

The Project Gutenberg Complete Works of Gilbert Parker

Gilbert Parker

The Project Gutenberg Ebook The PG Complete Works of Gilbert Parker
#127 in our series by Gilbert Parker

Copyright laws are changing all over the world. Be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before downloading or redistributing this or any other Project Gutenberg eBook.

This header should be the first thing seen when viewing this Project Gutenberg file. Please do not remove it. Do not change or edit the header without written permission.

Please read the "legal small print," and other information about the eBook and Project Gutenberg at the bottom of this file. Included is important information about your specific rights and restrictions in how the file may be used. You can also find out about how to make a donation to Project Gutenberg, and how to get involved.

****Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts****

****EBooks Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971****

*******These EBooks Were Prepared By Thousands of Volunteers*******

Title: The Project Gutenberg Complete Works of Gilbert Parker

Author: Gilbert Parker

Release Date: Aug, 2004 [EBook #6300]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on December 19, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE COMPLETE WORKS OF PARKER *****

This eBook was produced by David Widger <widger@cecomet.net>

Livros Grátis

<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

CONTENTS:

The Judgment House
Pierre and His People
Romany of the Snows
Northern Lights
Mrs. Falchion
Cumner & South Sea Folk
Valmond Came to Pontiac
The Trail of the Sword
Translation of a Savage
Pomp of the Lavillettes
At Sign of the Eagle
The Trespasser
March of White Guard
Seats of the Mighty
Battle Of The Strong
Lane Had No Turning
Parables Of A Province
The Right Of Way
Michel And Angele
John Enderby
Sorrow On The Sea
Donovan Pasha &c
The Weavers
Embers (Poetry)
A Lover's Diary(Poetry)
The Money Master
The World For Sale
Never Know Your Luck
Wild Youth
No Defense
Carnac's Folly

THE JUDGMENT HOUSE

by Gilbert Parker

The "Judgment House" etext was produced by Juli Rew (juliana@ucar.edu)

NOTE

Except where references to characters well-known to all the world occur in these pages, this book does not present a picture of public

or private individuals living or dead. It is not in any sense a historical novel. It is in conception and portraiture a work of the imagination.

"Strangers come to the outer wall--
(Why do the sleepers stir?)
Strangers enter the Judgment House--
(Why do the sleepers sigh?)
Slow they rise in their judgment seats,
Sieve and measure the naked souls,
Then with a blessing return to sleep.
(Quiet the Judgment House.)
Lone and sick are the vagrant souls--
(When shall the world come home?)"

"Let them fight it out, friend! things have gone too far,
God must judge the couple: leave them as they are--
Whichever one's the guiltless, to his glory,
And whichever one the guilt's with, to my story!

"Once more. Will the wronger, at this last of all,
Dare to say, 'I did wrong,' rising in his fall?
No? Let go, then! Both the fighters to their places!
While I count three, step you back as many paces!"

"And the Sibyl, you know. I saw her with my own eyes at
Cumae, hanging in a jar; and when the boys asked her, 'What
would you, Sibyl?' she answered, 'I would die.'"

"So is Pheidippides happy for ever,--the noble strong man
Who would race like a God, bear the face of a God, whom a
God loved so well:
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began
So to end gloriously--once to shout, thereafter to be mute:
'Athens is saved!' Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed."

"Oh, never star
Was lost here, but it rose afar."

THE JUDGMENT HOUSE

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE JASMINE FLOWER

The music throbbed in a voice of singular and delicate power; the air was resonant with melody, love and pain. The meanest Italian in the gallery far up beneath the ceiling, the most exalted of the land in the boxes and the stalls, leaned indulgently forward, to be swept by this sweet storm of song. They yielded themselves utterly to the power of the triumphant debutante who was making "Manassa" the musical feast of the year, renewing to Covent Garden a reputation which recent lack of enterprise had somewhat forfeited.

Yet, apparently, not all the vast audience were hypnotized by the unknown and unheralded singer, whose stage name was Al'mah. At the moment of the opera's supreme appeal the eyes of three people at least were not in the thrall of the singer. Seated at the end of the first row of the stalls was a fair, slim, graciously attired man of about thirty, who, turning in his seat so that nearly the whole house was in his circle of vision, stroked his golden moustache, and ran his eyes over the thousands of faces with a smile of pride and satisfaction which in a less handsome man would have been almost a leer. His name was Adrian Fellowes.

Either the opera and the singer had no charms for Adrian Fellowes, or else he had heard both so often that, without doing violence to his musical sense, he could afford to study the effect of this wonderful effort upon the mob of London, mastered by the radiant being on the stage. Very sleek, handsome, and material he looked; of happy colour, and, apparently, with a mind and soul in which no conflicts ever raged--to the advantage of his attractive exterior. Only at the summit of the applause did he turn to the stage again. Then it was with the gloating look of the gambler who swings from the roulette-table with the winnings of a great coup, cynical joy in his eyes that he has beaten the Bank, conquered the dark spirit which has tricked him so often. Now the cold-blue eyes caught, for a second, the dark-brown eyes of the Celtic singer, which laughed at him gaily, victoriously, eagerly, and then again drank in the light and the joy of the myriad faces before her.

In a box opposite the royal box were two people, a man and a very young woman, who also in the crisis of the opera were not looking at the stage. The eyes of the man, sitting well back--purposely, so that he might see her without marked observation--were fixed upon the rose-tinted, delicate features of the girl in a joyous blue silk gown, which was so perfect a contrast to the golden hair and wonderful colour of her face. Her eyes were fixed upon her lap, the lids half closed, as though in reverie, yet with that perspicuous and reflective look which showed her conscious of all that was passing round her--even the effect of her own pose. Her name was Jasmine Grenfel.

She was not oblivious of the music. Her heart beat faster because of it; and a temperament adjustable to every mood and turn of human feeling was answering to the poignancy of the opera; yet her youth, child-likeness, and natural spontaneity were controlled by an elate consciousness. She was responsive to the passionate harmony; but she was also acutely sensitive to the bold yet deferential appeal to her emotions of the dark, distinguished, bearded man at her side, with the brown eyes and the Grecian profile, whose years spent in the Foreign

Office and at embassies on the Continent had given him a tact and an insinuating address peculiarly alluring to her sex. She was well aware of Ian Stafford's ambitions, and had come to the point where she delighted in them, and had thought of sharing in them, "for weal or for woe"; but she would probably have resented the suggestion that his comparative poverty was weighed against her natural inclinations and his real and honest passion. For she had her ambitions, too; and when she had scanned the royal box that night, she had felt that something only little less than a diadem would really satisfy her.

Then it was that she had turned meditatively towards another occupant of her box, who sat beside her pretty stepmother--a big, bronzed, clean-shaven, strong-faced man of about the same age as Ian Stafford of the Foreign Office, who had brought him that night at her request. Ian had called him, "my South African nabob," in tribute to the millions he had made with Cecil Rhodes and others at Kimberley and on the Rand. At first sight of the forceful and rather ungainly form she had inwardly contrasted it with the figure of Ian Stafford and that other spring-time figure of a man at the end of the first row in the stalls, towards which the prima donna had flashed one trusting, happy glance, and with which she herself had been familiar since her childhood. The contrast had not been wholly to the advantage of the nabob; though, to be sure, he was simply arrayed--as if, indeed, he were not worth a thousand a year. Certainly he had about him a sense of power, but his occasional laugh was too vigorous for one whose own great sense of humour was conveyed by an infectious, rippling murmur delightful to hear.

Rudyard Byng was worth three millions of pounds, and that she interested him was evident by the sudden arrest of his look and his movements when introduced to her. Ian Stafford had noted this look; but he had seen many another man look at Jasmine Grenfel with just as much natural and unbidden interest, and he shrugged the shoulders of his mind; for the millions alone would not influence her, that was sure. Had she not a comfortable fortune of her own? Besides, Byng was not the kind of man to capture Jasmine's fastidious sense and nature. So much had happened between Jasmine and himself, so deep an understanding had grown up between them, that it only remained to bring her to the last court of inquiry and get reply to a vital question--already put in a thousand ways and answered to his perfect satisfaction. Indeed, there was between Jasmine and himself the equivalent of a betrothal. He had asked her to marry him, and she had not said no; but she had bargained for time to "prepare"; that she should have another year in which to be gay in a gay world and, in her own words, "walk the primrose path of pleasure untrammelled and alone, save for my dear friend Mrs. Grundy."

Since that moment he had been quite sure that all was well. And now the year was nearly up, and she had not changed; had, indeed, grown more confiding and delicately dependent in manner towards him, though seeing him but seldom alone.

As Ian Stafford looked at her now, he kept saying to himself, "So exquisite and so clever, what will she not be at thirty! So well poised, and yet so sweetly child-like dear dresden-china Jasmine."

That was what she looked like--a lovely thing of the time of Boucher in dresden china.

At last, as though conscious of what was going on in his mind, she slowly turned her drooping eyes towards him, and, over her shoulder, as he quickly leaned forward, she said in a low voice which the others could not hear:

"I am too young, and not clever enough to understand all the music means--is that what you are thinking?"

He shook his head in negation, and his dark-brown eyes commanded hers, but still deferentially, as he said: "You know of what I was thinking. You will be forever young, but yours was always--will always be--the wisdom of the wise. I'd like to have been as clever at twenty-two."

"How trying that you should know my age so exactly--it darkens the future," she rejoined with a soft little laugh; then, suddenly, a cloud passed over her face. It weighed down her eyelids, and she gazed before her into space with a strange, perplexed, and timorous anxiety. What did she see? Nothing that was light and joyous, for her small sensuous lips drew closer, and the fan she held in her lap slipped from her fingers to the floor.

This aroused her, and Stafford, as he returned the fan to her, said into a face again alive to the present: "You look as though you were trying to summon the sable spirits of a sombre future."

Her fine pink-white shoulders lifted a little and, once more quite self-possessed, she rejoined, lightly, "I have a chameleon mind; it chimes with every mood and circumstance."

Suddenly her eyes rested on Rudyard Byng, and something in the rough power of the head arrested her attention, and the thought flashed through her mind: "How wonderful to have got so much at thirty-three! Three millions at thirty-three--and millions beget millions!"

. . . Power--millions meant power; millions made ready the stage for the display and use of every gift, gave the opportunity for the full occupation of all personal qualities, made a setting for the jewel of life and beauty, which reflected, intensified every ray of merit. Power--that was it. Her own grandfather had had power. He had made his fortune, a great one too, by patents which exploited the vanity of mankind, and, as though to prove his cynical contempt for his fellow-creatures, had then invented a quick-firing gun which nearly every nation in the world adopted. First, he had got power by a fortune which represented the shallowness and gullibility of human nature, then had exploited the serious gift which had always been his, the native genius which had devised the gun when he was yet a boy. He had died at last with the smile on his lips which had followed his remark, quoted in every great newspaper of two continents, that: "The world wants to be fooled, so I fooled it; it wants to be stunned, so I stunned it. My fooling will last as long as my gun; and both have paid me well. But they all love being fooled best."

