooded over Fiodor who intolerably loved Elise: it was a preposterous, laughable House That Jack Built, the race of the torch, the flame passing from hand to hand. But then again, when such thoughts took him, pressed him against the uneasy bosom of his intellect, he thrust them away. It was not elixir that Olga poured, but narcotic.

And still the days of love went by on wings rosy as those of the flamingo. Fiodor, in pursuit of his love, had not expressed what he wanted of her: whether passion without thought or ruth, or marriage and bourgeois comfort, or unconsciously, perhaps, a remedy for unoccupied days, or perhaps even just a lie, something to make him believe that his mind was not disordered, that he truly saw the rosy wings and not the grizzly black webs of the bat. His depression had not returned. It was not a dream he lived for; he was too active, too vital. Giving his life into the custody of another, he had taken another's life into

his own charge. It seemed as if he had for the first time come into the fulness of his activity. Dead were broodings and philosophies, uncertainties, vain rages and regrets. Illumined by the high-flaming star of his passion, he rode with the Valkyr. Hulder found it hard to realize that the pink and white daughter of a tradesman could be the cause of such a revolution. He had to remind himself often that the idea was more than the fact, that the object of love is far less than love itself. But soon, in the growing egoism of his own love, which made it impossible for him to trouble about aught else, he ceased to question the end and the genuineness of Fiodor's passion. As if Elise had indeed been the high-born creature, rich in thought and emotion, who should have been Fiodor's mate, he accepted her.

Once only did he descend from the pinnacle of egoism on which every true lover dwells. Accidentally, upon the shore of the lake, opposite that spot which serves as a wharf for the little sailing boats, he met Elise. For some moments he was able to consider her unobserved. She was clad in a skirt of thin white material, over which was a plaid blouse, low-cut at the neck. Rather round-faced, her head bent a little under the heavy weight of her fair tresses, she looked intently towards the lake. All of her, the slenderness not yet redeemed by maturity, the round curves of her white neck and bare arms, all this was so young that Hulder felt moving in him something tender and sorrowful. She was as a little barque setting out upon the ocean in fair weather, and ignorant of the storms to come. He went up to her, spoke. She hardly answered, so great was her embarrassment, and so great her desire to suppress her blushes, to appear very sedate, col-

lected and grown-up. Timidly, she inquired whether Fiodor was well.

"Oh, he's quite well," said Hulder, a little guiltily. Then hurriedly, "He's always well now."

She could not govern her blushes.

"Yes," said Hulder, "he's a new man since he loves you."

Elise averted her head.

"Why do you turn your head away? Don't you love him, too?"

She did not reply, and he saw her fingers tremble.

"Don't you?" he said, impelled by a half-conscious desire to gain the truth from her, while aware that the truth mattered little: if she loved Fiodor, she went to disaster with him; if she did not love him, another disaster must come.

"Yes," she whispered.

Hulder spoke of Fiodor, of his charm, of his wild cleverness. He painted him as a weak thing animated by a fierce spirit, and Elise listened gravely for a very long time, while Hulder spoke of his friend, and of Olga, warmly, excitedly, as if something of the ambient hysteria had touched even him. All this that was happening was not common life, but some nightmare. He had with words to drug himself into a belief in its reality. Elise listened to the end. She made as if to speak, turned away. Then her soft features became resolute; she looked him full in the face.

"*Oh, Monsieur Hulder!*" she cried.

There was a pause and then, suddenly, there burst from her the dithyramb of her adoration. Looking beyond Hulder, she poured forth her love song. All that she had dreamt had come—the little blue flower of Swiss sentiment—the learning, the philosophical

bent that many a woman reveres without understanding it—and above all the youth, heart and body aflame, Lohengrin in his silver armour drawn by the swan . . .

It was pitiful, wonderful. And, out of the tenderness of this love, Hulder drew something gentle which he laid later on Olga's altar, there to be scorched by the fierce flame of her passion. That evening, as if a plot had been hatched by earth and sky, there was a thunderstorm.

While the glittering peaks of the mountains were still bathed with rose, a mauveness crept up from the valleys towards the slopes. Purple fought with red, dominated it, and in its train came grey, long streamers of cloud rising from the south slowly moving into position, capping every peak with a grey haze which slowly grew darker until, upon a background yellow as sulphur, the clouds had set as troops about to go into action. Sulphur paled to whiteness, darkened to grey, and as, under the weight of heat and clotted water, a hush fell over the country, the clouds seemed to join up into a common blackness, blotting out the sky. And then, very slowly, the greater blackness of the mountains began to merge with that of the heavens, for a thick grey shroud of rain, many miles away, was uniting air and rock.

For nearly an hour, dull against the rattle of the forked lightning as it zigzagged like streams of molten metal across the black wing of the night, came the continuous, muffled roar of the thunderclaps joining up in a terrible chorus. Sometimes the sky was naught save a sheet of flame in which the black mountains, lit up by the bolts that struck them, appeared like lace-work cut in basalt.

The three stood at Hulder's window, against which the rain swept, sometimes sharp with hail, sometimes so heavy that it might itself have been a shower of stones, and then quite solid as another pane of glass. Before them the trees struggled in the wind, bending to earth, their branches furled round them as a woman's skirts about her limbs. And once, before their eyes, flew something large and black: the roof of a shanty torn from its walls.

An intolerable excitement seized them. Standing together, Olga and Hulder clasped each other's hands, unconscious almost of Fiodor, though they had not told him their love, as if they realized that to tell him would not have affected him, that there was room in him for only one thought. Fiodor, close against the window, stared out into the black and golden fury of the storm. He murmured to himself. His mouth worked and, little by little, he became audible.

"Storm," he said. "Revenge of heaven upon earth, fouled by man—you are like a vulture settling upon Prometheus and tearing at his liver. Strike! Yes, strike again, O Storm! Strike while you may, for we fear you not, we men, we strong things of the world. For we have wit and learning, and we have love." A flash of lightning gilded his face, gave brilliance to his eyes. "Love," he cried, "ultimate, self-sufficient, self-explanatory, accountable to none! See! There goes Love flying by upon a golden chariot, drawn by black clouds harnessed with lightning!"

He was wild, he was mad. And those two who stood with him, silent, with their souls boiling within them, were they, too, wild and mad? Were all mad, or were all men so? Could, in three weeks, three creatures lose contact with the little laws and the little habits of

civilization, stand stark before a storm as if spirits thereof, because in the grasp of their passions they were tossed by a greater storm?

"Are we all mad?" thought Hulder. And, swiftly, out of some deep cavern of himself, that he had not explored, came the reply—

"I don't know, and I don't care."

Fiodor had stretched his arms towards the fire-streaked night; behind him Hulder drew Olga close in a hard clasp.

X

Fiodor lay at Elise's feet. About him, the afternoon was in mid-glory. A soft, effulgent warmth rose up from the distant waters of the lake that were unruffled as a silver mirror. He lay full-length on the charred grass, stretched out upon the cape, a little languid in the heat that had made him throw open his coat. At times, with a nervous hand, he pushed away from his forehead the matted black hair that clung to his skin. But the movement was unconscious, as was also his observation of the scene: his head thrown back, he looked at Elise, at the firm whiteness of her chin and the queer shortening of her features when so seen. Elise did not look at him, save from time to time, as if by accident, when for a moment her blue eyes would plunge deep into those of Fiodor, soft, humid and conveying, without coquetry or concealment, the gentleness of a soul surviving the turbulence of its passion. More often she let them satiate themselves with all this landscape which she had known for eighteen years and for the first time saw as beautiful. She was revisiting the land of her birth with eyes

opened and made new. Before her spread the flat meadows, dotted here and there by browsing sheep; beyond were yet more meadows, then little clumps of trees, hazel and birch; quite alone upon a hillock was a great copper beech that now blazed with every leaf as metal, save here and there where the purple darkness of autumn touched it.

They were alone. Far away was a small house, white up to the ground floor, then yellow and crowned with a roof of crimson tiles. And there was no sound save the distant lowing of a cow and the soft, steady breath of the wind among the light leaves of the birches.

She was oppressed, as if all this newly understood beauty were a gift too great for one who had just discovered happiness. She had never heard of abstract beauty, this little Swiss girl. Those eighteen years of hers had been spent in Treitzen's shop, at school, in the kitchen, and, more rarely, at the fair. She knew nothing, understood nothing. And now, for the first time, as Columbus setting foot on an unknown shore, she was feeling with incomprehensible intensity; her mind was in turmoil with delight. A shy delight, almost incredulous, mixed with a fear of this thing to come which she so desired; she was as a nymph fleeing from a satyr, anxious that he should overtake her, shuddering lest he might. For a moment she let rest upon her lover's face a gaze so purely adoring, so much the gaze which came into her eyes when she knelt before the Virgin, that he noticed it, became conscious of her as a woman and not as an extension of his own personality.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, taking her hand.

"I don't know," she said, after a long pause, "except that somehow it seems to me too wonderful to be true."

He pressed the hand, laid a kiss in the firm, warm palm.

"It is wonderful," he said. "But it's true. Out of nothing and out of nowhere, little Elise, I have come because I had to find you, and because you were looking for me. Isn't that true, little Margaret of the golden plaits?"

"Yes," she said seriously, "that's true. I have been waiting. I didn't know it until you said so, and now I know. It seemed so long, so long, *mon Fiodor*."

"Yes, life that is so short can seem very long. It depends what you do with it, you see. Whether you make of it a great adventure that heaps fuel upon the flame and causes it to devour you more quickly, or whether you let life consume you very, very slowly. Which is the best, little Elise, do you think?"

She looked at him, uncomprehending but still adoring.

"Whichever way you like," she said.

He laughed, sat up, threw his arm about her, drew her close.

"Ah!" he cried, with the soft, low break that comes into a lover's voice when he holds his beloved. "Whichever way I will! That's well spoken, little Elise."

And for a long time, slowly, softly, as if anxious to forego no delights, he covered her face with kisses, surrounding with a necklace of caresses her firm white neck, stinging into redness her rosy cheeks, into purple her consenting lips.

"I love you," he murmured. "I have never loved

anybody before, not like this. So it must be true if it's different, mustn't it, little Elise?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"I love you," he said. "We must never be parted, must we? You will follow me, will you not—to the end?"

"To the end," repeated Elise, her eyes closed, understanding him not at all and yet content to love him without understanding.

For a moment, though he held her close, he forgot her.

"It is strange," he said, "this quality of love, bound up in such little things: the curve of a lip, the tilt of an eyelash, the note in a voice, or just one stray, gentle word falling like dew on a parched field, and no more. Just one thing so slight and a world born anew. That one thing missing, and the world as sour as it was. What is it? What can it be? It isn't the body only, for one can love when one's body is failing, when one is old, when one is parted by the sea, or even by the grave. No, it is more than the body, though the body be the link. Let us know it and not take the messenger for the message. Love is the discovering of the complement, the solution of the equation, the x which makes it come right. It is a concordance of discords, the thing that makes attraction complete, just as a kiss, sweet Elise, completes."

He laughed, bent over her, his lips very close to hers.

"Qu'est ce qu'un baiser? Un point rose sur l'i du verbe aimer."

He kissed her, and for a very long time they were silent.

"And so, my angel," said Fiodor, "all things are said. I love you. Do you love me?"

"Yes," said Elise simply.

"Are you ready to dare all things, suffer all things?"

She hesitated. Something puritanic or virginal rebelled in her at the last moment. She did not know whether he meant to marry her or not and, desperately, she clung to all that she had been taught; but his grey eyes laid upon her a heavy spell: what he desired, she felt, that she would do.

"Yes," she said, gripping his hand tight. "Anything you choose, Fiodor."

He clasped her to him in pure joy, but at that moment there passed through him a new impulse strangely compounded of two impulses. Now he would tell her what she must bear. Despite Nietzsche, and Machiavelli, and all those others who had made him, he thought it fair that she should know that the instincts of a gentleman survived in him philosophical culture. He could do the handsome thing even though the ridiculous. And, mixed with this old moral feeling, there was something else: a desire to test his power, to set himself up as plague-stricken, bearer of a plague, and yet to give to his own pride the balm of a victory. That she should love him, that was well; but that she should love him dying and dangerous, that was better.

He leant over her hungrily and wished that already she knew that in every one of his kisses might lurk her own death: terrible to her, they would be sweeter to him.

"Listen," he said; "I have something to tell you."

His tone had suddenly grown so grave that she started away from him. His eyes fixed upon hers, he did not try to draw her back. Indeed, he loosed

her hands, so anxious was he to offer to his pride of conquest the greatest salve; to be able to tell himself that, without the spell of contact, he had been able to hold her.

"It's something you must know," he said, "know and accept if you love me. I am young and, to you, I seem strong, perhaps fair. But as a fruit that hangs, all gold and crimson upon a branch, and bears within its breast a canker, so am I. Do you understand?"

She shook her head. She could not understand, but she could be afraid.

"I am sick," he said. "I am dying. Oh," he cried, as she leapt to her feet with convulsed face, "so are you, so are we all. But I die perhaps a little more quickly. I may perhaps live long. A little time ago I thought it would not be long. I counted days. The days—let me count them again. One hundred and eighty-three, less two months and two days, sixty-two—no, July has thirty-one—sixty-three; that leaves me a hundred and twenty days. A hundred and twenty days, Elise! If that were all, would it be enough for you?"

Hands clenched upon her breast, which rose and fell with her quick breathing, she did not reply, but stared into his face, a wildness in her pupils.

"A hundred and twenty," he said again. "It's a great deal, little Elise, even if it's true. And it isn't true. It isn't true," he cried more fiercely. "It was true, perhaps, until I loved you. But now all things are changed, and I must live even though I have but one lung."

"One lung!" said Elise hoarsely. "But then—but then——"

In her fear she was almost hostile.

Fiodor's tone changed. "But then," he said, "well, you know—consumption. Yes, that's what it is; I'm consumptive. One lung has gone and the other is touched." He seemed to see her no more. "Touched, even the other, and every day the obscure travail of the tubercles continues, eating me and gnawing me, drinking my blood, sapping my breath. I'm all poisoned with it, and steeped in it. My body's on the rack." His voice rose. "And even though I love you, even though a minute ago I thought that your love could do what the doctors failed to do, now I know it more truly. Nothing can come between us. A hundred and twenty," he muttered. And then louder, "A hundred and twenty!" He looked at her. "Will you take me for a hundred and twenty days, Elise? Bear with my humours, watch over me, love me?"

Her hands came out open towards him, but he had not seen them when he added—

"And will you take your risk, Elise? Will you take poison with every one of my kisses? Will you dance with me the dance of death? Be mine here on earth, and take poison from my mouth, soon to earth come with me?"

"Fiodor!" cried the girl. And there was such a horror in her features that Fiodor's pride reared up, stung.

"Ah!" he said. "You're afraid; then you're afraid. So that's the value of your love for me! You love me young and strong, don't you, Elise—but not weak! And you love me in your safety. You won't come with me into the Valley of the Shadow. Oh," he added bitterly, "it's natural enough."

"Fiodor, I don't mean——"

"No, but what do you mean? You're afraid you may catch it, you, too. Oh, it isn't wonderful. But where's the dream? You're casting me off."

"Oh, no. Oh, no, Fiodor."

"No? You're not casting me off? Then come, Elise, take me in your arms now. Come, now you know, kiss me, be my bride. Ah, you shrink, you shrink! You're not for me, after all. You fear for the roses and the lilies of your cheek. You don't want with me to pant for breath; you don't want to be shaken by a cough and see the blood pour from your lips. You don't love me."

Suddenly Elise hid her face in her hands and she began to weep. For some moments Fiodor watched her. She was all shaken with sobs that were deep, almost noiseless, and soon, between her fingers, he could see the moisture of her tears. As he looked a new gentleness and understanding pity came to him. Was it not too much to ask of this fair young creature that, even in the cause of love, she should give herself into the hands of death? Very gently he took her hands, tried to draw them away from her face. But as he did so a little shiver went through the girl. She drew back. At that moment Fiodor loosed her.

"Ah," he cried, "you shrink, you shrink from me! I mustn't touch you; you're afraid of me, of the plague-bearer. Never mind, never mind," he shouted. "A hundred and twenty! What does it matter? It won't be long. A hundred and twenty!" he screamed. And, as he turned and began to run, he cried, "A hundred and twenty—or less!"

Elise, through her wet eyes, saw him run across the meadows. As he turned when he leapt a stile once more to cry out at her the terrible figure, she saw his

face, purplish, convulsed, for the last time. She saw him take his handkerchief from his pocket and, as he vanished behind the trees, she saw that, as he stumbled on, he pressed it against his mouth. For a long time she stood alone. The cold of death had come into her hands and feet; her clothing, moist with heat, seemed suddenly to have grown icy and clammy as a winding-sheet. Her ideas ceased to connect.

Fiodor had gone—but he loved her, of course he loved her—and she, too—but he was ill, very ill—and she was afraid. Yes, but what did that matter? Her mind would not hold the problem. She struggled to understand, though conscious now only of irreparable loss. Suddenly the cold of her body seemed more acute and she knew only one thing, that Fiodor had gone, that she had lost him.

She gave a low cry, pressed both hands against her cheeks, took a few steps forward, a few more, quicker; then she began to run, aimlessly, as if she did not know where she went; to run with hair loose upon her shoulders, her mouth open in a scream which her strained breath would not let her utter, to run half demented across the meadows.

XI

The denser woods spread over a little hillock between the ravines all tangled with brushwood and creepers that were spattered here and there by scarlet and purple berries. Here a couple sat, silent, under a tall pine tree. Along the base of the hill wound the road towards Starnois, like a broad white ribbon shining dustily in the evening sun. Through the boughs they

could see the sky slit up by the trunks into blue panels, all of them vertical and almost geometrically similar, as if Nature with an artistic hand had conceived her landscape as a decorator. And there was no sound save, on the left, the distant ringing of the bells of the church with the swollen spire.

They had, both of them, a sense of suspension, as if for a moment the earth had stopped to breathe, interrupting the swiftness of its race round the sun. About them was the silence of the pinewoods, seldom broken by the call of a bird, where there are no leaves to eddy upon the light wind and then to fall, with a dry, crackling sound, upon the corpses of their brothers. As Hulder lay at Olga's feet, his head pillowed upon her knee, he had again something of the sensation he had experienced that first time in the boat under the ogives of the willows: content, fulfilment, peace. And yet there now mixed with his beatitude something more precise, a security in his new possession, an assurance that, however tempestuous might run the course of his passion, however much as the fleeing hare it might double in its tracks, surely and irremediably it was such that at last it must reach its goal. Under his contentment lay purposefulness. This hand, which he held, with the slim, hard fingers, it was no longer something distant, something ideal almost: it was an actual thing given into his trust, and he did not doubt that he could hold it, for the hand just then did not refuse itself. Indeed, the long fingers had, little by little, wound themselves in among his own, so that in an intimate clasp the two hot, moist palms were joined. The lovers did not move, conscious that the clasp of their hands was so close that, holding, they were almost wedded, for hands can be

formal and rapid in their touch, and mincing, or sportive, or cold, revengeful, challenging. But when, very closely, they are welded into one, when phalanges are intertwined so that they cannot easily be parted, when palms touch as lips, then are truly two spirits through their bodies embracing.

But at last Hulder looked up to meet the softness of Olga's eyes. She smiled. Her full, pouting mouth parted upon her small teeth; her eyes were half dreamy, half ironic, and it was in a tone where tenderness ran coupled with banter that she said—

“What are you thinking of?”

“You,” said Hulder promptly.

She laughed. “Oh, what a ready lover, and what a ready speech! Is that not the answer to give a woman always?”

Still her tone was ironic, but she laid her hand upon his forehead and softly caressed his hair.

“Your hair,” she murmured, “I like it. It's so short, and it tries so hard to curl, and you won't let it. You're cruel to your hair, don't you think—cutting so close those tight little curls!”

“You wouldn't like me to look like a barber's block?” said Hulder.

He, too, spoke lightly, but he was all filled with the delight of this contact, and as he spoke slowly moved his head so that her hand should come upon his neck where the hair grew close like a brush of sturdy little wires.

“You feel like a doormat,” said Olga. And still, as if captured by the vigour, the hardness of the man, she continued stroking his hair, forcing it out of its natural lie, glad to feel it rebel against her hand and ultimately prevail. Hulder turned a little to look full

into her face, and in that moment was oppressed by her beauty as he never had been before, for the sunshine, as it filtered through the pine needles, had gained a mauve quality that made her pallor radiant. And something more contented him: her restfulness and her power and the response which he felt in the hand that caressed him.

"I love you," he murmured.

Her eyes, still serious, plunged into his.

"I love you. I adore you. Oh, it isn't only that you're beautiful—there's that, of course, though I suppose I've seen many other beautiful women. It's something else. Just you, I suppose."

"Yes, it's always just oneself when one loves. How could one explain?"

"Olga, couldn't you explain?" said Hulder, a little anxiously, as he sat up, throwing his arm about her waist. "Couldn't you?" he asked, with entreaty in his voice. "You can, better than I, you know."

Very close to him, she looked into his face. He could see little details of her, varying colour in her pupils, the close grain of her skin, and the faint dark down upon her upper lip.

"Explain," she said vaguely, and her brows puckered as if she were seeking words. "No, I suppose I can't. How can one? Just a consciousness of your presence in a world which was different before; only like that."

Hulder was moved for a moment to discuss love and self-expression, but the rhythmic rise and fall of her body against his seemed to deprive him of coherence. He did not want to argue—he wanted to know; and, in his desire, he was willing to skip all intervening steps, explanations, qualifications, possibilities. All

that he wanted was to know that she loved him, to be sure of it, and then to be told it as a tribute, and again to be told it as a mere delight, and again to be told it, and again, because the love song is to men's ears the music that may be to God's the music of the spheres.

"Do you love me?" he asked urgently.

She did not reply. He held her closer.

"Do you love me?" he repeated. "Say you love me."

Her eyes were very close to his; he saw her lips move, but, before he could catch the whisper, she had come closer, laid her mouth upon his, and the discontent that was in him, that balked desire to know, to hear, all this was swamped in the close, powerful clinging of her lips as she held him, and, as the shiver of her frame communicated itself to his, his intelligence was swamped by his emotion. To know, to understand, what did all that matter, with this shining, fragrant creature in his arms?

They had broken their link now and sat side by side, still silent, watching in the meadow below the shadow of an elm that slowly grew longer. Then Olga spoke, irrelevantly—

"How still it is. There's nobody here."

"No, nobody," said Hulder. And, as he spoke, far away upon the white ribbon of the road, he saw a figure, no more than a dark dot. Idly he watched it for a time, telling himself that it mattered little who it was, for the road passed below the hillock towards Ammenzell; nobody that walked that way could see them if they did not so wish, and yet he watched that figure growing before his eyes with an interest that seemed abnormal when taken in a stranger. It was as if some instinct bade him keep his eyes fixed upon it,

or as if he were moved by some peculiarity of it. Already, when he could see that it was a woman, two things struck him. One that her course was not direct, that she zigzagged across the road. He wondered whether she was drunk, and then remembered that he was in Switzerland, where those things did not happen. The other was that the woman grew in size at a rate incompatible with walking speed. He realized that she was running, running upon the road very fast, and also from side to side, as if driven by something terrible and imperious which almost deprived her of control of her movements. Then, in the light, he saw shining a strand of fair hair, and, quite suddenly, before he recognized her, his heart began to beat as if a suspicion of something secret but sinister were upon him. In that second he knew that this was Elise running towards them—and she was alone. Could it be——

He heard a hoarse exclamation. Olga, too, had seen, recognized, understood.

“Look!” she cried. “Who’s that? Elise! I’m sure it is—but why is she alone? Running, see how she runs! But—but—she went with Fiodor!”

Olga leapt to her feet, seemingly unconscious of the grip which the American still maintained upon her hand. Looking away towards Elise, who was now some two hundred yards away, she seemed rigid, was, with one arm outstretched, as a statue depicted in the midst of an arrested movement; but, suddenly, her features leapt into activity.

“Look!” she cried. “Look at her face! She sways—and her hair is upon her shoulders. Something has happened; something’s happened to Fiodor!”

She tore her hand from Hulder’s grasp and then, with a heart like a balloon tugging at its ropes, he

was running behind her down the steep towards the road. As they reached it Elise came abreast of them.

The girl did not seem to see them. Her blue eyes were staring from her face, now covered with sweat and dust; her mouth was open and twisted as if she could hardly draw a breath, and both her hands were pressed upon her breast; she was still running swiftly, one of her shoes loose and clattering on the road. She would have passed them, so intent was the gaze she bent upon the unknown goal towards which she ran, towards which she would run until her limbs gave way beneath her, or something material stopped her.

Olga thrust out her hand, seized the girl by the wrist so roughly that, carried by her own momentum, Elise swung almost round her, fell against her. But, before Elise could clasp the body that was friendly because it was human, because so badly she needed something to touch and to hold, Olga had thrust her away with a furious push, was screaming at her questions: Where was Fiodor? What had she done with him?

Elise did not reply. She stood, her eyes staring, unable to speak, and swinging from foot to foot as if about to fall. Hulder caught her in his arms, into which she fell, quite limply. She was half fainting; her head fell back upon his shoulder and suddenly she became quite heavy in his arms. He drew her to the side of the road, seated her upon the grass, her back against a heap of stones, and then, for some minutes, Hulder tended her, wiping her face, softly patting her hands. Crouching over them, her hands upon her knees, Olga again and again repeated her questions.

It was several minutes before Elise could speak, for there was no brook or pond from which water could

be taken to revive her, and even then, when her body had regained energy, there was still in her mind something wild and strained, some inability to understand that which she knew. At last only, in reply to Olga, did she say—

“Fiodor—I don’t know.”

“But you were with him,” cried Olga. “Where is he? You were with him.”

“Yes,” said Elise. “I was with him.”

“But where is he?” Olga stamped as she spoke, and her teeth set in her lower lip.

“He ran away,” said Elise, in a low voice.

“Ran away? What do you mean? Why did he run away? Where to? Where is he?”

“I don’t know where he is,” said Elise, and her head fell back upon Hulder’s breast as if she were near fainting. But, quite suddenly, relief came. Two large tears formed in the corners of her eyes, slowly rolled down her cheeks; then more tears, coming one after the other, flooding, as if she could not control them, as if her eyes were dissolving into tears. Olga stood silent and rigid before her, realizing that nothing could be done just then, while Hulder very softly rocked the girl in his arms, murmured comforting little words and, from time to time, wiped away the tears until at last they became less violent, until Elise opened her eyes and showed by the clearness of her gaze that once more her thoughts were sequent.

“Fiodor——” she murmured. “Oh—I remember now. He ran away there across the meadows—he ran away, but I don’t quite know—but he told me that he loved me, and he said”—her face contracted—“oh, dreadful things—that he was consumptive—that he was going to die in a hundred and twenty days——”

"Hush!" said Hulder, for a low cry had escaped Olga.

"It was dreadful—it was dreadful!" murmured Elise. "He asked me to love him like that for a hundred and twenty days——"

"And you refused," muttered Olga, bending down.

"I was frightened, I was so frightened," whispered Elise. "He said, I, too, I, too, perhaps I would die if I married him. And he knew it. He said I was frightened; that's why he ran away." She flung both arms about Hulder's neck, hid her face upon his breast. "Oh, I'm afraid," she cried. "Hold me close. He ran away—his eyes were staring and his hair had fallen on his face."

"Back at once!" Olga shouted. She seized Elise by the wrist, dragged her to her feet, and now she was urging the two along the road. "At once, at once. We must find him. Where did he go? Speak, fool. Didn't you see?"

Elise shook her head as she stumbled on. "I don't remember; I was afraid."

"Afraid?" said Olga bitterly. "Afraid of the king of men! Little fool! Can't you even tell whether he went to the right or left?"

Elise shook her head and again began to weep.

"Let her alone, Olga," said Hulder; "she can't tell you anything. We must go back to the hotel and wait."

"Wait!" shouted Olga, and raised into the air a clenched fist. "Wait! It'll make me mad to wait."

They were walking swiftly upon the road now, and the first villas of Ammenzell were past. Still supporting Elise, Hulder held Olga's arm above the elbow as if to restrain her. She did not seem to notice it,

but walked on, swinging her other arm, muttering under her breath. As Hulder walked on between these two distraught women, he, too, was haunted by a vision of Fiodor fleeing in his despair, disappointed in his love, hopeless of a doomed life, and ending it in the lake. He did not know what this meant to him, but as he felt in his own the quivering of Olga's arm, he knew that all this was not without influence upon his fate. And now, as they turned past the Royal, affronting the curious eyes of the people of the town who knew Elise well, he was hatefully conscious that he had a share in a public scene. Mixed in with his anxiety for his friend, with the pain that filled the woman he loved, with his pity for the poor weeping child whom he led, was the self-effacing gentleman's hatred of a conspicuous position; and, as he realized this, he hated himself, called himself a bloodless, vain creature, unfit for the stress of life. Yet he was, with Elise, pushed rather than led to Treitzen's shop. He sped with Olga up the road towards the National. Once again, as on that day when they had been too long upon the lake, Olga walked swiftly, tried to run, but this time a greater fear was behind them, touched them with the spur, for it was precise now, not indefinite. They did not speak nor touch each other as they went. There was nothing they could say, for the anxiety which held them was too gnawing to need expression. They were, both of them, wildly rolling in the same area of disturbance, as two ships together sucked into the maelstrom; they needed no words.

Together they ran up the steps of the National, through the empty garden. Together, on the stairs, in hoarse voices, they called Fiodor's name, then ran into the bedrooms. There was no reply. Fiodor had

not come back. For two hours Hulder had to struggle against something in Olga which he thought to be growing madness. A little of that madness was in him, too, for when he tried to reassure her, to make her believe that after an hour in the fields Fiodor would return needing her, he found that he himself did not believe this, that he had vague visions of something horrible that had just happened, which were not less terrible because they were vague. All that could be done was done. Hulder went downstairs to telephone the police officer, and sent out on a search, to which he attached a reward, several labourers from a neighbouring farm. He returned to find Olga, face down upon the bed, silent, rigid, and when he took her in his arms she still so remained, eyes closed and mouth compressed. He caressed her cheeks, and she did not resist; softly kissed her as a mother comforting her child. Again he was optimistic against the growing certainty of disaster. He told her what he had done.

"A search," she murmured vaguely. "Yes, that's good. I must go. I must search, too."

Hulder restrained her by force. "No, no, you can't go."

"Let me go," she cried, struggling with him. But the American held her.

"No, you can't go. If he comes back here he will need you. You must wait."

"Yes," said Olga quietly. "He'll need me; I must wait."

And so they remained together silent for another hour, until the sun, dipping low, stained the sky blood-red. The room was half in darkness. There was a tap at the door.

"*Entrez!*" cried Hulder. A maid, open-mouthed, white-faced, handed Olga an open telegram addressed "National." For a moment she held it out at arm's length before her eyes. There was not a twitch in her features, nor did she say a word, but her face had set into a mask, dirty yellow in colour, from which her lips protruded dark brown. In that second of silence Hulder knew that Fiodor was dead and, in his horror, he, too, felt his features setting, grow rigid and so hard that, had he wanted to, he could not have spoken. Almost unconsciously he stood up, went to Olga's side, took the hand that held the telegram. She did not seem to know that he was touching her, but still remained staring at the telegram upon which Hulder, without conscious intention, read the words—

Young foreigner found shot lamp depot *Gare de Cornavin*. Envelope in pocket name Nazimov. Proprietor communicate police and identify body.

When the silence had lasted so long that from it spectral voices seemed to come and engage him in converse, Hulder, recovering from the horror of the shock, was all swamped with pity. Gently he tried to draw Olga into his arms, and found it was an effort to bend back her arm. Literally she seemed turned to stone, but still she gave way without looking at him, let him take her into his arms, seat her upon the bed, kiss her cheek.

"Olga," he murmured. "My poor, sweet Olga. This is terrible, but you must be brave; my darling, have courage." And then, with the egotism of a lover, that egotism which convinces him who loves that he is all-sufficient in the world, he added, "I am here with you."

Olga did not reply. Still she remained staring straight in front of her, as if her eyes could still see the words written on the telegram which she had unconsciously crushed in her hand. And Hulder, while he wondered what he could do or say, feeling that the comfort he might offer availed little against such despair, seemed to see again unrolling before him the immense tragedy of a few weeks. This was the twenty-fourth. On the first day of August he had met Fiodor. In twenty-three days he had known love and friendship; Olga and Fiodor had loved; Fiodor had died. Truly their lives had sped more swiftly than the globe which bore them.

But now Olga's silence frightened him; she was quite motionless in his arms and, when he bent down to kiss her lips, which were dry and burning, she did not respond to the caress; she seemed unaware of it.

"What are you going to do, Olga?" asked Hulder.

There was no reply.

"Would you like me to go to the station and—and do what needs to be done?"

Still no reply.

"Or," he said, with hesitation, "would you like to go to Fiodor?"

Olga's eyelids fluttered. She looked at him as if her brother's name had touched in her some chord that at once responded.

"Fiodor," she said. Then, with queer, quick childishness, "Fiodor. Oh, well, he's at Geneva. I must go to him. I must go to him now." She smiled. "I'm going to see Fiodor. How nice!"

She freed herself, rose to her feet. "Where is my powder puff?" She laughed. "How things get lost

in hotels! \ And my handkerchief—I have lost my handkerchief.”

“Olga!” cried the American, and did not know there could be such fear in his voice.

She paid no attention to him, took up her hat from the bed and put it on.

“Such an ugly hat,” she said. “Look how knocked about it is, and Fiodor hates me when I’m untidy.” And then, stridently, in continuous peals, she began to laugh, hands upon her hips, rocking to and fro as if swayed by uncontrollable merriment, to laugh on a shrill, high note.

The laughter seemed to pierce Hulder’s eardrums, and in that minute he was almost sure that she had lost her reason. Dominating his fear, he seized her by the shoulders and, in his excitement, shook her until her head rocked backward and forward.

“Olga!” he shouted. “Don’t you understand? Fiodor is dead.”

As if she had been struck dumb, the laughter stopped.

“Dead,” she said softly. “Oh, yes, I must go to him.”

She had not shed a tear, and now she seemed quite reasonable, so reasonable that Hulder thought it best to offer no comfort.

“Shall I come with you?” he said.

“Come with me?” she replied, as if some hotel guest were offering her a polite attention. “Oh, don’t trouble; why should you come?”

“But I—I——” murmured Hulder.

“You?” said Olga. “Who are you?”

For a moment Hulder was silent, and a thin streak of understanding entered his mind.

"I?" he said. "Don't you know me, Olga? I'm John Hulder. You're going to marry me soon. I was Fiodor's friend."

"Oh, yes," she said, "Fiodor's friend. I remember now. But Fiodor is dead; you have no friend."

He seized her hand. "But I have you, Olga, my darling."

Gently she freed her hand.

"But don't you understand? You were Fiodor's friend and he is dead. That's all, isn't it?"

Moved by some terrible premonition, he threw his arms about her, kissed her on the mouth. For a second she submitted to the caress, then suddenly thrust him back. Her voice rose to a cry: "Who are you? I don't know you. Let me go! I say, let me go!"

She put her hand to his chin, thrust him away, ran to the door. "I'm going to Geneva!" she shouted. "Let me go!" she screamed again, as if she were being held. "I must go to Geneva, now."

Hulder ran down the stairs, conscious only, in the turmoil of his mind, that he must follow her, but she was winged with despair. Already she had fled through the front garden; he could hear her running upon the road. He was gaining upon her, already her footsteps sounded louder. Then he lost them. He realized that she must have taken the short cut on the right, down the steep little path that ran from the brewery. Stumbling in the darkness of the plantation, he followed her, but heard her footsteps no more. He must have been wrong, he thought. He retraced his footsteps, but he had lost her, and when, a quarter of an hour later, he arrived at Ammenzell, he was told that, a minute before, Olga had hired the motor-car at the Royal and driven away to Geneva. The suicide

was known in the town, and Hulder found himself the object of curiosity as an associate of the dead. But he paid no attention to questions and condolences; as he walked to Treitzen's shop to tell Elise the truth in case she had not heard it, there was but one thought in his mind: he had been told at the Royal that Olga was not crying, but that she seemed filled with an ungovernable rage, that she had abused the proprietor and the chauffeur, called the latter by names which no lady would use. Except, added the proprietor, under the stress of emotion.

Hulder could not understand. Olga weeping, Olga prostrate, that would have been natural, but Olga blaspheming, raging at fate—this was something he could not grasp. He knew only that he was in contact with a temperament the reactions of which he could not understand, and it added to his anxiety and his pain that the thread of his life should have become entangled with some other strand that threatened to make of it something he could no longer follow.

Elise, at least, gave him the satisfaction of her greater obviousness. She already knew, had been told, and her father allowed him to see her for a few minutes. While Hulder knelt by the side of the girl's bed, where she lay, still white-faced and quite exhausted, Treitzen, who did not understand, stood in a corner of the room, his large pink cheeks shaken by sobs, and his good-humoured eyes swollen with the tears that his daughter's incomprehensible misery had called up. Elise did not reply to the words of comfort which Hulder mechanically gave her, nor did she weep. She was too exhausted. At last only did she murmur—

“I must go to him. I must see him once more.”