Old Draygon Grenfel's fortune had been divided among his three sons and herself, for she had been her grandfather's favourite, and she was the only grandchild to whom he had left more than a small reminder of his existence. As a child her intelligence was so keen, her perception so acute, she realized him so well, that he had said she was the only one of his blood who had anything of himself in character or

personality, and he predicted--too often in her presence--that she "would give the world a start or two when she had the chance." His intellectual contempt for his eldest son, her father, was reproduced in her with no prompting on his part; and, without her own mother from the age of three, Jasmine had grown up self-willed and imperious, yet with too much intelligence to carry her will and power too far. Infinite adaptability had been the result of a desire to please and charm; behind which lay an unlimited determination to get her own way and bend other wills to hers.

The two wills she had not yet bent as she pleased were those of her stepmother and of Ian Stafford--one, because she was jealous and obstinate, and the other because he had an adequate self-respect and an ambition of his own to have his way in a world which would not give save at the point of the sword. Come of as good family as there was in England, and the grandson of a duke, he still was eager for power, determined to get on, ingenious in searching for that opportunity which even the most distinguished talent must have, if it is to soar high above the capable average. That chance, the predestined alluring opening had not yet come; but his eyes were wide open, and he was ready for the spring--nerved the more to do so by the thought that Jasmine would appreciate his success above all others, even from the standpoint of intellectual appreciation, all emotions excluded. How did it come that Jasmine was so worldly wise, and yet so marvellously the insouciant child?

He followed her slow, reflective glance at Byng, and the impression of force and natural power of the millionaire struck him now, as it had often done. As though summoned by them both, Byng turned his face and, catching Jasmine's eyes, smiled and leaned forward.

"I haven't got over that great outburst of singing yet," he said, with a little jerk of the head towards the stage, where, for the moment, minor characters were in possession, preparing the path for the last rush of song by which Al'mah, the new prima donna, would bring her first night to a complete triumph.

With face turned full towards her, something of the power of his head seemed to evaporate swiftly. It was honest, alert, and almost brutally simple--the face of a pioneer. The forehead was broad and strong, and the chin was square and determined; but the full, dark-blue eyes had in them shadows of rashness and recklessness, the mouth was somewhat self-indulgent and indolent; though the hands clasping both knees were combined of strength, activity, and also a little of grace.

"I never had much chance to hear great singers before I went to South Africa," he added, reflectively, "and this swallows me like a storm on the high veld--all lightning and thunder and flood. I've missed a lot in my time."

With a look which made his pulses gallop, Jasmine leaned over and whispered--for the prima donna was beginning to sing again:

"There's nothing you have missed in your race that you cannot ride back and collect. It is those who haven't run a race who cannot ride back. You have won; and it is all waiting for you."

Again her eyes beamed upon him, and a new sensation came to him--the kind of thing he felt once when he was sixteen, and the vicar's

daughter had suddenly held him up for quite a week, while all his natural occupations were neglected, and the spirit of sport was humiliated and abashed. Also he had caroused in his time--who was there in those first days at Kimberley and on the Rand who did not carouse, when life was so hard, luck so uncertain, and food so bad; when men got so dead beat, with no homes anywhere--only shake-downs and the Tents of Shem? Once he had had a native woman summoned to be his slave, to keep his home; but that was a business which had revolted him, and he had never repeated the experiment. Then, there had been an adventuress, a wandering, foreign princess who had fooled him and half a dozen of his friends to the top of their bent; but a thousand times he had preferred other sorts of pleasures--cards, horses, and the bright outlook which came with the clinking glass after the strenuous day.

Jasmine seemed to divine it all as she looked at him--his primitive, almost Edenic sincerity; his natural indolence and native force: a nature that would not stir until greatly roused, but then, with an unyielding persistence and concentrated force, would range on to its goal, making up for a slow-moving intellect by sheer will, vision and a gallant heart.

Al'mah was singing again, and Byng leaned forward eagerly. There was a rustle in the audience, a movement to a listening position, then a tense waiting and attention.

As Jasmine composed herself she said in a low voice to Ian Stafford, whose well-proportioned character, personality, and refinement of culture were in such marked contrast to the personality of the other: "They live hard lives in those new lands. He has wasted much of himself."

"Three millions at thirty-three means spending a deal of one thing to get another," Ian answered a little grimly.

"Hush! Oh, Ian, listen!" she added in a whisper.

Once more Al'mah rose to mastery over the audience. The bold and generous orchestration, the exceptional chorus, the fine and brilliant tenor, had made a broad path for her last and supreme effort. The audience had long since given up their critical sense, they were ready to be carried into captivity again, and the surrender was instant and complete. Now, not an eye was turned away from the singer. Even the Corinthian gallant at the end of the first row of stalls gave himself up to feasting on her and her success, and the characters in the opera were as electrified as the audience.

For a whole seven minutes this voice seemed to be the only thing in the world, transposing all thoughts, emotions, all elements of life into terms of melody. Then, at last, with a crash of sweetness, the voice broke over them all in crystals of sound and floated away into a world of bright dreams.

An instant's silence which followed was broken by a tempest of applause. Again, again, and again it was renewed. The subordinate singers were quickly disposed of before the curtain, then Al'mah received her memorable tribute. How many times she came and went she never knew; but at last the curtain, rising, showed her well up the stage beside a table where two huge candles flared. The storm of

applause breaking forth once more, the grateful singer raised her arms and spread them out impulsively in gratitude and dramatic abandon.

As she did so, the loose, flowing sleeve of her robe caught the flame of a candle, and in an instant she was in a cloud of fire. The wild applause turned suddenly to notes of terror as, with a sharp cry, she stumbled forward to the middle of the stage.

For one stark moment no one stirred, then suddenly a man with an opera-cloak on his arm was seen to spring across a space of many feet between a box on the level of the stage and the stage itself. He crashed into the footlights, but recovered himself and ran forward. In an instant he had enveloped the agonized figure of the singer and had crushed out the flames with swift, strong movements.

Then lifting the now unconscious artist in his great arms, he strode off with her behind the scenes.

"Well done, Byng! Well done, Ruddy Byng!" cried a strong voice from the audience; and a cheer went up.

In a moment Byng returned and came down the stage. "She is not seriously hurt," he said simply to the audience. "We were just in time."

Presently, as he entered the Grenfel box again, deafening applause broke forth.

"We were just in time," said Ian Stafford, with an admiring, teasing laugh, as he gripped Byng's arm.

"We'--well, it was a royal business," said Jasmine, standing close to him and looking up into his eyes with that ingratiating softness which had deluded many another man; "but do you realize that it was my cloak you took?" she added, whimsically.

"Well, I'm glad it was," Byng answered, boyishly. "You'll have to wear my overcoat home."

"I certainly will," she answered. "Come--the giant's robe."

People were crowding upon their box.

"Let's get out of this," Byng said, as he took his coat from the hook on the wall.

As they left the box the girl's white-haired, prematurely aged father whispered in the pretty stepmother's ear: "Jasmine'll marry that nabob--you'll see."

The stepmother shrugged a shoulder. "Jasmine is in love with Ian Stafford," she said, decisively.

"But she'll marry Rudyard Byng," was the stubborn reply.

CHAPTER II

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

"What's that you say--Jameson--what?"

Rudyard Byng paused with the lighted match at the end of his cigar, and stared at a man who was reading from a tape-machine, which gave the club the world's news from minute to minute.

"Dr. Jameson's riding on Johannesburg with eight hundred men. He started from Pitsani two days ago. And Cronje with his burghers are out after him."

The flaming match burned Byng's fingers. He threw it into the fireplace, and stood transfixed for a moment, his face hot with feeling, then he burst out:

"But--God! they're not ready at Johannesburg. The burghers'll catch him at Doornkop or somewhere, and--" He paused, overcome. His eyes suffused. His hands went out in a gesture of despair.

"Jameson's jumped too soon," he muttered. "He's lost the game for them."

The other eyed him quizzically. "Perhaps he'll get in yet. He surely planned the thing with due regard for every chance. Johannesburg--"

"Johannesburg isn't ready, Stafford. I know. That Jameson and the Rand should coincide was the only chance. And they'll not coincide now. It might have been--it was to have been--a revolution at Johannesburg, with Dr. Jim to step in at the right minute. It's only a filibustering business now, and Oom Paul will catch the filibuster, as sure as guns. 'Gad, it makes me sick!'"

"Europe will like it--much," remarked Ian Stafford, cynically, offering Byng a lighted match.

Byng grumbled out an oath, then fixed his clear, strong look on Stafford. "It's almost enough to make Germany and France forget 1870 and fall into each other's arms," he answered. "But that's your business, you Foreign Office people's business. It's the fellows out there, friends of mine, so many of them, I'm thinking of. It's the British kids that can't be taught in their mother-tongue, and the men who pay all the taxes and can't become citizens. It's the justice you can only buy; it's the foot of Kruger on the necks of the subjects of his suzerain; it's eating dirt as Englishmen have never had to eat it anywhere in the range of the Seven Seas. And when they catch Dr. Jim, it'll be ten times worse. Yes, it'll be at Doornkop, unless-- But, no, they'll track him, trap him, get him now. Johannesburg wasn't ready. Only yesterday I had a cable that--" he stopped short . . . "but they weren't ready. They hadn't guns enough, or something; and Englishmen aren't good conspirators, not by a damned sight! Now it'll be the old Majuba game all over again. You'll see."

"It certainly will set things back. Your last state will be worse than your first," remarked Stafford.

Rudyard Byng drained off a glass of brandy and water at a gulp almost,

as Stafford watched him with inward adverse comment, for he never touched wine or spirits save at meal-time, and the between-meal swizzle revolted his Eesthetic sense. Byng put down the glass very slowly, gazing straight before him for a moment without speaking. Then he looked round. There was no one very near, though curious faces were turned in his direction, as the grim news of the Raid was passed from mouth to mouth. He came up close to Stafford and touched his chest with a firm forefinger.

"Every egg in the basket is broken, Stafford. I'm sure of that. Dr. Jim'll never get in now; and there'll be no oeufs a la coque for breakfast. But there's an omelette to be got out of the mess, if the chef doesn't turn up his nose too high. After all, what has brought things to this pass? Why, mean, low tyranny and injustice. Why, just a narrow, jealous race-hatred which makes helots of British men. Simple farmers, the sentimental newspapers call them--simple Machiavellis in veldschoen!" *

Stafford nodded assent. "But England is a very conventional chef," he replied. "She likes the eggs for her omelette broken in the orthodox way."

"She's not so particular where the eggs come from, is she?"

Stafford smiled as he answered: "There'll be a good many people in England who won't sleep to-night some because they want Jameson to get in; some because they don't; but most because they're thinking of the millions of British money locked up in the Rand, with Kruger standing over it with a sjambak, which he'll use. Last night at the opera we had a fine example of presence of mind, when a lady burst into flames on the stage. That spirited South African prima donna, the Transvaal, is in flames. I wonder if she really will be saved, and who will save her, and--"

A light, like the sun, broke over the gloomy and rather haggard face of Rudyard Byng, and humour shot up into his eyes. He gave a low, generous laugh, as he said with a twinkle: "And whether he does it at some expense to himself--with his own overcoat, or with some one else's cloak. Is that what you want to say?"

All at once the personal element, so powerful in most of us--even in moments when interests are in existence so great that they should obliterate all others--came to the surface. For a moment it almost made Byng forget the crisis which had come to a land where he had done all that was worth doing, so far in his life; which had burned itself into his very soul; which drew him, sleeping or waking, into its arms of memory and longing.

He had read only one paper that morning, and it--the latest attempt at sensational journalism--had so made him blush at the flattering references to himself in relation to the incident at the opera, that he had opened no other. He had left his chambers to avoid the telegrams and notes of congratulation which were arriving in great numbers. He had gone for his morning ride in Battersea Park instead of the Row to escape observation; had afterwards spent two hours at the house he was building in Park Lane; had then come to the club, where he had encountered Ian Stafford and had heard the news which overwhelmed him.

"Well, an opera cloak did the work better than an overcoat would have done," Stafford answered, laughing. "It was a flash of real genius to think of it. You did think it all out in the second, didn't you?"

Stafford looked at him curiously, for he wondered if the choice of a soft cloak which could more easily be wrapped round the burning woman than an overcoat was accidental, or whether it was the product of a mind of unusual decision.

Byng puffed out a great cloud of smoke and laughed again quietly as he replied:

"Well, I've had a good deal of lion and rhinoceros shooting in my time, and I've had to make up my mind pretty quick now and then; so I suppose it gets to be a habit. You don't stop to think when the trouble's on you; you think as you go. If I'd stopped to think, I'd have funk'd the whole thing, I suppose--jumping from that box onto the stage, and grabbing a lady in my arms, all in the open, as it were. But that wouldn't have been the natural man. The natural man that's in most of us, even when we're not very clever, does things right. It's when the conventional man comes in and says, Let us consider, that we go wrong. By Jingo, Al'mah was as near having her beauty spoiled as any woman ever was; but she's only got a few nasty burns on the arm and has singed her hair a little."

"You've seen her to-day, then?"

Stafford looked at him with some curiosity, for the event was one likely to rouse a man's interest in a woman. Al'mah was unmarried, so far as the world knew, and a man of Byng's kind, if not generally inflammable, was very likely to be swept off his feet by some unusual woman in some unusual circumstance. Stafford had never seen Rudyard Byng talk to any woman but Jasmine for more than five minutes at a time, though hundreds of eager and avaricious eyes had singled him out for attention; and, as it seemed absurd that any one should build a palace in Park Lane to live in by himself, the glances sent in his direction from many quarters had not been without hopefulness. And there need not have been, and there was not, any loss of dignity on the part of match-making mothers in angling for him, for his family was quite good enough; his origin was not obscure, and his upbringing was adequate. His external ruggedness was partly natural; but it was also got from the bitter rough life he had lived for so many years in South Africa before he had fallen on his feet at Kimberley and Johannesburg.

As for "strange women," during the time that had passed since his return to England there had never been any sign of loose living. So, to Stafford's mind, Byng was the more likely to be swept away on a sudden flood that would bear him out to the sea of matrimony. He had put his question out of curiosity, and he had not to wait for a reply. It came frankly and instantly:

"Why, I was at Al'mah's house in Bruton Street at eight o'clock this morning--with the milkman and the newsboy; and you wouldn't believe it, but I saw her, too. She'd been up since six o'clock, she said. Couldn't sleep for excitement and pain, but looking like a pansy blossom all the same, rigged out as pretty as could be in her boudoir, and a nurse doing the needful. It's an odd dark kind of beauty she has, with those full lips and the heavy eyebrows. Well, it was a bull

in a china-shop, as you might judge--and thank you kindly, Mr. Byng, with such a jolly laugh, and ever and ever and ever so grateful and so wonderfully--thoughtful, I think, was the word, as though one had planned it all. And wouldn't I stay to breakfast? And not a bit stagey or actressy, and rather what you call an uncut diamond--a gem in her way, but not fine beur, not exactly. A touch of the karoo, or the prairie, or the salt-bush plains in her, but a good chap altogether; and I'm glad I was in it last night with her. I laughed a lot at breakfast--why yes, I stayed to breakfast. Laugh before breakfast and cry before supper, that's the proverb, isn't it? And I'm crying, all right, and there's weeping down on the Rand too."

As he spoke Stafford made inward comment on the story being told to him, so patently true and honest in every particular. It was rather contradictory and unreasonable, however, to hear this big, shy, rugged fellow taking exception, however delicately and by inference only, to the lack of high refinement, to the want of fine fleur, in Al'mah's personality. It did not occur to him that Byng was the kind of man who would be comparing Jasmine's quite wonderful delicacy, perfumed grace, and exquisite adaptability with the somewhat coarser beauty and genius of the singer. It seemed natural that Byng should turn to a personality more in keeping with his own, more likely to make him perfectly at ease mentally and physically.

Stafford judged Jasmine by his own conversations with her, when he was so acutely alive to the fact that she was the most naturally brilliant woman he had ever known or met; and had capacities for culture and attainment, as she had gifts of discernment and skill in thought, in marked contrast to the best of the ladies of their world. To him she had naturally shown only the one side of her nature--she adapted herself to him as she did to every one else; she had put him always at an advantage, and, in doing so, herself as well.

Full of dangerous coquetry he knew her to be--she had been so from a child; and though this was culpable in a way, he and most others had made more than due allowance, because mother-care and loving surveillance had been withdrawn so soon. For years she had been the spoiled darling of her father and brothers until her father married again; and then it had been too late to control her. The wonder was that she had turned out so well, that she had been so studious, so determined, so capable. Was it because she had unusual brain and insight into human nature, and had been wise and practical enough to see that there was a point where restraint must be applied, and so had kept herself free from blame or deserved opprobrium, if not entirely from criticism? In the day when girls were not in the present sense emancipated, she had the savoir faire and the poise of a married woman of thirty. Yet she was delicate, fresh, and flower-like, and very amusing, in a way which delighted men; and she did not antagonize women.

Stafford had ruled Byng out of consideration where she was concerned. He had not heard her father's remark of the night before, "Jasmine will marry that nabob--you'll see."

He was, however, recalled to the strange possibilities of life by a note which was handed to Byng as they stood before the club-room fire. He could not help but see--he knew the envelope, and no other handwriting was like Jasmine's, that long, graceful, sliding hand. Byng turned it over before opening it.

"Hello," he said, "I'm caught. It's a woman's hand. I wonder how she knew I was here."

Mentally Stafford shrugged his shoulders as he said to himself: "If Jasmine wanted to know where he was, she'd find out. I wonder--I wonder."

He watched Byng, over whose face passed a pleased smile.

"Why," Byng said, almost eagerly, "it's from Miss Grenfel--wants me to go and tell her about Jameson and the Raid."

He paused for an instant, and his face clouded again. "The first thing I must do is to send cables to Johannesburg. Perhaps there are some waiting for me at my rooms. I'll go and see. I don't know why I didn't get news sooner. I generally get word before the Government. There's something wrong somewhere. Somebody has had me."

"If I were you I'd go to our friend first. When I'm told to go at once, I go. She wouldn't like cablegrams and other things coming between you and her command--even when Dr. Jim's riding out of Matabeleland on the Rand for to free the slaves."

Stafford's words were playful, but there was, almost unknown to himself, a strange little note of discontent and irony behind.

Byng laughed. "But I'll be able to tell her more, perhaps, if I go to my rooms first."

"You are going to see her, then?"

"Certainly. There's nothing to do till we get news of Jameson at bay in a conga or balled up at a kopje." Thrusting the delicately perfumed letter in his pocket, he nodded, and was gone.

"I was going to see her myself," thought Stafford, "but that settles it. It will be easier to go where duty calls instead, since Byng takes my place. Why, she told me to come to-day at this very hour," he added, suddenly, and paused in his walk towards the door.

"But I want no triangular tea-parties," he continued to

reflect.... "Well, there'll be work to do at the Foreign Office, that's sure. France, Austria, Russia can spit out their venom now and look to their mobilization. And won't Kaiser William throw up his cap if Dr. Jim gets caught! What a mess it will be! Well--well--well!"

He sighed, and went on his way brooding darkly; for he knew that this was the beginning of a great trial for England and all British people.

CHAPTER III

A DAUGHTER OF TYRE

"Monsieur voleur!"

Jasmine looked at him again, as she had done the night before at the opera, standing quite confidentially close to him, her hand resting in his big palm like a pad of rose-leaves; while a delicate perfume greeted his senses. Byng beamed down on her, mystified and eager, yet by no means impatient, since the situation was one wholly agreeable to him, and he had been called robber in his time with greater violence and with a different voice. Now he merely shook his head in humorous protest, and gave her an indulgent look of inquiry. Somehow he felt quite at home with her; while yet he was abashed by so much delicacy and beauty and bloom.

"Why, what else are you but a robber?" she added, withdrawing her hand rather quickly from the too frank friendliness of his grasp. "You ran off with my opera-cloak last night, and a very pretty and expensive one it was."

"Expensive isn't the word," he rejoined; "it was unpurchasable."

She preened herself a little at the phrase. "I returned your overcoat this morning--before breakfast; and I didn't even receive a note of thanks for it. I might properly have kept it till my opera cloak came back."

"It's never coming back," he answered; "and as for my overcoat, I didn't know it had been returned. I was out all the morning."

"In the Row?" she asked, with an undertone of meaning.

"Well, not exactly. I was out looking for your cloak."

"Without breakfast?" she urged with a whimsical glance.

"Well, I got breakfast while I was looking."

"And while you were indulging material tastes, the cloak hid itself--or went out and hanged itself?"

He settled himself comfortably in the huge chair which seemed made especially for him. With a rare sense for details she had had this very chair brought from the library beyond, where her stepmother, in full view, was writing letters. He laughed at her words--a deep, round chuckle it was.

"It didn't exactly hang itself; it lay over the back of a Chesterfield where I could see it and breakfast too."

"A Chesterfield in a breakfast-room! That's more like the furniture of a boudoir."

"Well, it was a boudoir." He blushed a little in spite of himself.

"Ah!... Al'mah's? Well, she owed you a breakfast, at least, didn't she?"

"Not so good a breakfast as I got."

"That is putting rather a low price on her life," she rejoined; and a little smile of triumph gathered at her pink lips; lips a little like

those Nelson loved not wisely yet not too well, if love is worth while at all.

"I didn't see where you were leading me," he gasped, helplessly. "I give up. I can't talk in your way."

"What is my way?" she pleaded with a little wave of laughter in her eyes.

"Why, no frontal attacks--only flank movements, and getting round the kopjes, with an ambush in a drift here and there."

"That sounds like Paul Kruger or General Joubert," she cried in mock dismay. "Isn't that what they are doing with Dr. Jameson, perhaps?"