"Yes," said Hulder gently. "You shall, Elise; you shall."

"Take me with you now," she said.

"No, not now; to-morrow. I'll take you to-morrow."

"No, no," she cried, more shrilly, clasping both his hands. "Now! To-night!"

She tried to sit up in her bed, but Hulder easily forced her back upon the pillow.

"No; you must be reasonable, you must rest. To-morrow morning, I promise you—there, do you hear?—I promise you, to-morrow morning."

Elise did not reply. As a child she was controlled. Besides, her weariness was such that a command from another served her as a will. As Hulder tiptoed out of the room he saw that her cheek lay on the pillow, and that her features were relaxing. In another minute, as an exhausted child, she would be asleep.

Alone he went to the station. In three-quarters of an hour he was at Geneva. From the station he was sent to the police office, thence to the mortuary. But it was nine o'clock; the mortuary was closed. The custodian said he must come in the morning.

"But I want to see him now," cried the American.

He did not know why he wanted to see his friend. Perhaps, he thought, by some mysterious means Olga had gained access to him.

"Oh, you all say that," replied the official. "There was a young lady here an hour ago; she, too, wanted to see him. I told her to come to-morrow morning. It is the rule."

So Olga had come. A brief description and a coin drew confirmation of this.

"She made a nice row," said the man. "Had to

have her taken away by the police. Ridiculous, I call it."

Taken away by the police! Hulder dominated his pain, for the desire was still in him.

"I'd like to see him to-night," said Hulder, taking some silver from his pocket.

The official shook his head.

"Impossible. It is the rule. Besides," he added, half smiling, "you'll find him all right in the morning. *Il vous attendra!*"

As Hulder walked away, the brutal jest echoed in his head. No, Fiodor wouldn't run away. For two hours he searched Geneva, though he knew that his chance of finding Olga was small. He thought of inquiring at the hotels, but there were hundreds of them, and, besides, who could say what Olga had done? At eleven o'clock he suddenly realized he had had no food for ten hours. He ate hurriedly, standing up at the station buffet. In another hour he was at the National, upon his balcony. Olga had not returned. And when at dawn at last he threw himself upon his bed, haunted by anxieties, horrible, incomprehensible intimations of personal disaster, she was still missing.

XII

WHEN, next morning, the doors of the mortuary opened, Hulder stood waiting with Fiodor's beloved. The girl had been dressed in black by her conventional father. She was not weeping, and on the journey had not said a word. In fact, only once altogether had she broken silence, and that was when passing a florist's she asked Hulder to buy some white flowers. It

was bearing in her arms a great bunch of lilies that she entered the chamber of the dead. As Hulder looked upon the face of his friend, for a moment he forgot the preoccupation which had been filling him: Olga's disappearance and her attitude to him.

The mortuary was a small room, painted brownish green. There were four inclined stone slabs upon which trickled a little water. Three of the slabs were empty; on the fourth lay Fiodor. His face had not changed; it was much as in life: yellowish, a little drawn. The lips were parted, showing the beautiful teeth. And, as if nature had given way before death, or as if death had been decent, the mass of black hair that in life hung over his left eyebrow had fallen over the right so as to hide the bullet hole in the temple.

For some moments those two stood silently before the body. They had, both of them, been too racked to feel much emotion. There was no sound save in the corner the clicking of the mortuary keeper's keys as he watched the scene with an air of boredom.

"That's the gentleman, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Hulder.

"Oh, you'll have to sign to identify in the office." He nodded towards the door, then stifled a yawn.

Elise drew nearer to the body, bent down, recoiled for an instant as if afraid, bent down again and softly kissed the dead man's forehead. Then, with uncertain hands, she spread the lilies over the body, lilies upon his breast, and lilies by his side. She stopped; there was a catch in her breath; she repressed a sob, bent down to arrange about Fiodor's head a crown of lilies. As she did so Hulder heard the opening of a door, a sound—and then another sound.

"Ah! ah!" cried the voice. "Lilies—lilies—how funny!"

He turned. Olga stood in the doorway, her hands clasped together, hatless, her hair matted and falling over her face. But her eyes were not wild; they seemed clear and purposeful.

"Lilies!" she cried. "Like lace on a wound. You've come in good time, little fool, with your lilies."

She came closer to Elise, stood face to face with her.

"So you've come to see what you've done?" she said. Her voice was very low and distinct. "You've come to see the man you've killed because you didn't love him?"

Elise started back, frightened, her hands outspread as if to defend herself.

"Because you didn't love him," repeated Olga, still in low tones.

"Oh, I did, I did," moaned Elise, "only——"

"Only you were afraid—only you were a coward—because you were ready to play with him and deceive him—and betray him—because you were willing to make his wretched life a greater hell."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Yes, yes!" cried Olga, louder. "Miserable little fool! Did you not then know how proud you should have been—that he should turn to you—oh, such a man to such a one as you! It was like the sun shining upon a weed, and you ruined him, and you killed him; but for you he would have lived. How dared you do such a thing? How dared you be such a fool?"

She took a quick step forward. Elise recoiled.

"Coward!" shouted Olga, and then again, "Coward!"

Before Hulder could move Olga had suddenly swung her arm back, and in the same movement, with the full weight of arm and body, struck Elise upon the cheek so terrible a blow that the girl reeled back and would have fallen if she had not encountered the wall. And there, for some moments, while Hulder seized Olga from behind, she remained, trembling, her hands against her mouth, and upon her cheek the purplish mark of four fingers.

"Olga! Olga!" cried Hulder desperately.

Through all his sorrow there ran again a conventional feeling: that one should not wrangle in the chamber of death. But, as he touched her, suddenly Olga freed herself.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "How dare you touch me? I don't know you. Leave me alone, all of you."

She made a movement with both arms as if to sweep the room clear.

"But, Olga!" cried Hulder. In that moment he forgot that others heard him. "I love you. Don't you remember? And you love me."

There was a long pause. Then Olga spoke quite quietly—

"Love you? I never loved you. Oh, no, perhaps I did love you, but Fiodor was alive then. He wanted you, needed you. But now he is dead. Don't you see what a difference that makes?"

"Olga, I beg you——"

"But don't you understand? He is dead; it is all different now. I can't see you any more; you are no longer there."

And Hulder, as he heard the low voice speaking philosophical abstractions, suddenly had a horrible

thrill as if it were the dead man who had spoken. But energy had come into Olga. She shouted—

“Go away, all of you! All of you—now!” She seized the flowers. “Take away your lilies, all of you—and go.” She seized Elise by the arm, dragged her to the door. “Go, little coward, before I kill you. And you, too,” she cried, seizing Hulder. And with sudden, irresistible strength, driving them towards the door—

“Go away, all of you, and leave me with my dead.”

Bewildered, they stood in the corridor. The official was with them, still jingling his keys. He nodded towards a little window.

“You can see through there,” he said.

Hulder bent towards the pane. Upon her knees by the side of the stone slab was Olga. Bathed in the reflected greenish light, her hands and neck had assumed the colour of the corpse's features. She knelt, quite motionless, her lax hands upon Fiodor's breast, her eyes hidden in his cape. There was no movement in her as she communed with her dead.

Then, little by little, Hulder found that the official was urging him with Elise towards the identification bureau. A register was opened before him. Mechanically he signed. As he did so, he heard the custodian's voice coming from some far-away region where lay shattered the dream of love, the hopes, the ambitions and the desires, all the sweetness of life ground into powder by death. He did not know what the man was saying; he seemed to be talking a great deal. Hulder knew that all was over, that between him and Olga there had never been anything save the bridge that Fiodor built. And now Fiodor lay upon the stone

slab; the bridge was broken. Between him and Olga was a chasm across which never more could a bridge be thrown. Oh, what was that the custodian was saying?

"Lord! The young lady did make a fuss! They do now and then."

He yawned.

FOUR STORIES

I. THE CORK

“WE shall have to do it,” said the old man slowly. “We shall have to do it after all, *la mère.*”

The old woman stood by the side of the wide tiled hearth, her gnarled brown hands planted on her thin hips. Small, wizened, burned the colour of brick, she seemed, in spite of her seventy years, more vigorous than her old husband. She was slightly bent; her sparse white hair was drawn tightly back from her forehead. Under the veined skin the skull was indicated; she looked like a bird of prey. Now her dark, beady eyes rested upon him, and her thin lips, hardly redder than her chin, were pursed up in thought.

“Why?” she asked at length.

The old man did not reply in words. He shrugged his shoulders; his head slowly swayed from right to left and back again, like that of a very old cab-horse which can no longer kick when its master whips it. Mother Perguix understood very well the movement of this man, with whom she had lived half a century. Perguix was saying clearly, “Look at me. Am I not seventy-four? Do you not see that my back is bent as a bow? That my hands are bound with the knots of gout? I can no longer work merrily in the fields,

plough a straight furrow; and shudders run down my old back when I stagger under the weight of the fencing poles. Is it not time I had my rest?"

She did not argue with him. The time to abdicate had come, so she accepted the idea of change, as she had all her life accepted storms, droughts, pests, diseases, all those evils nature sends the peasant. Seeing her old husband so feeble and broken, her heart ached; she tried to comfort him.

"It had to come. It may not be so bad, for Jules is a good boy. Besides, many others have given up their land and lived happily. Euphrasie is a good girl."

The old man did not answer. He was not looking at her. He let his eyes travel past the oak dresser his great-grandfather had bought in Chartres, when the town was afire with excitement because Marie-Antoinette, the Austrian, had dropped her head into the basket of the guillotine; he considered the big bed in the alcove, the worn red eiderdown under which he had been born, under which he would die, the brass pots, the glittering kettle, the china of Sundays and festivals. Then he looked through the window at the winding white road which glowed in the sun as it rose up the hill of Aveneau. He could see the farrier's house, a horse about to be shod, and one of his own meadows in which browsed one of his cows.

The door opened and Euphrasie entered. Tall, raw-boned and dark, she had an air of joviality which might be brutality. Hands on hips, she looked at the old people as if she wondered whether it would be well to cajole them or better to bully them. She decided to be good-tempered.

"Well, *les vieux*, what are you plotting, you two?"

It was Mother Perguix answered after a pause.

"He can't work so well now." She indicated the old man by a toss of her head. "So he's been thinking of what Jules said. And . . ."

"And you'll give up the land?" cried Euphrasie excitedly. Her black eyes glittered, her voice trembled with unguarded eagerness.

"Maybe we will—maybe we will," said the old man sulkily. He looked at her with an air of suspicion. "And maybe we won't. Maybe I'll talk to Jules when he comes in. And maybe we'll go before the *notaire*, and put it all on paper. And maybe we won't do anything at all."

He rose carefully from his seat and walked to the door, choosing places for his feet as if some were softer than others; and as he went he muttered again and again, "Maybe we will and maybe we won't. Maybe we will . . ."

Outside the door he found Henri, his great-grandson, aged five, gravely playing with a bucket of water. The little boy looked up at him and smiled, gleefully holding up a cork. "*Grand-père, grand-père!*" he cried, "look, look at me: look at the funny game I'm playing."

"Yes, Henri," said the old man, "let me see."

The little boy plunged his arm into the bucket, wetting his sleeve up to the elbow, then released the cork. "It always comes to the top," he whispered confidentially—"always."

The old man turned away, murmuring, "What silly games children play!" and again began to gaze at his field, where browsed his cow.

The agreement was made very soon, for the notary had a common form for such transactions. When

old Perguix and his grandson Jules appeared before him, very awkward in their stiff blue *blouses*, which shone in the sun where the starch was thickest, he merely asked, "Annuity?"

"*Cinq cents francs, M'sieu l'Notaire,*" said Jules. The young man threw out his chest. The mention of this vast sum made him feel so proud that he ceased to pick at the soft black hat he carried in his hairy hands; he was no longer embarrassed; and when he left with old Perguix, he magnanimously suited his stride to the shuffle of the bent figure. Was he not Jules Perguix, twenty-five, free of military duties and the quasi-owner of the old house, three meadows, seven cows, an orchard, and four acres of good arable land?

Jules Perguix walked slowly; but he walked a little in front of his grandfather.

The old man did not reply when Jules asked him to come into the house and seal the contract with a glass of brandy. He did not want to be invited into his own house. He shook his head and walked on, a hundred yards to the labourer's cottage, where his wife waited, almost settled in her new home. The furniture had already been put in its place; there was the dresser with the Sunday china; his armchair stood by the side of the hearth. He sank into it without a word, so bent, so broken that again his old wife's heart ached.

"*Courage, vieux!*" she said. Then, as he did not look up, she added, "*Tiens, here's some tobacco. Fill your pipe. Why, vieux, aren't you happy? You'll never have to work again.*"

She laid her hand upon his shoulder, shyly almost, as if her hands had forgotten that they could caress.

For caresses such as those had died so long ago.

And so they settled down to idleness uneasily, for they had had no practice in the art. When Perguix had dressed, read the *Petit Journal*, smoked a pipe upon the bench outside, his wife could join him, sit there too, for the dusting of their two rooms was soon over. There was not much cooking to do, and washing-day came but once a month. Most of the day they would sit on the bench, he smoking steadily, she knitting socks for little Henri. Then the dusk would come and the shadows grow longer on the Aveneau road. Then night. Then another day, and the end a little nearer. When Jules came punctually on the ninety-first day to pay the hundred and twenty-five francs, he rallied them as he regretfully piled upon the table the twenty-five pieces of silver.

“Well, *les vieux*, happy doing nothing?”

They did not commit themselves. They seemed to have no will in the presence of this vigorous young man. They did not protest when, on the next occasion, the money was a fortnight late. It was paid, but, said Jules, times were very hard, the crop had been poor, there had been greenfly, and some fungus had got into the potatoes. In March no money came, and after a month had elapsed, Mother Perguix went to the house. Euphrasie reiterated her husband's complaints. They could not pay at once, and the string of her troubles was unwound, while her bold eyes avoided those of Mother Perguix. Euphrasie gave her seventy francs, but the remaining fifty-five were paid only when the next quarter was due. Then the whole of that quarter became overdue. The old

people had had no meat for three weeks. The cider-cask was dry and the pipe empty.

Then Euphrasie came, half-fawning, half-truculent : "You'd much better come and live with us. Fancy paying double rent. Why, we'd make you feel so happy ! I'd make your clothes, *la mère*, and you'd be living just as we do, on our own land. Think how good it would be, to sit there and smoke, *père*, and look at little Henri."

They came. They were too old to go to law, much as they loved the idea of a lawsuit. Soon Perguix was sitting by the hearth in the house, while his wife knitted opposite. But one day Euphrasie forgot to buy him the *Petit Journal*, and he did not feel strong enough to walk up the hill to the shop. Mother Perguix told Euphrasie to go and buy it. The woman bought it ; but next day it was forgotten again. Then the paper was bought on Sundays only, but Jules took it away, and after reading it, slept with his head on it in the barn.

"What?" said Euphrasie one day. "You've got no more tobacco? You smoke too much, *vieux*; it'll do you harm. You can't have any more this week."

The old man eked out from Saturday to Saturday the supply which formerly sufficed for four days. Mother Perguix no longer had on Sundays a penny for the poor, but merely a single *sou*. Further than that Jules and Euphrasie could not go, for there was Monsieur le Curé to reckon with.

One day, as she had to help Jules to clean out the pigsty, Euphrasie suggested that the old Mother should wash the floor. There was no demur, though nothing had been said about work when the old couple came to live with the young. Soon Mother Perguix

not only washed the floor, but helped to clean vegetables, to cook; she killed rabbits, gave a hand on washing-day. Then Jules said to the old man, "Why don't you come into the orchard, *vieux*? It would change your ideas."

Soon the old man was loading fallen apples into a wheelbarrow. It was not hard work, for the curve of his back made it easy to pick them up. When he returned from the orchard he found Henri outside. The child was seven now; he smiled at his great-grandfather, who returned the greeting; he felt he wanted to amuse the little boy.

"What was that game with a cork you used to play?" he asked.

"Game? Oh, yes! cork in the bucket. Oh, I haven't played that for a long time!"

"Let's play it," said the old man.

The child fetched a cork, a bucket of water, and obediently plunged in his hand.

"Hold it tight," said the old man.

"I can't hold it for ever, *grand-père*," said Henri laughing. "I'd get too tired; or I'd get cramp, and it'd get loose and rise."

"True," said the old man. "Still you can hold it for a little."

"Yes," said the child, "but it's got to come to the top some time."

Now Mother Perguix cooked the meals alone; she carried food to the pigs; she walked to the far meadow to milk the cows. Her old husband did not come home until sunset, for he did the menial work, bound sheaves and stacked wood, or carried materials when fences and roofs had to be mended. They did as they were told, dumbly, as if they could not question

the right of orders. Once Mother Perguix protested when Jules told his grandfather to go out at night and padlock the barn door.

"What's that?" asked Jules angrily. "What do you mean? What's the good of you if you can't do a stroke of work? Sitting here all day doing nothing, eating and drinking, while I kill myself with work! Don't let me hear that again, *la mère*."

He looked so threatening that no more was said. Even Euphrasie was afraid. And so the life wore on, the life of endless toil to which are bound those who live by the land. All day it was labour, difficult and slow because the hands that did it were old and stiff; it was ditching and draining and the carrying of weights; it was the drawing of water and of loads, and there were long weary journeys to Aveneau to buy crockery or ironmongery. Now the tongues of Jules and Euphrasie were as lashes: they commanded, they urged, they reproached; and the young hated the slow old people, they hated their helplessness.

One day, as Perguix drank his soup, his hand trembled so that he spilled a spoonful down his *blouse*.

"*Vieux dégoûtant!*" roared Jules. "A new clean *blouse!* Who's to be paid for washing that?"

He raised his hand and, as if carried away by an ungovernable impulse, leaned across the table and struck the old man on the side of the head. Perguix said nothing. He sat at the table long after his old wife had cleared away the dishes; there were streaks upon his cheeks which might have been sweat, or tears.

A little later in that year Perguix paused in front of the house, laid down the heavy ploughshare he had

brought home to have sharpened, wiped the sweat from his dim eyes. Then he saw Henri seated on the bench and reading a school-book.

"What's that book, Henri?" asked the old man.

"History," said the child, with the portentous gravity of his nine years.

"What history?" asked the old man.

"History of France. How some kings were beaten when some others came. Battles, you know."

"Ah . . ." said the old man. Then his unsteady mind wandered. "What's that game you used to play, Henri, with a cork and a bucket?"

"Oh, I don't play your silly old games," said the child impatiently. "I've got better games now. I play a game with a ball. Father says he doesn't want to play it, but I make him. I always make him, for I can go on asking longer than he can say *no*. He says little boys always make the old ones play their games because the old ones get tired. He says little boys must win. Is that true, *grand-père*?"

"But the cork . . ." said the old man.

"*Ah, sut!*" said the child, and walked away.

The old man hesitated, then went into the house, came back with a cork in his hand. He drew a bucket from the well, dropped the cork into the water. First he held it under, but the water was cold, his fingers were stiff; the cork slipped away and rose to the surface. Then he poked at it, submerging it for a second. He poked at it with uncertain fingers, but it eluded him, refused to sink. At length he let his hand fall. "It's no good, it's no good," he muttered, "it won't stay under."

2. THE HOUSE

I

ALBERT BERRY laid down his pen and pushed away the account-book. He looked wearily round the shabby room, an insignificant little figure all of a colour with his surroundings. His fingers strayed into the straight black hair, which was too long in front, and cast a shadow over his pale face; he pulled at it unconsciously, as he was wont to do when trying to solve the riddle of life. He felt conscious, so far as it was in him to be conscious, of his inadequacy; he was sheerly unable to grapple with too large a problem. Nor did he find any help in the scene which met his eyes—his mother bending low over the sock she was knitting, her brows wrinkled in the effort to capture all she could of the scanty light, his sister whose listless hands had dropped into her lap a tattered novel, his brother Tom deep in a French grammar. Nothing moved in the room, and no sound was heard, except at times mumbled words from Tom, as he tried to commit a rule to memory.

“Well, Bert?” asked the mother, raising her head suddenly. Her face showed pale and still pretty as it tilted up in the light.

“We’re down again,” said Albert slowly. His eyes were watery grey, his mouth undecided. His face was

that of a man who would ask a boon if he knew what he wanted.

There was a pause. Tom raised his eyes from the grammar. The girl looked at her elder brother as if she were frightened of something, and yet trusted him to rescue her.

"You know what we said last week, Bert?" said Mrs. Berry in a low voice.

"Yes, mother."

"Mr. Johnson will give fifteen pounds for the business . . . so . . ."

"Oh, don't give it up!—don't give it up, mother!" cried the girl passionately.

"Oh, shut up, Sarah!" snapped Tom suddenly. "We been making a loss every week for two months. If I'd had my way . . ."

"Oh! you know a lot," interposed Albert. His voice rang weary rather than savage. There was a pause. Then again Mrs. Berry spoke:

"Fifty pounds it cost us, Bert. Stock's worth thirty. Sweets, toys, tobacco. Tobacco did it, Bert; there's too many in it. I . . . well, I suppose we better sell."

Nobody answered. Albert stood up and again looked at the room. This dingy little back shop, the sideboard, the red curtains, the coloured advertisements of the tobacco people, all that had been enterprise, and now . . . well, they'd better sell. With an air of bewilderment he swept back from his low forehead the fringe that was too long.

"All right," he said, rather hoarsely.

Mrs. Berry's face sank down to the sock, while Tom returned to the French grammar and Sarah to the tattered novel.

Albert slowly paced the room, and stopped before the window which looked into the back yard. He gazed intently into the darkness, the sodden mantle of defeat clinging round his shoulders. This, then, was the end of six months' struggling! Theirs was a simple story enough: after the death of their father their mother had bought a newsagent's and general business on which there was a weekly loss, while he and his brother remained clerks in the City. Together the two boys earned a hundred and fifty pounds a year; another ten pounds was available from their cousin the auctioneer's apprentice.

Albert Berry looked out into the blackness, where shapes formed and rolled in the night air. For the first time in his life he perceived dimly that he was laden like Atlas. He and his brother Tom earned bread for all. Of course it could not be otherwise. His mother had to look after the shop and, assisted by Sarah, to nurse the old grandmother whose chronic neuritis made it impossible to leave her for more than half-an-hour at a time. Albert Berry had once before felt his trammels; he had even tried to discuss the situation with Tom. But neither could articulate his thoughts. In the back of both their minds was a feeling that the grandmother ought to go into a home, when of course Sarah could take up some work. But in fact Albert had said—

“It'd break her heart to go into a 'sylum.”

“And I don't suppose mother could run the shop without Sarah,” had been Tom's answer.

It remained at that. The two boys looked at each other suspiciously, as if one waited for the other to be selfish or cruel and were making ready to reprove him. Neither spoke, but they were pervaded by a

sense of immense if undefinable wrong. Then further letters came to them. Suddenly their mother's brother and his wife were carried away by typhoid fever, leaving behind them their two boys aged eleven and thirteen.

"We can't see them go to the workhouse," said Mrs. Berry.

"No, mother," replied Albert.

Tom had not spoken, for he did not know what to say, how to express that his aching young shoulders could not bear a heavier load. Soon the two little cousins were adopted. One was now at school, the other apprenticed to an auctioneer.

"Good job," Tom had said with regard to the boy's billet. "Gives a man a position."

That had settled the question, even though the boy could thus earn nothing for six months. Mr. Berry had been a traveller; his sons were clerks. The family had put its hand to the plough: if it swerved from the furrow it must irremediably sink into the labouring class.

So Sarah, in the intervals of sulky ministering to the needs of her grandmother, read novels borrowed from the club. And the business was sold.

II

A period of joy was now coming for the Berrys. They were to come into possession of their house. After the sale of the business they found it necessary to look for a new home.

"Why not buy your 'ouse, Mrs. Berry?" said Mr. Roper.

Mr. Roper was an old friend of Mr. Berry's, a traveller, too. As he sat with his rotund stomach drawing taut his clumsy silver chain, his fat hands clasped so as to allow his squat thumbs to circle round each other, there was a curious air of alertness about him. His stiff black hair, his sharp little blue eyes, his red face, his quickness, made one think of a London sparrow decked out in the plumes of a cockatoo.

"Buy a house, Mr. Roper?" said Mrs. Berry, with a gasp. "Oh! we can't do that."

"Yes, you can," said Mr. Roper, with grinding decision. "I'll put you on to a building society. Seventy pounds down. 'Ouse is yours. You pay it off in twelve years. Doesn't hardly cost you more than rent."

The Berrys looked at one another. An electric thrill ran through them all. Mrs. Berry felt herself swelling at the idea of having her own home. Settled! . . . she could be settled. The dream of old age would be realized: she could drop her anchor and live—that is, wait for death. Sarah looked at her greedily, hardly trusting herself to speak, afraid she might seem too eager. She could see a parlour, no, a drawing-room, where they could have music . . . a young gentleman to tea . . . hymns on Sunday afternoons. Both Tom and Albert felt their hearts beating. To them a house would mean solidity, security. They would be publicly lifted up from among the masses which crowd in lodgings and half-houses and pray that poverty may not thrust them into tenements. A house, their house, would define them as of the middle rank; it would consecrate them, flash forth the news that the Berrys had escaped for good from the labouring class.

Mr. Roper had his way. Tempestuously he brushed aside the timid objections that Albert put forward in his vain efforts to plead against his own desires.

“Capital? What d’you want capital for? You’ve got the seventy pounds. Well, pay what you like and ’ave what you like. Nothing like property, my boy—nothing like property.”

He had beamed, he had hurtled more than ever like a colossal cockatoo; on his impetuous wings, of which the wind blew away such problems as firing and repairs, he had wafted the Berrys into triumphant possession.

“Your own ’ouse, my boy,” he shouted, as he clapped Albert on the back, “think of that! In twelve years: Mr. Albert Berry, Esq., of 44, Lamoro Avenue, ’Ighbury. Tony, eh! Why, Bert, you’ve only got to look at the ’ouse . . .”

The Berry looked at the house, their house, with the deep passion which breathes from love at first sight. It was a brick box, sandwiched between other brick boxes, one of a row of sixty or so. It had a flat face that looked very fresh and clean, a little door varnished white, a porch which it shared with No. 45, some stained glass to keep light from the hall. It had a bow window which was obviously intended to contain a three-legged table carrying an artificial palm tree in a fancy pot. On the left of the garden path (flagged) lay the front garden, mostly brilliant yellow gravel; in the middle of the stony waste a round plot of earth afforded scanty nourishment to some young geraniums. Along the iron palings grew stringy plants, which might one day become bushy privet.

The Berrys took possession. They knew days of bliss. Even Albert the repressed, the good young man, slammed his door with an energy which was every night a taking of possession. A subtle suggestion of power, of social status, emanated from the family as it sat at home of evenings before its favourite tasks. The tasks had not changed, but the atmosphere had. They were house folk now, on the way to becoming carriage folk. On the last day of the month Albert paid the rent and buttoned up the receipt with a curiously capitalistic air.

Two months later the water rate became due. Also a white notice arrived from the borough. Albert began making casual calculations, but singularly enough he seemed to become more intent upon them as he went on. Mrs. Berry stealthily watched him; her intuition told her that her son was disturbed. Then a sound from above called her to the bedside of the grandmother.

The reaction from joy was slow. It took the form of an atmosphere of vague anxiety. Nothing was said; at the most Tom occasionally cleared his throat as if about to speak, then changed his mind. Mrs. Berry once asked Albert whether he had paid the rates. He looked at her anxiously, drew his hand over his forehead.

"Yes," he said at length, "but . . . I say, mother, do you think you could cut the weekly books a bit finer?"

Mrs. Berry's brow suddenly showed its wrinkles.

"I don't know, Bert . . . I don't want to . . . I can't very well; there's your grandmother, you know. All that medicine costs a lot."

"Yes, yes." Albert's voice was rather testy.

“Oh! that’s all right,” he added, dismissing the subject.

Mrs. Berry did not like to press him, fearing to know more, but the general feeling of disquiet grew. Sarah was affected by it, and often stayed the evening at the working girls’ club. At last, one night, Albert suddenly handed his mother a demand for ground-rent.

“Seven pounds!” faltered Mrs. Berry. “I didn’t know . . . I thought that was in the rent.”

“It isn’t,” said Albert savagely. “Roper didn’t tell me.”

“What are we going to do?”

Albert hesitated.

“Look here,” he answered quietly. “I’ve worked it out. Forty-two pounds a year for the Society, rates and water rate fourteen pounds, King’s taxes fifteen shillings, ground-rent seven pounds, that’s nearly sixty-four pounds.”

“Sixty-four pounds!” gasped Mrs. Berry. “Oh, Bert, we can’t do it!”

“Leaves ninety-six pounds for the lot of us,” said Albert dully.

“Less season tickets and six pounds we owe the tailor,” added Tom.

“What are we going to do?” said Mrs. Berry.

There was silence for a moment. Then Albert laughed rather bitterly.

“Oh! we’ll find the money,” he said, with the suspicion of a snarl.

The money was found; the rates and ground-rent were paid. Both Tom and Albert obtained from their employers a fortnight’s salary in advance. Now the household lived from hand to mouth, struggling to

make up the leeway those advances had entailed. Mrs. Berry made more desperate efforts every day to think of nothing but cleaning and keeping the house, but it resisted her efforts. Everlastingly the rhythm, "Sixty-four pounds a year!—sixty-four pounds a year!" resounded in her ears; even Sarah, tied to her grandmother's bedside, heard it ring in her futile brain.

The tailor began to press for payment. Albert borrowed three pounds from his departmental head; Tom obtained two from a friend; Mrs. Berry extorted sustenance from the very bone of the leg of mutton; Sarah washed the blinds at home. But blow after blow seemed to fall: now the season tickets, then insurance, then again boots—fatal things that came in sovereigns at a time. The Berrys faced the storm bravely, working together with splendid solidarity. They did not even indulge in the melancholy cheerfulness which follows on an exchange of views; they preferred not to speak of what they all feared, to confront any hardship rather than surrender the symbol of their rising class. As Tom and Albert did not smoke, they had few luxuries to cut down; but they tacitly ceased to buy the morning paper they usually shared. Sarah no longer went to the club; she had wanted a new hat for a long time, but she could not ask for one, and did not care to meet her friends without it. So the days passed similar and uneventful, except that the pressure became ever a little closer. The boys, availing themselves of their season tickets, began to return home for the lunch hour, of which forty minutes were now spent in travelling. The evening meal shrank a little more; the tea seemed to grow paler; meat gave place to an occasional course of fish.

Above all, the house remained, magnificent and symbolical. Its windows shone from perpetual rubbing; its curtains were immaculate, and tied up with red ribbon; not a single leaf or blade of grass marred its gravel or its flagged walk. Whenever Mrs. Berry came back to it she looked at it as tenderly as a lover gazing into the face of his mistress; sometimes though there was hunger in her eyes as if she were looking at a sickly child which death might take. Yet it stood strong, and among all things the cynosure; it needed no household gods, for it was the housegod itself.

The grandmother became worse, and as she suffered, grew more exacting and more pitifully grateful for every useless visit of the doctor. The house was silent now, and at times the boys surprised themselves throwing evil glances at costly medicine bottles in the hall. Yet, above all, the house towered dominating and gluttonous, crying out perpetually for a monthly payment, for a slate, a tap, a new pane of glass.

The death throes of the grandmother coincided with those of the family's exchequer. She was costly and exacting to the end, dying in an orgy of remedies that could not save, remedies made up of the family's life blood. Her insurance proved inadequate, for the funeral had to be good.

"We can't have a poor funeral, Bert," said Mrs. Berry. "You see, here we are—there's the house to think of."

The grandmother was buried in a style worthy of the house. Seated in the darkened room, behind the drawn blinds, the Berrys faced the problem she had left behind her. The mother and the two boys looked at Sarah doubtfully. The girl in the cheap mourning

with red eyes and hands soiled by the black gloves, was the centre of their thoughts. Now she was free; she was no longer wanted as a nurse. She could work; help to save them. But Sarah said nothing, and none dared attack the subject boldly.

“’Spouse you’re thinking of the change, Sarah?” Tom hinted. Sarah looked at him blankly. Then a prodigy happened. As though she did not know it, as though some occult force moved her, Mrs. Berry spoke. She was seized, driven.

“Of course,” she said simply, “Sarah’ll have to help me with the house.”

The irreparable had been spoken. The house had them, held them. It had sucked their substance, and now it triumphantly wrenched their sister from the sick-room to polish its knocker, clean its steps, perform all menial offices for it, the master of its masters.

One month later a bailiff was in their midst. With dry and burning eyes Albert signed the deed of renunciation, restoring possession to the building society. He recovered eight pounds out of the seventy he had paid ten months before. Then he joined the little procession—his mother with downcast eyes, his brother sulky and silent, his two young cousins, Sarah, who wept noisily into her handkerchief as she walked down the flagged path. After closing the gate behind them the outcasts turned to say good-bye.

Evening had come; behind Lamoro Avenue the sun was setting, bathing with mauves and roses the slaty roofs. The house stood in the sumptuous light, large, solid, and imposing, the emblem of attainment that might have been. The six stood before it as if worshipping it. Like lovers they sought out the minute

beauties of its form; it had meant hope. Now hope had gone with it. There was no bitterness in their minds. One cannot hate that which one loves when it is taken from one, even if it has been a burden, for the burden of such love was a joy . . .

The sun went down and, slowly, the twilight fell over the symbol.

3. THRIFT

WILLIAM CASSON listened thoughtfully to the distant chimes—St. Mary-at-Hill perhaps, or St. Michael in Cornhill; he had never troubled to inquire. There was a pause, and the hour of one struck. He laid down his pen, closed the sundries ledger, and standing up, removed his office-coat—a thing of tatters which aroused envy among the juniors, for an office-coat should be tattered. He left the room, and reappeared some minutes later, drying his face and hands after his midday wash. As he rubbed he puffed, for William Casson was not a young man. He had one of those long, thin faces that always look hungry, a pointed nose, a hard mouth, and scanty grey hair. He was sixty, but looked more, perhaps because his attire had no glory; to evoke William Casson in one's mind was at once to think of dark-grey trousers with baggy knees, a wrinkled waistcoat crossed by a clumsy silver watch-chain, a dark-blue poplin tie much discoloured and tightly drawn. He had never been seen wearing obtrusively new boots or glossy unfrayed linen, or—even in the giddy days somewhere round 1870—with a flower in his buttonhole. The mysteries of William Casson's costume had ceased to interest his fellow-clerks; they had given up asking him

ironically whether his trousers were the work of a bird-fancier. He was merely a seedy old man who had for forty years kept a ledger for Labonde & Company; they had engaged him for the purpose at twenty shillings a week, and raised his wages by small increments to thirty. And there he now stood, blowing as he rubbed his long pale face.

"Is it cold to-day?" he asked of Vanner, the junior at the next desk.

Vanner grunted without raising his head. He was copying out a statement of account in the beautiful writing by favour of which he lived; his head slowly followed the movement of his hand, and as he wrote his tongue protruded a little, while his eyes were anxious. For Vanner was an artist in his own way.

Old Casson, taking no notice of the snub, looked out of the window at the doubtfully clear sky over Fenchurch Street. It did not look very warm; still, it had not been cold when he came up in the morning. He decided to leave his overcoat on its peg, and putting on his ancient bowler, left the room without another word. As he passed down the stone stairs of the warehouse he still turned over in his mind the question of the overcoat. The air outside struck him as chilly, but it was bearable; and he reflected with satisfaction that, after all, it was not really cold. Meanwhile his treasured overcoat could hang safely on its peg and be saved unnecessary wear.

William Casson quickly made his way towards Lombard Street, a copy of the *Times* under his arm. He never bought a newspaper, but had a traditional right every day to borrow the office copy from the general office. So well established was the practice

that Mr. Labonde himself had learned to give up asking for the *Times* between one and two.

The old man walked rigid and resolute, his bowler hat set far back on his grey hair; he looked neither to the right nor to the left, but made, as if by a homing instinct, for the tea-shop where he lunched. His tea-shop was not one of those new limited liability creations which flaunt tiles and urns and cakes and appetizing window exhibitions; it was very much what it had been in the 'seventies—a temperance tavern with a floor of boards, hard benches, and stained deal tables. An untidy girl laid before him, without orders, a cup of tea, three slices of brown bread, and a piece of cheddar, which Casson consumed slowly while he read the leading article of the *Times*, the paper securely shored up against the dirty cruet. He took not the slightest interest in the eating-house—its savoury steaming pans full of sausages, the piles of rough greens, the noise, the clatter of knives and forks; he seemed very uncomfortable, for two office-boys and a carman had crowded on his bench; but he was not uncomfortable, not only because he had lunched on this very spot about twelve thousand times, but because he had realized twelve thousand times that here a cup of tea cost a penny-halfpenny instead of the twopence charged by the new establishments, while a penny bought three slices of bread instead of two.

William Casson slowly ate his food without any show of pleasure. He ate because eat he must, and grudging rather than joyful; often he was haunted by horrid calculations such as: "If I had no lunch I could save threepence-halfpenny a day; three hundred and sixty-five times threepence-halfpenny is——"

And then he would work out the annual waste on lunch, the amount he had wasted on lunch for forty years, the accumulated compound interest on the saving he might have effected if he were not addicted to lunch! The results were awful, heartrending. Still, he found that he had to have lunch; it was a great trouble to him.

Twenty minutes were allotted to the meal, ten to a walk to St. Botolph's and back, twenty-five to a further perusal of the *Times* in the churchyard. Then William Casson returned to the office to post in the sundries ledger the vagaries of casks, bottles and corks, the results of mysterious adventures where demurrage, breakage-allowances, and special discounts played their part. He took no interest in these affairs of Labonde & Company, Wine Merchants and Bottlers; the vast sums which he mechanically entered held no meaning for him. His imagination had once been stirred by the invoicing-clerk, who had tried to assuage a moment of revolt against the bottles by telling him that David Copperfield himself had worked among bottles. William Casson acquired a deep interest in David Copperfield, but he never read the book. He was often seen gazing at a cheap reprint which contained the romance of bottles; but he could not make up his mind to buy it, for sixpence was sixpence. And David Copperfield became idealized as the classic of bottles, as a book dealing with nothing but bottles, as the wonderful epic of bottles, which he could never afford to buy.

At six o'clock William Casson placed the sundries ledger in the safe and left the office. A short walk brought him to his room in Finsbury, where the landlady offered him food and other perfunctory attention

when she was not doing the washing in the basement in the midst of a hot Scotch mist. At seven he ate. Then he walked to the "Angel" regularly; and, untempted by the glow of this Mecca of the omnibuses, he would turn back, climb to his room at the top of the house, up the dark staircase with the broken steps. There he slept, near the thunder of the trams in the City Road, haunted by the smell of the landlady's soap-suds and the cooking of her greens. But the uncarpeted room, in which there was no grate, cost him but three shillings a week.

It should not be concluded from the manner of William Casson's living that he was a poor man. One can be rich or poor on thirty shillings a week or on ten thousand a year; it is all a matter of wants, and Casson had reduced his to vanishing-point. He most morally lived well within his means, for the example of his childhood's home had taught him that the wages of extravagance is penury. It was because he had seen his old father and mother remove to the workhouse, his sister vanish into service, his elder brother emigrate and also vanish, that he had sworn not to depend in his old age on a curmudgeon State. He was going to save money, he thought in 1870, and forty years later he was saving it still. Father, mother, sister, all were dead; his brother was lost. Thus, standing alone, he decided to end free. It was all a matter of saving five hundred pounds, which would buy a forty-pound annuity and a peaceful end in a cottage.

It had not been, some would say, a cheerful life. For forty years rent and breakfast had cost him five and fourpence a week, his midday meal two shillings and a halfpenny; his landlady fed him at night for

three and sixpence a week. He thus found himself living and clothing himself for some thirteen shillings a week. He had never had a fire, bought a newspaper, visited a music-hall; he had hankered after pleasure, but yet had never wasted a halfpenny on tobacco or on drink. Indeed, he had never spent money when it could be helped; there had been casualties, an illness during which the landlady forced upon him a useless doctor and an extortionate chemist without realizing, the insensitive woman, that William Casson preferred to die now to dying poor; there had also been a terrible day when Mr. Labonde had commanded him to go out at once and buy a new rig-out, on the absurd plea that he was a bachelor and could afford it, also that his status in the firm required of him good clothes. William Casson had grudgingly bought the new rig-out at a second-hand dealer's in Hatton Garden, who was his tailor, his hosier, and his bootmaker too (which explained why his clothes were never new); but it had given his exchequer a shock from which it did not recover for ten long weeks.

Yet, in spite of these set-backs, disease of the flesh and trammels of fashion, William Casson had marched splendidly towards his goal. He had set aside everything for economy. He had, in the early 'seventies, removed from the fields of Highbury to the slums of Finsbury to save the daily 'bus fare; he had steadfastly refused to join in sweepstakes; he had given up religion because of the clamorous plate thrust before him by the sidesman; he had never played games, because clubs could not, apparently, be carried on without funds; he had never taken holidays, or rather had made them profitable by

devoting these wasteful periods of his life to temporary work in other offices. Naturally, he lived alone, having mastered the principle that company cannot be had for nothing; besides, none obtruded themselves upon him, not even his facile fellows at the office, for William Casson had shown himself a "hunks" somewhere about 1892, when Mr. Labonde, senior, died. The office, having prayed for many years that Mr. Labonde senior's troubles might be lifted from him, decided to commemorate the occasion by a wreath; one man refused his shilling, and that was William Casson, the "hunks." It was felt that he ought to have contributed, either in a broken-hearted frame of mind or in a spirit of thankfulness (this being optional); but he kept his shilling, and was rewarded by an atmosphere of unfriendliness which emanated traditionally from new clerks as well as from old. He lived in the desert.

William Casson had had his struggles. He had known awful moments when the devil tempted him and strove to make him order an egg from the untidy girl at the tea-shop, or to make him buy an evening paper when people were being killed in South Africa in interesting ways; the devil had led him past book-shop after book-shop where the dastardly bookseller featured David Copperfield, the hero of the bottle-trade; the devil had whispered "Kew Gardens," "the old Mogul, only fourpence," "Earl's Court"; but he whispered in vain. William Casson had saved his money, fighting down the desire for riot, gambling, glorious drunkenness, glorious life. Once only the devil nearly triumphed; he made William Casson fall in love. That was a terrible affair, for she was slim, fair, roguishly blue-eyed, and wore shoes so

small and neat that William Casson dreamed wonderful dreams, where he knelt and humbly kissed them while she smiled over his bent head. She packed bottles while he entered them, and packed them with a winning gaiety, singing, as she packed, snatches of "He's not a marrying man, my love," and "Champagne Charlie." One day William Casson went into the warehouse where his goddess was busy packing. He watched her raptly, her rosy fingers nimble in the straw, the toss of her conscious fair head (he did not know it was conscious), and then the load on his shoulders became too heavy to bear. Recognizing, full of joy and fear, that his hour had struck, he mumbled a request that they might meet that evening under the porch. The invitation was accepted with disturbing alacrity, and William Casson went back to his ledger, his head buzzing with the music of her laugh, his eyes dazzled by her yellow hair, and he could not look at his own lean hand on the pen without thinking of the rosy fingers that so magically packed.

It was a night of terror. The divinity, having bewildered him with one blue-eyed flash, stopped in front of a barrow in Gracechurch Street.

"I am hungry," she declared, and in the presence of her lover calmly seized an apple and bit it. She bit it while William Casson stood with open, horrified mouth.

"Fourpence, gov'nor," remarked the coster as he put four more apples into a bag; "we sells 'em by the pound."

"Right!" said the charmer; "put them in your pocket, William. We'll eat them on the 'bus."

And William Casson, impotent in presence of this

munching girl and this threatening coster, allowed them to thrust the apples into his pocket while he paid the price of a lunch. Gloomily then he walked by the side of the girl, uncheered even by the immaculate little feet. At the Bank she lightly skipped on to an omnibus. He was still on the pavement when she waved to him from the top, fairy-like and mischievous.

“Come along, William!”

He came along as if in a nightmare. He paid, and as his pocket lightened realized what it must feel like to have a finger amputated. He paid for a ribbon picked off a stall; he paid for a badly printed song some strollers were singing in the lane outside the “Cheshire Cheese”; he paid—he paid—and she laughed, the merry siren, as she drew his life’s blood—he paid—paid. His head was like putty, but his protesting tongue clove to his palate; he was bewitched; he could not believe he walked; he must wake up soon and find that all was well with his life. At last the siren went too far; she stopped with deliberation opposite Eleanor’s Cross, and suggested that they should go to Cremorne Gardens. William Casson looked at her as if she were an evil spirit. Cremorne, the dazzling home of fashion—gilded haunts of vice—roundabouts outside, penny a ride!

“No,” he said bluntly, and suddenly felt a man again.

“Why not?” asked the girl angrily.

“Because——”

“Oh, because? Because you’re a hunks! Hunks!” She turned on her little heel, vanished in the crowd, and with her went the spirit of life.

Thus briefly was William Casson’s dream broken and laid low with shattered wings. In a sense a load

was lifted from him, for he had never believed, even when Cupid shot, that two could live as cheaply as one. Thenceforth he avoided the dangerous blue eyes, the nimble, rosy fingers, until, after a while, she married some one else and freed him from his thrall.

His agreeably joyless life flowed in its old channel; he amassed five shillings a week, then six, then seven; then, as the delirious years passed by, as much as sixteen. The Savings Bank could no longer help this man of property, for he had passed the legal maximum; interest accumulated, shillings at a time, then pounds at a time; William Casson's wealth overflowed into the penny bank, for there seemed to be a conspiracy to make him a rich man. At sixty he had five hundred pounds. He carried about with him the immense power of those five hundred pounds, not money invested in Consols, wretched things that fluctuated and made you in one day the poorer or the richer by the earnings of a month, but real golden money. And now the time had come for him to retire as a man of means, into the house of a cottager of Norfolk, where blows fragrant the North Sea wind. Five hundred pounds—his ambition—meant liberty. And now he had five hundred pounds.

William Casson sat on a bench outside the cottage. He had earned his right by the labour of forty years. All his affairs were arranged, his forty-pound annuity bought. He need do nothing now but sit on this bench and watch the rolling sea. As he watched, this first day, memories came over him, memories of London, the bells of St. Mary-at-Hill, the barrows and their costly bananas, the cold room in Finsbury. He thought with some bitterness of all this sight of the sea had cost him. He had been alone, and had

known no joy; he had starved and toiled; he had turned from his fellow-man, followed no statesman, served no God; he had flouted love, too—love, the bearer of gifts. An immense sorrow was upon him as he thought of the fair girl with the small, neatly shod feet.

Now a stranger was by his side—a lawyer, that he could see by his frock-coat. He was talking a great deal. “What did he want?” thought old William Casson.

“We had a lot of trouble to find you,” said the man; “quite a chance we found you at all. As I was saying, your brother died a wealthy man, a very wealthy man. We believe, Mr. Casson, that the estate will be worth twenty thousand a year.”

“Yes, yes,” said the old man dully. “Twenty thousand a year. Very nice.”

“It will be very pleasant for you, Mr. Casson, especially if you have not saved much,” said the lawyer, a hint of patronage in his voice.

“Ah,” said William Casson, “I did save—save.” And he thought of all the bare past—the desert through which he had trudged to attain this rolling sea, the fair-haired girl married to another.

“You need not have done so,” said the lawyer, and his laugh was professional and jolly. “Pity you didn’t know!”

Old William Casson did not answer. He had bought the sea and lost it, earned liberty and found it too dear. He had not lived, and now he was to die.

“Yes,” he muttered, “it is a pity. If I had known——”

But the flood was too strong for his old heart.

Sixty years of joys forfeited came beating into his body like an equinoctial tide, sixty years of life despised, sixty years of prudence without a single glorious break!

"If I had known!" muttered William Casson. At a bound his spirit cast its bonds and flew away to the immaterial unearned joys.

4. KNIGHT GASTON

I

MADEMOISELLE FALLOUX was bothered. As Jane Weston called up to her to inquire whether she was coming down to tea, all she obtained was a vision of Mademoiselle Falloux's head thrust through the window in irrelevant answer.

"Don't speak to me. Don't speak to me. He'll be here in half-an-hour. If Hilda is with you, ask her to come to me at once." Mademoiselle Falloux was a healthy, robust-looking woman of forty or thereabouts, fresh-faced, fair-haired and brisk by profession as well as by temperament, for she was a teacher of French in the girls' high school at Gorton-on-Trent, and compelled, as are all who teach French, to be funny, erratic and excitable. Her friend, Miss Weston, on receipt of the message, went slowly into the house. Being an English mistress in the same school dignity was as constantly demanded of her as it was denied her friend, and she sustained her part by well-cut blue serge coats, a gold-rimmed *pince-nez* and a general air of trimness and cleanliness.

Jane Weston, Hilda's sister, the youngest and best-looking of the party, thus became the sole occupant of the little French garden, which she noted with a smile of relief. Sliding still lower in her deck chair,

she crossed her hands behind her and tilted her eyes upward until she could see nothing but the sky. She was tired to-day, she told herself. How else could she be feeling so critical and captious? Was it not holiday time? (She also taught in the school at Gorton-on-Trent.) Was not everything being designed for her enjoyment, and were not her sister and her friend intent upon restoring to her the health an operation for appendicitis had cost her? Mademoiselle Falloux, out of the kindness of her heart, was entertaining both Hilda and Jane in her cottage at Garville, so that she, Jane, should benefit by the light French air; while Hilda, though three months had elapsed since the operation, would not yet allow her to fasten a hook or put in a hairpin for herself. It must be sheer weakness of body, then, that made her feel alternately cross and inclined to cry when Mademoiselle Falloux found a wasp in her teacup and drowned it to the accompaniment of much shrill laughter, or when Hilda read extracts from Baedeker relating to Chartres Cathedral, which she proposed to visit on her bicycle before she left France.

Jane's feet stirred restlessly and she unlocked her hands while her eyes returned to earth. Her surroundings were certainly pretty in an unpretentious way. In the foreground a white cat was washing herself beside the old pump flanked by two rose-trees, now a glowing mass of bloom. The old wall that bounded the garden was clad in ivy and sweet-smelling honeysuckle; the roadway was flanked with poplars, green and golden in the evening sunlight. Further on were the village roofs and the church spire outlined between the trees, and beyond them a distant ribbon of the road, winding away to Chartres.

It was in the nursing home that she had realized how much she disliked teaching, a tiresome fact to obtrude itself when, as far as she could see, teaching must suffice for her occupation and her livelihood for the remainder of her days. She had found out, too, that she was getting old. She had just celebrated her twenty-eighth birthday. That was horribly near thirty, when the world would be justified in classing her as an old maid. Mademoiselle Falloux and her sister were old maids already, for they were both of them over forty. They did not mind; they almost boasted of the fact, made a joke of it. Jane had never definitely contemplated matrimony, but somehow she had unconsciously hoped that there would some day be a happening in her life, a thing that would change the grey to gold for a little, some man who would look into her eyes and find them beautiful, at whose coming her heart would beat faster and everything be new and different. There were very few men in Gorton-on-Trent, and those among them who associated with teachers were all married. At holiday time she and her sister took rooms in some country village or in some obscure seaside place where they knew nobody. At Christmas they visited two aunts in London, old maids who entertained the vicar of their parish at dinner on Christmas day. It was absurd to think of any happenings in which men were involved.

"We have made his bed," cried Mademoiselle Falloux from the open doorway.

"I was quite forgetting," said Jane, "that a man is coming to sleep under our roof to-night."

"A man! Oh, you mean Gaston, my nephew," said Mademoiselle Falloux. "But you can hardly call

him a man. He is only eighteen. When I saw him last he was wearing knickerbockers."

"Well," interrupted Hilda, "somebody is now leaving the high road and walking down the path toward this house. It is certainly a man, and who else but your nephew would arrive at this hour?"

"It is Gaston! I see him! I know him by his walk!" cried Mademoiselle Falloux. She rushed to the gate to greet the dark-haired, dark-eyed young man and to kiss him vigorously on both cheeks.

"It is a pity Frenchmen always wear their hats too small for them," said Jane Weston lazily. "Otherwise he might be quite good-looking."

"He must be more than eighteen," said Hilda, almost resentfully. "I don't think Félicité would have invited him here with us had she known he was a man!"

II

It was two days later, and Gaston Falloux sat in the deck chair. He was a handsome young man, with his dark eyes, dark hair and short, crisp moustache, well dressed in his way, though he was mistaken in thinking he would have passed anywhere for an Englishman. For one thing, his clothes, though well cut, were just a little tight; his boots were far too long and pointed in the toe, and his tie, a piece of white brocade patterned with fern leaves, was not of the kind sold in Piccadilly. Happily for himself, he was not aware of these shortcomings, for he was very self-conscious and at an age when it would have cost him a pang to have found out that the Westons in no wise looked upon him as a typical Anglo-Saxon. So he

sat in the little garden well contented with his appearance. Yet as he pulled very hard at his Maryland cigarette, he wondered whether he should write to his mother and tell her he must join her at Dieppe immediately, for his experiment in rusticity and the simple life was a disastrous failure.

From the cottage beside him came the cheerful sounds of domestic labour. The maid sang as she burnished the copper saucepans; in the bedroom above Hilda Weston talked incessantly as she made the beds with Mademoiselle Falloux, the latter laughing at everything and nothing and every now and then putting her head out of the window to retail the jokes to her nephew. Jane Weston alone gave no sign of existence. Presumably she was still in bed, for so far she had not appeared before the twelve o'clock *déjeuner*. Gaston began to wish she would get up and come down and talk to him, for his English was nearly as fluent as his French, and he always enjoyed hearing himself talk in what he called "*la langue de Shakespeare*." Yes, there was no doubt about it, he hated this little French village, so like every other French village he had ever seen; and he hated his Aunt Félicité, with her inane giggle, her untidy, careless ways.

He did not like Hilda Weston either; she was too stiff, too prim. He disliked the way in which she pulled her hair off her forehead, her trick of showing all her teeth when she spoke, the hard dryness of her complexion and the wrinkles made by her *pince-nez* across the bridge of her nose. It depressed him to think that in a few years Jane would be very like her sister. It seemed sad somehow, for at one time she must have been quite pretty; she was pretty still now

and then, when the lamplight shone on her light brown hair, or when she smiled, for the curves of her mouth were beautiful and sometimes a dimple appeared in her cheek. It was indeed sad to think that in a few years she would be just like Hilda, parched, weather-beaten, that her hair would recede further from her forehead, her teeth grow long and show their roots. If she married, of course, she would not age in this manner; Gaston already knew enough of women to realize that. If she married her slender frame would probably fill out, her arms and bust would become rounded, the skin of her face soft and pink. He could imagine her in fact quite beautiful. But would she marry? They managed these things so badly in England, and the girl clearly had no *dot* or she would not be teaching in a school. She would have made such a good wife too, responsive, tender, grateful, with enough intellect to keep her husband from getting bored. Sometimes even he had thought to discern a gleam of passion in those curious weary-looking eyes, a suggestion that she was sleeping rather than dead, and that, if the Fairy Prince kissed her, she would awake as a resplendent glorified being.

He looked up and found the girl he was criticizing standing by his side. She was certainly not pretty in the strong morning light; her complexion looked quite sallow and there were purplish shadows under her eyes. As she spoke she hesitated and moved her fingers in a nervous manner that displeased him.

“Mademoiselle Falloux wishes to know if you will go to the farm and fetch the milk. It is not very far—just at the end of the road.”

Gaston frowned; like most Frenchmen he disliked

exercise in any form. "Is there nobody else to go?" he questioned. "Why not send Marie?"

"She is busy in the kitchen. She cleans all her saucepans this morning."

"I will go." He smiled boldly into her timid face. "I will go if you will come with me."

"Oh, but——" In a second the sallow face became rosy.

"It is too long a walk. Pardon me. I forgot that you are not well."

"No, no; I am quite strong again now, only I thought——" The colour in her face deepened. She could not tell him that for her to walk with any man unless her sister were by her side, was against the habits of a lifetime.

"I will come," she said at length. A few minutes later they were together and Gaston was talking with such vivacity and with so much deference that Jane forgot to be shy. On their return journey they carried the milk-can between them. It was full and its contents tended to overflow. Once, in adjusting it, Gaston laid a firm hand over Jane's white, transparent fingers. Cruel though it might be, he could not resist the temptation to make her blush, if only to note her tortured expression as she tried to hide her distress. Then he wanted to smoke, and the milk-can was set down in the roadway so that he might light a match.

"It is an English cigarette," he explained—"a Three Castles." And he tried to persuade her to try one. But she shook her head and reminded him that she had to set an example to her pupils. And he propounded for her the new gospel of individualism, which clashed so queerly with his socialistic views, that every being was free to do exactly what he

pleased, and that consideration for others was mere weakness. Jane's cheeks were flushed and her eyes glowing by the time they reached the cottage.

"You look very hot," said Hilda, as she relieved her of the milk-can. "I'm sure your temperature is up again. I insist upon your coming in and lying down for half-an-hour or we shall have you ill again."

Gaston sat down and wrote a long letter to his mother. He was a Frenchman: his sense of filial duty was strongly developed. But he did not suggest joining her at Dieppe.

III

Miss Weston and Mademoiselle Falloux had gone to Chartres on their bicycles. This expedition had served as a topic at meals for several days. They had wondered whether they should take lunch or go to the Grand Monarque, whether they should take milk in bottles or content themselves with coffee when they arrived, whether they would cycle both ways or only one, whether they would attend afternoon service in the cathedral and thus put back the evening meal for half-an-hour. On one point, however, Mademoiselle Falloux was quite secure, and this was that Gaston should accompany them. It was a duty to her brother to see that her nephew visited the cathedral before he left. Gaston fell in with their plans without demur, and gallantly set out with the two ladies in a pair of very tight knickerbockers and such a diminutive cap that even his aunt remarked on it and warned him against a possible sunstroke. Generally any pleasantries on the subject of his appearance called up a

scowl, but this morning he was so amiable that it seemed impossible to mar his serenity. Thus they had all left, a noisy and seemingly very cheerful party, so much so that Jane, who was not allowed to go, felt quite disconsolate as she picked up her deck-chair and her novel and removed them to the cherry orchard at the far end of the garden. It was about half-an-hour later, and she still sat listless and idle, when Gaston returned.

"My bicycle," he explained—"a bad puncture."

"And you had to come back? What a pity!" said Jane sympathetically. "Could you not have mended it?"

"No." He shook his head emphatically. "The nearest village was seven miles away, and I had nothing to mend it with myself."

"It was a pity you couldn't go," she repeated. "And your aunt had set her heart upon your seeing the cathedral before you went back."

He looked at her with a whimsical lift of his eyebrows. "Perhaps I hadn't set my heart upon seeing the cathedral as firmly as she had. Perhaps I was reserving it for something quite different."

"Oh, Monsieur Falloux!" She gave a little gasp and grew very red, hardly knowing whether to be annoyed or flattered by the implication. He did not tell her that he had himself lacerated the tyre with his penknife, or that he had never really intended to make one of the expedition. He flung himself down in the long grass at her feet, lit a cigarette, and taking as a text the novel she had been reading, fired off a series of high-sounding paradoxes on the romantic and the realistic schools of novelists. Presently, when she had forgotten to be shy or to ask herself whether she was

doing right in enjoying his company, he picked up a cherry and threw it up at her crying, "Catch!"

She caught it mechanically, and he threw her another.

She caught this too, a little proud of her prowess, and she began to explain to him that she had played cricket and had always been known as a good fielder. But Gaston took no interest in athletics, and he did not wish to betray to this English girl his total ignorance of cricket. Instead of listening to her, he picked up more cherries and began to throw them at her faster and faster, vowing that he would make her eat all those that she did not catch. In a few seconds the cherries were bombarding her from all sides, striking her head, her neck and arms until a particularly well aimed one found its mark in the dimple in her cheek.

"Eat!" he cried impetuously. "You shall eat them all!" And he tried to force a cherry into her laughing mouth. She struck out at him with unexpected vigour, for her long arms, though thin, were muscular. Then he tried to catch hold of her hands, and again she eluded him, but in so doing lost her balance and fell into the long grass beside him, where they struggled together like a couple of kittens, laughing and fighting, until Jane's hair fell in a long, thick rope down her neck and Gaston's collar flew wide of its stud. And then quite suddenly the spirit of the game changed; it was a game no longer. They had ceased to laugh, and Gaston no longer tried to thrust cherries into her mouth. He was still holding her, but instead of pushing her, he was straining her toward him, straining her so tightly that she could feel his heart beating against her ribs. Nor was she struggling or

attempting to free herself; she was acquiescing, letting him draw her to him, resting in his arms, a supine, languid burden. In a moment, he told himself with thrilling expectation, he would touch her lips. And then Marie's apron showed, a big splotch of white against the trunks of the trees, and her high-pitched voice came shrilling through the silence.

"Mademoiselle, le déjeuner est servi. Il ne faut pas laisser gâter votre omelette!"

Gaston's hands relaxed their hold; Jane sat up and laughed a little hysterically as she discovered the condition of her hair. She was as white now as she had been red before, and as she groped in the grass for her hairpins, Gaston noted that her fingers were trembling. In silence they returned to the cottage. It was a mushroom omelette, Marie explained, and the mushrooms were the first of the season. She had risen at five in the morning to pick them for mademoiselle, who was going to be so lonely all day. She continued to stand and talk to them, while Gaston ate the greater part of the omelette, and Jane looked at the tiny portion on her own plate and hoped the other two would not notice the difficulty she had in swallowing it.

"I must go and lie down," she said, when at length she had disposed of it. "I promised Hilda I would rest this afternoon."

"All the afternoon?" he cried in consternation.

"Well, till about four. They said they would be back about four, didn't they?"

She left him smiling at the *naïveté* of this remark, at her implicit confession of weakness. It was all part of her, this delicious innocence which matched so oddly with her years. No man, he could swear that, had

ever held her in his arms before; no man, he was certain, had ever kissed her. It was cruel of Marie to have disturbed them in the orchard; but no matter—the opportunity still held good. That evening he would persuade her to come for a walk with him. They would go down the poplar-shrouded lane, and in the shadow of the giant trees he would hold her to him again, and this time he would kiss her flower-like mouth. And then? Then he would kiss her again and yet again, until the shyness faded out of her eyes and they glowed with responsive gratitude, until some of the years of her wasted womanhood were avenged.

IV

“And that night,” said Jane Weston, finishing her story abruptly, “she died. That was all—the end.”

Jane and Gaston were sitting together, as was now their daily custom during the morning while the others attended to their various domestic duties. This morning, however, Jane had been later than usual in making her appearance, and when she found him alone, had shown signs of immediately returning to the house. To prevent this, Gaston had abruptly turned the conversation on Gorton-on-Trent and life in English provincial towns, gradually leading her on to tell him a little of her own life. And so insinuating had been his method that after a little he had won from her this most intimate of all her reminiscences, the story of the little girl who had typhoid and whom, contrary to all regulations, she had nursed night and day only to see her die in her arms.

"You must have been very fond of her," said Gaston.

"I was. I loved her desperately," Jane admitted. "A little I should imagine in the way a mother loves her child. She was everything to me. I can't tell you why, for to the others she was quite ordinary." She paused and continued after a little, "I have never loved anything like that again. Perhaps I couldn't or perhaps it is merely the opportunity that has been lacking." Her thoughts returned to her one emotional adventure, and her eyes filled with tears.

Gaston observed her narrowly. He had drawn this little story out of her unawares, and he was now diagnosing its significance in relation to herself. "You are rash," he said at length, "unwise. After all, life is for the living. Love while you may—anything or anybody. In front of us all stretches the great darkness. Let us laugh in the light while it still shines."

"Yes, I know—I know," she assented. "It would be so much better if one could. But with me it has always been all or nothing; I can't make reservations."

"What are you two talking about?" inquired Mademoiselle Falloux, suddenly thrusting her head through the top window. "Gaston, Hilda wants to know if you can get your bicycle mended in time to go with her to Aveneau this evening. It is a pretty village, and there is a church with a crypt full of skulls."

Gaston hesitated, wondering how long he could postpone the finding of his puncture outfit. This evening he was keeping for Jane, for the walk in the poplar-shrouded lane. The last words of the girl still echoed in his ears—"All or nothing; I can't make reservations." And this was the girl he intended to

kiss and to leave the following week! It was ridiculous, this note of idealism, so characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon temperament, so remote from the sensuous lightness of the French—ridiculous and at the same time fine, splendid. He continued to look from his aunt's tumbled fair head to Jane's demure one, now bent a little to hide her tears. And as he looked his mood changed. No, he wouldn't take her walking along the lane that evening; he wouldn't take her out at all. He would go fishing by himself away from everybody, where he could sit on the bank and think.

He declined his aunt's proposal on the ground that his bicycle was not yet mended, and told her what he proposed to do instead.

"Fishing!" Mademoiselle Falloux fell in with the notion at once; he had not yet explored the beauties of the little river Sorgue. What a pity it was that the rest of the party were not provided with rods! As it was, they must content themselves with watching the sport and with bringing him tea on the river bank. "You will not find it too long a walk, will you, Jane?" she ended up kindly.

"Oh, no," Jane said eagerly. "I am quite strong now."

She had quite forgiven Gaston his part in the episode of the cherries, telling herself she had exaggerated its importance, found in it a significance which had not been there. Gaston, however, showed no enthusiasm for the plan. "I shall go a long way," he said almost brusquely. "Possibly beyond the bend of the river."

"Oh, we shall find you," said Mademoiselle Falloux cheerfully.

He continued to look doubtful. Finally, seeing no

way to dissuade them, he went into the house to look for his fishing tackle and left without saying another word. No, he told himself as he strode across the water meadows, there certainly would be no walk along the lane that evening with a girl who made no reservations, who staked her life to win all or lose all. This woman of twenty-eight had the heart of a romantic schoolgirl! How, then, without being guilty of deliberate cruelty, could he kiss her and tell her he loved her, when in another week or so he would pass out of her life for ever? She did not love him yet, or if she did she did not know it. *La Belle au Bois Dormant* still slept, though perhaps she was dimly aware that her knight rode toward her through the forest. Yet, until his kiss was on her lips, he thought, she would not stir. Later, perhaps, in the cold gray daylight she might vaguely remember his passing as a pleasant dream. He reached the bend of the river, chose a likely spot, baited and cast. Fishing as an occupation bored him at any time, and the poor little gudgeon and dace which were all the Sorgue offered seemed hardly worth catching. He did not remember ever having put himself out to this extent for anybody in the world, and petulant lines showed on his forehead and mouth as he wondered how long he would find it his duty to stay there.

After awhile he found he was getting stiff, turned to rub the muscles of his right leg and saw that only a short hundred yards divided him from the rest of the party. As he wondered how to get rid of the intruders, he caught his line in a clump of nettles, and carelessly stooping to disentangle it, pitched head foremost into the middle of the river. Fortunately the stream was not deep, nor was the current strong,

but he had to swim a stroke or so to reach the shore, and even then it took him some minutes to clamber up the slippery bank. When at last he stood on dry ground the only one of the party he could see was his aunt, who was running toward him, a teacup in her hand. They had all seen the accident, it seemed, and the sight of it had been too much for poor Jane Weston in her delicate state of health, for she had fainted on the spot. Mademoiselle Falloux had come to fetch water to revive her while her sister supported her and unfastened her blouse. By the time they returned with the water Jane was already sitting up. She was still livid, and beads of perspiration were rolling off her forehead, but it was evident that her heart was again beating regularly and that she was recovering.

“But I thought——” she murmured weakly under her breath as she saw Gaston. And across her face flitted for a brief moment the smile of rapture he had thought to kindle by his kiss. He understood. It was too late. She already loved him.

V

Was it too late? All the evening Gaston had asked himself that question, and now it was midnight and he had found no answer. Was it too late to save Jane from falling in love with him? If she loved him now, and in spite of himself his heart beat faster at the thought, she would love him for ever; she had said as much. She would go back to Gorton-on-Trent and continue to teach little girls in the high school, and all the while, the years ebbing away in grey monotony, she would carry his image in her heart. He would

like, he thought, to have figured thus to somebody as an eternally romantic memory; he would like to think of this woman's heart as a shrine where the lamps burned perpetually in his honour; it would have flattered his vanity. At the same time he felt that such a thing must not be; he must prevent it if he could. If her life had not been so circumscribed, her chances of meeting other men so few, he might have risked it; as it was, he felt like a spy, a would-be thief to whom a trusting woman has confided the hiding-place of her poor little store of treasure. And for once in his life he cursed his fertile imagination, the feminine intuition on which he had hitherto relied so securely in his dealings with women. At last, telling himself for the fiftieth time that if this romantic girl loved him there was the end so far as he was concerned, he flung off his coat and prepared to go to bed.

But as he undressed a new and subtle thought crept in, and again the situation was altered. This girl loved him as she saw him, as he appeared to her. Supposing then he could disguise himself, appear to her differently, conceal those qualities which appealed to her delicate imagination or substitute for them ugly gross defects, what then? He might show himself as a ribald drunkard; that would disgust her quickly enough. Or he might be blunt, boorish, sulky, snub her on every occasion; but that attitude, too, would require a good deal of sustaining. Besides, the time for disillusioning her was short, for every hour the illusion lived it gained strength. He must kill it at once, on the spot. Ah, he was coming to it at last; the metaphor had helped! He must kill it so to speak before it was born. This idea that she loved him had

hardly yet had time to take root in her mind; he would tread it out of being before it could truly be said to have lived. *He* would make the avowal; the declaration of love should come from him; he would woo her in terms that would make him ridiculous and her not a little ashamed of ever having thought of taking him seriously. Then she would hate him and her salvation would be assured.

An hour later he had written his love letter, a masterpiece of extravagance and bathos. In ridiculous, high-flown terms he raved of her beauty and of his passion for her, vowing that he could not live without her, that all his life was in her hands. He was lyrical, pagan. When he read the letter through he was surprised at himself, for he had not known he had it in him to reproduce so accurately the ravings of a precocious, neurotic schoolboy. But of its success he was certain. It would disgust Jane. All the reticence, the pride in her would rise in protest; her sturdy Northern temperament would never tolerate anything so blatant, so French and so vulgar.

He put the letter in an envelope and pushed it under her door. He was very tired; his young face showed quite pale in the looking-glass and his eyes were swollen. He had never before reduced himself to such a state of physical fatigue for any one. It was too bad, he thought, that all his cynicism should have failed him when he needed it most, that an *ingénue* of twenty-eight should have completely routed him.

In the pale dawn he got up to repair his punctured tyre, for he had yet to send himself a telegram bidding him at once rejoin his mother at Dieppe. This was delivered to him at the breakfast table.

He had finished his packing and was waiting in the

garden to say good-bye to his aunt when Jane Weston appeared. Her eyes were red with crying and her cheeks pale and sunken, but she carried her head high and it was evident she intended to face the situation.

"Well," he said boldly, hoping she would not notice his nervousness, "did you get my letter?"

"How dared you?" Her eyes glistened with scorn and fury; she showed her teeth a little. "How dared you write such a thing? What ever made you think that I should be gulled by high-sounding phrases? What reason had I given you to think that I—that I was in love with you? It will be a lesson to me in the future to be less kind to boys. Yes, boys!" she repeated savagely, as she saw that her thrust had told. "I have made a great mistake, but I see it all now. You see, I have had a good deal of experience in dealing with schoolgirls, but my experience of boys has been limited."

Gaston made no defence. For a moment he longed to take her in his arms, if only to assert his virility, to show her that at any rate he had the physical strength to woo her as a man. He turned aside, bit his lip and looked at his watch. "I must go," he said. "I must go at once if I am to catch that train. Will you say good-bye to my aunt for me?"

Then he held out his hand. "Good-bye, Miss Weston. Will you not let us part as friends?"

"Oh, friends, certainly!" She laughed lightly. "Why not? When do you go back to the Lycée? I expect your mother will be sorry when the holidays are over."

He went out smiling bravely. Was he not a knight who had rescued a maiden from imminent peril? And she would never know.

TWENTY-ONE SHORT DRAMAS

I. THE PATRIOT

THE train pulled out of the Gare du Nord with the extreme slowness of a heavy express. For some seconds the long black curve undulated quicker and quicker past the groups on the platform. These were young Frenchmen assembled to give a send-off to one of their fellows bound for England, noisy women and girls who waved their handkerchiefs to potential waiters in gay ties, and, here and there, silent straight figures in tweeds, male and female, but much alike, who at most raised an undemonstrative hand. The train gathered momentum, disappeared with a roar under the iron bridge.

The track was old-fashioned and worn—a cause of much jolting. It seemed at times to lift the train an inch off the metals. A woman, seated with her back to the engine in a first-class compartment, dropped on her knees an illustrated English paper. A pallor had come over her face, which struck one as peculiar owing to its swollen whiteness; the eyes, too, one remembered, for their lids were red, and a purple aura zoned them with pain. Just then they were closed, and there was abandonment in every line of the shapeless figure. The woman wore a long travelling coat of green tweed, which covered her down to the ankles.

But for an occasional twitch of the lips she might have been thought asleep.

Her companions were two, one of them a bulky Frenchman, very red and hot in his frock coat and tall hat, with tight boots and tight trousers, and reddish gloves which hurt his wrists.

At times he looked at the somnolent figure with inquisitiveness in his large brown eyes, then worried his black moustache or rapidly turned over the pages of *Le Rire*. At times, too, as he mopped his forehead, he stole a look at the lady's escort, a look of interest to which there was no response. The woman's companion was obviously English, tall, very thin, with a long brown face, grey eyes, and well-brushed hair which was getting scanty at the temples. His crossed legs displayed the knees through the grey tweed. He seemed, as he critically examined the *New York Herald*, bored, aloof. This man's mouth was the man—a thin, hard little mouth which seldom opened, and then showed good white teeth. Even without the clues afforded by his leanness, his yellowness, by the worn guncase in the rack behind which was a golf-bag, he could unmistakably have been classed as a British officer, probably Indian Army; besides, there was a whiteness about the woman, presumably his wife, a dry, hot-house whiteness, a lack of zest, all the languor of the European who has learnt weariness in the East.

The woman moved uneasily, opened her eyes, large blue eyes which, together with her brown hair, redeemed a little her puffed-out cheeks. The Frenchman looked at her again interestedly, avoiding the blue eyes; a faint sound escaped her and he looked at her more critically. The Englishman turned to the middle page of his newspaper.