His face clouded. Storm gathered slowly in his eyes, a grimness suddenly settled in his strong jaw. "Yes," he answered, presently, "that's what they will be doing; and if I'm not mistaken they'll catch Jameson just as you caught me just now. They'll catch him at Doornkop or thereabouts, if I know myself--and Oom Paul."

Her face flushed prettily with excitement. "I want to hear all about this empire-making, or losing, affair; but there are other things to be settled first. There's my opera-cloak and the breakfast in the prima donna's boudoir, and--"

"But, how did you know it was Al'mah?" he asked blankly.

"Why, where else would my cloak be?" she inquired with a little laugh. "Not at the costumier's or the cleaner's so soon. But, all this horrid flippancy aside, do you really think I should have talked like this, or been so exigent about the cloak, if I hadn't known everything; if I hadn't been to see Al'mah, and spent an hour with her and knew that she was recovering from that dreadful shock very quickly? But could you think me so inhuman and unwomanly as not to have asked about her?"

"I wouldn't be in a position to investigate much when you were talking--not critically," he replied, boldly. "I would only be thinking that everything you said was all right. It wouldn't occur to me to--"

She half closed her eyes, looking at him with languishing humour. "Now you must please remember that I am quite young, and may have my head turned, and--"

"It wouldn't alter my mind about you if you turned your head," he broke in, gallantly, with a desperate attempt to take advantage of an opportunity, and try his hand at a game entirely new to him.

There was an instant's pause, in which she looked at him with what was half-assumed, half-natural shyness. His attempt to play with words was so full of nature, and had behind it such apparent admiration, that the unspoiled part of her was suddenly made self-conscious, however agreeably so. Then she said to him: "I won't say you were brave last night--that doesn't touch the situation. It wasn't bravery, of course; it was splendid presence of mind which could only come to a man with great decision of character. I don't think the newspapers put it at all in the right way. It wasn't like saving a child from the top of a

burning building, was it?"

"There was nothing in it at all where I was concerned," he replied. "I've been living a life for fifteen years where you had to move quick--by instinct, as it were. There's no virtue in it. I was just a little quicker than a thousand other men present, and I was nearer to the stage."

"Not nearer than my father or Mr. Stafford."

"They had a bigger shock than I had, I suppose. They got struck numb for a second. I'm a coarser kind. I have seen lots of sickening things; and I suppose they don't stun me. We get callous, I fancy, we veld-rangers and adventurers."

"You seem sensitive enough to fine emotions," she said, almost shyly. "You were completely absorbed, carried away, by Al'mah's singing last night. There wasn't a throb of music that escaped you, I should think."

"Well, that's primary instinct. Music is for the most savage natures. The boor that couldn't appreciate the Taj Mahal, or the sculpture of Michael Angelo, might be swept off his feet by the music of a master, though he couldn't understand its story. Besides, I've carried a banjo and a cornet to the ends of the earth with me. I saved my life with the cornet once. A lion got inside my zareba in Rhodesia. I hadn't my gun within reach, but I'd been playing the cornet, and just as he was crouching I blew a blast from it--one of those jarring discords of Wagner in the "Gotterdammerung"--and he turned tail and got away into the bush with a howl. Hearing gets to be the most acute of all the senses with the pioneer. If you've ever been really dying of thirst, and have reached water again, its sounds become wonderful to you ever after that--the trickle of a creek, the wash of a wave on the shore, the drip on a tin roof, the drop over a fall, the swish of a rainstorm. It's the same with birds and trees. And trees all make different sounds--that's the shape of the leaves. It's all music, too."

Her breath came quickly with pleasure at the imagination and observation of his words. "So it wasn't strange that you should be ravished by Al'mah's singing last night was it?" She looked at him keenly. "Isn't it curious that such a marvellous gift should be given to a woman who in other respects--" she paused.

"Yes, I know what you mean. She's so untrained in lots of ways. That's what I was saying to Stafford a little while ago. They live in a world of their own, the stage people. There's always a kind of irresponsibility. The habit of letting themselves go in their art, I suppose, makes them, in real life, throw things down so hard when they don't like them. Living at high pressure is an art like music. It alters the whole equilibrium, I suppose. A woman like Al'mah would commit suicide, or kill a man, without realizing the true significance of it all."

"Were you thinking that when you breakfasted with her?"

"Yes, when she was laughing and jesting--and when she kissed me good-bye."

"When--she--kissed you--good-bye?"

Jasmine drew back, then half-glanced towards her stepmother in the other room. She was only twenty-two, and though her emancipation had been accomplished in its way somewhat in advance of her generation, it had its origin in a very early period of her life, when she had been allowed to read books of verse--Shelley, Byron, Shakespeare, Verlaine, Rossetti, Swinburne, and many others--unchallenged and unguided. The understanding of things, reserved for "the wise and prudent," had been at first vaguely and then definitely conveyed to her by slow but subtle means--an apprehension from instinct, not from knowledge. There had never been a shock to her mind.

The knowledge of things had grown imperceptibly, and most of life's ugly meanings were known--at a great distance, to be sure, but still known. Yet there came a sudden half-angry feeling when she heard Rudyard Byng say, so loosely, that Al'Mah had kissed him. Was it possible, then, that a man, that any man, thought she might hear such things without resentment; that any man thought her to know so much of life that it did not matter what was said? Did her outward appearance, then, bear such false evidence?

He did not understand quite, yet he saw that she misunderstood, and he handled the situation with a tact which seemed hardly to belong to a man of his training and calibre.

"She thought no more of kissing me," he continued, presently, in a calm voice--"a man she had seen only once before, and was not likely to see again, than would a child of five. It meant nothing more to her than kissing Fanato on the stage. It was pure impulse. She forgot it as soon as it was done. It was her way of showing gratitude. Somewhat unconventional, wasn't it? But then, she is a little Irish, a little Spanish, and the rest Saxon; and she is all artist and bohemian."

Jasmine's face cleared, and her equilibrium was instantly restored. She was glad she had misunderstood. Yet Al'mah had not kissed her when she left, while expressing gratitude, too. There was a difference. She turned the subject, saying: "Of course, she insists on sending me a new cloak, and keeping the other as a memento. It was rather badly singed, wasn't it?"

"It did its work well, and it deserves an honoured home. Do you know that even as I flung the cloak round her, in the excitement of the moment I 'sensed,' as my young nephew says, the perfume you use."

He lifted his hand, conscious that his fingers still carried some of that delicate perfume which her fingers left there as they lay in his palm when she greeted him on his entrance. "It was like an incense from the cloak, as it blanketed the flames. Strange, wasn't it, that the undersense should be conscious of that little thing, while the over-sense was adding a sensational postscript to the opera?"

She smiled in a pleased way. "Do you like the perfume? I really use very little of it."

"It's like no other. It starts a kind of cloud of ideas floating. I don't know how to describe it. I imagine myself--"

She interrupted, laughing merrily. "My brother says it always makes

him angry, and Ian Stafford calls it 'The Wild Tincture of Time'--frivolously and sillily says that it comes from a bank whereon the 'wild thyme' grows! But now, I want to ask you many questions. We have been mentally dancing, while down beyond the Limpopo--"

His demeanour instantly changed, and she noted the look of power and purpose coming into the rather boyish and good-natured, the rash and yet determined, face. It was not quite handsome. The features were not regular, the forehead was perhaps a little too low, and the hair grew very thick, and would have been a vast mane if it had not been kept fairly close by his valet. This valet was Krool, a half-caste--Hottentot and Boer--whom he had rescued from Lobengula in the Matabele war, and who had in his day been ship-steward, barber, cook, guide, and native recruiter. Krool had attached himself to Byng, and he would not be shaken off even when his master came home to England.

Looking at her visitor with a new sense of observation alive in her, Jasmine saw the inherent native drowsiness of the nature, the love of sleep and good living, the healthy primary desires, the striving, adventurous, yet, in one sense, unambitious soul. The very cleft in the chin, like the alluring dimple of a child's cheek, enlarged and hardened, was suggestive of animal beauty, with its parallel suggestion of indolence. Yet, somehow, too ample as he was both in fact and by suggestion to the imagination there was an apparent underlying force, a capacity to do huge things when once roused. He had been roused in his short day. The life into which he had been thrown with men of vaster ambition and much more selfish ends than his own, had stirred him to prodigies of activity in those strenuous, wonderful, electric days when gold and diamonds changed the hard-bitten, wearied prospector, who had doggedly delved till he had forced open the hand of the Spirit of the Earth and caught the treasure that flowed forth, into a millionaire, into a conqueror, with the world at his feet. He had been of those who, for many a night and many a year, eating food scarce fit for Kaffirs, had, in poverty and grim endeavour, seen the sun rise and fall over the Magaliesberg range, hope alive in the morning and dead at night. He had faced the devilish storms which swept the high veld with lightning and the thunderstone, striking men dead as they fled for shelter to the boulders of some barren, mocking kopje; and he had had the occasional wild nights of carousal, when the miseries and robberies of life and time and the ceaseless weariness and hope deferred, were forgotten.

It was all there in his face--the pioneer endeavour, the reckless effort, the gambler's anxiety, the self-indulgence, the crude passions, with a far-off, vague idealism, the selfish outlook, and yet great breadth of feeling, with narrowness of individual purpose. The rough life, the sordid struggle, had left their mark, and this easy, coaxing, comfortable life of London had not covered it up--not yet. He still belonged to other--and higher--spheres.

There was a great contrast between him and Ian Stafford. Ian was handsome, exquisitely refined, lean and graceful of figure, with a mind which saw the end of your sentences from the first word, with a skill of speech like a Damascus blade, with knowledge of a half-dozen languages. Ian had an allusiveness of conversation which made human intercourse a perpetual entertainment, and Jasmine's intercourse with him a delight which lingered after his going until his coming again. The contrast was prodigious--and perplexing, for Rudyard Byng

had qualities which compelled her interest. She sighed as she reflected.

"I suppose you can't get three millions all to yourself with your own hands without missing a good deal and getting a good deal you could do without," she said to herself, as he wonderingly interjected the exclamation:

"Now, what do you know of the Limpopo? I'll venture there isn't another woman in England who even knows the name."

"I always had a thirst for travel, and I've read endless books of travel and adventure," she replied. "I'd have been an explorer, or a Cecil Rhodes, if I had been a man."

"Can you ride?" he asked, looking wonderingly at her tiny hand, her slight figure, her delicate face with its almost impossible pink and white.

"Oh, man of little faith!" she rejoined. "I can't remember when I didn't ride. First a Shetland pony, and now at last I've reached Zambesi--such a wicked dear."

"Zambesi--why Zambesi? One would think you were South African."