The train rattled and bumped, roaring through tunnels, then flying through the cuttings with a swish. A groan came from the lips of the woman, who was now pale as marble. The Frenchman put out a hand and, as he opened his mouth to speak, the Englishman looked up. An expression of concern crossed his face.

"I say, Molly . . . are you all right?" he asked nervously. There was no reply. The woman's head had fallen back on the cushions; a few beads of sweat appeared on her forehead.

"*Madame est indisposée?*" asked the Frenchman, shifting in his seat. The Englishman got up and went to sit by the woman's side.

"What's wrong? Shall I open the window?" He made as if to take the woman's hand, then hesitated and refrained.

"No, no," she murmured, without opening her eyes, "leave me alone, Dick; I'll be all right in a minute."

The Englishman looked at her as if puzzled as to what to do, then angrily at the Frenchman. The latter offered him a small flask which, after a second's hesitation he accepted and uncorked. The Frenchman talked quickly, gesticulating, but the Englishman took hardly any notice of him. He could barely understand him, but merely catch the word *médecin*, which he knew to mean "doctor." His mouth had set into a snarl of annoyance.

"*Médecin,*" shouted the Frenchman, "per'aps in ze train."

The Englishman looked at him interrogatively, then understood and nodded. The Frenchman vanished into the corridor. The woman groaned again, caught at the seat with both hands.

"Poor old girl," said the Englishman. His voice was kinder now they were alone. "There, lie down. Let me put the rug under your head."

The woman groaned.

"Oh, no, no, don't touch me." But she allowed herself to be laid on her back on the seat. Her eyes were closed once more; sweat had soaked stray wisps of hair on her temples.

"Dick," she said suddenly, "I can't go on . . . I can't bear it. Oh, . . . Dick, you must put me out at Amiens."

"Nonsense," said the man; "you'll be all right. It'll be over soon. There, cheer up; you know Murray said it wouldn't be for a month."

"I can't, I can't," she moaned. Tears of weakness rolled slowly down her face.

The Englishman watched her silently, helplessly. He was roused by the return of the Frenchman, red, excited, mopping his face. He was followed by a short little man with a black pointed beard and spectacles. The doctor unceremoniously pushed past him into the compartment, leant over the woman. Her shapeless form was heaving. Soon he raised his head.

"You will have to descend at Amiens, monsieur," he said.

The Englishman looked at him amazed.

"Oh, impossible," he said sharply.

"It is necessary, absolutely necessary," repeated the doctor. His eyes flashed behind the spectacles.

"Why?" asked the Englishman angrily. He was almost beside himself with shame at this publicity.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "*Il n'est que temps*," he remarked to the Frenchman.

"Look here," said the Englishman, "she shall not

get off at Amiens. Understand? We must get to England."

The men argued, the stilted English of the doctor blending queerly with the soldier's curt ejaculations and the Frenchman's babble. The woman on the seat now groaned at every jolt. At last the train stopped at Amiens.

"Now, quick, monsieur," cried the doctor; "you have six minutes."

"No. Can't you understand English? She shan't get off."

"*Il est fou,*" shrieked the Frenchman.

"*Voyons, monsieur . . .*" pleaded the doctor.

The argument grew more violent; a little crowd began to gather in the corridor. All through the Englishman's "No, no," rang obstinately. Then more tumult, shouts outside . . .

"*En voiture, en voiture . . .*"

The train began to vibrate, to move, gained momentum, pulled out of Amiens station. Then, for two hours the men struggled to ease the woman, shifting her, moistening her hands and forehead with eau de cologne, placing bags, rugs, under her heels. The Frenchman babbled unceasingly, offering remedies, protesting. At times the argument began once more, the doctor almost threatening, the Frenchman pleading with tears in his voice.

"No, no, no," said the Englishman, in queer, savage tones. At last Calais, the turmoil of passengers in the corridor.

"I beg you, monsieur," cried the doctor, "descend."

The Englishman seemed not to hear him. Careless of his gun-case and clubs he seized the woman in his arms and lifted her up. As he staggered through the

corridor she gave a few piteous cries, a long wailing scream when he jumped on the platform. The doctor, the Frenchman, a crowd of passengers followed them. They passed under the frightened eyes of groups which parted to make way for the couple, this pallid man, whose every muscle seemed strained to breaking point, this woman, grey-faced, with a twisted mouth and brown hair which fell in heavy wet masses on her left shoulder.

Then the long agony of the journey when the woman lay groaning in a private cabin with the French doctor still by her side. As the coast of England came into sight a piercing cry burst from her, then scream after scream. The doctor unsteadily wiped his forehead and bent over her, while the Englishman clenched his hands and looked out of the window towards the chalk cliffs crowned by the greenness of the downs. The paroxysm passed. But again, as the Englishman staggered up the gangway, clasping his horrible tortured burden, scream after scream was rent from it. The woman swayed limply as a wet cloth, then threw up her arms, her hands clutching at the air.

Half-an-hour later the Englishman sat on a trunk, alone, outside the waiting-room where the woman had been laid. His head was bowed low; his eyes were fixed on the ground, but he did not move: he seemed stupefied, broken. His hands closed convulsively as, at times, a cry reached his ears. Some distance away a few travellers watched him, morbidly fascinated by this figure of tragedy. Then, at last, a great cry, long and echoing, rang through the awful room. Slowly, mechanically, the Englishman put up his hands and stopped his ears.

The door opened. The French doctor stood before

him in his shirt sleeves, his face drawn and blotched with angry red. He walked towards the Englishman with the quick step of some ridiculous fowl, but the expression on his face, the horror, the rage of it, redeemed him.

"*Assassin*," he whispered savagely, "your wife is dying."

The Englishman looked at him vacantly as if he had not heard him; he struggled to regain his power of speech.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" he asked dully.

"A boy," faltered the doctor, his jaw dropping with surprise.

The Englishman's head sank down once more. Then his voice came faint and far away.

"Thank God, he's born on British soil."

2. A CLEAN BREAST

“**B**UT, my dear fellow,” Sir Selwyn protested, as he joined together his long thin brown fingers, “what does it matter? By all that’s important, what does it matter? We all do these things.”

“You don’t understand, Sir Selwyn,” replied the young man. “I don’t feel about it as you do; of course I know you—you——”

“Don’t spare me, Maurice, don’t spare me,” said the old man with a smile; “go on, pitch into me if it relieves you. Say it is notorious that my diplomatic career has proceeded along a path of broken hearts, that my affairs with Russian princesses and the wives of U.S.A. Congressmen have been legion; charge me with having frequented every—every—what is the *cliché*?—ah, yes, every gilded haunt of vice in Europe and Port Said. It’s quite true. But it doesn’t worry me, and why your depravity and degradation——”

“I never said that, Sir Selwyn,” said Felstead, as he angrily surveyed the handsome profile of the old man. In his penitent mood he found everything repulsive in this fine, sunburnt old face, with the straight nose, the sensitive, well-cut lips, and the humorous dark eyes. Sir Selwyn Graham, still wonderfully good-looking at sixty, appeared to him as

Mephistopheles preaching the gospel of impurity to him, Felstead, knightly, tortured Maurice Felstead, instead of nobly advising him to wash himself by confession free from his sins.

“No,” said Sir Selwyn, smiling still, “but you thought yourself depraved and degraded because of an affair, a single affair—and such an affair! Oh, it’s too funny! And to think that you’re so quixotic as to want to give Violet a shock, to risk marring her happiness and yours, just for the sake of self-righteousness—well, *c’est magnifique mais ce n’est pas l’amour.*”

“Sir Selwyn,” said Felstead, with splendid obstinacy, “you may be right, but it shall not be said that I allowed Violet to marry me in ignorance of—of my past. I have no right to risk her future happiness; why, if after a year of marriage she discovered it it would break her heart. You may be her uncle, but you don’t understand her; she’s so noble, so far from all ugly things.”

“Well, well,” said Sir Selwyn, “if you must, you must. In the course of a lengthy career I have always found it advisable to let savages have their way and then to put things right. Go then, go and tell Violet about your affair; go, get yourself into an awful mess, but don’t mention me; I’m fond of Violet, and I don’t see why she should quarrel with her uncle because her *fiancé* wants to be a burnt offering.”

Felstead left the club in a fine medley of feelings. As he strode along Pall Mall, a slim, elegant figure, in emphatically Sackville Street clothes, there was nothing in his good-looking, boyish face, his blue eyes and innocent pink and white colour, to show that he was going to submit to the sternest test his first

love, the only real love he had known. When some twenty minutes later he stood in front of Violet in the boudoir at Kensington Gore his mood was partly that of the hardened sinner who repents in tears and ignominy, partly that of the anchorite grinding down the evil in his heart for the sake of purity. While the maid went to Violet, Felstead examined every detail of the charming, familiar room, and wondered miserably whether he would ever be admitted to it again. It was in this room he had first met Violet Graham; she was sitting on the white and green chintz settee, dressed—but he could not remember what gossamer the fairy wore, for he had thought of nothing but her dark slimness, her thick black hair, the languor of her veiled eyes, and the grace with which her long pale hand held out towards a visitor a small flowered plate. Oh, the line of that hand and arm! And now, perhaps, this was the beginning of the end; perhaps he must bid good-bye to the boudoir, the green and white settee, the sea-green walls, the little French etchings, the Sheraton tables laden with Violet's exquisite feminine knick-knackery.

"Well, Maurice," said a soft, low voice, "dreaming?"

He turned, suddenly joyful, and forgetting his errand, threw his arms round her shoulders, drew her to him, kissed her on lips and neck with unconscious roughness. She remained passive in his arms, yielding and happy, shaken by his ardour, and yet serene in her subjection. At last she freed herself.

"You seem very excited to-day, Maurice," she said at length, as she curiously observed the contrast between his glowing blue eyes and his very serious face.

"Excited," murmured Felstead, "not exactly excited, nervous perhaps."

"Oh!" The long lashes rose and the dark eyes looked at him inquisitively. "Anything the matter?"

"Oh, no, nothing the matter; I just wanted to say something to you."

"Well, come and say it here," said Violet, with the careless laugh of the happy as she sat down on the settee and invitingly patted the seat.

"No, wait a minute," replied Felstead, "wait until I've told you."

Violet's smile suddenly faded away, and she leant forward to look at him more closely.

"The fact is," Felstead muttered, "I want—I want to make a confession to you. Don't interrupt me. Let me tell you. Two years ago, when I was at Vienna with—with——" He stumbled, remembering Sir Selwyn's request. "Well, anyhow, I was about a good deal, you know, and lonely, and all that. And one day I was feeling miserable and homesick, and I met a woman on the Prater——"

"Yes?" said Violet, as he stopped. The tenseness of her face frightened him. He imagined nameless fears forming in her brain.

"Oh, there was nothing much in it," he said lightly, then quickly relapsed into gravity as he remembered his duty, "but I wanted you to know. I wasn't in love with her—but for a week—I didn't see her again after a week—but it's weighing on me—I can't bear that you should think of me more highly than I'm worth—I want you to know everything, that I've not been everything you expect in a man——"

He looked miserably at the carpet, wondering why

he pleaded so feebly; he felt so horribly humble and abased. Then Violet spoke—

“Oh!” she said. “Is that all?”

Felstead looked up amazed, hardly believing that he saw a glimmer of amusement in the dark eyes.

“All,” he said, “all what?”

“All your—confession?”

“Yes, of course, it’s all my confession. What did you expect?”

And then Violet laughed, laughed almost boisterously at his tragic face.

“Silly boy,” she said; “well, that’s nothing, is it?”

Felstead looked at her with amazement and horror in his eyes. Nothing! Nothing! Was it possible that she, the noble, the pure— Oh, incredible!

“You think that’s nothing,” he said at last, “you whom I thought the loftiest——”

“Now, Maurice, do be reasonable. I——”

“Reasonable!” he shouted. “You talk to me of reason when I tell you my shame—my infamy. You look at me serene as if things of this kind were part of your everyday life——”

“Maurice! How dare you!”

“Oh, don’t try and tragedy queen me. I thought you didn’t know anything of these ugly facts—that you were high up, high above me——”

Broken words streamed from him as he surveyed his shattered illusion. He was fierce, pitiless; he wanted to lash her with cruel words because he had built her a pedestal and because she, in infinite tolerance, had stepped down from it. At last he stopped, breathless, almost tearful.

“What do you want?” said Violet quietly.

He found no pity for the strained face, the veiled, dark eyes.

"Oh, I don't want anything."

"Good-bye, then," whispered Violet.

He turned his head away. He did not take her hand. Then he stood outside the house, gazing vacantly through the park railings, and all alone.

3. THE PRIDE OF HIS PROFESSION

‘WELL?’ said the News Editor rather sulkily. It had been a long day and he was not as yet very well impressed by the new reporter. He could not get over the escape of the Princess of Novogorod, who had dived into a block of flats in Piccadilly to elude the reporter’s notebook and left him to wait two hours at the door while she coolly walked out into Jermyn Street. A journalist who wasn’t up to that. . . . Well! So he looked unkindly on the short figure in grey as it apologetically worried its straw hat.

“I’ve got something, Chief,” said the reporter slowly; “murder.”

“Oh? We’ll get that from the Association,” replied the News Editor.

“Sure enough, by and by, not for a couple of hours, though.”

The News Editor’s face showed sudden signs of interest. He threw himself back in his armchair and pushed his scanty hair away from his forehead, as he was wont to do when a special piece of information fired his surfeited imagination. “Oh?” he said at length; “how’s that?”

“Saw it half-an-hour ago; nobody else did.” A

slight flush rose up into the reporter's cheeks as he exhibited his prize.

"Nobody else? . . . How? . . . What? . . ." cried the News Editor with increasing interest. "Let's hear about it anyhow. . . . Buck up, we'll be in time for the final."

"I was walking along Lisson Grove," began the reporter, "on my way to the Tube, when I saw a big navy-looking sort of chap walking just in front of me. Nothing particular about him; had a drop too much perhaps. He went on in front, not hurrying at all, steadily though. Just as I was going to pass him he put his hand in his coat pocket, took a razor out, looked at it, put it back."

The reporter stopped, his eyes dreamily fixed on the faded wallpaper.

"Yes?" asked the News Editor.

"Struck me as queer. I just dropped back a step or two, following him quietly. A minute later he took the razor out again, kept it in his hand that time, turned into Devonshire Street sharp. Of course I followed right on. He turned into one of the houses, slammed the door almost in my face. Now they often leave the doors open in the slums. When I was doing Bethnal Green . . ."

"Yes, yes," snapped the News Editor, "get on with it, man." There was tenseness in his voice; his languor had left him.

"Well," resumed the reporter quite unruffled, "I thought there was something in this. So I looked through the keyhole; couldn't see anything, of course: passage pitch dark. So I got against the wall and squinted through the window. There was no area. There he was right enough, waving his arms in front

of a woman. Couple of children in a corner. 'I'll learn yer,' he was saying; I could hear him, for the window was open at the bottom. 'I'm goin' to do yer in and the kids,' he shouted. She screamed—screamed fit to rouse the whole street. He just jumped on her, got hold of her by the throat and threw her down on the ground."

"What did you do?" gasped the News Editor.

"Oh, I looked. I couldn't see very well just then. Rather hard lines."

The News Editor's eyes were now beginning to bulge. He moistened his dry lips.

"What happened then?"

"I couldn't see much for a moment, except the children in the corner, one of them crying, the other, a nice little girl, screaming 'Daddy! daddy!' as hard as she could. Of course it didn't matter in those parts; half-a-dozen people passed me, but it's like that in the slums; they don't want to get mixed up. Anyhow, the woman got up again; there was a bit of a scrap. She was a game one: I saw her smack him on the head with a bottle; her hair was coming down: she looked as much of a devil as he did. But he came at her again. 'Don't, Jim,' she cried, 'don't do it. I've always done my duty to you.' No, wait a bit, she didn't say that . . ."

The young man deftly drew out his notebook.

"No, what she said was: 'I've always been a good wife to you.' I took a shorthand note, you see," he explained.

An extraordinary expression came over the News Editor's face. It went a dirty pale, and yet the corners of his mouth suddenly twitched upwards.

"Go on, go on," he stammered.

"There's not much more," said the reporter. "He got hold of her by the hair, pulled her head back, got her with one arm jammed against the wall and the other against him. Then he cut her throat. It took him half-a-dozen cuts before she stopped screaming. Then he let her go. She went down in a heap. He didn't look at her, just walked across to the corner and cut the children's throats too. Easy, you know; they were just petrified, too frightened to cry out."

"Good heavens," muttered the News Editor, "did you call the police?"

"I did think of it," faltered the reporter in a shame-faced way, as if avowing a weakness. "But . . . Well, it seemed a pity to spoil it, and it wouldn't have done any good. I watched him wash and get his hair tidy; then I guessed he was coming out. It wouldn't have done if he found me there, so I just sheered off fifty yards or so and watched the street. Sure enough he came out a minute or two later. I followed him down Lisson Grove, along Marylebone Road, just to see where he was going. He was steady enough, sobered perhaps. At last he walked into a place that was half a mews and half a street, quiet sort of place, but he wasn't walking so well then. After hanging about for a minute or so he went to the end, where there's an empty house. I was watching him from the corner, but though he looked round he didn't see me. I saw him go down the area, heard him break a pane of glass, lift up a sash. He got into the kitchen, I expect."

"And here you are," said the News Editor blankly. He was staring at the young man with extraordinary intentness.

"He's bound to be there now," resumed the re-

porter. "I thought of telling the police, but that would have let the cat out of the bag, wouldn't it? And it wouldn't have done his family much good."

"No, you're right there," said the News Editor, his mouth again twitching.

"But I had a bit of luck," added the reporter. His eyes glittered now, full of vivacity. "As I ran out into Marylebone Road to find a taxi I fell into Brunton. Didn't tell him everything, of course; just let him know there was a murderer in that house. Made him swear to watch it and shadow the man if he came out and give him in charge about an hour later, or, if he didn't come out after an hour, tell the police."

The News Editor's eyes blinked quickly. He impatiently pushed away his hair.

"What did you do that for?" he asked.

"Well, I thought we'd have the murder as a scoop in the final and then we could have a special out an hour after with the arrest."

The News Editor slowly rose up from his chair, walked up and down the room, his hands twisting his handkerchief. Suddenly he turned to the reporter, whose eyes were once more dreamily directed to the faded wallpaper. He considered him the space of a second, then, with a movement that was all impulse, he clapped him on the back.

"Young man," he shouted, "you're the pride of your profession."

4. A PROUD MOTHER

MRS. THOMSON knocked peremptorily at the door which faced her own. It bore the numeral 28, and on a card the words, "Pinking. Millinery. Ladies' Own Materials Made Up." She was a haggard woman of forty-five, with unruly grey hair, hard, yellow features, and the general air of untidiness about the blouse which one associates with charwomen. There was a rumble inside the room, the sound of heavy footsteps; then the door opened and the more comfortable form of a contemporary but rotund woman confronted her. The owner of the room smiled broadly—so broadly as almost to hide within the red creases of her face the pale blue pupils of her eyes.

"Mornin', Mrs. Thomson," said the fat woman cheerfully.

"Mornin', Mrs. Smith. Fine mornin'."

"Ah! Any noos?"

"On'y wanted to tell yer 'e's gorn. Sailed last night on the—funny thing, I can't remember—sounded like 'Tomato.' Gorn any'ow, 'e is. Don't s'pose I'll ever set eyes on 'im agin, no more nor on me 'usband, I s'pose. Not that I've missed 'im much, I can tell yer, Mrs. Smith."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Smith soothingly, "yer can't say the same of Jim, can yer? 'E was a good son

to yer, wasn't 'e? Same as my Tom was. And there 'e is in Canada; been there six months 'e 'as; doing well, 'e says. Did I read yer 'is letter I got last week? 'E says——"

"Yes," said Mrs. Thomson quickly, "I read it. 'Ope as 'ow Jim'll do as well in Orstralier. We 'aven't 'ad a bit 'o luck in the family since me old man 'ooked it with that gurl. Ah, if on'y I could set eyes on that gurl!"

"We all 'as our worries," said Mrs. Smith, with a heavy sigh, "all on us. When Tim died I thought all me troubles was over; but Tom, 'e lifted 'is elbow like 'is father—runs in the family like. Still, I mustn't talk now 'e's in Canada, earnin' eight dollars a week, 'e says, wotever a dollar is."

The conversation was interrupted by the occupant of No. 42, on the upper storey of Beowulf Buildings. He was merry, indeed jovial, so much so that he attempted to embrace Mrs. Thomson. After a slight interchange of courtesies he was persuaded to make for his own floor.

"'E's a worm," said Mrs. Thomson.

"Call that a man," remarked Mrs. Smith, full of scorn, "a classy class 'e is!"

Then, the trifle having been disposed of, the discussion as to Tom and Jim revived, undisturbed by the apparently difficult progress of No. 42 towards his home. There were to be many such discussions in the months to come, for Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Thomson were both greatly proud of their sons beyond the sea; they were now beautiful, ideal sons, not the ordinary Beowulf Buildings sort of son, that lifts its elbow and gives its employer the what for and smacks its old mother in the mouth when it's feeling cheerful. No,

they were princely sons, who had refused to live at home like tame rabbits in a hutch; they were fine, enterprising young fellows, builders of Empire, potential millionaires. And now and then they wrote quite wonderful letters about crops and kangaroos—at least Jim did, as everybody in the buildings knew, for Mrs. Smith carried the letters about and read them once at least to every one of her acquaintances. She burdened even her customers with the great feats of her son. One day her imagination carried her away a little, for she told a graphic tale of Tom's encounter with the Boers.

"Boers, Mrs. Smith!" protested the lady from No. 84. "Boers lives in South Africa, they does. Thought yer said 'e was in Canada."

"Didn't say Boers," replied Mrs. Smith, "I said bears."

Really Mrs. Smith was splendid. Mrs. Thomson, too, was splendid, for she seemed above these little things; she did not brag. It is true she did mention Jim and the kangaroos, but she never read out his letters. When requested to do so she became rather stiff, and stated that she kept herself to herself. There was a mystery in her life: immediately on landing from the good ship "Tomato" (probably) Jim had sent her a postcard saying that he had been robbed and was on his uppers. Since then, and that was four months ago, Jim had not sent her a word. Possibly, she reflected, when he got off his uppers he might raise the price of a penny stamp, but the process seemed lengthy. So she had to content herself with haughty silence and go about her duties as cleaner of the schools with a soul steeled in dignity. As for Mrs. Smith, she remained exuberant, atrociously full of in-

formation about the Canadian Pacific engines and the proper way to rope a steer. It was almost intolerable, but one day it became quite intolerable.

Mrs. Thomson entered No. 28, to find the room crowded. There was the lady from No. 42 with a black eye and a bandaged head (given her by her husband, the classy class), and the lady from 84, a little condescending, for she was a good customer, her little girl dressed in one of Mrs. Smith's highest achievements; also another lady, and to crown all, the wife of the housekeeper, who did not as a rule mix with the fourth floor. In the midst of the excited group, in her large armchair, sat Mrs. Smith, with a very red face, which she frequently wiped, babbling wildly of Tom and lumber and grizzly bears in front of a fine Britannia-ware teapot.

"Tom give it me," she declared; "saved it up out of 'is pay. Gittin' on 'e is, and bought it in Montreal, 'e says, from a man 'as was down on 'is luck, 'e says."

"Real kind," remarked the lady from 84.

"Yer'll allus 'ave somfing to pop," said the lady from 42, who knew the world.

"Very considerate of him," added the housekeeper's wife in refined tones; "real silver I should say. I remember my mother's brother——"

Mrs. Thomson said nothing, but an expression of ferocity settled on her yellow features. She glared at the group, and, muttering, left the room. She slammed behind her the door of her own dwelling, and wondered whether a good cry would put her right; but she was made of fighting stuff and unconsciously sought for revenge rather than sympathy. She wasn't going to have them coming it over her because Jim hadn't condescended to write to her. Even if he was

a worm it shouldn't be said that nobody sent her presents. Feverishly she counted her money; she had a balance of eight shillings, which was to buy her a cloak in November. Never mind, the honour of the Thomsons first.

Four days later the lady from 42, the lady from 84, the housekeeper's wife, and some odd persons were invited to view on Mrs. Thomson's table a magnificent Indian shawl, the best imitation seven-and-six could buy in the Borough. Mrs. Thompson was crafty and had gone far afield, far from Beowulf Buildings, Marylebone. The shawl was a huge success, and even Mrs. Smith was compelled to admire; she suffered though, for three months later Mrs. Thomson gave a private view of a silver sauceboat, hall-marked with the sign of the lion. Little by little, during the next three years the fame of the Smith clan waned while that of the Thomsons blazed. Talk as she might of dollars and the Canadian Pacific, Mrs. Smith could make no headway against the imitation Crown Derby jars, the boxes inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the nine-carat gold brooches, which appeared for Mrs. Thomson at every anniversary. Mrs. Thomson did not look well, stated that too much food did not suit her, and that her boots would still last a long time . . . but the absent Jim Thomson became the model of the Buildings, the good son whom all envied her.

Ten years passed. Mrs. Smith had resigned herself to defeat, while Mrs. Thomson had almost come to believe that the Jim who had so completely disappeared was loading her with gifts. One day a message came for her from Marylebone Workhouse, saying that a man giving the name of James Thomson lay dying in the infirmary, of drink apparently, and

that he said she was his mother. Mrs. Thomson did not hesitate; the absurd libel must be crushed. Splendid in her Indian shawl and gold brooch (gifts of Jim) she went to the workhouse only to hear that the man was dead.

“’Spose you’d like to see him,” said the matron, indifferently, as she opened the door of the infirmary. “He’s your son, after all.”

Mrs. Thomson looked awhile at the thin body under the sheet. Then as she clasped about her the Indian shawl and fumbled at the gold brooch, she said in resolute tones—

“That? That ain’t my son. My son’s in Orstrailier. Doin’ well, ’e is. ’E’s goin’ to send me some gold earrings next mail.”

5. A LOVER OF VARIETY

“**I**T’S a crool shame, Mrs. Thomas,” said the cook sympathetically; “’ave a little something to put yer right. Some of the best. I gets it from the King’s Arms.” The kind red hand took from the cupboard a quartern bottle filled with the colourless fluid beloved of the Mrs. Thomases of this world, poured out into a tumbler an adequate dose, which her guest, still sniffing after the recital of her woes, drank in very small sips as a connoisseur sampling sherry. She finished at leisure, wiped her mouth with the somewhat grubby back of her hand, and heaved a large sigh.

“Dearie me,” she murmured, “it’s a weary world.”

“That it is, Mrs. Thomas,” said the cook cordially, “an’ well I knows it, though I ain’t married meself. Not that I ain’t ’ad my chances,” she added, with a quick raise of her head and a squaring of her plump shoulders.

“Yer ain’t lost much,” said Mrs. Thomas gloomily. “Yer see wot it comes ter. ’Ere am I with my Jim out o’ work an’ the kids to keep, an’ ’im not takin’ any exercise ’cept when ’e treads on my fice.”

“Crool,” said the cook; “’e wasn’t allus that sort, was ’e?”

“More or less, ’e was. The day we got married they

'ad to kerry 'im 'ome; not that I minded then, bless yer, a man's got a right to be jolly on 'is weddin'-day, I think. Still, 'e wasn't gettin' married every day, but yer might 'ave thought 'e was, these ten years."

"Ten years," said the cook dreamily; "'ow time flies."

It was not obvious that time flew so very speedily for Mrs. Thomas. There was something at least monotonous in her existence, for the same events seemed to recur rather often; the gamut of her experience was strictly limited. For the last ten years Jim Thomas had habituated her to intermittent periods of unemployment, which tended to grow longer and longer as they became more frequent, to hardly intermittent periods of drunkenness; of late years he had taken to giving her "something to write 'ome to mother abaht" in the shape of occasional black eyes and frequent smacks in the mouth; on the eve of the conversation with the kindly cook he had, in a particularly inspired mood, made her feel the weight of his boots. Mrs. Thomas did not specially complain: life was life, and a boot wasn't much harder than a fist, and there you were. Besides, she had other things to bother about—the keeping clean of the two rooms at 71 Beowulf Buildings in the intervals of charing, the charing itself, the care of the four kids. She had had eight of these in ten years, but fortunately four had died. She accepted this as a sort of natural wastage, part of the day's work. But if she did not take the thing to heart others did. The cook carried the harrowing tale of Jim's new idea to her employer, who was duly horrified: she thought these things only happened in the Sunday papers.

"It's abominable," she declared. "She must leave him."

"She wouldn't, mum, not she," said the cook; "'e's 'er 'usband, and 'usbands are 'usbands, mum."

"You'd better not let Mr. Emlyn hear you, Bessie," said her mistress, with a laugh, "you might put it into his head to give me—what did you call it, Bessie?—oh, yes, something to write home to mother about. But seriously, do you think she'd have a judicial separation? He couldn't come near her then. Mr. Emlyn would see about it."

"I can't say, mum," said the cook doubtfully; "I'll ask 'er."

And so the majestic law was set in motion. Mrs. Thomas gave her evidence before the "beak" in the most convinced manner, and within eight minutes was rid of her trouble. "Less gas about it than at the dentist's," she remarked later, with unconscious humour. The thing seemed to be a great success. Jim had taken it very well. At least he had disappeared, after stating that he'd come round and break every bloody bone in her body one of these days, but had done nothing, having doubtless been informed by a "pal" that if he put the threat into execution there would be trouble with the "beak." When the cook went to call at No. 71, she found Mrs. Thomas drinking tea with Mrs. Thompson, whose son was doing so well in Orstralier. There was an air of prosperity about the two rooms which had been absent when Jim lorded it over his wife; Mrs. Thomas's hair was, if not done, at least sort of done, and the four kids had had their faces washed. Mrs. Thomas's mood was sedate, rather than cheerful; she seemed to have at last found in life something reason-

ably satisfying, probably that peace and relative immunity from discomfort which are a very fair substitute for active happiness.

"Yes," she declared, "things does seem a bit better. The vicar's lady, she come in to-day: Good-morning, Mrs. Thomas, she says, I 'ear as 'ow you've given your 'usband the 'oof, she says, using long words to say it, of course. Yes, mum, says I, and time I did, mum, says I. Yer ought to bear yer cross, says she, an' a lot more. I gave 'er the wot for, I can tell yer. I ain't goin' to be preached at for 'arf a sack o' coal and a pint o' gruel."

Mrs. Thomas's fine combative spirit was admired, her independence of mind wondered at, and promises were made her of greater value than any the vicar's lady could have ventured on. Indeed, she reaped at once the fruits of her energy, for the cook had brought a welcome with her, a quarter of a steak-pie, two bananas (slightly off), and a brown loaf which was not yet so hard as to defy the teeth of the young Thomases. She went about her work in a placid spirit, talking little and apparently satisfied. Jim had not reappeared; thus there was nothing to disturb her when she settled down to scrub floors and steps, wash curtains and clean brass. The Emlyns were delighted with her.

"What did I tell you, Bessie?" Mrs. Emlyn remarked at least once a week. "Now she's rid of that scoundrel, Mrs. Thomas is quite another woman. She's active, she looks well, bright."

"Shouldn't exactly call 'er bright, mum," replied Bessie.

"Well, how could she be bright, considering the life she's led?"

"No, mum, you couldn't expect it. I 'xpect she's as bright as ever she was."

But Mrs. Thomas was not as bright as she had been. There was about her now, some three months having elapsed since her entry into the world of grass widows, an undefinable lack of something. You could not explain it better. She lacked "something." Her work had not deteriorated, her conversation was at its usual level of cheerfulness, a little above zero; her complexion was, as usual, a good deal less rosy than her hands. But she no longer had the fine ghoulish joy of recounting her miseries; at times with Mrs. Thompson and the cook, she cried over the gloomy past, but it was the past, the glamorous past, clad by an obscure mental process with faintly glowing colours. At last one day it appeared that a new interest had come into her life. She arrived at Mrs. Emlyn's at eight on the usual Friday, and encountered the lady of the house in the hall, for she was up betimes so as to catch a train. Mrs. Emlyn opened mouth and eyes and screamed.

"Heavens!"

Mrs. Thomas looked at her from artistically blackened eyes. She had not done her hair.

"Yes, mum," she said sedately, "'e did it."

"But—but—this can't go on. You must speak to Mr. Emlyn, tell the police."

"No, mum, it's no good. I've gorn back to 'im."

"But—but why?"

"Oo, I dunno, mum, p'r'aps life was lonely like."

"Hum! Do you like the sort of society he's giving you now?"

"I dunno as I do, mum, but wot's a 'ome when there ain't no 'usband in it, mum? Things were flat,

mum," she added, with a sudden access of feeling, "it give me the fair sick."

Mrs. Emlyn stared at her, wondering how to tackle this peculiar social problem. Of course, Mrs. Thomas felt dull; still the alternative of returning to Jim was apparently a little too lively.

"Yer see, mum," Mrs. Thomas philosophized, "it's like this. If yer lives alone nothing 'appens. It's jest the work and yer two bob, an' cookin' the dinner an' gittin' the children orf to school. An' so on all the time. Wot 'appens on Monday 'appens next Monday. And there yer are. Stuck in the mud like. But when yer've got a 'usband, things 'as wot they call a zest. If 'e don't come 'ome yer can wonder if 'e's been knocked down by a moter-car or been run in. Sort of excitin', mum. And if 'e do come 'ome, ah, that's where it comes in. P'r'aps 'e's got a job an's goin' ter sye, 'M'rier, wot sye ter a day 'orf on Sunday with the kids at Richmond? Eh, ole gell?' Or p'r'aps 'e'll give yer one in the mouf. Variety, that's wot it is, mum, variety."

Mrs. Emlyn smiled, realized herself as powerless.

"Yes, mum," Mrs. Thomas concluded, as she reflectively rubbed her left eye, for it was rather swollen, "there ain't no life where there ain't no variety."

6. FARVER

“**A**ND thet,” remarked Mrs. Edmunds, as she slowly twisted up between her hands the moist warm rag, “’ll about do it.”

She remained on her knees at the entrance of the kitchen living-room, her large red hands still aimlessly playing with the rag, and surveyed the view with an almost loving air. It certainly was a room to be proud of, a room for the like of which there was material in some four hundred other rooms in Beowulf Buildings, but she reflected with absolutely unctuous satisfaction that the material was woefully misused. She knew of no other household where the boards were so white, the window-panes so transparent, where the range was so perfectly black-leaded; as for the pots and pans, Mrs. Edmunds often gently boasted that they encouraged Lizzie’s vanity. It is surprising to record that Mrs. Edmunds was a washerwoman, for in virtue of the eternal paradox which decrees that the boot-maker’s son is ill-shod, such cleanliness as hers would have been more fitting in a Welsh coal sifter; one would have thought that her daily eight to ten hours of noisy splashing in warm, soapy water, her mangling, her starching, would effectually have disgusted her, induced in her some cynicism as to cleanliness.

It was not so : Mrs. Edmund's tastes were so depraved that, for her, godliness itself took the second place. She knelt at the entrance of the spotless room, the comfortable picture of a woman aged probably thirty-five, with a pleasant red face, somewhat slackened by its continual contact with steam, and a figure which a blue blouse made a pretence of controlling ; she had bright blue eyes, which would have been large if the puffed-out cheeks had not caused them to appear sunken, tightly drawn hair, once red-brown but now bleached, and such ridiculously good teeth that she appeared her real age and not fifty, as should a normal washerwoman of the lower classes. Indeed, there was an air of prosperity about Mrs. Edmunds. She was drawn from her contemplation by a knock at the door.

"Them," she muttered. "Lordie, lordie, dirty boots agin."

Mrs. Edmunds sighed as she made this remark. She sighed and said "dirty boots agin" punctually every Saturday when Lizzie and Bert returned from school (or, during the holidays, play). Warily she opened the door and interposed into the opening her bulky frame.

"Nar then," she commanded, to the two small figures on the landing, "orf with them boots."

"They ain't dirty, mar," said Bert sulkily.

"Orf with 'em," repeated Mrs. Edmunds, with an air of ferocity. "An' you, too, Miss Lizzie. 'Ere's yer slippers, both of yer."

Half grumbling and half laughing, sandy-haired Lizzie sat down on the stone floor to take off her boots and be fit to enter her mother's mosque. Bert, still grumbling, did likewise.

"Surprised at yer," remarked Mrs. Edmunds severely, as she watched them. "Yes, surprised ;

fancy wantin' to come into a nice clean room with feet like a bus 'orse's 'oofs. Wot would yer farver say if he knew?"

There was no reply. The children, a little shame-faced, rose in their slippers, and carrying their boots, were allowed into the sacred precincts. For the hundredth time sulky eight-year-old Bert (whose experience of life was nearer eighteen) and petulant Lizzie had been awed into obedience by the absent but immense "farver," the father whose name was magic when the proprieties were at stake. "Farver," though never seen, was always there; he hovered over No. 66 like a great angel, clean, sober, God-fearing, an angel who never swore or spent his wages at the pub., or assaulted the police, or wanted to go to music-halls, or ever did any of the dreadful things which many fathers in Beowulf Buildings did as a matter of course.