She enjoyed his mystification. Then she grew serious and her eyes softened. "I had a friend--a girl, older than I. She married. Well, he's an earl now, the Earl of Tynemouth, but he was the elder son then, and wild for sport. They went on their honeymoon to shoot in Africa, and they visited the falls of the Zambesi. She, my friend, was standing on the edge of the chasm--perhaps you know it--not far from Livingstone's tree, between the streams. It was October, and the river was low. She put up her big parasol. A gust of wind suddenly caught it, and instead of letting the thing fly, she hung on, and was nearly swept into the chasm. A man with them pulled her back in time--but she hung on to that red parasol. Only when it was all over did she realize what had really happened. Well, when she came back to England, as a kind of thank-offering she gave me her father's best hunter. That was like her, too; she could always make other people generous. He is a beautiful Satan, and I rechristened him Zambesi. I wanted the red parasol, too, but Alice Tynemouth wouldn't give it to me."

"So she gave it to the man who pulled her back. Why not?"

"How do you know she did that?"

"Well, it hangs in an honoured place in Stafford's chambers. I conjecture right, do I?"

Her eyes darkened slowly, and a swift-passing shadow covered her faintly smiling lips; but she only said, "You see he was entitled to it, wasn't he?" To herself, however, she whispered, "Neither of them--neither ever told me that."

At that moment the door opened, and a footman came forward to Rudyard Byng. "If you please, sir, your servant says, will you see him. There is news from South Africa."

Byng rose, but Jasmine intervened. "No, tell him to come here," she

said to the footman. "Mayn't he?" she asked.

Byng nodded, and remained standing. He seemed suddenly lost to her presence, and with head dropped forward looked into space, engrossed, intense.

Jasmine studied him as an artist would study a picture, and decided that he had elements of the unusual, and was a distinct personality. Though rugged, he was not uncouth, and there was nothing of the nouveau riche about him. He did not wear a ring or scarf-pin, his watch-chain was simple and inconspicuous enough for a school-boy--and he was worth three million pounds, with a palace building in Park Lane and a feudal castle in Wales leased for a period of years. There was nothing greatly striking in his carriage; indeed, he did not make enough of his height and bulk; but his eye was strong and clear, his head was powerful, and his quick smile was very winning. Yet--yet, he was not the type of man who, to her mind should have made three millions at thirty-three. It did not seem to her that he was really representative of the great fortune-builders--she had her grandfather and others closely in mind. She had seen many captains of industry and finance in her grandfather's house, men mostly silent, deliberate and taciturn, and showing in their manner and persons the accumulated habits of patience, force, ceaseless aggression and domination.

Was it only luck which had given Rudyard Byng those three millions? It could not be just that alone. She remembered her grandfather used to say that luck was a powerful ingredient in the successful career of every man, but that the man was on the spot to take the luck, knew when to take it, and how to use it. "The lucky man is the man that sits up watching for the windfall while other men are sleeping"--that was the way he had put it. So Rudyard Byng, if lucky, had also been of those who had grown haggard with watching, working and waiting; but not a hair of his head had whitened, and if he looked older than he was, still he was young enough to marry the youngest debutante in England and the prettiest and best-born. He certainly had inherent breeding. His family had a long pedigree, and every man could not be as distinguished-looking as Ian Stafford--as Ian Stafford, who, however, had not three millions of pounds; who had not yet made his name and might never do so.

She flushed with anger at herself that she should be so disloyal to Ian, for whom she had pictured a brilliant future--ambassador at Paris or Berlin, or, if he chose, Foreign Minister in Whitehall--Ian, gracious, diligent, wonderfully trained, waiting, watching for his luck and ready to take it; and to carry success, when it came, like a prince of princelier days. Ian gratified every sense in her, met every demand of an exacting nature, satisfied her unusually critical instinct, and was, in effect, her affianced husband. Yet it was so hard to wait for luck, for place, for power, for the environment where she could do great things, could fill that radiant place which her cynical and melodramatic but powerful and sympathetic grandfather had prefigured for her. She had been the apple of that old man's eye, and he had filled her brain--purposely--with ambitious ideas. He had done it when she was very young, because he had not long to stay; and he had overcoloured the pictures in order that the impression should be vivid and indelible when he was gone. He had meant to bless, for, to his mind, to shine, to do big things, to achieve notoriety, to attain power, "to make the band play when you come," was the true philosophy

of life. And as this philosophy, successful in his case, was accompanied by habits of life which would bear the closest inspection by the dean and chapter, it was a difficult one to meet by argument or admonition. He had taught his grandchild as successfully as he had built the structure of his success. He had made material things the basis of life's philosophy and purpose; and if she was not wholly materialistic, it was because she had drunk deep, for one so young, at the fountains of art, poetry, sculpture and history. For the last she had a passion which was represented by books of biography without number, and all the standard historians were to be found in her bedroom and her boudoir. Yet, too, when she had opportunity--when Lady Tynemouth brought them to her--she read the newest and most daring productions of a school of French novelists and dramatists who saw the world with eyes morally astigmatic and out of focus. Once she had remarked to Alice Tynemouth:

"You say I dress well, yet it isn't I. It's my dressmaker. I choose the over-coloured thing three times out of five--it used to be more than that. Instinctively I want to blaze. It is the same in everything. I need to be kept down, but, alas! I have my own way in everything. I wish I hadn't, for my own good. Yet I can't brook being ruled."

To this Alice had replied: "A really selfish husband--not a difficult thing to find--would soon keep you down sufficiently. Then you'd choose the over-coloured thing not more than two times, perhaps one time, out of five. Your orientalism is only undisciplined self-will. A little cruelty would give you a better sense of proportion in colour--and everything else. You have orientalism, but little or no orientation."

Here, now, standing before the fire, was that possible husband who, no doubt, was selfish, and had capacities for cruelty which would give her greater proportion--and sense of colour. In Byng's palace, with three millions behind her--she herself had only the tenth of one million--she could settle down into an exquisitely ordered, beautiful, perfect life where the world would come as to a court, and--

Suddenly she shuddered, for these thoughts were sordid, humiliating, and degrading. They were unbidden, but still they came. They came from some dark fountain within herself. She really wanted--her idealistic self wanted--to be all that she knew she looked, a flower in life and thought. But, oh, it was hard, hard for her to be what she wished! Why should it be so hard for her?

She was roused by a voice. "Cronje!" it said in a deep, slow, ragged note.

Byng's half-caste valet, Krool, sombre of face, small, lean, ominous, was standing in the doorway.

"Cronje! . . . Well?" rejoined Byng, quietly, yet with a kind of smother in the tone.

Krool stretched out a long, skinny, open hand, and slowly closed the fingers up tight with a gesture suggestive of a trap closing upon a crushed captive.

"Where?" Byng asked, huskily.

"Doornkop," was the reply; and Jasmine, watching closely, fascinated by Krool's taciturnity, revolted by his immobile face, thought she saw in his eyes a glint of malicious and furtive joy. A dark premonition suddenly flashed into her mind that this creature would one day, somehow, do her harm; that he was her foe, her primal foe, without present or past cause for which she was responsible; but still a foe--one of those antipathies foreordained, one of those evil influences which exist somewhere in the universe against every individual life.

"Doornkop--what did I say!" Byng exclaimed to Jasmine. "I knew they'd put the double-and-twist on him at Doornkop, or some such place; and they've done it--Kruger and Joubert. Englishmen aren't slim enough to be conspirators. Dr. Jim was going it blind, trusting to good luck, gambling with the Almighty. It's bury me deep now. It's Paul Kruger licking his chops over the savoury mess. 'Oh, isn't it a pretty dish to set before the king!' What else, Krool?"

"Nothing, Baas."

"Nothing more in the cables?"

"No, Baas."

"That will do, Krool. Wait. Go to Mr. Whalen. Say I want him to bring a stenographer and all the Partners--he'll understand--to me at ten to-night."

"Yes, Baas."

Krool bowed slowly. As he raised his head his eyes caught those of Jasmine. For an instant they regarded each other steadily, then the man's eyes dropped, and a faint flush passed over his face. The look had its revelation which neither ever forgot. A quiver of fear passed through Jasmine, and was followed by a sense of self-protection and a hardening of her will, as against some possible danger.

As Krool left the room he said to himself: "The Baas speaks her for his vrouw. But the Baas will go back quick to the Vaal--p'r'aps."

Then an evil smile passed over his face, as he thought of the fall of the Rooinek--of Dr. Jim in Oom Paul's clutches. He opened and shut his fingers again with a malignant cruelty.

Standing before the fire, Byng said to Jasmine meditatively, with that old ironic humour which was always part of him: "'Fee, fo, fi, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman.'"

Her face contracted with pain. "They will take Dr. Jim's life?" she asked, solemnly.

"It's hard to tell. It isn't him alone. There's lots of others that we both know."

"Yes, yes, of course. It's terrible, terrible," she whispered.

"It's more terrible than it looks, even now. It's a black day for England. She doesn't know yet how black it is. I see it, though; I see

it. It's as plain as an open book. Well, there's work to do, and I must be about it. I'm off to the Colonial Office. No time to lose. It's a job that has no eight-hours shift."

Now the real man was alive. He was transformed. The face was set and quiet. He looked concentrated will and power as he stood with his hands clasped behind him, his shoulders thrown back, his eyes alight with fire and determination. To herself Jasmine seemed to be moving in the centre of great events, having her fingers upon the levers which work behind the scenes of the world's vast schemes, standing by the secret machinery of government.

"How I wish I could help you," she said, softly, coming nearer to him, a warm light in her liquid blue eyes, her exquisite face flushing with excitement, her hands clasped in front of her.

As Byng looked at her, it seemed to him that sweet honesty and high-heartedness had never had so fine a setting; that never had there been in the world such an epitome of talent, beauty and sincerity. He had suddenly capitulated, he who had ridden unscathed so long. If he had dared he would have taken her in his arms there and then; but he had known her only for a day. He had been always told that a woman must be wooed and won, and to woo took time. It was not a task he understood, but suddenly it came to him that he was prepared to do it; that he must be patient and watch and serve, and, as he used to do, perhaps, be elate in the morning and depressed at night, till the day of triumph came and his luck was made manifest.

"But you can help me, yes, you can help me as no one else can," he said almost hoarsely, and his hands moved a little towards her.

"You must show me how," she said, scarce above a whisper, and she drew back slightly, for this look in his eyes told its own story.

"When may I come again?" he asked.

"I want so much to hear everything about South Africa. Won't you come to-morrow at six?" she asked.

"Certainly, to-morrow at six," he answered, eagerly, "and thank you."

His honest look of admiration enveloped her as her hand was again lost in his strong, generous palm, and lay there for a moment thrilling him.... He turned at the door and looked back, and the smile she gave seemed the most delightful thing he had ever seen.

"She is a flower, a jasmine-flower," he said, happily, as he made his way into the street.

When he had gone she fled to her bedroom. Standing before the mirror, she looked at herself long, laughing feverishly. Then suddenly she turned and threw herself upon the bed, bursting into a passion of tears. Sobs shook her.

"Oh, Ian," she said, raising her head at last, "oh, Ian, Ian, I hate myself!"

Down in the library her stepmother was saying to her father, "You are right, Jasmine will marry the nabob."

"I am sorry for Ian Stafford," was the response.

"Men get over such things," came the quietly cynical reply.