"Yer can't 'ave no more puddin'," said Mrs. Edmunds, as later she gave the children their dinner.

"I'm 'ungry," growled Bert, holding out his plate.

"And I——" began Lizzie, cleverly forcing tears into her blue eyes.

"No, yer ain't," Mrs. Edmunds broke in. "If yer 'ungry, tell me for why yer refused taters. Ah!" she went on severely, "it ain't 'ungry yer are, it's greedy."

Bert opened his mouth to protest, but too late.

"Greedy," said Mrs. Edmunds, in thunderous tones; "wot would yer farver say if 'e knew?"

There was no reply. There could be no reply. It was all over, it was impossible to argue, for what could a poor boy argue against the great tradition? "Farver" dominated him; "farver" compelled him to wash his face when it hardly needed it that same after-

noon, compelled him to do so in the meanest way, not by mere commands which could be flouted, but by sitting somewhere on a pillar of cloud and giving off horrible potent waves of disapproval. Likewise he made Lizzie mend her torn pinafore, thus breaking an important engagement with Flo, aged eleven, who lived in three rooms and was quite the lady; he made Bert learn a hymn; he made Lizzie consent to mind the baby for the lady at Number 65. "Farver" caused a tide of goodness to overwhelm his awestruck children. It was wonderful.

"Farver" had been in the perfection business for many years. Not once had he shown himself; probably he did not condescend. Thus he remained great, except for Mrs. Edmunds, who in sane moments (for she, too, was at times overwhelmed by him) remembered the truth about her Bill. "Farver" had run away seven years before, after living with her for five years, during which the black eye became for her a habit, broken only by his occasional visits to "quod," to the hospital, and for a blissful six months to an inebriates' farm colony. But Mrs. Edmunds did not mention these things; "farver" was more useful as a model than as an awful example.

On that Saturday afternoon the revolution happened. There was a knock at the door. Mrs. Edmunds opened it and drew back with a stifled cry. A man stood in front of her, short, broad, clad in dirty and ragged fustian. He had a lowering red face, a redder nose, a watery eye, and a truculent air which his unshaven chin accentuated.

"Well," said the man at last. "I've come back, Maria. Glad ter see me?"

There was no reply.

"Looks like it. Them the kids? Ain't yer got anything ter sye ter yer farver? Speak up, yer dummies, cawn't yer? Blime—— I've 'arf a mind ter give yer a smack in the mouth, Maria, ter cheer yer up."

"Bill," faltered Mrs. Edmunds, "before the children——"

"Children be ——. 'Ere, don't let's 'ave no more of it. Got a drink? No? Go an' git it." He swayed a little as he entered the room.

"Bill," said Mrs. Edmunds gently, "don't yer think yer've 'ad enough?"

"D'yer mean I'm drunk?" said "farver," with slow ferocity. "Sye it agin, Maria—sye it agin—and I'll—— Ah, that's better," he added, as his affrighted wife eluded him, seized a jug and rushed out of the dwelling. "I'll 'ave a nap till yer come back. Tired, that's wot I am, tired."

The children looked with amazement at the door of the bedroom as it closed behind the man.

"Farver!" whispered Lizzie.

"Saw 'is clothes," said Bert. "'E's got a dandy kit, I don't think."

"'Eard wot 'e said? Blime, 'e said."

"An' mar orf with a jug to git 'im beer!"

"But then, then," cried Lizzie, "wot mar's allus sying abaht 'im it's—it's—gas."

The terrible truth had come out. The idol was down. The legend was—gas.

Then Bert, bereft of all illusion, hauled up the new colours of free speech and free agency.

"Blime," he said, "I've got a brown, Liz. I'm orf."

"Where to?" asked Lizzie.

"To the Red Lion," said Bert, rather proudly, "jest for a mouthful of beer."

7. ON THE ALTAR OF HIS PRIDE

“*NO, Señor.*”

The words had come very soft but firm through the heavy star-hung night of the southern sea. There was silence for a moment while the man took in their purport, realized with despair and abasement that this fine, sudden passion of his had, as a bird, beaten impotent against a wall, and now lay stunned on the ground. He did not reply at once, for John Stirling was not prodigal of words: he was a Scot, such a Scot as neither China nor Rio can make other nor absorb. He sat rigid in his deck-chair on the old *Pombal*, a long figure with thin white-clad legs, resolute even in his abandoned pose. His face was of the fine Caledonian shape, not unduly high in the cheekbone, freckled, well crowned with short sandy hair. Now his steady blue eyes looked fixedly at the languid woman by his side, who had dealt him the first blow ever levelled at him by a gentle hand! It was a heavy blow; but John Stirling did not whimper, rave, kneel, do any of the things a rejected Spanish suitor might have done when flouted by Josefa Relvas. He was not that kind of stuff, John Stirling; perhaps he did not feel the blow, perhaps it took a lot to make him cry out; perhaps, too, the dim shape of Josefa's chaperon, an old veiled aunt, who sat some ten feet away, a still

and perpetual watcher, compelled him to realize himself as a civilized man bound by etiquette. So he merely said, "Why?"

The woman smiled, shrugged her heavy shoulders as if to say, "Who knows?" and faintly waved her two hands. She had said everything with those two fine Spanish hands, animate and final. So there was another silence while Stirling looked long at this woman who had blazed like a comet streaming through the darkness of his life. Now that he had lost her he realized every little detail of her, for he saw her more impersonally. She was no longer the gorgeous presence that fired him as it passed him swelling as the sail of a caravel; she was just the beautiful Josefa Relvas, daughter of a penurious Spanish consul in a Brazilian port. Josefa was short, heavy already with the weight of her twenty years as an Englishwoman of thirty; she lay in her deck-chair, a handsome animal with a dead-white downy-cheeked face, eyes sometimes sleepy and sometimes lustrous, a thick red mouth faintly lined by dark hair on the upper lip. Against the white canvas of the chair her heavy black coiled hair piled up high, its oiliness glittering a little in the light of the taffrail lamps.

"Why?" John Stirling whispered again, too tense to cast a look towards the silent chaperon.

Josefa again made that helpless gesture with her hands, then realized that this Scot was not as her countrymen, and that words, precise words, must be used to make him understand.

"How can I tell you?" she murmured. "These things . . . *Quien sabe?* You are . . . you are not as we are. We are fire, you are ice. Oh, do not protest," she added hurriedly as Stirling seemed about

to interrupt. "I know your countrymen from that island in the north. I have met them at Rio, at Para, at Buenos Ayres—yes." She stopped as if to think. "Your countrymen, they are strong and good; they want all things, and gain many by grasping at them, pitiless, relentless; they are generous, too . . . when they are generous. But you have no souls."

Josefa listened with a smile on her full red mouth as Stirling whispered denials, renewed his plea; but he did not move her, this handsome Scot, whose precise and perfect Spanish was more correct than her own. No, no, he pleaded too grammatically. If Stirling had known, he would have forced a tear into the steady crystal of his eyes, and the long white jewelled hand would have been his for ever. But he did not know. So silence fell again on the couple. Josefa did not repeat her refusal, for all was over.

"Josefa," said the voice of the chaperon, "*las once van a dar.*" And, truly enough, eleven struck slowly. Josefa rose, wrapped round her head and broad shoulders a black silver-spangled scarf. Then, with an inclination of the head, she ended the interview. Stirling sat down again on his deck-chair, having risen and bowed as the women left: he was of the trained type of man that must acknowledge a woman's bow while walking to the scaffold. He lit a cigar, and during the thirty minutes it lasted passed through despair, through amazement, into anger. Josefa had fired him with the swift strange passion that so often overcomes the Scot when he clashes with the mysterious quality of antipodean Spain. He wanted her, wanted her desperately, wanted her as he had never wanted any woman in his thirty-eight rigid scheduled years. He sat and suffered without a sigh, very like

some Scotch terrier which has been mauled and silently waits for death. But despair was not everything. He could not understand how he, a salvage engineer, well-to-do and passing handsome, could be refused by this girl of twenty, over-ripe already from the native point of view, the dowry-lacking daughter of a poor official. It was amazing—above all, it was insulting. He, John Stirling, the pride of his daring profession, vice-president of his institute—he was not good enough! A wave of heat rose to Stirling's face, a sudden, silent rage flooded him, so that he could not answer Captain D'Almeida when the old yellow-faced sailor wished him good-night as he passed. D'Almeida threw him a quick look from dark pupils zoned in yellowish white, and strutted away, an absurd, monkey-like thing with white whiskers, clad in a shabby uniform overloaded with gold braid.

John Stirling retired for the night to toss in the horrible heat and smell of his cabin, while the old *Pombal* creaked on towards Lisbon: she rolled, this filthy old Portuguese tub, greasy, odorous, with her cargo of scratching humanity tormented by evil crawling insects. But Stirling was above these little things, so ground was he between the millstones of his passion and of his outraged pride. This mood was maintained as the old ship wallowed through the heavy seas towards the north-east: he wanted Josefa, and he hated her. He saw her as terribly beautiful, as terribly repulsive. He wanted to seize her in his arms, crush her to him; he wanted to strike with the back of his hand that insolent red mouth. His fury was fed by a second refusal, for passion had once more dominated him. Again Josefa said, "*No, Señor,*" almost fiercely. Then he hated her without admixture, followed

her swaying walk along the deck with murderous eyes.

The days passed on, and now Stirling lived in isolation, occupied solely with his hatred; short, almost insulting to kindly old D'Almeida. The islands were passed, the tension did not relax. Stirling reflected, almost joyfully, that next day would see him in Lisbon, when he would be free of the hateful presence he had once loved. But it was not to be, for the sanitary inspector suspected yellow fever in one of the stokers, and placed the *Pombal* under observation for two days. John Stirling clenched his jaws together when told the news, so as not to burst into incoherent oaths, for it was a rule with him not to swear. He was truly a caged beast.

At last the two days passed, two terrible days of inaction in the midst of the Tagus. Stirling leant against a bulwark watching the distant lights on the crest of Cintra, the big *Camoens* at anchor, the nearer blaze of the Avenida Palace; by straining his ears he could catch the rumble of the traffic on the Chiado. To-morrow he would be free. He surveyed the deserted deck with an immense feeling of relief. Free! It was then, and suddenly, that he heard a sound somewhere aft, a splash, then a cry. Every nerve went taut; he listened: again he heard the cry.

John Stirling had run the length of the deck. Leaning over the rail, he saw floating before his eyes the white face of Josefa. She was open-mouthed, her black hair was uncoiled. He looked without moving, all strength gone, watching for the death of his enemy. Josefa sank deeper in the water—then he heard her voice, and his muscles seemed to propel him towards her.

“Help!” she murmured—“help, Señor—I will marry you.”

Stirling drew back suddenly. She had said “Señor” . . . oh, if she had said “Juan”! He turned his head away, fearing that the terrible temptation would sweep him away. Resist? He must resist—a gift thus offered was not for him. No, no; she should not ignobly bribe him. When at last he looked again Josefa had disappeared. Where she had been glowed a peacock’s tail of phosphorescence. Long he looked into the black water, then buried his head in his hands. All was over. His shame was washed away, the offering burnt.

8. THE GALLANT NINETY-NINTH

THE little electric cars rattled past noisily on the Rambla, abruptly swerving to the left as they passed me to enter the Plaza de Cataluña. They were laden with home-going artisans, tight-haired, dark-faced women, and clerks in frock-coats, brown boots and straw hats; to some a handsome *guardia civil* imparted a flavour of importance. Before me the life of Barcelona unrolled under the palm-trees of the *plaza*—carts drawn by oxen, water-carriers in gay skirts, hurrying bare-headed girls. From this spot, the Café del Rey, one could feel the pulse of the city. Round me were the Spaniards, solitary and sullen or massed and noisy, corpulent dark youths, family parties that included little pale children and handsome grandmothers with silvery hair and deep eyes. Most notable of all was my neighbour at the next table, a type of the *conquistador*, with swarthy face, long black moustache, and the big broken nose of a soldier of Cortes. He sat moodily before his absinthe (for France is not far from Barcelona, and absinthe has come to Spain), feeling with his lean fingers a coarse *cigarrillo*. I watched him as he licked the paper and deftly rolled the cigarette, rather envious, for I usually lost half the tobacco in so doing. I, too, lit a cigarette,

and, waiting for him to be ready, offered him the match.

He took it with a long gay smile, and as he lit his *cigarrillo* said, "*Gracias, Señor Inglés.*"

I was surprised, annoyed, for, after all, I had said nothing. How did he know me for an Englishman? But I quickly remembered that, if I had been of any Latin breed, I should have offered not the match but the cigarette. So we talked, amicably and desultorily, of the heat, the skies, the palm-trees, the iniquity of the Government—for Catalonians hate all Governments. He struck me as intelligent, this lean Spaniard, humorous too, if his black eyes spoke truth. But he was not wordy; the conversation flagged, and I tried to revive it by praising the smartness of a company of soldiers as they passed us on the way to their barracks.

"Ah, ah!" he almost shouted as he slapped his thin leg, "but did you not see? It is the 99th—the gallant 99th."

"No, I did not see. But why 'the gallant 99th'?"

My friend opened his eyes incredulously, then pulled with glee at his *cigarrillo* so as to make the foul tobacco frizzle. The look made of him a picture of Mephistopheles.

"What!" he cried. "You do not . . . *Caramba!* I will tell you the story." He took a gulp of absinthe, and threw himself back in his uncomfortable cane chair.

"It was long ago, very long, when we were policing the Moulouya, we and the French, near Dar el Golea, you know, each on our side of the river. I was there—I had been buying alfalfa. I can tell you, Señor, I was glad—for the tribes were bad, yes, very bad—

glad to be safe in Dar el Golea; and there were others, too, a whole caravan that dared not set out for Melilla, and friendly Moors and their families. We were herded in that little dirty town . . . dirty! well, if you do not know Morocco, you do not understand."

"No," I said, "but I will guess."

"Guess then, Señor. I will not tell you more than that Dar el Golea smells worse than the port of Lisbon, and that insects are more. But this was not all our suffering: we were afraid—afraid for our money and our lives. If those tribes, the Rawia, were stronger than our friends, we were lost; we would be slaves carrying packs south of the Atlas, or shot, decapitated, bastinadoed; our tongues would be cut out and our mouths scalded with boiling water. I thought of nothing else, and of all I left behind me here." He looked sentimentally at the palm-trees, and resumed. "There had been a little fighting between the *Joyeux*—that is the French *Bataillon d'Afrique*, you know—and the Rawia. We had a company of the 99th, too, our gallant 99th. But one night suddenly I woke up to hear the gunpowder speaking in the south. Ah! you should have heard it, the crackling and the rumbling. We said nothing—we, the little frightened crowd on the roof of the *tabor*: we were afraid."

He stopped, and I saw that his face was tense.

"All night long they fought. And at daybreak they were fighting still. There had been no news, nor anything, except in the night the passing of twenty *Joyeux*, who left the town for the front. Ah! you should have seen them run, singing as they ran—

"Depuis q' j'suis v'nu dans c'te sal'té d'Afrique,
Ou c' que j' fais'l Jacques avec un sac su'l dos,
Je suis dev'nu sec (que) comm' un coup d'trique:
J'ai bientôt plus que la peau sur les os"

And then nothing." He paused, and I heard him murmur the song of the *Bat' d'Af'*. "When day came rumours rose . . . like mist before the sun. There had been much fighting, many killed, but it was said that the Rawia were beaten and had left great heaps of dead. We were glad, all of us, for we had been cold in the night on the roof of the *tabor*; we were proud, too, because our French friends and our own Spanish 99th had won. The news came that the French captain was dead, and that the *Joyeux* were camping on the field. An orderly rode up to the *tabor*, where we were making coffee, followed by a running mob of protected Moors, but he did not know anything: he had passed the night in a dry *oued* waiting for orders. And none read his letter save the silent chief of the *tabor*. But soon we heard that, if the *Joyeux* were not returning, the 99th was—the gallant 99th, who had saved us from spoliation and death. I tell you, Señor, it was great."

I looked at him with curiosity, at this long, lanky trader who had seen war so close. It seemed strange for him to sit here in civilized Barcelona, and to know that he saw limitless white sands strewn with black rocks, scrub, and the dead bodies of French and Spanish troopers.

"They came back, that company of the 99th. Ah, I can see them, in double file, marching through the *calle* between the houses that are so close and leave between their roofs but a strip of sky. They came up the slope like a long centipede with red legs, slow as if tired with much fighting. And as we saw them coming—I cannot, Señor, tell you our gratitude. I shouted, Señor, we all shouted, and the women peeped from behind the curtains; the little children ran out,

while the dogs were frightened and ceased to forage in the square, and even the *burros* brayed. We filled the little street, all of us, so that the soldiers could hardly pass; we would have thrown flowers at the heroes if we had had any, but all we could give was cold water and dates. They passed silent and as if full of modesty, for we Spaniards do not sing as those little thieves the *Joyeux*. They hurried to the square where was their camp—for there are no barracks at Dar el Golea—and there stayed behind their sentries, as if under orders."

Again my friend stopped, stroking his big broken nose.

"But it was not orders," he suddenly shouted, much to my Anglo-Saxon unease, though nobody noticed the shout—"it was shame. Señor, the left bank of the Moulouya had fought, and of the hundred and twenty *Joyeux* thirty were dead and forty-five wounded, but . . ." He raised his head and declaimed, with histrionic air, "Within an hour it was posted in the *tabor* that the Rawia were routed, that the French had lost seventy-five . . . while ours remained idle on the right bank. There were no orders. They did not fight. So"—and his voice was hard—"the *Joyeux* died."

"But then," I said, "your rejoicings, your ovation, when you greeted them on their return? . . ."

The long mouth twisted into a sneer.

"Ah, Señor, we had our revenge. We gave praise where praise was not due. . . . Our praise was a stolen thing. And that is why we call them the gallant 99th."

9. SACRIFICE

“ALL over, sir.”

Old Captain Maggs dragged deeper over his ears his dripping peaked cap, and looked out ahead into the night. He had caught, faint as a whisper, the shout of the first mate, who leant towards him while he desperately held on to the rail of the bridge. As he looked, the wind, solid as a column, savagely drove into his face the wall of rain which shrouded to invisibility the plunging bows of the *Emily Mary*. The tramp steamer groaned and reared as sea after sea struck her astern, as high waves passed all over her, flooding her decks, pouring out with a fierce hiss from the scuppers; she was water-logged and no longer rose to fight for her life. For ten hours she had been driven in front of the gale, straight towards the east, out of her course; her steering gear had broken down; some two hours before a sea had almost swamped her, rushed down the open hatches, for the terrified stokers had raised them in defiance of orders and put out her fires. Vaguely the skipper thought of his passengers, those twenty-two Italian women, currant pickers, whom he was to carry from Malta to Palermo, and who would in some three minutes be wrecked on Pantelaria.

"Yes, Brown, yes," said Captain Maggs; "all over." He spoke dreamily, without realizing very well that the black line of coast he could see within a mile or so was the end of his journey and that of the *Emily Mary*. It was beyond the power of man to save the ship; she must strike. Already the crew were aware of their peril; from a crowded little group of men that cowered in the bows behind the bulwark under the intermittent blows of the seas and the perpetual sting of foam, heads were poised above crouching bodies to look out over the water towards the inevitable cliffs. A figure, a woman, whose dripping skirts were suddenly furled round her by the wind, ran unsteadily across the deck towards the bridge, falling face forward every two or three steps, and shrieking above the gale.

"Paolo! Paolo!" screamed the woman, "Paolo!" then fell on her face, rolled over and over like a bundle as a sea flooded the deck, then again, as she rose and with frightful monotony: "Paolo! Paolo!"

Old Captain Maggs stood rigid on the bridge with the first mate by his side, waiting for the inevitable crunching of the keel as the *Emily Mary* ground herself on the beach. Thoughts streamed through his brain swift as the unrolling film of a cinematograph: he was going to lose his ship after forty-two years of navigation, going to lose his life too, no doubt; he would never again see his home and his old wife at Havant; how annoyed his owners would be! The woman had picked herself up again, dragged herself to the hatch, and now with downcast head smothered in streaming black hair, was perpetually crying, "Paolo! Paolo!" into the depths of the fore-castle.

"Shall I tell the boatswain to pipe to quarters, sir?" asked Brown.

The skipper looked at him sorrowfully, with tears or salt water in his light blue eyes, while his clean-shaven old mouth twitched between its deep furrows. He found himself forgetting his old wife, the home at Havant, the owners of the *Emily Mary*; for a second he concentrated on the fate of this handsome fresh-faced young sailor with the Danish yellow curls. Instead of replying, he said—

"Got a girl, Brown?"

"Yes, sir," said the young man, and turned away his pink face.

"Ah!" said Captain Maggs. Then, inconsequently, "We shall never see them again, you and I."

Not another word was spoken, for where was the use of piping the men to their stations? Time enough when the crash came.

And then it came. Quite suddenly the black cliffs loomed enormous and high above the funnel, while a fiercer blast seized the *Emily Mary*, hoisted her on the crest of a green wave that raced gleefully, throbbing under its burden, towards the black shore. For a second she hovered almost in the air, in the midst of hieratic silence. The woman at the hatch screamed "Paolo!" in a broken voice. Then the air was filled with sound, the loud boom of the hull on the rocks, then crashings and sharp splinterings of wood and steel as jagged point after jagged point entered the port side; the funnel fell on the deck-house and scattered a rain of shattered plate glass; above all came the thunders of the seas, which leapt over the starboard bow, one after the other, driving the *Emily Mary* further on the jagged rocks.

Captain Maggs and his mate struggled in a heap among the twisted ruins of the rail. Under the almost continuous torrent of water they managed to regain their feet, slid half-way down the deck, for the ship had heeled over at an angle of forty-five degrees. Slowly, under the battering blows, they made towards the group in the bows and signed them to crawl toward the main hatch. It was impossible now to make oneself heard unless one shouted mouth to ear, for the ship was as an enormous sounding board for the thunder of the waves. By signs then the mate ordered the main hatch to be opened, so that the passengers might be given a chance to escape in the boats. He had not dared to launch these before in the boiling sea. As soon as the hatch was up the screams of the women below dominated even the gale; they streamed up the swaying steps of the companion, crying, chattering, clasping brown-faced babies in their arms, and invoking the Virgin as the water flooded them, swathed them in their soaked coloured shawls and head-dresses. A small curly-haired boy ran to the woman who still shrieked his name, Paolo, clasped her in his arms. Then a sea seized them both, rolled them over and over like dead bodies, but there was no time to help them, for the crew was struggling with the boats. The falls were useless, mere jammed and twisted masses of metal; the men hacked at the ropes with axes, aiming so wildly that one of them, having nearly severed his left hand, fell back fainting and was at once carried away by a sea. One of the women, shrieking in incoherent Italian, ran to their assistance with a long knife which she blunted against the tarred strands.

Again the violence of the gale increased. An

immense wave hoisted the *Emily Mary* off the rocks, flooding her deck, tearing clean away two of the starboard boats. For some seconds the ship was submerged; then with a roar like the flap of a hundred sails, the water streamed away, while the vessel with a grinding sound louder than any which had gone before, settled once more on the rocks. Again the men hacked at the falls, severing one by one the ropes that were rigid as iron bars. As their work advanced the skipper hurriedly conferred with his mate.

"Two boats gone?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"You know, Brown?"

"Aye, aye, sir." Yes, he knew, the young mate. He could not look at the old man, for he knew that the remaining boat would barely hold the women and children. No room for him, his girl's man, none for the man who belonged to the old woman in the Havant home.

"Got your revolver? You may want it."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

They were extraordinarily understanding, these two men. A tense atmosphere united them. There was no need to shout to one another to explain that they had to stay until the timbers parted, that they might have to shoot men so that women and children might be saved. At last the boat was out, filled from bows to stern by the women and children, who fell, floundered into it, were dragged in from the surging water while the men desperately fended off to save the boat from being dashed to pieces against the deck. There was a roaring and a screaming, a cry as Brown mechanically fired at a man who attempted to push a woman away from the gunwale. . . . Suddenly the

boat was gone with its cargo, as if torn away by the sea, perhaps to be swept away and swamped, perhaps to be flung up into safety on some rocky ledge. The eighteen sailors clustered round the skipper and the mate waiting for the end. It came swiftly. The last sea, the powerful thing that had snatched the laden boat, seized the *Emily Mary*, half threw her into the air; she came down at a sharp angle, shivered, then capsized.

There was no human crying now, merely the endless roar of the waves. Miles away, on the great back of a current, safely floated the boat full of women and children, the reward of sacrifice.

Three days later, on a sea flat as glass and blue as sapphire, the twenty-two currant pickers landed on soft sand on the coast of Sicily. They chattered and cried, these brown women, as they fell starving and half fainting on the dry land. The mother of Paolo, mad, no doubt, sat crouching in the sun, endlessly jabbering mongrel and broken Latin prayers, interspersed with Italian words: “. . . *in nomine pater . . . figlio . . . pax vobiscum . . .*”

But beyond the sands the land lay torn and broken by an earthquake. A town lay blackened and in ruins. Perhaps, some fifty miles away, life might be found at the price of marching such as can be done by men, not by famished women.

So they lay, the futile price of sacrifice, the futile price of human lives, under the Sicilian sun, while the mad mother of Paolo, ready for her death, still jabbered in broken Latin—

“. . . *in nomine pater . . . figlio . . . pax vobiscum . . .*”

10. THE PRICE OF GOOD CHEER

FREDERICK HORTON was in trouble within half-an-hour of his arrival in Gaylen. He had driven up from the station, where but half-a-dozen trains a day disturbed the peace of Hampshire, not knowing that the brougham bore witness to his unimportance; other and more significant guests were due an hour later from a down station, and the cars were reserved for them. The brougham had, however, worried him enough, for a footman had opened the door when he alighted, while, as his luggage was not to be seen, it could be assumed that there was a luggage cart. Thus already three persons were interested in Horton's progress—three pampered, tippable persons. But in the hall, where the French bulldogs snuffled as they slept, yet more dangers had appeared—the sallow, grey-haired butler with the heavy silver watch-chain, another footman, so richly garbed as to appear simple, the groom of chambers, an immense person, with heavy shaven chops, great limbs, the ease of Jove, and the air of a man who has never done any work.

Horton noted all this as his coat and bowler were removed to some unknown region. His eyes took in also the heavy magnificence of Gaylen Hall, the polished parquet covered with the skins of beasts, the

coal-scuttle—equal to four of his landlady's—the big ecclesiastic oaken chairs, the brass chandelier, the twenty thousand pound Hoppner casual on the stairs, and all the evidence of money—crushing, obvious money. It had fallen on him like a heavy mantle. He was nervous when his host spoke to him.

“Hello, Horton; had a good journey down?”

“Yes, Sir John; a little slow on account of the fog.”

“Fog? Ah, yes, foggy enough. It's the rain, Horton, the rain. It's been spoiling the country for a month. The hounds didn't have a chance all last week. It's enough to make one pray for frost and the risk of a broken neck.”

Horton followed his host through the vast hall to a vaster room which managed to be cosy when compared with the glacial immensity of the drawing-room. He vaguely answered Lady Felliner when questioned as to the health of his mother. He tried to make friends with the bulldogs, who had sulkily followed. The beasts covered him with confusion because he spoke French to them; evidently they didn't understand his French, Miss Felliner remarked with the brutality of eighteen. He had barely recovered from his embarrassment when a discreet footman was whispering into his ear.

“What, what?” he asked.

“Your keys, sir,” the man murmured.

“What do you—oh—you needn't do that—oh, that's all right——”

Horton suddenly found that the Felliners were staring at him as intently as their good manners allowed. An awful conflict raged within him; how could he tell them that he had no dressing-case—merely a loose brush and a sponge-bag? How could he say that he

did not remember whether his cuffs did not need trimming with the scissors? At last he controlled himself.

"There are no keys," he said loftily; "it's a patent. I'll open my bag." As the man left the room Horton found himself nervously explaining to Lady Felliner that it was one of those funny little American patents which it took years to understand. And thus the conversation dragged on until at last the people arrived for whom the motors were reserved. There was bustle, by favour of which Horton escaped to the library, where he stood, cold and frightened, as he read the uninteresting biography of the Brennans of Tipton. Then, when he went to his room to dress, Gaylen Hall struck at him again. There was hot water, which he never had at his lodgings, an armful of warm towels; the bed was immense; plugs and switches were everywhere. He surveyed the room almost desperately to try and find fault with it; but in vain, for from moulded ceiling to soft carpet it was quietly perfect; there was even a small library in a corner, while the scent-bottles on the dressing-table were filled with lavender water and eau de cologne.

"Fool!" Horton thought, as he surveyed himself in the looking-glass and knew that the washerwoman had not made the best of his shirt; "what are you doing here?" He could find no answer to the riddle. His mother was a second cousin of Sir John's, and, for her snobbish sake, he had "kept up" with the Felliners. Now he paid the penalty by being asked to leave his two-pound-a-week surroundings for theirs. At dinner especially he paid the penalty. His neighbour continually asked him whether he had read certain books—him who could not afford Mudie's; the brisk young matron whom he had taken in wanted to know what

plays he had seen, whether he liked golf, and whether he was going abroad that winter. All around him was the profusion of silver and crystal, the medley of wines. Horton found himself as if dazed by the conversation of the languid men with the outdoor faces, the fine, bejewelled women. At dinner and after he staggered in the midst of unfamiliar and expensive things—shooting, hunting, polo, Claridge's, winter sports, Monte Carlo, Egypt. He sidled away from the wealthy, wandered from the drawing-room to the gun-room, to the library, to the hall. In despair, he drank too much. He was so miserable that he was the last to go to bed because he dared not be the first.

Christmas Day, too, oozed away, a misery. Horton went to church, for that absorbed time; exhausted Sir John's kindness by following him for hours round the model dairy and the kennels. He could not ride—he had no breeches; he could not putt, for he had no clubs; he could not play bridge, for he had but his return ticket and eighteen shillings, of which ten were mortgaged; and, horrible to think, the man who attended him could not be tipped if the butler was to have his rights. And then again, blessed as a climax after this day of wandering and fear under the puzzled eyes of the rich, the Christmas dinner. It was the same ordeal as that of the previous night—a little worse, perhaps, for presents had been given and received. The vicar, his wife and his two daughters were there; also the steward, some gentry and persons from town who had roystered the night before at the Savoy. Horton talked with such desperate oddity that his neighbour summed him up, despite his twenty-four years, as a "dear old thing."

At last came the pudding—flames, spirits, cries.

"Now, Jack, be careful," Lady Felliner admonished, "remember Doctor Squire."

"I did miss the pudding at Palermo," a woman confided.

"There's nothing like it after a hard day," said the man with the horseman's legs.

And then there were more exclamations, digging in the small helpings, for coins were secreted there. Frederick Horton found his heart beating, for he had drawn a clean half-sovereign from his. All through the slow eating of the pudding his eyes could not leave the coin. Ten shillings!—two days' salary; and, more than that, enough to settle the unforeseen trouble, to fee the butler and the footman too. The accursed woman by his side chaffed him.

"You've got all the luck, Mr. Horton. I've drawn nothing, and my husband's got a threepenny-bit. We shan't be able to afford meat next week."

Horton laughed, but his hands trembled. He could see that the few who had found coins left them on the edge of the plate. Must he? He bowed his head, crushed by the convention, but his spirit rebelled. Why should he? Why should he suffer indignity before these gross, rich servants? He would take the money—after all, he would return it to the servants. Just before his plate was removed Horton carelessly swept his fingers across the edge—grasped the half-sovereign. And all through the first restless hours of the night he was haunted by the fear of detection; he had done worse than steal—he had broken a convention. Probably no one had noticed his deed, for he had cleverly timed it; his neighbour's head had been turned away when he did it and she had not looked again in his direction until the plate was gone. Yet

he had done it and there would be no relief for him until the train steamed away with him towards great London, where he could hide unknown.

At last the farewells were said, the thanks voiced. Horton signed the visitors' book and, very quickly, thrust the half-sovereign into the butler's hand—his own ten shillings had gone to the footman. The butler looked at the coin an infinitesimal moment, then said, "Thank you, sir," in deferential manner.

But as the respectful servant closed the door of the brougham, Horton heard him softly mutter, as if to himself—

"Funny, them George the Fourth 'arf-sovereigns—one don't often see them!"

11. AFTER THE END

ALEXANDER EASTON sat, an evening paper in his hand, in the train which crawled along the tunnel towards the West. There clearly was something amiss with this well-tailored, well-preserved man of fifty; his hair was indefinitely ruffled on the left side, his highly-polished hat sat at an angle a trifle too acute, while his eyes continually roved from the paper to the advertisements on the wall. It seemed to cost him an effort of will to drag himself back to the news of the day, for in so doing he knotted his brows and compressed his lips. As the train entered Mansion House Station he abandoned the task, and a minute later, as it stopped outside Blackfriars, he threw the paper down on his knees and looked at the ceiling in meditation.

They were not pleasant meditations. That day he had been hammered. His twenty-six years of membership of the Stock Exchange, his fortune, his house in Sloane Street, his motor and his house-boat at Maidenhead, all this had suddenly dropped from him, retaining hardly more consistency than scenery. Soon, within a few weeks, the scene-shifters would come, sell up house, plate, furniture, and turn him, a man of fifty, adrift to fight his way through a hostile world. Easton reviewed the prospects point by point, with the

thoroughness to which he owed his early successes. Of course, Edmund would have to leave Rugby; that would hurt the poor chap—still, it had to be. Easton felt a twinge of almost physical pain as he realized what his son would suffer even if he said nothing. Then his thoughts flew to his elegant wife, to his daughter Janet. It would be hard for them; no more opera, or sables or chocolates from Bond Street; it would need all their pluck. And the twins! Well, perhaps the twins were luckier than the rest of the family; being only six years old, so long as they were fed they would not mind. Indeed, if they had to migrate to the suburbs and live awhile on Mrs. Easton's two hundred a year, the twins might enjoy, say, Hampstead Heath or Clapham Common.

Then Easton's thoughts took another, a more relieved turn. It was one thing to be ruined; it was another to go to gaol. He had been very near gaol these three months, as he used all means to escape from the growing embarrassments which had ended in his downfall; at last he had had to stake Potter's securities on a speculation which, if it had come off, would have cleared him. But it had not come off, and he had had to go to Potter and tell him—Easton shivered as he remembered the interview, though Potter had been decent, frightfully decent.

"No," said Potter, "I'm not going to prosecute. Why should I? It wouldn't give me my money back. I don't say that I can afford to lose seventeen thousand pounds, but it won't break me. I've known you nearly thirty years, Easton. I'm awfully sorry, old chap. Anything I can do . . ."

Yes, Potter had been decent; he had almost refused Easton's I.O.U., to be redeemed when the new fortune

was made. It was something to the good to be free to try again. The train started once more, entered Blackfriars Station, and, as new passengers streamed into the carriage, Easton found himself turning over in his brain the very same ideas as those with which his meditation had begun. He was, however, startled by suddenly hearing his name pronounced.

"Yes," said the voice, "he's gone smash. Thought he would. Easton always went the pace, did well at the game, too, until he overdid it."

Easton threw a sidelong glance at the speaker, whose back was turned towards him, for he and his companion sat in the "garden seat" which abutted immediately against his own. He knew the two men, the one fairly well, the other by sight. An instinctive movement made him turn away, a morbid fancy listen eagerly.

"Do you think he'll start afresh?" asked the second man.

"Oh, no, it's all up. He couldn't get any credit. You see, it isn't just a smash; being hammered's bad, but a man sometimes gets over it if someone puts up some money for him. But Easton's gone worse than that."

"Oh?"

Easton found himself listening with terrible intentness. He knew what was going to be said. But the noise at Temple Station drowned the voices; later only did he hear the end of the conversation.

". . . said he wouldn't prosecute. I've just heard about it; one of Potter's clerks told one of mine, and of course it got to me."

"What do you think he'll do, then?"

"Oh, I don't know. Proud chap, Easton; it's all up with him. You'll see he'll commit suicide. My dear fellow, it's no use saying 'rot.' Everybody's against him. You'll see; I give him two days."

Easton listened without a movement. Absurd, of course; ridiculous. He'd show them whether he'd commit suicide. Everybody against him! Anyhow, his wife'd stick to him and Janet; and Edmund too when he realized. Then his agitation resolved itself into a desire to escape from the carriage, for it would be awkward to be recognized; thus he changed carriages at Charing Cross and alighted at Sloane Square unnoticed.

As the hall door closed behind him he found himself face to face with Janet. The girl carried a tray on which was piled a curious collection—silver photograph frames, tortoiseshell brushes, pintrays, a water colour by an R.B.A. Easton noticed a curious glow in her dark eyes and affected to be cheerful.

"Good heavens, Janet," he said, "what are you doing—moving . . . already?"

"No," said Janet, raising her head so as not to look at him; "I'm taking these things into the billiard-room. They can be sold with the rest."

"There's no need," said Easton, after a painful pause.

"No," replied Janet, "but I choose to do so."

Easton sighed as he went upstairs, but did not enter the drawing-room, where he could hear his sister-in-law from St. Albans talking shrilly. Instead, he climbed to the second floor, went into Edmund's room, where a light burned. The boy was standing at the window, and wheeled round sharply as his father entered.