"Jasmine takes a lot of getting over," answered Jasmine's father. "She has got the brains of all the family, the beauty her family never had--the genius of my father, and the wilfulness, and--"

He paused, for, after all, he was not talking to the mother of his child.

"Yes, all of it, dear child," was the enigmatical reply.

"I wish--Nelly, I do wish that--"

"Yes, I know what you wish, Cuthbert, but it's no good. I'm not of any use to her. She will work out her own destiny alone--as her grandfather did."

"God knows I hope not! A man can carry it off, but a woman--"

Slow and almost stupid as he was, he knew that her inheritance from her grandfather's nature was a perilous gift.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTNERS MEET

England was more stunned than shocked. The dark significance, the evil consequences destined to flow from the Jameson Raid had not yet reached the general mind. There was something gallant and romantic in this wild invasion: a few hundred men, with no commissariat and insufficient clothing, with enough ammunition and guns for only the merest flurry of battle, doing this unbelievable gamble with Fate--challenging a republic of fighting men with well-stocked arsenals and capable artillery, with ample sources of supply, with command of railways and communications. It was certainly magnificent; but it was magnificent folly.

It did not take England long to decide that point; and not even the Laureate's paean in the organ of the aristocracy and upper middle class could evoke any outburst of feeling. There was plenty of admiration for the pluck and boldness, for the careless indifference with which the raiders risked their lives; for the romantic side of the dash from Pitsani to the Rand; but the thing was so palpably impossible, as it was carried out, that there was not a knowing mind in the Islands which would not have echoed Rhodes' words, "Jameson has upset the apple-cart."

Rudyard Byng did not visit Jasmine the next evening at six o'clock. His world was all in chaos, and he had not closed his eyes to sleep since he had left her. At ten o'clock at night, as he had arranged, "The Partners" and himself met at his chambers, around which had gathered a crowd of reporters and curious idlers; and from that time till the grey dawn he and they had sat in conference. He had

spent two hours at the Colonial Office after he left Jasmine, and now all night he kneaded the dough of a new policy with his companions in finance and misfortune.

There was Wallstein, the fairest, ablest, and richest financier of them all, with a marvellous head for figures and invaluable and commanding at the council-board, by virtue of his clear brain and his power to co-ordinate all the elements of the most confusing financial problems. Others had by luck and persistence made money--the basis of their fortunes; but Wallstein had showed them how to save those fortunes and make them grow; had enabled them to compete successfully with the games of other great financiers in the world's stock-markets. Wallstein was short and stout, with a big blue eye and an unwrinkled forehead; prematurely aged from lack of exercise and the exciting air of the high veld; from planning and scheming while others slept; from an inherent physical weakness due to the fact that he was one of twin sons, to his brother being given great physical strength, to himself a powerful brain for finance and a frail if ample body. Wallstein knew little and cared less about politics; yet he saw the use of politics in finance, and he did not stick his head into the sand as some of his colleagues did when political activities hampered their operations. In Johannesburg he had kept aloof from the struggle with Oom Paul, not from lack of will, but because he had no stomach for daily intrigue and guerrilla warfare and subterranean workings; and he was convinced that only a great and bloody struggle would end the contest for progress and equal rights for all white men on the Rand. His inquiries had been bent towards so disposing the financial operations, so bulwarking the mining industry by sagacious designs, that, when the worst came, they all would be able to weather the storm. He had done his work better than his colleagues knew, or indeed even himself knew.

Probably only Fleming the Scotsman--another of the Partners--with a somewhat dour exterior, an indomitable will, and a caution which compelled him to make good every step of the way before him, and so cultivate a long sight financially and politically, understood how extraordinary Wallstein's work had been--only Fleming, and Rudyard Byng, who knew better than any and all.

There was also De Lancy Scovel, who had become a biggish figure in the Rand world because he had been a kind of financial valet to Wallstein and Byng, and, it was said, had been a real unofficial valet to Rhodes, being an authority on cooking, and on brewing a punch, and a master of commissariat in the long marches which Rhodes made in the days when he trekked into Rhodesia. It was indeed said that he had made his first ten thousand pounds out of two trips which Rhodes made en route to Lobengula, and had added to this amount on the principle of compound multiplication when the Matabele war came; for here again he had a collateral interest in the commissariat.

Rhodes, with a supreme carelessness in regard to money, with an indifference to details which left his mind free for the working of a few main ideas, had no idea how many cheques he gave on the spur of the moment to De Lancy Scovel in this month or in that, in this year or in that, for this thing or for that--cheques written very often on the backs of envelopes, on the white margin of a newspaper, on the fly-leaf of a book or a blank telegraph form. The Master Man was so stirred by half-contemptuous humour at the sycophancy and snobbery of his vain slave, who could make a salad out of anything edible, that,

caring little what men were, so long as they did his work for him, he once wrote a cheque for two thousand pounds on the starched cuff of his henchman's "biled shirt" at a dinner prepared for his birthday.

So it was that, with the marrow-bones thrown to him, De Lancy Scovel came to a point where he could follow Wallstein's and Rhodes' lead financially, being privy to their plans, through eavesdropping on the conferences of his chiefs. It came as a surprise to his superiors that one day's chance discovery showed De Lancy Scovel to be worth fifty thousand pounds; and from that time on they used him for many a purpose in which it was expedient their own hands should not appear. They felt confident that a man who could so carefully and secretly build up his own fortune had a gift which could be used to advantage. A man who could be so subterranean in his own affairs would no doubt be equally secluded in their business. Selfishness would make him silent. And so it was that "the dude" of the camp and the kraal, the factotum, who in his time had brushed Rhodes' clothes when he brushed his own, after the Kaffir servant had messed them about, came to be a millionaire and one of the Partners. For him South Africa had no charms. He was happy in London, or at his country-seat in Leicestershire, where he followed the hounds with a temerity which was at base vanity; where he gave the county the best food to be got outside St. Petersburg or Paris; where his so-called bachelor establishment was cared for by a coarse, gray-haired housekeeper who, the initiated said, was De Lancy's South African wife, with a rooted objection to being a lady or "moving in social circles"; whose pleasure lay in managing this big household under De Lancy's guidance. There were those who said they had seen her brush a speck of dust from De Lancy's coat-collar, as she emerged from her morning interview with him; and others who said they had seen her hidden in the shrubbery listening to the rather flaccid conversation of her splendid poodle of a master.

There were others who had climbed to success in their own way, some by happy accident, some by a force which disregarded anything in their way, and some by sheer honest rough merit, through which the soul of the true pioneer shone.

There was also Barry Whalen, who had been educated as a doctor, and, with a rare Irish sense of adaptability and amazing Celtic cleverness, had also become a mining engineer, in the days when the Transvaal was emerging from its pioneer obscurity into the golden light of mining prosperity. Abrupt, obstinately honest, and sincere; always protesting against this and against that, always the critic of authority, whether the authority was friend or foe; always smothering his own views in the moment when the test of loyalty came; always with a voice like a young bull and a heart which would have suited a Goliath, there was no one but trusted Barry, none that had not hurried to him in a difficulty; not because he was so wise, but because he was so true. He would never have made money, in spite of the fact that his prescience, his mining sense, his diagnosis of the case of a mine, as Byng called it, had been a great source of wealth to others, had it not been for Wallstein and Byng.

Wallstein had in him a curious gentleness and human sympathy, little in keeping with the view held of him by that section of the British press which would willingly have seen England at the mercy of Paul Kruger--for England's good, for her soul's welfare as it were, for her needed chastisement. He was spoken of as a cruel, tyrannical, greedy

German Jew, whose soul was in his own pocket and his hand in the pockets of the world. In truth he was none of these things, save that he was of German birth, and of as good and honest German origin as George of Hanover and his descendants, if not so distinguished. Wallstein's eye was an eye of kindness, save in the vision of business; then it saw without emotion to the advantage of the country where he had made his money, and to the perpetual advantage of England, to whom he gave an honourable and philanthropic citizenship. His charities were not of the spectacular kind; but many a poor and worthy, and often unworthy, unfortunate was sheltered through bad days and heavy weather of life by the immediate personal care of "the Jew Mining Magnate, who didn't care a damn what happened to England so long as his own nest was well lined!"

It was Wallstein who took heed of the fact that, as he became rich, Barry Whalen remained poor; and it was he who took note that Barry had a daughter who might any day be left penniless with frail health and no protector; and taking heed and note, it was he made all the Partners unite in taking some financial risks and responsibilities for Barry, when two new mines were opened--to Barry's large profit. It was characteristic of Barry, however, that, if they had not disguised their action by financial devices, and by making him a Partner, because he was needed professionally and intellectually and for other business reasons, nicely phrased to please his Celtic vanity, he would have rejected the means to the fortune which came to him. It was a far smaller fortune than any of the others had; but it was sufficient for him and for his child. So it was that Barry became one of the Partners, and said things that every one else would hesitate to say, but were glad to hear said.

Others of the group were of varying degrees of ability and interest and importance. One or two were poltroons in body and mind, with only a real instinct for money-making and a capacity for constructive individualism. Of them the most conspicuous was Clifford Melville, whose name was originally Joseph Sobieski, with habitat Poland, whose small part in this veracious tale belongs elsewhere.

Each had his place, and all were influenced by the great schemes of Rhodes and their reflection in the purposes and actions of Wallstein. Wallstein was inspired by the dreams and daring purposes of Empire which had driven Rhodes from Table Mountain to the kraal of Lobengula and far beyond; until, at last, the flag he had learned to love had been triumphantly trailed from the Cape to Cairo.

Now in the great crisis, Wallstein, of them all, was the most self-possessed, save Rudyard Byng. Some of the others were paralyzed. They could only whine out execrations on the man who had dared something; who, if he had succeeded, would have been hailed as the great leader of a Revolution, not the scorned and humiliated captain of a filibustering expedition. A triumphant rebellion or raid is always a revolution in the archives of a nation. These men were of a class who run for cover before a battle begins, and can never be kept in the fighting-line except with the bayonet in the small of their backs. Others were irritable and strenuous, bitter in their denunciations of the Johannesburg conspirators, who had bungled their side of the business and who had certainly shown no rashness. At any rate, whatever the merits of their case, no one in England accused the Johannesburgers of foolhardy courage or impassioned daring. They were so busy in trying to induce Jameson to go back that they had no time

to go forward themselves. It was not that they lost their heads, their hearts were the disappearing factors.

At this gloomy meeting in his house, Byng did not join either of the two sections who represented the more extreme views and the unpolitical minds. There was a small section, of which he was one, who were not cleverer financially than their friends, but who had political sense and intuition; and these, to their credit, were more concerned, at this dark moment, for the political and national consequences of the Raid, than for the certain set-back to the mining and financial enterprises of the Rand. A few of the richest of them were the most hopeless politically--ever ready to sacrifice principle for an extra dividend of a quarter per cent.; and, in their inmost souls, ready to bow the knee to Oom Paul and his unwholesome, undemocratic, and corrupt government, if only the dividends moved on and up.

Byng was not a great genius, and he had never given his natural political talent its full chance; but his soul was bigger than his pocket. He had a passionate love for the land--for England--which had given him birth; and he had a decent pride in her honour and good name. So it was that he had almost savagely challenged some of the sordid deliberations of this stern conference. In a full-blooded and manly appeal he begged them "to get on higher ground." If he could but have heard it, it would have cheered the heart of the broken and discredited pioneer of Empire at Capetown, who had received his death-warrant, to take effect within five years, in the little cottage at Muizenberg by the sea; as great a soul in posse as ever came from the womb of the English mother; who said as he sat and watched the tide flow in and out, and his own tide of life ebbed, "Life is a three days' trip to the sea-shore: one day in going, one day in settling down, and one day in packing up again."

Byng had one or two colleagues who, under his inspiration, also took the larger view, and who looked ahead to the consequences yet to flow from the fiasco at Doornkop, which became a tragedy. What would happen to the conspirators of Johannesburg? What would happen to Jameson and Willoughby and Bobby White and Raleigh Grey? Who was to go to South Africa to help in holding things together, and to prevent the worst happening, if possible? At this point they had arrived when they saw--

. . . The dull dank morn stare in,
Like a dim drowned face with oozy eyes.

A more miserable morning seldom had broken, even in England.

"I will go. I must go," remarked Byng at last, though there was a strange sinking of the heart as he said it. Even yet the perfume of Jasmine's cloak stole to his senses to intoxicate them. But it was his duty to offer to go; and he felt that he could do good by going, and that he was needed at Johannesburg. He, more than all of them, had been in open conflict with Oom Paul in the the past, had fought him the most vigorously, and yet for him the old veldschoen Boer had some regard and much respect, in so far as he could respect a Rooinek at all.

"I will go," Byng repeated, and looked round the table at haggard faces, at ashen faces, at the faces of men who had smoked to quiet their nerves, or drunk hard all night to keep up their courage. How many times they had done the same in olden days, when the millions were not yet arrived, and their only luxury was companionship and champagne--or something less expensive.

As Byng spoke, Krool entered the room with a great coffee-pot and a dozen small white bowls. He heard Byng's words, and for a moment his dark eyes glowed with a look of evil satisfaction. But his immobile face showed nothing, and he moved like a spirit among them his lean hand putting a bowl before each person, like a servitor of Death passing the hemlock-brew.

At his entrance there was instant silence, for, secret as their conference must be, this half-caste, this Hottentot-Boer, must hear nothing and know nothing. Not one of them but resented his being Byng's servant. Not one but felt him a danger at any time, and particularly now. Once Barry Whalen, the most outwardly brusque and apparently frank of them all, had urged Byng to give Krool up, but without avail; and now Barry eyed the half-caste with a resentful determination. He knew that Krool had heard Byng's words, for he was sitting opposite the double doors, and had seen the malicious eyes light up. Instantly, however, that light vanished. They all might have been wooden men, and Krool but a wooden servitor, so mechanical and concentrated were his actions. He seemed to look at nobody; but some of them shrank a little as he leaned over and poured the brown, steaming liquid and the hot milk into the bowls. Only once did the factotum look at anybody directly, and that was at Byng just as he was about to leave the room. Then Barry Whalen saw him glance searchingly at his master's face in a mirror, and again that baleful light leaped up in his eyes.

When he had left the room, Barry Whalen said, impulsively: "Byng, it's all damn foolery your keeping that fellow about you. It's dangerous, 'specially now."

"Coffee's good, isn't it? Think there's poison in it?" Byng asked with a contemptuous little laugh. "Sugar--what?" He pushed the great bowl of sugar over the polished table towards Barry.

"Oh, he makes you comfortable enough, but--"

"But he makes you uncomfortable, Barry? Well, we're bound to get on one another's nerves one way or another in this world when the east wind blows; and if it isn't the east wind, it's some other wind. We're living on a planet which has to take the swipes of the universe, because it has permitted that corrupt, quarrelsome, and pernicious beast, man, to populate the hemispheres. Krool is staying on with me, Barry."

"We're in heavy seas, and we don't want any wreckers on the shore," was the moody and nervously indignant reply.

"Well, Krool's in the heavy seas, all right, too--with me."

Barry Whalen persisted. "We're in for complications, Byng. England has to take a hand in the game now with a vengeance. We don't want any spies. He's more Boer than native."

"There'll be nothing Krool can get worth spying for. If we keep our mouths shut to the outside world, we'll not need fear any spies. I'm not afraid of Krool. We'll not be sold by him. Though some one inside will sell us perhaps--as the Johannesburg game was sold by some one inside."

There was a painful silence, and more than one man looked at his fellows furtively.

"We will do nothing that will not bear the light of day, and then we need not fear any spying," continued Byng.

"If we have secret meetings and intentions which we don't make public, it is only what governments themselves have; and we keep them quiet to prevent any one taking advantage of us; but our actions are justifiable. I'm going to do nothing I'm ashamed of; and when it's necessary, or when and if it seems right to do so, I'll put all my cards on the table. But when I do, I'll see that it's a full hand--if I can."

There was a silence for a moment after he had ended, then some one said:

"You think it's best that you should go? You want to go to Johannesburg?"

"I didn't say anything about wanting to go. I said I'd go because one of us--or two of us--ought to go. There's plenty to do here; but if I can be any more use out there, why, Wallstein can stay here, and--"

He got no further, for Wallstein, to whom he had just referred, and who had been sitting strangely impassive, with his eyes approvingly fixed on Byng, half rose from his chair and fell forward, his thick, white hands sprawling on the mahogany table, his fat, pale face striking the polished wood with a thud. In an instant they were all on their feet and at his side.

Barry Whalen lifted up his head and drew him back into the chair, then three of them lifted him upon a sofa. Barry's hand felt the breast of the prostrate figure, and Byng's fingers sought his wrist. For a moment there was a dreadful silence, and then Byng and Whalen looked at each other and nodded.

"Brandy!" said Byng, peremptorily.

"He's not dead?" whispered some one.

"Brandy--quick," urged Byng, and, lifting up the head a little, he presently caught the glass from Whalen's hand and poured some brandy slowly between the bluish lips. "Some one ring for Krool," he added.

A moment later Krool entered. "The doctor--my doctor and his own--and a couple of nurses," Byng said, sharply, and Krool nodded and vanished. "Perhaps it's only a slight heart-attack, but it's best to be on the safe side."

"Anyhow, it shows that Wallstein needs to let up for a while," whispered Fleming.

"It means that some one must do Wallstein's work here," said Barry Whalen. "It means that Byng stays in London," he added, as Krool entered the room again with a rug to cover Wallstein.

Barry saw Krool's eyes droop before his words, and he was sure that the servant had reasons for wishing his master to go to South Africa. The others present, however, only saw a silent, magically adept figure stooping over the sick man, adjusting the body to greater ease, arranging skilfully the cushion under the head, loosening and removing the collar and the boots, and taking possession of the room, as though he himself were the doctor; while Byng looked on with satisfaction.

"Useful person, eh?" he said, meaningly, in an undertone to Barry Whalen.

"I don't think he's at home in England," rejoined Barry, as meaningly and very stubbornly: "He won't like your not going to South Africa."

"Am I not going to South Africa?" Byng asked, mechanically, and looking reflectively at Krool.

"Wallstein's a sick man, Byng. You can't leave London. You're the only real politician among us. Some one else must go to Johannesburg."

"You--Barry?"

"You know I can't, Byng--there's my girl. Besides, I don't carry enough weight, anyhow, and you know that too."

Byng remembered Whalen's girl--stricken down with consumption a few months before. He caught Whalen's arm in a grip of friendship. "All right, dear old man," he said, kindly. "Fleming shall go, and I'll stay. Yes, I'll stay here, and do Wallstein's work."

He was still mechanically watching Krool attend to the sick man, and he was suddenly conscious of an arrest of all motion in the half-caste's lithe frame. Then Krool turned, and their eyes met. Had he drawn Krool's eyes to his--the master-mind influencing the subservient intelligence?

"Krool wants to go to South Africa," he said to himself with a strange, new sensation which he did not understand, though it was not quite a doubt. He reassured himself. "Well, it's natural he should. It's his home.... But Fleming must go to Johannesburg. I'm needed most here."

There was gratitude in his heart that Fate had decreed it so. He was conscious of the perfume from Jasmine's cloak searching his senses, even in this hour when these things that mattered--the things of Fate--were so enormously awry.

CHAPTER V

A WOMAN TELLS HER STORY

"Soon he will speak you. Wait here, madame."

Krool passed almost stealthily out.

Al'mah looked round the rather formal sitting-room, with its somewhat incongruous furnishing--leopard-skins from Bechuanaland; lion-skins from Matabeleland; silver-mounted tusks of elephants from Eastern Cape Colony and Portuguese East Africa; statues and statuettes of classical subjects; two or three Holbeins, a Rembrandt, and an El Greco on the walls; a piano, a banjo, and a cornet; and, in the corner, a little roulette-table. It was a strange medley, in keeping, perhaps, with the incongruously furnished mind of the master of it all; it was expressive of tastes and habits not yet settled and consistent.

Al'mah's eyes had taken it all in rather wistfully, while she had waited for Krool's return from his master; but the wistfulness was due to personal trouble, for her eyes were clouded and her motions languid. But when she saw the banjo, the cornet, and the roulette-table, a deep little laugh rose to her full red lips.

"How like a subaltern, or a colonial civil servant!" she said to herself.

She reflected a moment, then pursued the thought further: "But there must be bigness in him, as well as presence of mind and depth of heart--yes, I'm sure his nature is deep."

She remembered the quick, protecting hands which had wrapped her round with Jasmine Grenfel's cloak, and the great arms in which she had rested, the danger over.

"There can't be much wrong with a nature like his, though Adrian hates him so. But, of course, Adrian would. Besides, Adrian will never get over the drop in the mining-stock which ruined him--Rudyard Byng's mine.... It's natural for Adrian to hate him, I suppose," she added with a heavy sigh.

Mentally she took to comparing this room with Adrian Fellowes' sitting-room overlooking the Thames Embankment, where everything was in perfect taste and order, where all was modulated, harmonious, soigne and artistic. Yet, somehow, the handsome chambers which hung over the muddy river with its wonderful lights and shades, its mists and radiance, its ghostly softness and greyness, lacked in something that roused imagination, that stirred her senses here--the vital being in her.

It was power, force, experience, adventure. They were all here. She knew the signs: the varied interests, the primary emotions, music, art, hunting, prospecting, fighting, gambling. They were mixed with the solid achievement of talent and force in the business of life. Here was a model of a new mining-drill, with a picture of the stamps working in the Work-and-Wonder mine, together with a model of the Kaffir compound at Kimberley, with the busy, teeming life behind the wire boundaries.