"Well, Edmund?" There was no reply. "House rather upset, eh!" There was another pause, after which Easton clumsily told the boy that, though he could not return to Rugby, it would be all right; that his uncle Jonas was going to send him to a good grammar school. Still the boy maintained his obstinate silence. To cover his embarrassment he brought out his stamp-book, took up a loose stamp.

"What's that?" Easton asked desperately. "A new Bermuda? Let's have a look at it."

Edmund closed the stamp-book with a bang and threw the stamp into the fire. After a second's hesitation Easton left the room. There was nothing to be done, they were turning from him. On the third floor he could hear loud sobs; he ran upstairs just in time to try and comfort Gertie. She was crying because Tim had frightened her with a description of the little house the servants said they were going to, where she would sleep in a bed full of earwigs. But Gertie pushed him away, and had to be resigned to her nurse. The dinner itself was terrible, for ordinary conversation had to be made in presence of the servants and of the moody Janet and Edmund. At last, however, he was alone with his wife in front of his untouched glass of port. Mrs Easton had been crying, thus did not look elegant; she wore hardly any jewels, and had forgotten to powder her nose.

"You've made all your plans, I suppose," said Easton.

"Yes. After all we'd better not go to Horsham. Bessie wants us to live near them. Jonas'll send Edmund to school and we'll have some society."

"Hum, we shan't have overmuch society. Still, I

don't like the idea; you don't care for Jonas, and I don't like Bessie."

"We have to do what we can," said Mrs. Easton, half aggressive, half tearful; "they'll bring Janet out. We *must* go."

"Oh, go, then," said Easton impatiently; "write to Bessie that you accept."

"But, Alec——"

"Tell her you'll go to St. Albans. As for me—— I'll go and get some fresh air."

Easton returned about midnight after a wild walk through the squares and gardens of South Kensington. As he entered his bedroom his mind was made up: their outlooks were fixed, their plans made, and there was no room for him. Those men in the Underground were right. He took the revolver which he kept loaded in expectation of burglars, without hesitation placed the muzzle against his left ear; then he pressed the trigger.

12. REVENGE

IT is six o'clock in the morning. The Place du Palais de Justice lies wrapped still in the grey mist of January; over it broods the black sky of Lille through which the sun seldom struggles. On one side is the gaol, a house so tall and so poor in windows that it looks in the gloom like a blank wall beyond which is another world; it stands, and as it stands it closes off life from life, and man from what was man. Barracks occupy another side of the Place, and these are as symbolically white as the gaol is black; faint eyes of light flash from every window and hurrying figures cross them, flat and dark as arabesques; in front, over the head of the sentry, as he monotonously paces to the right and then to the left, flaps a flag of no colour, the French flag. And opposite the barracks, on either side of the Rue du Palais de Justice, the main outlet of the Place, are two red brick estaminets.

The Place is singularly animated, though the hour be early. On the steps of the frowning Greek portico of the Palais de Justice stand little knots of gendarmes; some white-collared cuirassiers have massed their heavy horses at the entrance of the little street, while every side of the Place, prison wall, barrack frontage, closed estaminets, is lined by infantry. The soldiers stand elbow to elbow; they are almost invisible in the

gloom, for alone their belt buckles and bayonets glitter in the pale aura of the gas-lamps. There is noise, too : the trot of horses on the small cobbles, the hoarse whisper of orders ; there is a feeling of tension and desire. There is atmosphere, and its nucleus is in the middle of the Place, a something that is small but dominating because high up on a scaffold, dominating, too, because the eyes of every soldier are drawn, fastened to it, and torn away only by an effort. It is the guillotine, and, if there be drama here to-day, it will play the leading part. In a corner of the Place a soldier is sneezing ; he swears, wipes his eyes. For a second the guillotine is forgotten by one man.

"Dawn," says a voice on the steps of the Palais de Justice. It is an old cracked voice. The speaker is white-haired, bent ; his hands rest on two sticks and his jaws slowly move as if he chewed perpetually. "Time enough," says another voice. "I suppose they are waking him up now."

The old man raises his head, looks with filmy eyes at the younger man. But neither he nor his companion returns the old man's glance. They stand, both of them, with hunched shoulders and hands in pockets ; they are young, one dark, black-whiskered, the other tall and heavy, with something of the air of a big Flemish horse. Their eyes are fixed upon the guillotine, which now outlines itself, stark and red-painted, graceful almost, so sheer is its simplicity, so fitted is it for its work. "They are waking him up," the dark man repeats. "Look, there is the light."

Suddenly, at a far corner of the prison wall, a window has burst into radiance ; it blazes in the blackness, like a star. It is the centre, it has beaten the guillotine ; the eyes of the soldiers are upon it, there

is a stirring among the cuirassiers, for the drama has begun. Yes, the window has beaten the guillotine, for a while.

"Shaking him by the shoulder, I expect," says the dreamy voice of the fair man. "Getting him out of bed, saying to him, '*Du courage, mon ami*'; that's what they say to him, *hein, Jean?*"

"Yes, that's what they say to him. . . . I'd give him courage, courage with a whip . . . let him run out and shoot him as he ran. . . . Hypocrisy, I call it." The dark man's eyes are flashing; his teeth are seen white between his red lips, as a greyness steals over the black sky. "Yes," he says again, "hypocrisy. They're giving him brandy, as if he had lacked courage when he killed Jules . . . they're getting him to confess to the priest, giving him absolution . . . as if hell wasn't good enough for him."

The fair man laughs, a little unsteadily.

"No, no, Louis," says the old man, "that is not right. Human justice has spoken; your brother will be avenged."

"Father, he is avenged by men. . . . Are we going to help the murderer to escape God?"

The old man shakes his head, but he is in no mood to argue with his son. His eyes bent on the stone steps, he has forgotten all save his murdered son whom he is about to see avenged. He sees him, a little bare-legged child, then a schoolboy with a satchel and pockets that rattle, full of marbles, as he runs; he sees him again, a cheerful soldier, with a fresh face and short-cropped hair, as a bank collector in blue livery . . . his last livery, the one in which he was murdered by Favier, the man for whom they have lit the lamp. He has no words for his black-whiskered son, his

heavy, fair son-in-law, who stand by his side, the one boiling with hatred, the other awkward and a little overcome by his privileged position. For they alone, of all the citizens of Lille, are admitted with the military; the fair man cannot prevent the creeping into his heart of a little importance, for he is a vested interest, he plays a minor part in the drama of the day.

Slowly through the old man's mind flow the memories of many executions he has read of. He constructs the happenings behind the black wall.

In a square cell stand the Public Prosecutor, his deputy, the Juge d'Instruction, the almoner, and Favier's counsel. A warder waits by the door. They have already told Favier that the President of the Republic has denied him a reprieve. He dresses, saying not a word, for if he must die he will die well; he washes, he combs his hair; he listens meekly to the almoner who holds before his eyes a crucifix.

But the processes of the father's mind run too fast, so eager is he to see justice done on his son's murderer. He does not know that there is a hurried debate in the cell, that Favier's counsel, defending him still, struggling to prolong by a few moments his client's life, objects to the execution taking place before day has dawned. He pleads furtively, urged on by some professional principle or, perhaps, by the hope that a reprieve may yet come. The magistrates listen to him with respect; they, too, do not wish it said that they executed this man by night, half secretly.

"Yes," whispers the Public Prosecutor to the warder, "wait, gain time. It would not look well."

The eyes of the Public Prosecutor fix on the window where the night is too slowly waning. In the cell

a fictitious bustle responds to his instructions. The warder offers the condemned man a cigarette which he rejects; the barrister questions him as to his property, notes on a scrap of paper a message for his wife, places in his pocket-book a few words Favier has scribbled for some other loved one. Round them the almoner walks with a curious air of alertness, almost eager to play the part left him by the law. At last Favier looks at the Public Prosecutor, whose eyes are once more fixed on the window where, every minute, day affirms its coming. Their glances meet and the Public Prosecutor understands. On the white face he sees a question and a prayer; Favier is wondering how much longer he must be strong, asking for the last relief his fellow-man will give him.

"*Allons,*" says the Public Prosecutor sharply.

They are in the office now, near the gates, in the office where men are received into the house that will never again loose them, where others are granted their freedom. The register is signed. The almoner takes Favier into a corner where a crucifix stands on a rude altar between lighted candles. Book in hand he hears his confession. The priest speaks a few hurried, absolvent words, crosses the man on the forehead, kisses his cheek . . . then turns away, while the warders pinion Favier's arms, hobble his legs, slit wider his open shirt. At the contact of the scissors, foretaste of another steel, the skin of the condemned man shudders.

"*Le voilà! le voilà!*" says the dark young man. It is almost day now, and the light which forces itself from the east through the pall of smoke concentrates on the figure at the prison gate as if nature itself were enlisted in the play.

The soldiers in the ranks sway and bend forward, but the officers do not reprove them, for they, too, see nothing but the figure as it shambles towards the scaffold on its hobbled legs. Favier walks slowly, his eyes greedily taking in the details of the familiar Place, the grimy stone of the Palais de Justice where he was sentenced, the dirty red brick of the estaminets, the white face of the barracks where the clockwork sentry still paces up and down under the flag of France. He walks, and is conscious of little things: the grey morning, the cold he feels on his bare neck, the cobbles which hurt his feet through the list shoes. All around him things which were dream things as the prison gates rolled open and left him blind as a bull leaving the toril have become extraordinarily clear, detached as a stereoscopic view. In his right temple a little vein beats, beats, quick and rhythmic as a drum. But he does not see the scaffold, for the priest walks backwards in front of him, masking the view with the great bat-like wings of his cassock, with the heavy crucifix on which Favier can now see the brown streaks of age, like congealed blood.

He dreams, and now he is on the scaffold, with men tugging him here and there, impeding one another. He sees faces, hundreds of faces, under képis and helmets, faces at the upper windows of the estaminets, where the notables of Lille are watching him with cigarettes in their mouths and little glasses of brandy in their hands to keep out the cold. But he does not see, on the steps of the Palais de Justice, the old man who bends over two sticks and cranes his neck upwards to look at him, nor the dark man beside him, nor the big, fair Flemish man. He does not know, as they strap him on the bascule, that father,

brother, brother-in-law, have been given as a spectacle and a reward the only thing Favier can give. The bascule runs through the grooves, a lever creaks; the man in the frock-coat touches a button. As the triangular silvered blade falls, hisses and then rasps to rest, a sigh rises from the square as if the rasp had removed a weight from every heart. In the estaminet a woman has screamed.

"Justice is done," says the old man. His jaws still chew silently.

"Yes," says the dark man; "they owed us a head."

The fair man shifts uneasily, glad, too, that his brother-in-law's life is redeemed by another life, but perturbed a little. He thinks that Favier has died well.

Soon a cart rattles and bumps over the cobbles through the little street. The soldiers open their ranks to give passage to the chariot of Justice.

13. THE HOME-COMING

THOUGH it was but midday, old Indalecia Gomez sat by her empty hearth with unoccupied hands—unoccupied in so far as they plied a needle on an old red petticoat, for sewing was not her trade. Her old brown hands had all the morning been busy with washing, due to be delivered the next day to an English tramp steamer now lying in Bilbao harbour; now, as she idly put stitch after stitch into the faded stuff, she was careless as if on holiday. Old Indalecia was pleased as she thought of the linen that was drying in the back yard, for her earnings—some two pesetas—were a windfall. She reflected how delightfully accidental the order had been, how finely additional to her regular work. Those two pesetas would go to increase her hoard of one hundred and ninety-four pesetas in the chest of drawers. One hundred and ninety-six pesetas! Enough to buy the fishing smack for Carlos when he came back.

Old Indalecia smiled as she thought of Carlos, whom she expected the next day—Carlos who had left her eight years before to seek his fortune on the sea, so that he might return, buy a fishing smack, and live ever after and happily a prosperous citizen of Bilbao. He was coming back at last—at least, so his short letter said. A momentary pang of doubt shot through

her, for she could not read and had had to trust the postman to interpret Carlos's words; it might not be true. But, she reflected, why should the postman lie? And, more content, she wondered what fortune had been her son's. Perhaps Carlos might return penniless. But what matter? The hundred and ninety-six pesetas would buy him his boat; he would take a wife—give her grandchildren. She warmed to the thought, looked with pleasure at her dingy room, the frayed carpet, the high-piled bed with the ragged coverlet, the hanging strips of *bacallao* (for dried cod was her chief food), the plaster Virgin with a blue gown by the side of the earthenware jar of olive oil. She was happy. Then there was a knock at the door. Before she could reply a man well known to her entered the cottage—the tax-gatherer.

"*Impuesto. Cuatro pesetas,*" said the man briefly, as he threw down a red sheet.

"*No tengo dinero,*" replied the old woman passionately, as if he threatened her child.

"Come," snapped the man, "no lies. Red sheet, third summons. Pay or we turn you out."

"*No tengo dinero,*" said old Indalecia obstinately.

"Oh, enough," snarled the collector. "I know you. You can pay."

Old Indalecia gave a cry of horror as he strode to the chest of drawers and pulled the top drawer open. The collector knew households such as hers; with an unerring hand he seized a small bundle tied up in a dirty rag, while with the other he drove back the old woman as she flung herself upon him.

"Let me go, you old vixen!" he panted, "you old she-wolf!" With another effort he flung her right across the room. "Hold your tongue!" he shouted.

"I'm not going to rob you." Still grumbling, he undid the bundle, took from the heap of silver four pesetas, tied up the remainder, and returned it to the drawer.

"There," he snarled, as he signed the paper, "take your receipt, *madre*. Alfonso won't want any more from you for six months."

Old Indalecia did not reply. She lay face down on the ragged coverlet, her thin brown hands clasped about her silver hair, and softly crying into the dirty pillow. Quite half-an-hour did she lie thus; at last, when she rose, she was collected, but numb, as if the man had fought and trampled on her. The loss of the four pesetas from Carlos's hoard was intolerable. Oh, the inhumanity of it! Old Indalecia looked round the room, ugly to her now; she could see how frayed the carpet was, how faded the blue and yellow curtain. And now she would have but one hundred and ninety-two pesetas for Carlos. What would the boy say when he came to her and asked, "*Madre*, what of my ship?" But all through the long afternoon, though she struggled to find inspiration, she could think of nothing to do to earn even one more peseta, for her earnings were mortgaged and there was nothing to pawn. No, all she could add was the usual fifty centimos, a beggarly sum, such a sum as she had every week set aside for over seven years. At last night came. Old Indalecia ate a little bread and a bunch of grapes, then lay down under the coverlet to dream confused dreams of Carlos at last returning on the morrow to hold her in his arms, of Carlos disappointed and weeping for his unearned ship.

Old Indalecia's life was bitter. For over seven years she had supported herself alone by washing for

the small folk who cluster round the harbour of Bilbao. By working ten hours every day for six days a week she could earn nine pesetas. When Carlos left her she was living in one room, but now her cottage cost her four pesetas, a terrible sum, though necessary, for her trade required a back yard. Four pesetas bought her bread and *bacallao*, fifty centimos clothed her and afforded her at times her only luxury, a smoke in her old black pipe; fifty centimos went to Carlos's hoard. And thus she had lived for over seven years, since her husband had been drowned in the bay and Carlos had left her on a schooner bound for Cuba. He had seldom written, seldom suggested that he was saving money to buy the ship. And she, in her slavery, had never been able to afford even the fearful joy of the Spanish peasant—a tiny fraction of a Government lottery ticket.

Old Indalecia turned uneasily in her bed, as if conscious of some peril, but she slept too soundly to hear the breaking of her window, the turn of the hasp, the leap of a man into the room. She woke to find a dim shape strapping her to the bed. Frozen with horror, she watched it ransack the room, turn out the cupboards; at last, as it fumbled in the chest of drawers, she heard it exclaim when its fingers closed over the money in the rag. Then only did she regain power, struggled madly with her bonds, tried to shout for help through the gag. The figure looked at her a second, muttered, "*Silencio*," then shrugged its shoulder as it realised her helplessness and leaped through the window. Like a rabbit in a trap, old Indalecia fought with the rope, twisting, tugging, writhing, without feeling the strands cut into her limbs. All the time, as she struggled, she was almost unconscious

of her own activity, she was just a fighting purpose, a tortured thing shouting inaudibly into the gag. At last the bonds loosened and old Indalecia, slipping them nimbly, ran into the street without knowing where she went, in pursuit of the money that had become her soul. A *guardia civil* stopped her, questioned her, but could do nothing; it was too late. Almost by force the *guardia* took her home—left her at last exhausted on the bed. There she lay, with staring eyes, without moving a hand.

Eight hours later a man entered the cottage, flung his arms round old Indalecia. It was Carlos, excited and terrified.

“*Madre, madre*, what is the matter? Are you ill?”

He pressed her with questions, but old Indalecia did not return his caresses. Then, as Carlos held her hand, he saw upon the old brown wrists the recent marks of ropes. He looked. He recognised the room, the chest of drawers, the broken window pane. For a minute he could not speak, then felt a mad impulse to tell her how his ship had returned the previous day, how he had landed, penniless and desperate, because his pay was all in pawn, how in his despair he had rushed into this lonely place and broken into the hovel, not knowing it to be hers. But before he could speak old Indalecia moaned, without raising her eyes—

“Robbed, robbed, Carlos! I have no money. I have been robbed—robbed of the money to buy you a ship.”

Carlos hesitated, drew his hand through his curly black hair, fingered the gold rings in his ears. A ship? Ah, he understood—then all was well.

“*Madre*,” he said softly, as he leaned over her, “it

matters not. I have been fortunate at sea; I have money to buy a ship."

Old Indalecia looked at him, first doubtful, then excited, then radiant.

"Money!" she screamed, "you have money, Carlos—money for a ship? Ah," and she threw her arms round his neck, "all is well, all is well. I was robbed, but what matters it? for my son has had thrift and courage. My son has the money to buy the ship."

14. THE MAKING OF A GENTLEMAN

MR. STANHAM slowly raised his head from the flower-bed on which he had been working with microscopic intentness and examined the herbaceous border which would one day be luxuriant. He was pleased with his garden, this Sunday morning; it seemed as if it were at last about to pay for his labour, for it made a brave show of hollyhocks, sunflowers and larkspur. In a corner stood a vigorous shrub, lavender; the four fruit trees looked healthy, while on the small but trim lawn his little boy, Edward, sprawled with the kitten and completed the agreeable picture. Mr. Stanham was roused from his contemplation by a voice which came from the next garden.

"Hello!" it said; "fine morning, Mr. Stanham."

"Fine morning, Mr. Murray. Your garden's looking fine."

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," stammered Mr. Murray, as he looked across his shoulder towards a far from admirable flower bed. "Ah, Mr. Stanham, if it wasn't for green-fly!"

"Well," said Mr. Stanham, "I've told you what to do. I've had green-fly, and slugs, and American blight. And birds! birds!" He waved towards the sky a fist which threatened all winged things. "Still,"

he resumed, "you can't complain of your roses and—hello! Jack, I hadn't seen you."

Little Jack Murray had come to his father's side against the palings, soon to be faced by little Edward Stanham. The small boys grinned at each other shyly, afraid to play in the presence of their elders their customary games of mould-throwing and worm-hunting. The fathers looked at them critically, continued to talk of gardening, of the trouble small boys were in a garden, of small boys generally. Then, with the fine disregard of youthful ears so common to fathers, Mr. Stanham jerked his head towards little Jack Murray.

"Growing up, that boy of yours. You'll have to send him to school soon."

"Yes, I s'pose I shall. His mother'll miss him. Still, it won't matter much; I can't afford to send him away. He'll have to go to a day school."

"Not a Board school?" said Mr. Stanham, in a horrified tone.

"Ought to by rights," snapped Mr. Murray. "I can't afford the Academy. Still, there's his mother to consider."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Stanham. "I'd send him to the Academy if I were you. Of course, it depends what you're going to make of him."

"Oh, I dunno," said Mr. Murray; "clerk, I suppose, like his father."

"Hum, yes; still there are lots of careers; engineering, you know, the colonies, all that."

Mr. Murray laughed with queer bitterness, almost as if he hated his son.

"Oh, yes, I know. But I can't afford education. Out he goes at fifteen; he'll be good for ten bob a

week then. I can't help him. What can a man in our position do? How can he educate a kid? What are you going to make of him?" He jerked his head towards little Edward, then engaged in a grimace competition with Jack.

"Make of him?" said Mr. Stanham thoughtfully. "Well, it's early to say. Still—I had thought—it struck me—I'd like to make him a gentleman."

Mr. Murray looked at him with amazed eyes. What! Stanham, solicitor's clerk, four pounds a week, say five at the outside—make his son a gentleman. Mr. Murray nearly said, "Oh, Lor!" then recovered enough to close the conversation with a savage—

"Well, I wish you luck."

Mr. Stanham and Mr. Murray were men much in the same station in life. Both were clerks, Stanham in a solicitor's office, where he earned £220 a year, Murray, in a firm of jobbers, who, for the last ten years had paid him four pounds a week. Stanham was a widower, while Murray had a wife, but their responsibilities were much the same, for Mr. Stanham's house was kept by an old aunt. The rents of "Bellevue" and of "Lorelei" were the same, the charity-brat servants of the same breed, while the local tradesmen could testify that the weekly bills very closely tallied. But Murray was disappointed, having waited for advancement so long as to forget that it might be gained, while Stanham, a "member of the legal profession," had, in spite of his petty circumstances, retained vague hopes of success, if not for himself, at least for his boy.

And so it came about that Edward Stanham received the education which was to fit him for his

future position in life. Never before the conversation over the palings had his father so clearly stated his intentions, even to himself; he had tried to form notions of careers for Edward, but his imaginings seldom soared beyond a head clerkship of some kind. Now, however, it had become clear that the boy must be properly trained at a good school, a school run by gentlemen and for gentlemen. Thus only could the boy acquire the tone which would be required of him. So Edward was spared the Board school; indeed, he was not even sent to the Academy, which represented the ultimate goal of the inhabitants of such houses as "Lorelei" and "Bellevue," for Mr. Stanham suspected its tone, found it tainted with the curious blend of cockneyism and provincialism that prevails in the outer suburbs. Up to the age of ten Edward was taught by a governess, whom he then left for a preparatory school near Brighton. He returned from Brighton at intervals with a voice that progressively rose higher in his head and the aggressively washed air of the well-trained boy. Both the boy and his father suffered from their association, for Edward was uneasily conscious that he was not returning to homes such as the "Places" and houses in Squares which awaited his playfellows. It was thus no sorrow for either when the public school claimed him. Mr. Stanham made no attempt to place his son in a school of historic magnitude, but he procured his entry into an establishment which, though assisted by a Livery company, was emphatically public.

Edward's voice continued to acquire tone. His washing became absolutely ostentatious. At eighteen, after just failing to gain a scholarship, he went up to Oxford, whence he returned after three years without

special distinction, but competent in every way. He stood before his father, a wonderful product, quietly dressed, moderate in opinion and speech, a thing to be proud of—a gentleman.

A few weeks later Mr. Stanham met Mr. Murray, whom he not seen for several years, for his old neighbour had moved. Jack Murray, it appeared, was doing well, drawing twenty-five shillings a week in a shipping company, with the prospect of a half-crown rise at Christmas.

“Oh, Edward?” said Mr Stanham, in reply to Murray’s question, “he’s just down from Oxford. He’s going to take out his articles in my old firm.”

Mr. Stanham spoke truth. The matter had not been easy of arrangement, for the firm viewed with dislike the idea that young Stanham should be articled, while his father served under him in the ranks, but the old man had so piteously pleaded, while Edward so well impressed the partners that the concession was made. Edward was articled, and without apparent effort acquired the knowledge of law requisite to pass the Society’s examinations. Five years later he was a qualified solicitor and the recipient of a hundred pounds a year more than his father.

The five years became ten. Mr. Stanham was now very old, nearly seventy, while Edward, in every way a gentleman, was confidential clerk. His income was five hundred a year; he had long abandoned “Bellevue” and lived in chambers near Marble Arch. He was seen at the theatre, at private views, at Hurlingham. And his old father hung over him as an entomologist over some choice lepidopter. Yes, his son was a gentleman. Then events precipitated themselves. The senior partner died suddenly, and as the business

of the firm showed signs of increasing, it was essential that he should be replaced. Edward Stanham, on his thirty-fourth birthday, became a junior partner, while his old father retired on a pension. Curiously enough, one of the applicants for the vacancy caused by Mr. Stanham's retirement was a young fellow of thirty-four called Jack Murray.

"Seedy," said Edward Stanham; "his voice—oh, awful. And that ready-made suit; no soft roll, . . . padding in the shoulders."

But old Stanham, who remembered young Murray, pleaded for him, and as the work was not law but accounts, secured the post for him. One month later the news burst in upon the office that the accounts had been falsified and that a thousand pounds were missing. There was excitement, as in a disturbed ant-heap, and a sibilant whisper seemed to pass round the office, a whisper of "Murray, Murray." But Edward Stanham could not at once investigate the mystery, for he was called away to his father's bedside. He found Mr. Stanham struck down by paralysis; he might, said the doctor, live a week.

Edward Stanham bent over his father, found that he could still speak, and to divert his thoughts from his seizure, told him the terrible news.

"Ah!" said the old man at length. "Well, Edward, I shan't live many days. I may as well tell you, I did it. Been going on for years. Why?" he added, in response to his son's horrified glance. "Well, how d'you think I found the money to make you a gentleman?"

15. THE VOW

YOU will picture me, a small boy, in striped red and white jacket and knickerbockers, with legs bare and scratched in many places by thorns. I must have been disconsolate as I sat heavily under the mossy bank by the side of the broad, sloping field in front of which the rolling plains of Brabant fled towards the distant skyline. I found no pleasure in their prospect, in the solitary poplars, and the squat tower of the Flemish church, for all my thoughts were on the butterfly I held in my hand, a beautiful still thing, with dark wings powdered everywhere with the colours of the rainbow.

By my side lay my straw hat, my green butterfly net, and the cigar-box slung on a string in which I placed my captures, for I hunted butterflies, hunted them passionately, and this still thing in my hand was my latest prize. It held no joy for me, however, for it had deceived me as it fluttered from flower to flower, rose elusive to the sky, and settled as if to sleep on the good sunburnt earth. It had meant, as I warily tracked it through bushes, or pursued it in the open, the realization of my dream, the capture of that rarest Vanessa, the Camberwell Beauty. And now it lay in my hand, this reward of much toil, beautiful and yet worthless, for it was no Camberwell Beauty, but a

mere Io, with wings as a peacock's tail, and without rarity.

To possess the Camberwell Beauty, that is the ambition of all who pin in little glazed cases the flying flowers; it is beautiful, with its wings like a winter night, whose edges figure the Milky Way, while stars lighten them with a blue sheen. And it is rare, shy, fleet; it is the Diana of the clearings whom few see and fewer capture. As I sat with the common Vanessa in my hand I wondered whether it would be given to me to possess the Camberwell Beauty; I had not seen it, and soon I would leave these fragrant plains, return to Paris, where flies in the Champs-Elysees the vulgar Cabbage White. A horrible gloom settled upon me, a sense of failure. The sun slowly dipped towards the horizon, and a chill began to fall upon the plains; I felt dejected, hopeless, ready to abandon my quest. I would return to Paris, to my ignoble, uncrowned cases.

It was then and quite suddenly that there rushed upon me with stunning force the idea that illuminates. . . . I would enlist Providence . . . vow . . . what should I vow? I had it. . . . I stood, a little thrilled boy full of recent memories of Cœur de Lion and St. Louis, one hand uplifted towards the blue sky, and vowed to give two francs to the poor if but one Camberwell Beauty were granted me as a boon. I vowed, and waited for the clap of thunder that acknowledges: it did not come, but my ardour did not wane. I turned my back upon the broad fields with my vow upon my shoulders, a thing glorious as the crusader's cross, humble as the palmer's wallet. And through the broken night the Camberwell Beauty flitted in my dreams.

The next day I rose early, ran out into the dewy

grass, my butterfly net in my hand. I trembled as if going to a tryst, yet was secure in my steps. I walked quickly from meadow to copse and then between hedges, through woods and clearings, while the hot sun rose higher in the heavens. Then an instinct made me stop. I looked back and saw, settled on a brown rut, a dark butterfly. I remember how certain was my hand, so assured was I of success, for I had vowed and must be invincible. I knew, I intimately knew that I could not fail. The Camberwell Beauty did not move, for it was granted to me; I struck and it did not flutter. . . . I held it, crushed out its little life.

Later only did I remember my vow. It displeased me to think of it, of these two francs, a vast sum for me, the pocket-money of a month. Still, it would have to be paid, I felt; I could not escape. I had been foolish, rash; I had bid too high. The vow pressed on me as I looked at the butterfly in the setting frame; it haunted me as I walked abroad. I made terrible calculations, wondered whether Providence would take instalments; I speculated as to the consequences if I did not pay, wondered whether I should be chastised with seven plagues, whether my blood would turn to gall and furies invade my rest. The days passed away terrible and monotonous, for I found myself becoming a pursued, oppressed thing.

I returned to Paris like a fugitive with my fierce conscience tearing at my soul. I was spent, and yet could not relieve my spirit. . . . I had so little money, and so many cakes and sweets were ready to tempt me. At last my pain burst its bonds: I told my friend Pierron. Pierron listened as if he understood. It was, he said, a bad case. Then he became thoughtful, and

I waited eagerly for him to speak: I was weak now, and he must decide for me.

But it was awful to see him with a frown on his dark face, for I was indicted in a court of conscience: perhaps his advocacy would be too feeble . . . perhaps I should have to pay. But a subtle sense of relief came to me as, suddenly, Pierron smiled and fixed upon me eloquent brown eyes.

"You vowed that you would give two francs to the poor?"

"Yes," I said miserably.

"Ah! And who are the poor?"

I was nonplussed. I had not thought of any particular poor. I meant people in hospitals, people who are hungry. Briefly: the poor. Still I felt I must define, so faltered—

"The poor? Well . . . people who have no money."

"Ah!" said Pierron, and his brown eyes twinkled. "Then you are saved." He rapidly emptied his pockets on the table of pencils, string, marbles (we French boys played marbles); then he pulled the linings inside out, and stood before me with outstretched hands, a triumphant histrion.

"Behold," he cried, "I have no money; I am the poor."

I was shocked. Treachery! Surely Pierron did not hope by so coarse a ruse to exploit my folly. But he smiled now, and whispered—

"Give me the money . . . perhaps later I might make you a little present."

And then I understood. With hesitating fingers I gave him two francs—nearly all I possessed—three pieces of silver and eight coppers. He slipped them

into his pocket after thrusting the lining in, and turned to go.

"Pierron!" I cried, in an agonized voice. He smiled, a little superior in presence of my suspicion.

"Wait," he whispered. "I will return."

I waited anxiously, heard the door slam; two dreadful minutes passed while Pierron remained outside with my precious money. Perhaps he would never return, but leave me his wretched pledges, pencils, marbles and string. Then the door opened, and I held out my arms. The saviour of my conscience smiled gleefully, thrust the coins into my hand, and suddenly the horrid weight of guilt slipped away. I drew a deep sigh as it fell, and clenched my fist upon the money.

"*Voilà!*" said Pierron, full of roguish glee; "I give you this gift and . . . and you are free."

16. THE LITTLE BROWN SLAVE

CARRICK stopped before a little garden. It lay, a brown, caked patch, at the corner of an alley; ruins at the end showed that it had once been the site of a house, long since burnt down. No one had bought the plot, for things move slowly in Tripoli. And now the Englishman stood, a tall figure in white alpaca, protected from the sun which thundered down from the purple vault of the sky, gazing at the three tamarisks. Their leaves were small and sharp, whitened everywhere with dust, and there was dust, too, upon the little pink flowers that were as bows of ribbon. Actually, Carrick was not looking at the tamarisks. He was wondering what he did in Tripoli, and how long it would be before some ship could carry him to Malta or Tunis. He had been five days in the town, wandered, it seemed, endlessly through endless steep streets, whose overhanging houses made violet arbours of shadow, cleft above by narrow, brilliant bars of sky; bought wares he did not want; damaskeened weapons, embroidered slippers; and sometimes gone to the edge of the desert, where the town abruptly stops, to look out over the fawn billows of sand towards the distant, nodding palms of the oasis.

He walked on listlessly, for it was hot already,

though early morning. He entered a small, busy street, where dogs fought for refuse, hardly looking into the little shops to watch the tailor squatting, or the weaver's harmonious movement as he flung the shuttle. But again, suddenly, he stopped, for, through an open shop-front, far back and brilliantly sunlit, in a white-flagged court, he saw a small crowd of men and, a little above them, the bust of a girl. He had an impression of white burnous and red and green turbans, of ice-white, molten-hot light, of a small figure stripped to the waist, bronze brown. He thrilled. This was the East as he had conceived it from colour-prints. This girl, standing passive. . . . But already a man was by his side, bowing, almost at his feet, posturing, chattering in debased Arabic. He was inviting the Englishman into the court, and, without more parley, Carrick followed him.

There was a stir in the group. It parted into two rows of Berbers, Maltese, half-breed Italians; became nothing more than a background of dark faces and violent colour. Carrick did not look at them, but at the four actors of the drama the significance of which slowly filtered into his brain: the girl upon a packing-case, naked, her hands clasped above her knees, her little short head downcast, slender as the stem of a palm tree, copper pale; a very old Arab, over whose red slippers fell the filthy folds of loose European trousers; a full-blooded negro, smiling broad-lipped over great, splendid teeth; and a large, dark man, with something European but mongrel in his features, darker rather than those of the Arabs.

"Three hundred and fifty piastres," said the negro.

There was a silence, and Carrick shivered when his host murmured in his ear—

“Will not the noble English lord buy a contract?”

A contract! Yes, he knew, for seven years or for ever! A shift of the slave-market. The European frigate he had seen that day in the offing could not cope with the evasions of the Barbary coast. The old Arab looked towards the large, dark European—

“Well, Senhor Paturao?” he asked.

Portuguese, that one, or mainly Portuguese.

“Four hundred,” said Paturao suddenly.

There was another very long pause, and not a creature of the twenty moved, not even the little figure upon the packing-case. Carrick saw only the slow rise and fall of the small, dark breasts. The old Arab looked from side to side. He smiled at the negro as if to taunt him. The taunt availed.

“Four hundred and fifty!” The negro had almost roared the words.

Paturao shrugged his shoulders and turned as if to go. Then, once more, he looked at the little figure—

“A purse,” he growled.

The negro’s features lost their smile. Then, suppressing evident fury, assuming unconcern, he spat upon the flags and slowly moved out of the court.

“Only a purse!” cried the old Arab. “Shall she fall to a purse?”

Then Carrick heard a voice—

“Six hundred piastres.”

Something seemed to shrink in him, and he saw the girl’s dark face flush the colour of madder: the voice had been his own.

A few days later Carrick stood once more before the three tamarisks. He was wondering how all this would end. As an immediate outcome of his impulse,

inexplicable save by some sentimental hatred of the dealing, he now lived in a small native house, near the wooden wharf, served by an Arab boy and by Tullia. For her name was Tullia, and it seemed absurd, this Roman name, for a little, dark slave. And yet was it so strange? Her hair was not black, but deep brown, and had a soft wave; her features were regular. Through her veins might run the blood of dead legions—alone her eyes were too dark, and there was some thickness in the lips that spoke Southern.

“Where do you come from?” Carrick had asked.

“From Axum,” she replied.

“Where is that?”

“Many days away.”

Stolen, of course, from some Arab settlement, far from the caravan route. She did not know where was Axum, nor how old she was. Perhaps thirteen, perhaps sixteen, who could say? She seemed to regret nothing, to feel nothing; Carrick had bought her; he was her master; all her life was there. She never stood up unless commanded to do so. When questioned she replied in almost pure Arabic and, ending her reply, was silent. One thing she knew: that she must serve. She followed her new master upon feet so velvety and still that he was hardly aware of her. She was obedient, humble, yet some secret energies animated her, for it was she, and not the Arab boy, brought to Carrick the bowls of kous-kous, and the dishes of roast kid . . . and she who shadowed him as he wandered about Tripoli, following a little way behind, less boisterous than a dog, faithful as a dog's shadow.

In this minute Carrick wondered what he should do. The days were passing, and nothing called him back

to England. Indeed, a languor was upon him and the sun in his blood.

But he could not stay in Tripoli. It was ridiculous. He must go some time and then—sell her? The thought revolted him. Take her back to England? He laughed when he thought what his friends would say. He cursed his idiotic impulse. An anger rose in him against the girl, but it subsided, for the East was having its way with him and he was sluggish. Slowly he turned to go back; already the sun was high: ten paces away was Tullia, her slim arms and neck very dark against her white garment, squatting upon her heels in the dust; she was waiting his pleasure. He looked at her for a long time: silent, so slim, strange, and coming as if from another world, there was in her blind attitude of service an appeal. He thrust it back. He was resolved not to understand it.

The days had lengthened into six weeks, and Carrick began to love this silent following which he now knew was gratitude. For Tullia had said in reply to a question—

“I was afraid of those men, Master. I am glad you came.”

And so he grew accustomed to his shadow, for the shadow seemed content shadow to be.

But often Europe held out hands, led him to the wharf where sometimes came a steamer laden with tourists. One day, as Carrick stood there watching, he saw an Englishwoman before a little shop, looking at the hats and baskets woven of esparto grass. She did not see him, and, for a long time, Carrick remained staring at her. She was very beautiful, very white,

and a heavy coil of red hair lay upon her neck. Then she looked up. Carrick saw long, green eyes, and, a little ashamed, slowly passed on, while Tullia, who had squatted patiently behind him, rose and followed, curiously gazing, as he went, at the white woman.

Yes, Europe held out hands. She led him to the wharf that day, and again later, as the sun, still radiant, drowned its fires in a molten sea. And the next day again. But the ship had sailed, and, quite suddenly, unaccountably, a distress seized Carrick that made him fierce. He turned to his little brown shadow—

“Go!” he said. He pointed: “To the house.”

Tullia’s features were fixed, she was as a bronze coin. She bent her head, slowly turned, and there was no remorse in Carrick’s face when he observed the droop of the slim shoulders. For he suffered in the grasp of his problem. He did not love that glimpsed white woman, yet she was Europe. What should he do?

But Europe called but faintly in the terrace of flat-roofed houses. Returning, he refused food, threw himself upon the osier plaits that were his bed, and soon he slept.

Much later in the night he heard a noise. He lay half-awake. Through the mosquito netting the moon streamed in, bathing the white floor in opal and green. Then he grew uneasy. There was something in his room. He sat up—

“Tullia!” he cried.

The little brown maiden, still clad in her white garment, lay abased upon the floor, a yard from his bed.

“Master,” she murmured, “forgive me.”

“What do you want?” asked Carrick, rather rough.

For a long time she did not reply, still remained abased, her face hidden.

"Get up," said the man.

A little quiver ran through the slim frame, and suddenly she was upon her knees. He drew back, shaking. This was not Tullia. The face was the colour of white ash, from which stared the eyes, immense, black pools. An uncanny terror gripped the man.

"What is this? he whispered.

"Master," breathed Tullia, "forgive me. This is but chalk, master, but tell me, am I white enough?"

17. ANGÉLIQUE

MADEMOISELLE ANGÉLIQUE LACOUR was born in Givet in 1869. Forty-two years later, in that very town, having visited Paris once and the giddy departmental centre of Mézières twice, she committed suicide. Such lives as hers are not uncommon and are seldom recorded, for they abound not in loves and crimes, things done or worth the doing; they do not, as a rule, end so tragically as did that of Angélique. It is not too much to say that nothing had ever happened to her; she was a spectator, not an actor. She had passed from protesting babyhood to decorous childhood; she had been taught by the good sisters on the hill such things as a young lady should know; she had waited for a husband, but found none; she had seen her mother die, her father remarry when she was twenty, and a half-sister be born to her. Almost at once her father and stepmother had died, leaving her the charge of her little sister. Angélique wept, and then finding herself alone in the world, endowed with a sufficiency of money, realized there was nothing for her to do but live in Givet, where she was born, and to educate Julie, her little sister, for finer activities.

The days and years had passed away, silent almost,

stified by the little city that sits so gloomy on the Meuse. At all times the mists and clouds had slowly rolled from the black tree-clad Ardennes along the sullen Meuse with the waters of lead, shrouding Givet in a grey pall. All Givet was grey as the slate of its roofs and the dirty white of its walls; from the ingrate earth sprang reluctant crops, which heavy Walloon peasantry, seated on heavier Flemish horses, sulkily carried to the market, where there was no gaiety or chaffering, nought save the sodden spirit of dirt and drink breathed in those countries where life is dreary as the sun shrouded by the clouds. The life of Angélique Lacour was as that of the city. The daughter of an *avoué*, that singular cross between notary and solicitor, she found herself on the death of her father the mistress of three thousand francs a year, which meant comfort as understood by Givet.

Her three thousand francs meant comfort, but did not mean joy. Perhaps joy could at no price be bought in Givet; perhaps Angélique, who had never known greater pleasure than Schopenhauer's absence of pain, did not know what joy was. Enough be it that she did for Julie that very inadequate thing—her best according to her lights. Little Julie was taught to fold her hands in her lap, to avoid crossing her legs (as the vulgar new woman was doing in those days); she was taught her catechism very well and English very badly by the good sisters on the hill; she fasted when required by custom and avoided unhealthy literature: this cost her no effort, for she had no curiosities, indeed no interests at all. Every Thursday she made half-holiday for the pleasure of Angélique, with whom she solemnly paced for an hour in the afternoon

under the sorry bare branches of the trees on the Cours Gambetta. As they passed out of their solemn little flat-faced house, with the green shutters and the stunted garden, the grocer would nod and smile, and be rewarded with a bow. Sometimes Madame Bouland, the pork-butcher's wife, who was as rotund and red as her husband's sausages, would cry out cheerily—

"Il fait beau, hein! Mesdemoiselles!"

Angélique would smile and swell a little with pleasure, for she liked to hear that "Mademoiselle" had become the plural "Mesdemoiselles." It meant that her little Julie, now twenty years old, was a young person, a splendid young person, thanks to her. Then Angélique, as she walked slowly over the crissing gravel of the Cours, would steal a look at her lovely sister. Not that Julie was very lovely; she was a rather lanky, dark girl, with a complexion which within a few years would be sallow; black-eyed, somewhat poor of hair, but for Angélique she was beauty, refinement, aristocracy. Her stupid silences were for her sister fine ladylike reserves; her mincing step was such as befits a gentlewoman; her ignorance was innocence, her laziness was grace. Indeed, she was, in Angélique's fond eyes, the ghost of another Angélique, of her dead self of twenty years ago, when she knew hope and fear, and looked out upon the world round-eyed and admiring as a very young kitten. Julie's career was, for her sister, an unending series of thrills; thrills when she obtained at the convent the blue badge of merit, thrills when she returned from prize-giving with wreaths of laurel in her scanty hair, thrills again when a young officer turned on the Cours Gambetta to look back at her peerless Julie. Angélique, when she looked at

the commonplace dark face, saw infinite beauty, infinite hope.

Thus for her, life might have gone on to the end of its span, wonderfully dramatic if vicarious in its emotion, had it not been for Madame Bouland. One morning as Angélique was ordering *galantine*, the pork-butcher's wife remarked—

“C'est une belle fille, Mademoiselle Julie; faudra penser au mariage.”

Old Angélique suddenly blushed as if outraged and left the shop as soon as she could, but the barb was planted in her bosom and she could not forget it. Now she found herself meditating upon possible husbands for her loved one, making feeble plans to meet the soldier son of her doctor, the elderly justice of the peace, so as to weigh them, to discover whether one of them was worthy. As she looked at Julie's dark, plain face it tortured her to think that it might smile for some unknown man, and yet it thrilled her wonderfully to think of Julie's nuptials; but modesty suddenly made her draw back, for she had never dared think of those things for herself.

Then one day Angélique found the man. He was a young officer of the artillery, a handsome fellow, with fair hair and the long moustache of a Viking. She knew him but very slightly, having been introduced to him by the manager of the bank, but on meeting the sisters in the street he had saluted, smiled, especially at Julie. And later Julie had said he was handsome. This was enough for Angélique; sedulous inquiries showed that the young soldier had nought but his pay; thus a *dot* of fifty thousand francs, Julie's share of their property, would be enough. Besides, Angélique would gladly have given her share too, and

begged her bread in the grey streets. In her mind the intrigue developed, clad in the colours of the rainbow; she was haunted by visions of dark Julie and of the young officer with the moustache of a Viking. She figured her young sister in white satin, crowned with orange-blossom . . . Julie in brown tweed, about to leave for Italy for the honeymoon . . . Julie happy and rich, with children, a saddle-horse, a husband on whose sleeves a new strip of gold braid every year appeared.

So gorgeous were her dreams that she did not dare discuss them. Once, when Julie herself referred to the young man, saying that he had saluted her as she appeared at the window, Angélique found herself with a hand on her beating heart, quite speechless with emotion. Julie's idyll was too wonderful to bear. Then one morning, quite simply as a magazine explodes, Angélique heard that the young soldier was engaged to the daughter of the *sous-préfet*. She did not cry out; she went all that day about her tasks, saying the usual things to a different world. At times she looked at Julie, in terror lest she should hear that her life was ruined. Angélique was so desperate as to be gay; she was irrepressibly gay when, after dinner, she declared that she must go out to visit a sick woman; she was gay, almost laughing, in the streets; she was gay, riotously gay, along the wharf . . . and then, under the leaden sky of Givet, old Angélique, whose brain had given way, leaped into the swirling water.

Julie sat in her bedroom, combing her scanty hair, considering the news the servant had given her. This young officer, she reflected, he was not bad-looking;

but what a fool he looked. Still, he was marrying. She, too, would think of marriage one of these days. There was no hurry. Then she went to bed, assuming that Angélique would return later on. She felt so sleepy.

18. A RESPECTABLE WOMAN

I DO wish the car would come." Grace Enderby angrily tapped with her foot as she looked at the long line of motors and broughams which curled round the corner of the side street to take up their owners at the door of the theatre.

"Yes," snapped her companion. "We've been waiting ten minutes. I'm perished with cold." She drew closer about her shoulders her heavy black silk wrap trimmed with Chinese embroidery; the rich stuff threw into relief her delicate pale face and made her skin diaphanous. Her dark eyes lay large and still, overhung by her thick black hair, as deep pools of water under willows.

"So'm I," said Grace Enderby, "and this light"—she nodded towards the great arc lamps which blazed, in spite of the murky night—"those lights," she repeated, "I hate 'em; they make me look like a corpse."

Her companion laughed, for Grace Enderby did not suggest a corpse; she looked rather like a cherub gifted with vivacity. She had piled, reddish hair, a sharp oval face; her chin was pointed, her red lips pouted, and her cheeks were rounded as if modelled by Botticelli; but her eyes, which were grey, gave her that characteristic of determination which made her so wholly desirable. Still the motor did not come. The

two women stood in the crowd, jostled by the continual outflow from the stalls and dress circle, while passers-by, glad of the shelter of the verandah from the slow, steady drizzle, roughly pressed their sodden forms against the silks and evening clothes. Then, quite close to her, Grace Enderby saw a woman who was not trying to force her way through the crowd, but quite perceptibly took shelter from the rain. Their eyes met for a moment, and a queer look of pain, of hate, of longing indefinable and hopeless, came into the woman's eyes. Grace Enderby passed over her the swift glance of woman beholding woman, the glance which seems to skim and yet pitilessly delves, prices the clothes, tests the hat by the standard of the day, and takes in every line on the face, every laxness of the mouth, every strand of poor ill-dyed hair. Then she turned away to address her companion. She knew that sort of woman—its bold abandoned air, its fraudulent pathos, and she knew the one and eleven-three gloves it wears, and its dirty handkerchief cheaply scented. Faugh!

"Oh, there's the car!" said the friend.

"A quarter of an hour late," said Grace Enderby.

"I'll give it to Dubois to-morrow morning."

As the car drew up in front of them there was a swirl in the crowd. The woman in the cheap hat was impelled towards them and, as Grace Enderby stepped in, skirts daintily gathered away from the muddy step, the woman was pressed a second against her arm. She started away, jumped in, slammed the door, and as the car began to move, punished her with another of those swift, divesting glances.

"Disgraceful," she muttered, as she settled down on the soft grey seat; "that woman—you saw her?"

"The woman with the nine-carat gold brooch?"

"Yes. I hate those women. I suppose there'll always be that sort of woman. Still, it's disgusting. She brushed against me—oh!"

"Oh, awful," said her friend sympathetically; "it makes one feel soiled."

"They ought to be locked up," snarled Grace Enderby.

"They ought. But don't let's think about 'em. Let's talk of something else. Did you notice Lady Saintry's diamonds?"

"Her necklace? Rather. It makes one wild to see diamonds like those when one can't get any out of one's husband."

"Oh, but," protested the friend, "surely Tom——"

"Oh, Tom," said Mrs. Enderby impatiently—"Tom's mean. I've been pegging away at him for months, and I'm not even asking for diamonds; emeralds 'd do with my hair. But it's no good—as yet."

"You'll get 'em in time."

"I s'pose I shall, but it's weary work being married to Tom." Mrs. Enderby gave a quick, hard laugh.

The car smoothly swept up Regent Street, deposited Mrs. Enderby's friend at her home in Portland Place, and then, noiseless as a swan upon the water, carried Mrs. Enderby to Upper Berkeley Street. There was a light in the dining-room. As she opened the door she could see her husband lying in one of the large armchairs, his face red, his shirt-front somewhat crumpled.

"Hullo, Tom!"

"Hullo!" said the man.

As she took off her wrap she observed him—reflected

that Tom was not nice to look at. Enderby was thirty-five, but looked forty; he was short, stout, at all times red-faced, and that night flushed. His short, squat hands, crossed over his white waistcoat, upon which was a stain of port, were hairy and full of aggressive tendency. Grace Enderby felt repelled, indignant almost at the thought that this man, who was not drunk, but had certainly drunk too much—this fat dull animal was her husband. Still, she thought, she supposed she had to be civil—make conversation.

“Had a good time?” she asked.

“Not bad. Dined with Kopstein and Avonford at the club. Had to make shift with old Strathfield as a fourth.”

“Lord Strathfield?”

“Yes—old rotter.”

“Lost?”

Tom Enderby did not reply. His wife drew off her wrap, hesitated. He didn't seem in a very good mood; still, he had clearly dined well. He might come round, and Lady Saintry's diamonds were still in full blaze in her memory.

“Tom,” she said at length, “I wanted to talk to you when you went out this morning.”

“What about?”

“Those emeralds.”

Enderby did not reply, but fixed upon her a sulky, filmy eye. He felt inclined to swear at her.

“You know,” she pursued, “I'd love to have emeralds; you *might* treat me to them, Tom.”

“Oh, might I? Can't run to it.”

“Oh, yes, you can, Tom,” she wheedled; “they won't cost much.” She stepped towards the fireplace, stood before him in her pale green gown, with the light

playing on her mat shoulders, smiling with her beautiful red mouth. "They'd go so well with my hair," she added.

"Hum!" said Enderby. He looked her over approvingly. "Fine woman, Grace," he reflected.

"Well," he said at length, "I might—that is, I'll think it over."

"Oh, Tom, Tom." Grace clapped her hands, laughing childlike now. Enderby ponderously heaved himself up in his chair; his head felt heavy, but he could concentrate on her handsomeness.

"Come here," he said commandingly, pointing to his knee.

Grace Enderby hesitated an infinitesimal moment, looked at his short hairy hand, then stepped forward and sat down on his knees. He placed one arm round her waist, held her unresisting left arm just over the elbow.

"You're looking fine, Grace," he said, a little hoarsely and stroked her bare arm. She looked down, said nothing. An odd feeling of nausea was haunting her.

"I don't say I won't give you those emeralds, old girl," said Enderby, "but——"

"But," she whispered.

"Oh, well, you're looking fine to-night; you might be decent to a fellow—you know what I mean."

There was a pause—a pause during which she struggled with a desire to leap to her feet and run, but she remembered Lady Saintry's diamonds, closed her eyes, so as not to see the hand, the port wine stain, tried not to detect in his breath the odour of wine and cigars, tried to forget what he meant.

"Oh, very well," she said at last, rather faintly.

Tom Enderby said nothing, but she heard him laugh, then felt him kiss her harshly on the neck.

The woman in the one and eleven-three gloves walked away along the muddy pavement. Her skirts were wet and heavy at the edge. She wanted to go home, but she owed her landlady her rent. "Not that she'd turn me out," she reflected; "she nursed me when I had typhoid. She's a pal. But she's got to live, and you've got to play the game, Daisy, me dear." She sighed, walked on through Leicester Square to Charing Cross, then to Aldwych, back again to the Haymarket, to Regent Street, where the lights were growing less. She walked, she stood and waited; she walked again through the ever emptier streets. There were pains in her knees, a weight lay on her heart, a blindness on her eyes; and still she walked in streets and streets, past the well-fed, heavy policemen. One o'clock struck. She was so numbed, wet, cold, hungry, that she heard two strike without surprise. She was then standing all alone on the dry pavement under the Monico verandah. Slowly a pool of water formed at her feet from her soaked boots.

19. HONOUR

"YOU know," said Trent, "you are quite the most wonderful woman in the world. There's nobody like you ; you're so lovely, so fine, so everything."

"Ah," said Maude shyly, but self-conscious. She was pleased as a stroked cat, sat with her slim hand clasped in Trent's large brown one, rested with content her shoulder against his; she thought idly of the coming days when they would be married, when she would leave her father's house at Surbiton for the small flat near Putney Bridge, of which she had already taken possession. It would be a proud time. But the man by her side, as he held her to him in the summer-house, found himself spiritual in mind, as men are wont to be between brief periods of passion; he could not, nor did he want to concentrate on flats, or furniture, or wedding presents; he was conscious only of an overwhelming and delightful presence which impelled him to self-abasement.

"Maude," he said at length, "when a man's in love he does wonder all sorts of things. He wonders whether the girl'll stick to him when he's getting old and ugly and stout."

Maude laughed. She had a pretty, clear laugh. Also she tossed her dark curly hair and her blue eyes

looked at him roguishly from under the brows, a pleasant trick of hers.

"Yes, you may laugh," said Trent, "but I do wonder all sorts of things."

"I'll always be in love with you, Fred," said Maude, very softly, "even if you do get old and ugly and stout."

"And poor?"

"Yes, even if you're poor. And I hate being poor."

"I wonder," said Trent at length, as he lovingly played with her right hand, folded and unfolded her fingers, "I wonder whether you'd stick to me if I were dishonourable."

Maude hesitated. She disliked the abstract even when it was connected with love. She was not prepared to discuss a problem which could never confront her; besides, she had no views on the subject. So, very softly, she quoted—

"I could not love you, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more."

Trent looked at her again, moved, a little confused by the altitude his emotion had reached. He pressed her hand again, drew her towards him, and, with a feeling akin to reverence, kissed her softly on cheek and lips.

"My dear," he muttered, "my dear, I'm not worthy of you."

Soon after these two were married, and began the happy days in the flat near Putney Bridge. Happy days they were, wonderful days during which Maude learned how to run the flat, a tiny four-roomed affair, and to control the young servant with her mother's hard efficiency; the couple lived an extended honey-

moon, a time of lovely surprises, when Maude would ring up her husband and lunch with him in the City, on the flimsy pretext that shops were better in St. Paul's Churchyard than in Putney. There were meetings at the station, walks by the side of the sunlit reaches of the Thames, silent watches over the setting sun. There was nothing to mar their happiness, neither the poverty that grinds nor the wealth that inflames and oppresses. Trent was a clerk in a confidential position in a large firm; his duties were not arduous, his salary was three hundred and fifty a year; there was no reason why, with average health and luck, he should not rise somewhat in fortune and live happily his probable forty years.

It was not until seven or eight months had elapsed that faint difficulties began to appear. Maude had become accustomed to her new status; it no longer thrilled her to be called "Ma'am," to pay the weekly books, to have her servant, her flat, her key, her husband. She did not so much find a difficulty in making the best of her allowance as find she wanted new things, new excitements. The very fact that she had for a time been fully satisfied with life induced in her a reaction; she was restless, inclined to be fitful, even irritable. Remorse always overtook her when she had been testy, and, in those moods, her husband found her infinitely more alluring than in her equable periods. Indeed, as time went on, he discovered with surprise that, instead of tiring of her, he realised her as more attractive; she had become his dominating interest, the heaven in which he floated in wonderful peace. She seemed to neutralise in him all weariness and depression; she was like a tonic wine. For this big, quiet, brown man Maude was a need and a gift, a

creature for whom all things were worth doing, all things worth renouncing, if only she would smile.

Maude's restlessness translated itself suddenly into a suggestion that the piano was too small, and that it should be exchanged for a baby grand. Her husband hardly discussed the matter, though it vaguely annoyed him to think that the change was going to cost him a good deal of money; still, as the cottage piano was less than a year old, he managed to exchange it at the maker's for the better type at a cost of only twenty-five pounds. He was rewarded, for Maude leapt at him and threw her arms round his neck when he returned from the City, dragged him to the drawing-room, and triumphantly strummed for him, "See the conquering hero comes." At that moment Trent realised that he was utterly hers, and rejoiced in his enslavement.

But the piano seemed to feed the flame. Soon Trent found his wife restless as ever, tending to rush up to town to buy useless things; she took up afternoon bridge, neglected the ordering, and, as a result, omitted to keep down the weekly books. There were demands for money to which he responded a little anxiously, for his balance at the bank was going down. But Maude laughed whenever he yielded, kissed him, called him pet names, and he seemed to lose all power of resistance. October came, and with it an overdraft. Trent had to speak to his wife.

"Oh, how can you be so cruel!" she cried. "How can you!" She burst into tears, and Trent, as he tried to comfort her, heard her whisper: "And I did so want a musquash coat for the winter."

No more was said just then, but two days later Maude again mentioned the musquash coat, and Trent

went to the City haunted by the growing bills, and especially by the gift she so badly wanted. His work suffered; he found his appetite vanishing. At last the strain became too great, or he was tempted too far by the petty cash. The petty cash was entirely in his hands; the firm was so rich that it was careless, and never checked a voucher. With faltering fingers Trent forged vouchers for thirty pounds. The next day Maude was dancing for joy, arrayed in her new musquash coat, and Trent was watching her, glad to see her gay, but in horrible fear of detection, and, worse still, conscious that her joy would turn to despair if ever she discovered how he had forfeited his honour.

Trent was now helpless, as a man sliding down a glacier towards the precipice at the bottom. He found that he could satisfy his wife only for a time; having no child, she had every day to discover a fresh interest. Trent fought her manfully enough, but he had taken the first and easy step; his anæsthetic passion dominated him. He forged more vouchers to replace the drawing-room carpet, to pay Maude's subscription to Prince's, to buy her a harem skirt which she never ventured to wear. All through the horror lay on him that one day he would be discovered, sent to gaol, and, greater horror, that she would spurn him, love him no more. At last the crisis came. Maude announced that she could not bear the winter, that she must go to the Riviera for two months.

"No," said Trent bluntly, "it can't be done."

"Why?" asked Maude defiant, almost hostile.

"We can't afford it."

"Oh, can't you find the money? Oh, I'm so unhappy, I did so want to go, oh——"

"I'm sorry," murmured Trent. He felt horribly

weak, but he must not yield if only because she might discover and love him no more. This must end. But it was terrible, it was like torturing a child.

Maude looked at him from under her brows, as if she were testing his strength. Then suddenly she came up to him, threw her arms round his neck, and, with her mouth very close to his ear, whispered—

“Darling, you know what you said about your post in the firm—it could be managed—nobody would know—couldn't you—take a little money out of the petty cash?”

20. THE CHEMIST'S DAUGHTER

THE *Pharmacie Palluz*, on the west side of the Place Muron, was not a great establishment; indeed, it was quite a little shop at the base of a house so small that it accommodated none but M. Palluz himself, his daughter Jeanne, and Yvonne, their old maid-of-all-work. Its front was painted dark green, as is the custom among French chemists, and decorated by three bottles filled with green, yellow and red fluids; these glowed in the evening, when the lights were lit, and made quite a display in the otherwise dull little Place. It was seldom that anything happened on the Place, for it was no more than a backwater of Auteuil, the pretty green suburb which is itself a backwater of Paris; it was galvanised into fictitious animation when the neighbourhood collected in the morning to buy sparingly from the butcher and the grocer; at times, and yet more sparingly, lozenges or sticks of liquorice from the *Pharmacie Palluz*. Then afternoon came, and with it immense sleepy restfulness—the peace of the French provinces, where no tramways rumble by and even the milkcart is hushed. Cabs seldom occurred on the Place Muron, while no taximeter had ever been known to draw up at any of the white blocks of flats. The Place was a self-contained little

community of some thirty houses, broken into by five shops and two front gardens. It lived by abstaining from spending money.

It is not wonderful, therefore, that M. Palluz neither needed nor could afford a dispenser. On that afternoon he was in the dark little scullery at the back of his shop, on the dirty glass door of which was pompously painted the word "LABORATOIRE." Jeanne, as she sat at the raised cash desk, in case some inhabitant of Auteuil should want two sous' worth of boracic acid, had listlessly crossed in front of her her plump white hands, and was looking at the bottles ranged in rows in front of her. With her eyes she read off mechanically their imposing Latin labels, and unconsciously interpreted them into more commonplace words—quinine, alum, cinchona bark; with her ears she as unconsciously recorded that her father was making pills; she could hear him regularly revolving the upper stone slab of his elementary machine, and swearing mildly as he dropped on the floor some valuable calomel. All this she absorbed as naturally as her lungs took in air, for these sights and sounds had been familiar to her for some twenty years; besides, Jeanne Palluz had other things to think of—pleasant things, if one could trust the faint smile that played on her small red mouth. Jeanne was a good-looking enough girl, short, dark-haired, agreeably plump and flat-backed, like most of her rather rigid countrywomen. There was enough animation in her brown eyes to correct the stolidity of her immobile plump hands; she was a Frenchwoman, thus gay, but the keeper of the cashbox, thus staid. Now, however, as she sat vaguely gazing at her father's bottles, her smile was for the thought of Marcel Ferrand, the rising

young official who drew eighteen hundred francs a year at the Ministère de l'Intérieur in consideration of unexhausting labours.

There was something between her and Marcel—a beautifully exciting and irregular something. One day he had come into the *pharmacie* and bought some poppyheads, which, well boiled, were to soothe a toothache; she had sympathized with him over his swollen cheek; she had gently chaffed him because the trouble spoiled his beauty, and, in so doing, had observed that Marcel was agreeable with his black waxed moustache and sparkling dark eyes. She had been so sympathetic that Marcel returned when his swollen cheek subsided (he was too vain to exhibit it until then) and invested careful pennies on bicarbonate of soda he did not want, and on lozenges which might come in useful in the winter. There had been gentle jokes, smiles and blushes over medicines which do not as a rule put the Gaul to shame; there had been shy touchings of hands, stolen meetings, and at last a delicious informal engagement, without talk of *dot* or the intrusion of parents. All the while M. Palluz blissfully continued to make pills, and the lovers were undisturbed, for he was a widower, and there was no watchful Madame Palluz.

Five o'clock struck at the convent. Jeanne watched the rare passers-by—the *curé*, strolling across the Place, breviary in hand; the postman, with his black varnished box slung in front of him; the elderly spinsters from No. 9, with their nephew from the *Lycée Janson*, in his black uniform, with gilt buttons. Then Marcel entered the shop. Jeanne smiled at him with all the vivacity of her brown eyes, and nodded significantly towards the *laboratoire*, where M. Palluz

persisted in making pills. The nod meant "safe," but Marcel did not take advantage of the hint, touch her hand, or, after looking out of the window, quickly kiss her as he leant across the counter. Instead, he twisted his black moustache, talked of the weather, a recent bank crash, dull topics.

"Any news?" Jeanne asked at length.

"News?—well," stammered the young man—"yes."

"Oh! Good news?"

Marcel hesitated, then plunged, rejoicing in the opening.

"Yes—that is—well, I'm appointed *receveur* at Avignon. A very good post."

"Oh!" cried Jeanne. "I'm so glad; still, Avignon, it's very far."

For some seconds they waited, embarrassed. In Jeanne's mind a question formed, a horrible insistent question which became torturing as he remained silent.

"I'm going to-morrow," Marcel muttered, at length.

"Ah! And—and shall I? But, Marcel——"

"No," said Marcel suddenly. "I've thought it over—it can't be, not now that I'm to be *receveur*. I made a mistake—I'm sorry—good-bye."

Jeanne looked aimlessly round the empty shop. He was gone. She was forsaken. Her life was over. There was nothing to be done. Her wandering eyes concentrated curiously on one of the bottles—prussic acid. Out of the welter of her sorrow the idea rushed towards her. Yes, that was the thing—to finish it all, to suffer no more. She had loved and was betrayed. Prussic acid—that was the cure. M. Palluz entered, announcing that he had made two hundred pills. All the evening he tortured her with comments

on her silence; he followed her, persecuted her with kindness; she could not shake him off until at last she went to bed calm and determined beyond pain. In her room she consulted a textbook. Yes, prussic acid was the thing.

At eleven o'clock she slunk down into the silent shop, in a wrap on which flowed her black hair. By the light of a match she seized the fatal bottle, poured out enough to kill a hundred men—ah!—the fumes, how they gripped, just as the book said—still, courage, a drop would kill a dog—a gulp—ah, ah!—the wrenching at her larynx—burning—just as the book said—then nothing.

Eight hours later a doctor leant over the cold corpse while old M. Palluz sat noisily weeping at the cash desk. The doctor could not understand. He smelled the colourless liquid in the tumbler—poison, no doubt; but what poison? All those colourless poisons smell. But what? Then he saw the bottle, took it up. A cry escaped him: "Distilled water!"

"What do you say?" said M. Palluz, raising his head.

The doctor did not reply, gazed at the bottle, the tumbler, then at the empty space on the shelf. Next to it was the bottle of prussic acid. An extraordinary expression came over the doctor's face.

"Prussic acid," he murmured; "now I see she has the symptoms, but—but—distilled water? Is it possible she can have thought——"

M. Palluz leapt to his feet.

"Distilled water?" he cried. "What?" Then he looked at the bottle.

"But," he screamed, "one doesn't die of distilled water!"

There was a long silence. At last the doctor spoke—

“No, but if one thinks it is prussic acid . . . Imagination plays us strange tricks. My poor M. Palluz, the idea is greater than the fact.”

21. LA PIERRE

IL y a à Paris un pharmacien, maître d'une belle boutique. Derrière la haute glace luisent trois boccas, l'un bleu, l'autre vert, le troisième orangé. Près du monceau d'eucalyptus un sage serpent se tord dans son flacon d'alcool. Un jour le pharmacien, plein de férocité paisible, lisait dans son journal le récit des derniers exploits de Monseigneur le Prince de Vannes, camelot du Roy, grand décerveleur de francs-maçons, lorsqu'il aperçut, devant sa boutique, un homme du peuple qui l'examinait à travers le bocal orangé. Le pharmacien, fort de son expérience, se dit qu'un homme aussi mal vêtu ne pouvait être malade; cet être au pantalon de velours usé, à la veste sale, au menton bleui d'une barbe ambitieuse, ne pouvait en tout cas être bon que pour l'hôpital.

Le pharmacien ressaisit donc dans son journal le fil des aventures de Monseigneur, mais un sursaut l'arracha de sa caisse lorsqu'une lourde pierre, pénétrant à travers la devanture fracassée, roula jusqu'à ses pieds. Le pharmacien, inquiet et écarlate, se précipita vers l'homme du peuple qui, fort tranquille en apparence, lui dit :

—C'est moi, M'sieu l'pharmacien, qui vous ai fichu cette pierre. J'vous ai pas fait mal, au moins?—

Le pharmacien, dont la face ahurié et furieuse

tremblait entre ses favoris, n'eut que la force de crier : Au voleur ! la police ! Un agent s'entremet, et l'homme du peuple fut mené devant le commissaire, suivi d'une foule de composition démocratique, querelleuse et grandissante, et agrémentée de nombreux chiens. La porte une fois fermée, le commissaire de police recueillit la déposition du pharmacien, dont la teinte avait recouvré son degré normal ; puis, se renversant dans son fauteuil, il examina l'homme du peuple.

Le commissaire de police était fort jeune, mais bien pensant, et songeait à devenir préfet. Il déposa avec un soupir le savoureux havane dont il taillait la pointe lors de l'intempestive arrestation, et prit la parole en ces termes :

—Je vais vous demander, mon ami, de m'expliquer la cause de votre acte funeste et antisocial. Les tendances subversives du siècle ne me sont que trop bien connues, et je déplore les égarements quotidiens de la jeunesse française dont je suis le censeur involontaire. Je devine en vous une âme ardente, un rêveur, un rêveur exalté . . .—

—C'est pas ça du tout, M'sieu l'Commissaire . . .—

—Ne m'interrompez pas,—dit le Commissaire d'une voix abondante,—vous aurez le droit de vous défendre lorsque vous aurez été accusé. La République, mon ami, est honnête et généreuse. Elle vous considère comme un malade ; philanthropique, elle ne vous punira que pour vous amender. Il ressort des dépositions que vous avez projeté, et cela d'une main vigoureuse, une pierre à travers la devanture du sieur Fagot, pharmacien. Vous pouvez présenter une défense qui me permette de vous faire mettre en liberté, s'il y a lieu, ou me révéler les causes de cette singu-

lière violence. Parlez sans crainte : la Justice vous protège et ne songe qu'à votre bonheur.—

Le Commissaire flaira son havane d'une narine experte. L'homme du peuple lui répondit :

—J'vais vous expliquer, M'sieu l'Commissaire. C'est comme ça : j'ai faim, j'suis sans travail. Fallait faire queq' chose. Alors j'me suis dit : François, faut faire queq' chose pour t'faire mettre à l'ombre ; faut tuer un bourgeois, ou faut voler, ou crier : à bas les flics ! Mais tuer un bourgeois, ça m'disait rien ; un bourgeois, c'est un bourgeois, mais ça a une femme, des enfants, tout ça ; enfin, c'est presque un homme ; et puis j'aurais pu m'faire guillotiner, c'est pas comme un crime passionnel. Et crier : à bas les flics ; ça irait, ça, mais i m'ont rien fait, les flics, et si j'avais crié : à bas les flics ! j'aurais été passé à tabac. Et voler, j'sais pas, mais j'ai eu d' l'éducation, M'sieu l'Commissaire : voyez-vous, j'dois avoir des préjugés. Alors j'me suis dit : François, y a rien à faire que d'taper sur la propriété ; ça fera du bien à la société. Alors j'ai fichu la pierre dans la devanture à Monsieur.—

Le Commissaire, qui humait avec amour son savoureux havane, répondit :

—Soyez certain que les jurés, vos semblables et vos égaux devant la loi, vous rendront pleine et humaine justice.—

—Puis, se tournant vers les agents, il ajouta :—
Fourrez-moi c't homme-là au violon.—

Un mois plus tard, derrière les trois boccas, le pharmacien lisait dans son journal, plein de férocité paisible et coutumière, le récit des nouveaux exploits de Monseigneur le Prince de Vannes. Ayant levé les yeux, il vit sur le pavé, devant le bocal orangé, une

homme du peuple. Il ne le reconnut pas, mais la présentation se fit de façon brutale : une lourde pierre, pénétrant par la devanture fracassée, roula jusqu'à ses pieds.

Le pharmacien se précipita vers la porte, prêt à faire au fuyard une chasse ardente. Mais le fuyard ne fuyait pas. Les mains dans les poches, l'air indifférent plutôt que résigné, il semblait attendre.

—Quoi . . . qu'est-ce-que . . . ?—balbutia le pharmacien, dont le visage avait revêtu la couleur écarlate. Puis, ayant subitement reconnu une figure familière, il se trouva muet.

—Bonjour, M'sieu l'pharmacien,—dit poliment l'homme du peuple. Je vois que vous m'remettez. Vous savez, on revient toujours à ses premières amours.—

—Mais . . . mais . . . nom d'un chien . . .—fit le pharmacien, auquel il faut savoir gré d'avoir juré de façon aussi modeste,—. . . mais enfin, qu'est-ce-que ça signifie ? Vous allez pas venir casser ma glace tous les huit jours ?—

—Non, M'sieu l'pharmacien, pas tous les huit jours, et pour cause. J viens de tirer un mois, et si on peut pas s'arranger j'écoperai de trois . . .—

—S'arranger !—hurla le pharmacien.—Ça n'est pas difficile si vous m'payez mes cents francs de glace et une indemnité.—

L'homme du peuple secoua doucement la tête. Ainsi qu'un animal inoffensif et docile.

—Y a pas moyen, M'sieu l'pharmacien. J'ai pas l'sou. On pourra pas s'arranger comme ça. Mais vous m'avez pas l'air méchant ; j'vais vous dire c'qui faudra faire : envoyez chercher une glace neuve et du ciment, et j'vais vous la remettre, vot' glace ; vous

m'paierez ma journée, quatre francs, et tout sera dit. Ça va ?—

Le pharmacien le considéra d'un oeil glauque mais éloquent.

—Comprenez-moi,—dit l'homme du peuple,—j'ai pas l'sou. Faut bien que j'trouve à travailler. Du travail, i m'en faut. C'est bien embêtant, ces histoires-là, mais i m'faut du travail, voilà.—

—Eh bien,—fit le pharmacien, avec un petit rire qui manquait d'amabilité,—c'est un joli moyen de trouver du travail que de défoncer ma devanture.—

L'homme du peuple lui jeta un long regard, tortilla ses mains dans ses poches, puis reprit, de plus en plus semblable à une bête inoffensive et docile :

—C'est bien embêtant, mais qu' est-ce-que vous vous voulez, M'sieu l'pharmacien, moi j'suis vitrier.

THREE GROTESQUES

I. UNE AFFAIRE COMPLIQUÉE

“NON!” shouted M. Castagnac, as he ferociously struck the table with his fist, “*je ne le tolérerai pas!*”

The obsequious staff of *Le Moniteur* looked up from its tasks with faces that showed varying degrees of amazement and horror. The horror did not diminish, but the amazement disappeared as they noticed that their editor was perusing with a round and fierce black eye the columns of *Le Public*, a daily whose mission apparently was to make life hard for *Le Moniteur*. M. Castagnac leapt from his seat, looking as he bounced from the room, one hand clenched on the crumpled *Public* and the other buried in his own curly black hair, like an enraged golliwog. The office boy, on his own initiative, ran to the *kiosque* on the Boulevard to buy another copy of the inimical rag, and soon every member of the *rédaction* was crowding round the unsigned libel. One of the reporters sniggered, but the others, considering that this was really too bad, were justly indignant.

M. Castagnac was meanwhile wasting no time on either sniggers or indignation. He had already requested M. de Molin, the blonde and Belgian dandy, who did the *monde élégant*, to represent him in an

affair of honour, and had ebulliently secured over the telephone his fencing-master, M. Mesnard. Within an hour these faithful friends were dispatched to M. Samarin, editor of the detestable *Public*. It is fortunate that the laws of the duel forbid an interview between principals, as M. Castagnac, whom they left swearing by *sacré* everything that he would have M. Samarin's blood, would beyond doubt have taken some of the said blood on account from the impeccably polite Samarin. For M. Samarin blandly declared that, as he had not written the offending article and respected M. Castagnac above all men, he saw no reason why he should fight him. The article was the work of M. Vazeille, a lean and hungry person with a weak digestion and a vitriolic pen. M. Vazeille, he said, would be delighted to destroy M. Castagnac.

When M. Castagnac heard with incredulous horror that M. Samarin wished him no harm his fury knew no bounds, and nothing save the respect he bore M. Mesnard (who could pink him six times to his one) deterred him from making an example of him. They all three and in turn argued over the telephone with the resolutely polite Samarin, but he was aggressively amiable, refused to accept responsibility for the unsigned article, and persistently sheltered himself behind the willing and lean body of M. Vazeille. Thus the unfortunate Castagnac had to be content with writing on the spot an article such as to make *Le Public* wish that its company had never been floated.

Late next day, when M. Castagnac had ceased to gloat over his epithets, a terrible piece of news reached him. The *canaille* Samarin, still polite and friendly, had challenged the owner of *Le Moniteur*, M. de

Malville, as he held him responsible for M. Castagnac's verve, and M. de Malville, all innocence and gallantry, had nominated seconds, adding that he would fight anybody, though he didn't know what this was all about, as he never read his own paper; it bored him. At this the fury of M. Castagnac knew no bounds. What! Samarin refuse to meet him, and dared to challenge his employer; he dared, he—he was a—a—— M. Castagnac could find no words; he had used them all in the article. Deeds, however, were still within his power; he visualized with black eyes that were fast becoming bloodshot the hideous conference then taking place between the distinguished seconds in which his own had no part. Ah! he would show them, he would not tolerate it; he would not have "the grass cut under his feet," for "the mustard was beginning to rise to his nose." Samarin he would settle in good time, but his seconds, the odious Barbezan, who fenced so badly, and that Royalist fool of a de Bois le Duc, they had dared to act for Samarin in a quarrel which left him out—it was not to be endured. He would fight them both and his owner, too, if required.

The office of *Le Moniteur* had a terrible time that afternoon, while M. Castagnac treated copy with unusual severity, and dismissed the office-boy with unnecessary violence for having announced M. Vazeille. "I will not see him," shouted M. Castagnac. In vain did the unfortunate Vazeille plead through the speaking-tube that, as the writer of the article, he was entitled to answer for it; M. Castagnac did not care whether he had written it or not; he had no quarrel with him. Meanwhile, his seconds, M. Calamine, the sparkling barrister and the hope of the *Républicains*

de Gauche, and the *cuirassier*, Captain d'Avernon, were carrying his defiance to the offending seconds whom the hated Samarin had ventured to send to M. de Malville.

Another day dawned in the midst of the argument, enlivened by articles in both *Le Moniteur* and *Le Public*, the like of which had never been seen before. M. Castagnac, now assured of two duels within the week, felt exceedingly cheerful and reinstated the office-boy. He even spoke to M. Vazeille (through the speaking-tube), and told him that though he had written the article, he bore him no grudge. In the afternoon came the final development. M. de Malville's seconds, the stockbroker La Bardenne and the aged but bellicose *sénateur* Voreau, discovered that they were insulted because M. Castagnac had challenged the seconds of their principal's opponent, and added their own seconds to the fray.

This was at twelve o'clock, when fifteen persons were concerned in the affair, not counting M. Vazeille, the source of the trouble, for whom everybody entertained feelings of regard. By four o'clock the parties had increased to twenty-eight; dinner-time found them nearing the hundred. Within another day half the *Chambre des Deputés* and most of the Paris bar were involved. Arguments as to priority stopped all fighting, arbitration followed on arbitration, while challenges grew like mushrooms. By the end of the fatal week the affair was in a state of collapse, for every *gentilhomme* in Paris was concerned in it, and more were being drafted in from the country. Finally, the police stopped the issues both of *Le Moniteur* and *Le Public*, in view of the protests of the League for the Promotion of Journalistic Courtesy.

The closing scene took place in the *Salle des Fêtes du Trocadéro*, where the four thousand parties met in conclave, while many more clamoured for admittance. The president of the *Faculté de Médecine* having declined the chair (for he was professionally interested), the meeting chose M. Vazeille, who stood out Olympian and detached from the chaos he had created. With firm and dignified voice he declared the resolution in favour of peace carried, and closed the meeting to the acclamations of the would-be combatants. He then, as primary cause of the unrest, acknowledged the universal expressions of good feeling that were showered upon him. M. Vazeille was the man of the hour.

2. FATE AND HER DARLING

I

WILLIAM TOMKINS reflectively removed his cuff protectors. It was four o'clock; young Mr. Stone had gone, while the head clerk had in the morning announced that this was his tennis tournament day, which meant that he would leave at four-thirty. As for the other clerks, who were the machinery of Messrs. Richard Stone and Co., William Tomkins viewed them with the aloofness of one who sits alone in a telephone box, and deals every day in scores of thousands of quarters of corn. All this meant that in half-an-hour he would be a free man, walk home from the station across Clapham Common, and feel the general leisure of the nothing-to-do days. He was pleased, so pleased that he took out of his private drawer the small mirror which helped him to achieve at lunch and closing times ephemeral elegance.

The mirror showed him a young man of twenty-eight or so, with blue eyes and sandy hair; he did not altogether like his wide mouth; still there were worse, and, fortunately, he felt, nobody knew that he shaved only because he could not grow a moustache. There was about Tomkins, though he knew it not, the curious air of wonder that clings to clairvoyants and the simple of

the earth; the permanent arch of his eyebrows gave him an air of surprise, as if he were speculating on a thing Fate was going to pop into a mouth he conveniently kept open.

At the precise moment when Tomkins, wearying of self-admiration, was about to put the mirror back, the telephone bell rang. It rang so suddenly and so sharply that Tomkins' seasoned nerves gave way; the mirror fell crashing to the floor, while its owner said something his serious elder sister had told him never to say.

As he took up the receiver something told him, "That's the old man. At it again, can't get any peace." He was not deceived; for none but Mr. Richard Stone could the telephone bell have rung with such ferocity; not even the two hundred miles of wire which separated Leadenhall Street from Liverpool could dull his energy.

"Hullo! Is that you, Tomkins?"

"Yessir."

"Ah—Mr. James in?"

"No sir, Mr. James has gone."

There was a silence, during which the Trunk was so bad that Tomkins could not hear what Mr. Stone thought of his son's early hours. Then again—

"Look here, Tomkins"—(buzz, buzz)—"you hear me?"—(buzz).

"Yessir."

"Sell two hundred"—(buzz)—"two hundred thousand quarters—end September"—(buzz, buzz, rattle, rattle).

"Yessir, you said——"

"Two hundred thousand. Got that?" The noise in the line became deafening.

“And tell Mr. James to-morrow to”—(buzz, rattle)—“when he sees a profit of four shillings or so——”

“Yessir, tell him to——” Every man between London and Liverpool seemed to be shouting through that wire.

“Stop talking, Tomkins”—(buzz, rattle, hiss).—“Tell him I’ve got information that——” The remainder was lost in a fierce scream. Engine whistle probably.

“—sail in an hour——”

There was silence.

“Sir—I say, sir,” shouted Tomkins. There was no reply. “Gone,” he muttered, “gone. A shame, that’s what it is, a shame. Still, he’s gone. No more before he gets to New York.”

He settled down to execute his orders. It struck him, as broker after broker reported a lower price from the Baltic, that the “old man” was a “cute one”; the market looked weak. At twenty minutes to five he booked the last bargain, dismissed all thought of the transaction, made himself as elegant as he could without the broken mirror, and, thirty seconds after the head clerk, went home. The walk over Clapham Common had never been so pleasant, for it was April, English April, first weeping, then laughing, like a fair and fitful girl.

II

The seven days that followed were not distinguished by anything in particular. William Tomkins sat in the telephone box and did about a quarter of the work he had to face when the impetuous “old man” was in his office.

Mr. James, who was an exceeding dandy, noted without emotion the big order his father had booked; it did not interest him in the least, for the affairs of the firm bored him, and, though he would never have dared to breathe his intentions to his father, he was firmly resolved to turn over the corn business to somebody else as soon as it came into his hands, and to divide his life between Piccadilly and the Riviera, Trouville, and winter sports in Switzerland. Thus, when he cast a languid eye over the bargain book, which he held in a manicured hand, he merely said—

“Well, that’s all right, Tomkins. It’s a big deal; still, when you see four shillings profit, take it.”

As it never occurred to him to question the wisdom of his father’s operations, the matter did not crop up again, nor was there any need to raise it, for prices were not good; indeed, within two days they were bad. William Tomkins could not help admiring the “old man’s” grip of affairs.

“Wonderful,” he said confidentially to Johnson, the chief of the export department. “Does these things in the waiting-room, between two trains, and there you are; a point and a half down in three days, fifteen thousand pounds.”

The market continued to sag. There was too much corn; news came in that Russia was overstocked, that the United States were bursting with corn. France was smothered in corn. Every time the price fell half a point Richard Stone and Co. were five thousand pounds the richer, for they could buy back at a lower price that which they had sold high, and reap the difference.

Nothing came through from Mr. Stone, for he had

rashly booked his passage in a steamer belonging to an old-fashioned American line which had not yet accepted the gospel of Marconi.

William Tomkins watched the tape with feverish interest, waiting for the moment when Mr. Stone would triumph and scoop in his four point profit, forty thousand pounds. The tape ticked, ticked; just then the profit was three and a half—three and five-eighths—three-quarters—ah! it relapsed—three and a half again—three and three-quarters—three and seven-eighths—Tomkins bent over the shivering strip of paper.

“Go on,” he whispered to the machine, “go on. Do it, old girl, four points——”

Some one burst into the room.

“Here, Tomkins—I say, what’s this?”

Mr. James Stone was violently excited. William Tomkins, as he realised that the young man had forgotten his eyeglass, could not help wondering whether Mr. James had had an accident. It never occurred to him that a matter of business could so affect him. But Mr. James was far beyond trifling personal considerations; with trembling hands he handed Tomkins a cable from New York reading—

“Situation serious. In view heavy fall cut loss. Returning. Stone.”

Tomkins looked blankly at his young employer. Loss? Was the “old man” mad? Why, there was a sure profit of thirty-five thousand pounds at least.

“You sold those things? It’s all right, isn’t it?”

“Yessir,” said Tomkins, “the firm’s making about thirty-five thousand.”

“But then,” Mr. James stammered, “then my

father's got the thing wrong. He thinks we've bought."

William Tomkins looked at Mr. James, while an immense and horrible feeling of dismay crept over him—the Trunk must have been his undoing. But—and the thought struck him with revolutionary force, then his mistake had not only saved the firm thirty-five thousand pounds, but it had made thirty-five thousand for them.

"He told you to buy, didn't he?"

"Well, sir—I thought——"

"You thought?" Mr. James suddenly stopped, and an extraordinary expression crossed his features. "Tomkins," he said very slowly, "you don't mean to say you had the—the cheek to sell off your own bat when my father told you to buy?"

While he was speaking, Tomkins had analysed the situation. Yes, he had put his foot in it, but it was a success: if he kept cool it meant either immediate dismissal or promotion.

"Well, sir," he said with a deprecating smile, "you see one does think things out for oneself."

Mr. James gasped.

"Anyhow, I've made thirty-five thousand for the firm," said Tomkins negligently.

Mr. James hesitated, rearranged his disturbed tie.

"I—I think you'd better deal with my father about this," he said at length. "Meanwhile you'd better buy back your two hundred thousand quarters. You've—ahem—behaved disgracefully—still, I'll speak to my father when he arrives."

"Thank you, sir," said Tomkins gratefully to the elegant retreating back.

The week that separated Tomkins from the arrival

of Mr. Stone was not entirely pleasant. An explanation by marconigram (for Mr. Stone was in a hurry, and returning by the most modern steamer) had resulted in the three words: "Oh, did he?" in which the unfortunate dealing-clerk could hear the true ring of the "old man's" voice. Yet, when it came to it, the interview was not terrible. Richard Stone glared at the culprit for some seconds; the combination of his large dark eyes and shock of white hair was simply terrific. At last he boomed!

"So you went against my instructions, Tomkins?"

"I—I had an instinct, sir," faltered poor Tomkins. His heart was beating, and his legs felt strange, simultaneously knock-kneed and bandy. Mr. Stone looked at him in a fierce, inquisitorial way.

"Ahem. Instinct. Fine thing, instinct. Obedience, another fine thing. Still—it turned out all right—ahem—better than if you'd done what I said."

"Made thirty-eight thousand two hundred and six pounds, sir."

"And ninepence," murmured Mr. Stone. "Well, Tomkins, I'll be frank with you. I've been thinking this out on board ship. I ought to give you the sack; still, one wants courage in business, initiative. The long and short of it is that I've decided to give you a free hand in dealing. You can select a subordinate, and I'll raise your salary from two to four hundred a year."

III

The Tomkins affair was a great success. It leaked out very slowly in the office, for it obviously did not do to let the staff know that one might earn promotion

by disregarding orders. But Mr. Stone could not repress the internal delight with which Tomkins' deal had filled him. He could not help telling the story to the friends with whom he lunched at the club; from them it slowly percolated to their clerks, and back through them to the staff of Richard Stone and Co.

Tomkins began to breathe a peculiar atmosphere. The juniors now called him "sir." Johnson began to prefix his name with "Mr.," while the head clerk came over to his desk and said, "Tomkins, old chap, will you come to lunch?" Tomkins bore it very well. There was a halo round his head, and he felt quite ready to live up to it. The first thing to do was to be careful and to keep up his reputation; thus he dealt "small," took low profits, and cut losses whenever he felt himself to be in danger. Mr. Stone was a little disappointed.

"Tomkins," he said one day, "you're not so dashing as you were when you sold those two hundred thousand quarters."

"No, sir, it doesn't do to plunge. One must be careful—wait."

"Ahem. Wait for—an instinct, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, sir—perhaps—wait for an instinct."

Tomkins looked extremely wise as he said this, keeping his wide mouth steady. Mr. Stone merely said "Humph!" and left the room. He was rather impressed, though "he didn't like that instinct business much;" still, "perhaps he'd better let the fellow alone."

The situation did not develop for some time, and Tomkins, who was a prudent youth, realised with satisfaction that he was saving over two hundred a

year. But, though he knew it not, his business career was not over yet.

Johnson took his holiday in June, and Tomkins, being in high favour, was placed in charge of the export department. As he had not the slightest idea of what he was to do there, he allowed it to run itself, and confined himself to transmitting orders with an important air. On the third day of his tenure, Mr. James ordered him to forward a cargo of corn, then lying at the Azores, to the agents at Halifax, who would know what to do. Now William Tomkins, whose geography had been neglected, was not going to compromise his reputation by asking questions. He took down the gazetteer, and discovered that Halifax was a port in Nova Scotia; he read no further, so nothing whispered to him that Mr. James had given him a Jamesian address, and meant the wheat to go to Halifax, Yorks, *viâ* Liverpool and Manchester.

On the eve of Johnson's return, Tomkins was wanted by Mr. Stone.

"Tomkins." The "old man" paused and looked at him closely, so closely that the culprit was put on his guard. "Why did you send that corn to Nova Scotia when Mr. James said Yorkshire?"

All the old horrible sensations returned, but a wicked spirit murmured on behalf of Tomkins.

"Well, sir—I had an instinct——"

"Instinct!" shouted the "old man," as he shook his leonine white head. "You'll be telling me next that you knew there was going to be a blizzard in Canada—ruined crops—all that. You'll be telling me that you knew corn was going to famine prices from Quebec to Vancouver the day our ship got in——"

The "old man" stopped speechless, while Tomkins

attempted to pull himself together. Yes, he'd done it again, put his foot in it and done a great stroke—he must brazen it out. At last he demurely raised a blushing head.

“Yes, sir,” he faltered, “I did have an instinct.”

Mr. Stone looked at him in silence, and at last dismissed him without comment. But ten days later he informed Tomkins that, as his own son was—well, you know Mr. James, Tomkins—he would be taken into partnership at the end of the month. A few days later, while the fortunate youth was lunching at the best chop house in Lime Street, he heard behind him scraps of conversation.

“There, sandy-haired chap—Tomkins—Halifax—partner.”

Then he knew that he was a great man.

IV

The fame of Tomkins carried him high. He was placed above the staff and entitled to their respect, but he was invested with a mysterious something more, a something Mr. James did not enjoy, which made it impossible for a subordinate to engage him in conversation about the weather. The head clerk half regretted his friendly overtures, for he feared that the new partner might remember them and think them presumptuous; Johnson had swiftly turned his “Mr.” into “Sir,” while the juniors, when called to Tomkins' table, lost their otherwise fluent powers of speech.

It was, however, outside the office that Tomkins began to score anew. Mr. Stone had definitely made up his mind that he had a good man in the new recruit,

and relied upon him more and more every day. He observed, too, that a subtle change was coming over the junior partner, that Mr. James' influence and example were telling on him.

Tomkins was taking to excellent frock-coats, ties that probably cost seven and sixpence, and to shilling haircuts in the West End. He was seen with Mr. James at the theatre, and Mr. Stone, tempestuously making up his mind, decided that he should fill a seat at one of the second best dinners at his house in Queen's Gate.

It thus came about that, within two years of the memorable Trunk call, Tomkins found himself seated at Mr. Stone's table in front of four mysterious glasses, a select and complicated gathering of forks, and a Bruges epergne worth its weight in banknotes.

Tomkins, though not quite accustomed to the great world, and though Clapham had but recently been forsaken for Jermyn Street, withstood the magnificence of the company, the Indian colonel and his faded wife, the smart young barrister, the popular authoress, the ex-M.P., and the alderman removed but six years from the mayoral chair; he withstood the alderman's wife, though she bore heavy on her shoulders the fact that in six years her husband would be a knight; he even withstood Mr. Stone in the part of host, and Mr. James in the only part he could play—but he did not withstand Miss Gwendolen Stone.

A description of Gwendolen Stone was given by Tomkins to a club friend some days after the fateful meeting. It was, perhaps, highly coloured, for already Tomkins' interest in the lady was somewhat proprietary; still, it is important that in his eyes she appeared as a tall girl of twenty, crowned with the most lovely

black hair, a girl blue-eyed and red-lipped, whose hands were white and long, dressed—but here Tomkins' powers failed him; he knew only that, whatever she wore, it was soft, clinging, and delightfully becoming.

He did not tell his club friend, however, that Gwendolen had taken very little notice of him, though he had had the honour of taking her in to dinner; she had devoted herself to the rising young barrister. His name was Aubrey Warne; he had black hair, an aggressive nose, and eyebrows so heavy that they were clearly designed one day to beetle over the eyes of a judge.

Aubrey Warne was destined to be the fly in the pleasant ointment of Tomkins' life. Do what he would he could not rid himself of him. He called at five, as in duty bound, to find his hated rival—for he obviously was a rival—drinking tea and exchanging paradoxes with the sprightly Gwendolen. On calling again, this time at three, he discovered Aubrey Warne, who had been lunching at Queen's Gate, sharing with Gwendolen a sofa and a picture book.

The worst of the situation was that Aubrey Warne everywhere appeared unasked. Tomkins was not safe in Mr. Stone's box at the Opera, for his rival joined them between the acts. He went so far as to take a fancy to Tomkins, accosted him in Pall Mall, finally ran across him in the City, and even pursued him to his rooms, where for two martyring hours he dilated to the unfortunate Tomkins on the perfections of Gwendolen. During the minutes which Aubrey Warne left unspoiled Tomkins made some little progress. It was clear that Gwendolen liked him; certainly she liked his ties.

"I'm glad you like my ties, Miss Stone," he said one day, for despair had made him daring, "I wonder whether you've thought of a closer one?"

"What do you mean?" Gwendolen asked with fine simplicity as she opened very wide her big blue eyes.

Tomkins blushed, completely deceived, and stammered that he meant one of those chokers, but his spirits sank to the lowest depths. He did not guess that Gwendolen knew perfectly well that she played an important part in the daily drama of his life: She liked him well enough and respected him much, for her father's conversation had, for the last two years, been largely based on Tomkins' extraordinary instinct.

Still there was something lacking; she wanted a quality not to be found even under the intellectual brows of Aubrey Warne; she wanted a hero, a man apart, and wondered whether the pitting against each other of her two admirers would bring out of either a feat worthy of her hand.

It was in pursuit of his passion that the unfortunate Tomkins followed the Stones to Treruth during the holiday month. He arranged it with a duplicity that deceived nobody, for Mr. Stone saw through the transparent Tomkins. He did not interfere, judging that Tomkins would "do as well as any." Besides, "the fellow had an instinct."

It is not wonderful, then, that Tomkins knew for three days undiluted joys. He met Gwendolen on the parade, dressed all in white, and looking as lovely as in his dreams. He bathed with Gwendolen, he cycled with Gwendolen, he played tennis with Gwendolen. Above all, he could walk along the seashore with Gwendolen in the evening, when the moon and the west wind smiled on sentiment. At last, one night,

without artifice, he blurted out the truth. Gwendolen listened to him to the end.

"Mr. Tomkins," she said at last, "please don't press me. You see, I like you and I won't say No. Still, I had hoped for so much in marriage—a man who could do great deeds of heroism——"

"I will, I will for you," Tomkins protested fervently.

Gwendolen smiled and said she would see. Tomkins almost knew joy, for he kissed her hand and went unrebuked, but the next day a terrible thing happened. On calling at the Treruth Hotel he found, sitting by Gwendolen's side under the sunblind, the hated Aubrey Warne. Tomkins curbed his fury with an effort; he was even civil.

He knew despair now instead of joy, for the competition of Aubrey Warne, who was as smart in love as he was in law, was simply terrific. It was now the rising young barrister who cycled with Gwendolen, bathed with Gwendolen and, in the evening, walked with Gwendolen in the same propitious atmosphere, under the same moon. But the situation, as do all situations, came to a crisis.

One morning Aubrey Warne went down the hotel steps to bathe in the bay, while the beautiful Gwendolen, who that day had a headache, watched him from the window. The rising young barrister waded in up to his neck, turned to wave his hand to Gwendolen, and boldly swam out to sea. He was a good swimmer, but he did not know the Cornish waters. Two hundred yards from the shore he turned and made for home, but he somehow made no progress—then he realised that he was drifting away. He struggled desperately, but the current was too strong; soon he was being whirled out to sea.

Gwendolen sat watching him, first of all disquieted, then frightened, then horror-stricken as she realized what was happening. She was frozen, unable even to scream for help—she was going to see him drown. Then a wonderful thing happened. She saw Tomkins walk down the beach, push into the water an old boat, and calmly put out to sea. Her heart bounded as he seemed to pull towards the distant head of Aubrey Warne; she saw him gain on it, lean over, haul him in—then she fainted away.

It was good that Gwendolen had no instinct, or she would have known that Tomkins had not the faintest idea of what was going to happen. He merely proposed to row to the other side of the bay and there, alone, gloomily to fish, far away from the odious Aubrey Warne. Tomkins knew no more about Cornish waters than did his rival. He, too, was whirled away, paralysed, and it was only when he saw before him the feebly struggling swimmer that he realised he could be of use. He rescued Aubrey Warne at his last gasp, and, when he recognized him, had to strain his will-power to the utmost to refrain from returning him to the clamorous sea. This, the authentic story of Tomkins' heroism, ended in the two men being picked up by a tramp steamer and landed at Plymouth.

They returned by the evening train, Tomkins at his best, and Aubrey Warne unsuitably attired in overalls. On the platform, careless of publicity, the beautiful Gwendolen threw herself into Tomkins' arms.

"Oh, my hero," she murmured through her tears, "how brave, how unselfish to rescue him—him."

"Darling," said Tomkins, and he stroked the soft,

dark hair. But as he held her close to him, he thought :
“Well, I suppose it was my instinct.”

V

Mr. William Tomkins was now thirty-seven and an exceedingly happy man. The beautiful Gwendolen was as beautiful as ever, though she had been married seven years. Young Redvers Tomkins was destined for Eton, with Oxford and the diplomatic service to follow, for his father was now a rich man. Mr. Stone was dead, and Mr. James had precipitately handed over the business to the junior partner, while he retired to pace Piccadilly every day except when he was at Trouville, on the Riviera, or indulging in winter sports. Thus the Tomkins household had no difficulty in keeping up their house in Hyde Park Gate, their sixteen-room cottage near Basingstoke, and their shooting-box on the moors.

Tomkins was still Tomkins; his sandy hair was a little thinner, but not so his waist. There was about him an air of prosperity and security born of the possession of a good head clerk—a Johnson, whose efficiency waxed greater as the years went by, and an instinct which, if seldom manifested, gave him an almost magnetic influence in his deals. “He fascinates you, that fellow Tomkins,” was the City’s verdict. Tomkins did not only fascinate the City, he fascinated himself into the Commission of the Peace, fascinated himself into the Common Council, fascinated himself into the chairmanship of his political association. The daily papers even, which are not very sensitive to occult influences, could not resist the subtle charm; they mentioned Tomkins, Mrs. Tomkins, Redvers Tomkins.

One morning, as Tomkins sat in his private room, directing, with the assistance of the latest novel, the corn supplies of the world, the commissioner informed him that the secretary of the "People's Self-Help Association" craved an audience.

"What does he want?" Tomkins asked; "money, I suppose."

The commissioner looked respectful assent but said nothing.

"Well," said the great man, "show him in." The novel was rather dull.

The secretary was a little man with a face obviously trained to compromise with situations. It smiled, it sympathized, it wheedled and bullied whenever circumstances required. He explained at great length the objects of the People's Self-Help Association, a noble body which could raise anybody from the mire, provide colonial homes for the forlorn, porters' jobs for unemployed clerks, envelope addressing at remunerative rates for fraudulent solicitors. To do all this, however, the Association wanted money, much money.

"So," the secretary concluded, "we thought of you, Mr. Tomkins."

"Oh, very kind of you; what do you say to—two guineas?"

The secretary's face assumed its most cajoling air.

"Oh, Mr. Tomkins, thank you very much; still we had an idea—we wondered—in fact, we need ten thousand pounds."

Tomkins leapt to his feet. Really this was too bad. And the fellow wasn't joking.

"Quite impossible," he said coldly.

"But Mr. Tomkins," the secretary protested, "everybody knows you're a millionaire."

"That's got nothing to do with it." Tomkins was not quite a millionaire, but did not dislike the suggestion.

"You see," the secretary pursued ingratiatingly, "I speak as a man of business, Mr. Tomkins. I quite understand it's a large sum, and that you'd expect some return."

"Some return?" Tomkins' eyes opened very wide.

The secretary's face became intensely mysterious; he looked to the right and left, tightened his lips, and whispered—

"What would you say, Mr. Tomkins, if I told you that, as the Honours List comes out next Tuesday—a baronetcy would be possible? We have influence, a great deal of influence."

Tomkins thought for some seconds. This was another proposition; rather dear, still Gwendolen would like it—it would be rather heroic—and then there was Redvers, Sir Redvers. He resumed his seat.

"Oh," he said at length, "that's different."

The secretary was now talking with fine volubility. He flashed before the dazzled Tomkins a vision of Sir William Tomkins and Sir William Tomkins' crest, specially discovered by the College of Heralds, and Sir William Tomkins entertaining his tenants. At last he gained his point.

"All right," said Tomkins, "I'll give you a cheque now." He opened his private drawer, pulled out his cheque-book and, in exchange for the secretary's written pledge, handed him the princely and philanthropic gift.

Three days later Sir William and Lady Tomkins were congratulated by the highest circles on their well-

deserved distinction. Nothing further happened; the career of Richard Stone and Tomkins pursued its course. Twelve days later a bank at Montreal smashed, entailing upon the firm a loss of fourteen and elevenpence, their balance at the time. Just after Sir William had been apprised by Johnson of the sad news an infuriated, almost tearful secretary was shown into the room.

"Look," he screamed, as he threw before Tomkins a little strip of paper, "you—you swindled me—that cheque hasn't been met."

Tomkins took it up. Yes, quite wonderful, he must have made a mistake, picked up the disused cheque-book that still lay in the drawer and drawn ten thousand pounds against that fourteen and elevenpence.

"Very sad," he remarked vaguely; "that bank's smashed."

"Smashed!" shouted the secretary, "of course it's smashed, but where's our ten thousand pounds? You've lost your money, but where are we?"

And then Tomkins realised the situation. The cheque arrived at Montreal after the breaking of the bank. It had never been presented, but the secretary thought the ten thousand pounds were lost; *he did not know that the firm's balance was only fourteen and elevenpence.*

"Well," said Sir William, "what can I do? You don't expect me to give you ten thousand pounds after—after that awful smash?" He saved his conscience by this careful phrasing.

"N-no," muttered the secretary, "still, you owe us a baronetcy."

"Yes, yes," said Tomkins airily. "Now, I'll be

generous; I'll give you—twenty-five guineas and say no more about it."

"Sir William!" gasped the secretary, "you're joking."

"Not at all. It may seem a lot——"

"A lot! It's a disgrace."

The end of the debate was that the secretary, who did not care to sue on the cheque and face in Court the story of Tomkins' baronetcy, left a quarter of an hour later, minus the cheque and with twenty-six sovereigns and five shillings chinking in his pocket.

Sir William Tomkins leaned back in his chair and dreamily looked towards Leadenhall Street.

"I wonder," he slowly soliloquized, "how I made so foolish a mistake as to take up the wrong cheque-book?" After a pause something within him whispered: "Well, I suppose it was an instinct."

3. THE SHIVALEER

“**T**HE age of chivalry,” panted Mrs. Gettysburg, “is dead. Yes, dead.”

Certainly as she pushed over her eyes a hat which had in the struggle been transported to the back of her neck, reinserted a comb, replaced the ruffle of her blouse, and, with my help, collected from the pavement her parasol, little bag, two parcels and evening paper, it looked as if there were something in Mrs. Gettysburg’s plaint. In view of all this I suppose I need not explain at length that she had been trying to enter a motor-’bus at Oxford Circus on the stroke of six o’clock.

“Maybe,” I said gently; “though let me point out that your own sex has just had a hand in—well, let us say, ruffling you. I deliberately saw one woman——”

“Perhaps you did see,” snapped Mrs. Gettysburg, “but I felt. And what I felt was a navy’s elbow in my ribs and a City man’s bag in my face. I repeat, chivalry is dead. There isn’t a man in the world who won’t knock a woman down if she’s in the way, whilst the idea of doing anything for her, saving her trouble, making life easy for her—oh, that simply never occurs to them. Mean, cowardly brutes! You wait till the next No. 7 comes. I won’t be left standing here, if I smash ten top-hats.”

I attempted to soothe her outraged feelings by remarking that this was not quite the spirit of those women who inspired the great deeds of Perseus, Launcelot and Don Quixote, but my logic, being unanswerable, proved to be a mere irritant. Mrs. Gettysburg abandoned her attack on man in the abstract, and forgetting I had just picked up several articles for her, turned on me with the ferocity which is the salt of our friendship.

"And who are you to talk?" screamed Mrs. Gettysburg, as she waved her parasol and dropped a parcel, which I restored to her without being rewarded by thanks. "What do you do for a woman? If you'd been a man you'd have knocked that navy down."

"He was too big," I faltered.

"Hum! A nice thing for a shivaleer to think of. A shivaleer, indeed!"

I should explain that Mrs. Gettysburg's French pronunciation is—well, what it is.

"Talk," she renewed; "that's all you can do. Talk, and write silly little stories about heroic things men *don't* do. Why, let alone slaying dragons and tilting at windmills, and all that sort of thing, you're not even the sort of man who gives up his seat in the Underground when a poor woman with three babies is hanging to the strap just in front of him and treading on his toes every ten seconds."

"Oh," I protested, "I do, I assure you I do, if she treads hard enough."

"I suppose you call that funny," said Mrs. Gettysburg icily. And as I saw she was about to sulk I thought well to smooth her somewhat.

"You know," I said, "perhaps you are right. Per-

haps I don't give up my seat in the Underground, but then that's a principle of mine."

"Principle," sniffed Mrs. Gettysburg; "in other words, self-help."

"Dear Mrs. Gettysburg," I said, "you are so unkind that I am inclined to tell you how I acquired that principle. Still, no, I will not tell you; you might be shocked."

"If it's going to be one of your usual kind of story," she murmured dubiously.

"It is," I replied relentlessly.

"Ah! well—mind you, I wouldn't have you tell it if it wasn't that another No. 7 has passed without stopping at all. Go on."

"On your head be it, then. You should know that years ago, when I was a younger and more foolish man, I made a practice of yielding up my seat in tube, 'bus and Underground to any woman who wanted it. I always did it; I did it for old ladies and young women, for women with babies and women with band-boxes. I was such an utter shivaleer that I even made way for hockey girls. I did mad, absurd things. Once I gave up my right to the last seat in the City Atlas on a wet night to a German governess, and walked four miles in the rain to Hampstead."

"Hum!" said Mrs. Gettysburg incredulously.

"Yes, you may well say 'Hum!' Though true, it doesn't sound likely. Well, all that changed inside an hour. On a beautiful July evening some years ago, at this time and at this very spot, I was sitting on the near inside seat of the Bayswater 'bus. We stopped, though loaded to the full, opposite Jay's, for there was in front of us a regular clot of 'buses. I looked down, interested in the crowd—milliner girls and suburban

ladies, and horsey-looking clerks and actor-managers. It was gay, July-like, but within a few seconds I had forgotten about the crowd, for I was looking into the eyes of the prettiest, the most lovely girl I have ever seen. Oh, I simply couldn't describe her to you——”

“I could,” sniffed Mrs. Gettysburg: “big blue eyes, hair which a man believes to be free from peroxide, and a smile fit for a picture postcard.”

“How did you know?”

“Oh, I know your criteria of feminine beauty. Go on with your refined tale.”

“Well, as you have guessed the unique charm of this girl, I will go on. I looked for some seconds into those lovely dark blue pools—yes, you can laugh—I did. I was entranced; I knew it was rude to stare, but I had to. She didn't seem to mind; she looked at me, too—poor, lonely thing, waiting for a cruel 'bus. And then—I'll never forget it—in the very faintest way she deliciously smiled. I can't tell you what came over me, I simply couldn't help myself. I leapt to my feet, pushed past everybody in football scrum style, hurled myself down the steps—there stood my charmer waiting for me, still smiling like an angel. As I jumped on the pavement I took off my hat, and then——”

“Then?”

“Then she leapt forward, seized the rail, and climbed up to the top, sat down in my seat. I think it is rather mean of you to laugh,” I said, after a moment, while Mrs. Gettysburg wiped both her eyes.

“Oh!” she gasped. “Oh, it's too lovely! And is that why you——”

“No,” I said severely, “the story has a sequel; that

was only half my lesson. After standing on the pavement for five minutes saying things I will not demean myself by repeating, I had to take the tube. That also was very full, but I was on my mettle, and after kicking an old crippled gentleman and scattering a sickly child or two I found a seat. At Bond Street, among others, another girl came in, but she had to hold on to a strap in front of me. She was much prettier than the other, though very like her. And she threw me the sweetest appealing glances I have ever seen; but no! my heart was steeled. I merely looked at her with an arrogant air. A young man who was sitting next to me rose, clumsy as a bear, and offered her his seat. Without a word of thanks she subsided into it. The minx! Still, as I looked at her I felt less resentful. She was pretty—oh! really pretty—and there was something about her—a scent of heliotrope. When the young fool who had given up his seat regretfully got out at Marble Arch I was feeling much more friendly towards her. I was sorry for him, for he, too, had not been able to keep his eyes away from her. Need I tell you the rest? I found myself looking at her shyly, then more confidently as I found she did not seem to mind. Indeed, at Lancaster Gate she looked at me and I forgot my grievance. At Queen's Road a wonderful thing happened: so many of Whiteley's shoppers got in that we were wedged close, and as I moved, my hand touched the smallest, most graceful little white-gloved hand in the world. At Holland Park, where we both alighted, she dropped her bag. It burst open. I picked up the contents; we talked about little bags. Conversation about little bags is sometimes so interesting. Then—well, you know how things do develop."

“Hum!” said Mrs. Gettysburg doubtfully. Then, and very suddenly, a No. 7 appeared. With a fierce battle-cry my friend drove a sharp elbow into my waistcoat and leaped into the one available seat. There are no female shivaleers.

THE END



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