Thus near was Byng to the ways of a child, she thought, thus near to the everlasting intelligence and the busy soul of a constructive and creative Deity--if there was a Deity. Despite the frequent laughter on

her tongue and in her eyes, she doubted bitterly at times that there was a Deity. For how should happen the awful tragedies which encompassed men and peoples, if there was a Deity. No benign Deity could allow His own created humanity to be crushed in bleeding masses, like the grapes trampled in the vats of a vineyard. Whole cities swallowed up by earthquake; islands swept of their people by a tidal wave; a vast ship pierced by an iceberg and going down with its thousand souls; provinces spread with the vile elements of a plague which carpeted the land with dead; mines flooded by water or devastated by fire; the little new-born babe left without the rightful breast to feed it; the mother and her large family suddenly deprived of the breadwinner; old men who had lived like saints, giving their all to their own and to the world, driven to the degradation of the poorhouse in the end--ah, if one did not smile, one would die of weeping, she thought.

Al'mah had smiled her way through the world; with a quick word of sympathy for any who were hurt by the blows of life or time; with an open hand for the poor and miserable,--now that she could afford it--and hiding her own troubles behind mirth and bonhommie; for her humour, as her voice, was deep and strong like that of a man. It was sometimes too pronounced, however, Adrian Fellowes had said; and Adrian was an acute observer, who took great pride in her. Was it not to Adrian she had looked first for approval the night of her triumph at Covent Garden--why, that was only a few days ago, and it seemed a hundred days, so much had happened since. It was Adrian's handsome face which had told her then of the completeness of her triumph.

The half-caste valet entered again. "Here come, madame," he said with something very near a smile; for he liked this woman, and his dark, sensual soul would have approved of his master liking her.

"Soon the Baas, madame," he said as he placed a chair for her, and with the gliding footstep of a native left the room.

"Sunny creature!" she remarked aloud, with a little laugh, and looked round. Instantly her face lighted with interest. Here was nothing of that admired disorder, that medley of incongruous things which marked the room she had just left; but perfect order, precision, and balance of arrangement, the most peaceful equipoise. There was a great carved oak-table near to sun-lit windows, and on it were little regiments of things, carefully arranged--baskets with papers in elastic bands; classified and inscribed reference-books, scales, clips, pencils; and in one clear space, with a bunch of violets before it, the photograph of a woman in a splendid silver frame--a woman of seventy or so, obviously Rudyard Byng's mother.

Al'mah's eyes softened. Here was insight into a nature of which the world knew so little. She looked further. Everywhere were signs of disciplined hours and careful hands--cabinets with initialed drawers, shelves filled with books. There is no more impressive and revealing moment with man or woman than when you stand in a room empty of their actual presence, but having, in every inch of it, the pervasive influences of the absent personality. A strange, almost solemn quietness stole over Al'mah's senses. She had been admitted to the inner court, not of the man's house, but of his life. Her eyes travelled on with the gratified reflection that she had been admitted here. Above the books were rows of sketches--rows of sketches!

Suddenly, as her eyes rested on them, she turned pale and got to her feet. They were all sketches of the veld, high and low; of natives; of bits of Dutch architecture; of the stoep with its Boer farmer and his vrouw; of a kopje with a dozen horses or a herd of cattle grazing; of a spruit, or a Kaffir's kraal; of oxen leaning against the disselboom of a cape-wagon; of a herd of steinboks, or a little colony of meerkats in the karoo.

Her hand went to her heart with a gesture of pain, and a little cry of misery escaped her lips.

Now there was a quick footstep, and Byng entered with a cordial smile and an outstretched hand.

"Well, this is a friendly way to begin the New Year," he said, cheerily, taking her hand. "You certainly are none the worse for our little unrehearsed drama the other night. I see by the papers that you have been repeating your triumph. Please sit down. Do you mind my having a little toast while we talk? I always have my petit dejeuner here; and I'm late this morning."

"You look very tired," she said as she sat down.

Krool here entered with a tray, placing it on a small table by the big desk. He was about to pour out the tea, but Byng waved him away.

"Send this note at once by hand," he said, handing him an envelope. It was addressed to Jasmine Grenfel.

"Yes, I'm tired--rather," he added to his guest with a sudden weariness of manner. "I've had no sleep for three nights--working all the time, every hour; and in this air of London, which doesn't feed you, one needs plenty of sleep. You can't play with yourself here as you can on the high veld, where an hour or two of sleep a day will do. On-saddle and off-saddle, in-span and outspan, plenty to eat and a little sleep; and the air does the rest. It has been a worrying time."

"The Jameson Raid--and all the rest?"

"Particularly all the rest. I feel easier in my mind about Dr. Jim and the others. England will demand--so I understand," he added with a careful look at her, as though he had said too much--"the right to try Jameson and his filibusters from Matabeleland here in England; but it's different with the Jo'burgers. They will be arrested--"

"They have been arrested," she intervened.

"Oh, is it announced?" he asked without surprise.

"It was placarded an hour ago," she replied, heavily.

"Well, I fancied it would be," he remarked. "They'll have a close squeak. The sympathy of the world is with Kruger--so far."

"That is what I have come about," she said, with an involuntary and shrinking glance at the sketches on the walls.

"What you have come about?" he said, putting down his cup of tea and looking at her intently. "How are you concerned? Where do you come

in?"

"There is a man--he has been arrested with the others; with Farrar, Phillips, Hammond, and the rest--"

"Oh, that's bad! A relative, or--"

"Not a relative, exactly," she replied in a tone of irony. Rising, she went over to the wall and touched one of the water-colour sketches.

"How did you come by these?" she asked.

"Blantyre's sketches? Well, it's all I ever got for all Blantyre owed me, and they're not bad. They're lifted out of the life. That's why I bought them. Also because I liked to think I got something out of Blantyre; and that he would wish I hadn't. He could paint a bit--don't you think so?"

"He could paint a bit--always," she replied.

A silence followed. Her back was turned to him, her face was towards the pictures.

Presently he spoke, with a little deferential anxiety in the tone. "Are you interested in Blantyre?" he asked, cautiously. Getting up, he came over to her.

"He has been arrested--as I said--with the others."

"No, you did not say so. So they let Blantyre into the game, did they?" he asked almost musingly; then, as if recalling what she had said, he added: "Do you mind telling me exactly what is your interest in Blantyre?"

She looked at him straight in the eyes. For a face naturally so full of humour, hers was strangely dark with stormy feeling now.

"Yes, I will tell you as much as I can--enough for you to understand," she answered.

He drew up a chair to the fire, and she sat down. He nodded at her encouragingly. Presently she spoke.

"Well, at twenty-one I was studying hard, and he was painting--"

"Blantyre?"

She inclined her head. "He was full of dreams--beautiful, I thought them; and he was ambitious. Also he could talk quite marvellously."

"Yes, Blantyre could talk--once," Byng intervened, gently.

"We were married secretly."

Byng made a gesture of amazement, and his face became shocked and grave. "Married! Married! You were married to Blantyre?"

"At a registry office in Chelsea. One month, only one month it was, and then he went away to Madeira to paint--'a big commission,' he

said; and he would send for me as soon as he could get money in hand--certainly in a couple of months. He had taken most of my half-year's income--I had been left four hundred a year by my mother."

Byng muttered a malediction under his breath and leaned towards her sympathetically.

With an effort she continued. "From Madeira he wrote to tell me he was going on to South Africa, and would not be home for a year. From South Africa he wrote saying he was not coming back; that I could divorce him if I liked. The proof, he said, would be easy; or I needn't divorce him unless I liked, since no one knew we were married."

For an instant there was absolute silence, and she sat with her fingers pressed tight to her eyes. At last she went on, her face turned away from the great kindly blue eyes bent upon her, from the face flushed with honourable human sympathy.

"I went into the country, where I stayed for nearly three years, till--till I could bear it no longer; and then I began to study and sing again."

"What were you doing in the country?" he asked in a low voice.

"There was my baby," she replied, her hands clasping and unclasping in pain. "There was my little Nydia."

"A child--she is living?" he asked gently.

"No, she died two years ago," was the answer in a voice which tried to be firm.

"Does Blantyre know?"

"He knew she was born, nothing more."

"We were married secretly."

"And after all he has done, and left undone, you want to try and save him now?"

He was thinking that she still loved the man. "That offscouring!" he said to himself. "Well, women beat all! He treats her like a Patagonian; leaves her to drift with his child not yet born; rakes the hutches of the towns and the kraals of the veld for women--always women, black or white, it didn't matter; and yet, by gad, she wants him back!"

She seemed to understand what was passing in his mind. Rising, with a bitter laugh which he long remembered, she looked at him for a moment in silence, then she spoke, her voice shaking with scorn:

"You think it is love for him that prompts me now?" Her eyes blazed, but there was a contemptuous laugh at her lips, and she nervously pulled at the tails of her sable muff. "You are wrong--absolutely. I would rather bury myself in the mud of the Thames than let him touch me. Oh, I know what his life must have been--the life of him that you know! With him it would either be the sewer or the sycamore-tree of Zaccheus; either the little upper chamber among the saints or eating

husks with the swine. I realize him now. He was easily susceptible to good and evil, to the clean and the unclean; and he might have been kept in order by some one who would give a life to building up his character; but his nature was rickety, and he has gone down and not up."

"Then why try to save him? Let Oom Paul have him. He'll do no more harm, if--"

"Wait a minute," she urged. "You are a great man"--she came close to him--"and you ought to understand what I mean, without my saying it. I want to save him for his own sake, not for mine--to give him a chance. While there's life there's hope. To go as he is, with the mud up to his lips--ah, can't you see! He is the father of my dead child. I like to feel that he may make some thing of his life and of himself yet. That's why I haven't tried to divorce him, and--"

"If you ever want to do so--" he interrupted, meaningly.

"Yes, I know. I have always been sure that nothing could be quite so easy; but I waited, on the chance of something getting hold of him which would lift him out of himself, give him something to think of so much greater than himself, some cause, perhaps--"

"He had you and your unborn child," he intervened.

"Me--!" She laughed bitterly. "I don't think men would ever be better because of me. I've never seen that. I've seen them show the worst of human nature because of me--and it wasn't inspiring. I've not met many men who weren't on the low levels."

"He hasn't stood his trial for the Johannesburg conspiracy yet. How do you propose to help him? He is in real danger of his life."

She laughed coldly, and looked at him with keen, searching eyes. "You ask that, you who know that in the armory of life there's one all-powerful weapon?"

He nodded his head whimsically. "Money? Well, whatever other weapons you have, you must have that, I admit. And in the Transvaal--"

"Then here," she said, handing him an envelope--"here is what may help."

He took it hesitatingly. "I warn you," he remarked, "that if money is to be used at all, it must be a great deal. Kruger will put up the price to the full capacity of the victim."

"I suppose this victim has nothing," she ventured, quietly.

"Nothing but what the others give him, I should think. It may be a very costly business, even if it is possible, and you--"

"I have twenty thousand pounds," she said.

"Earned by your voice?" he asked, kindly.

"Every penny of it."

"Well, I wouldn't waste it on Blantyre, if I were you. No, by Heaven, you shall not do it, even if it can be done! It is too horrible."

"I owe it to myself to do it. After all, he is still my husband. I have let it be so; and while it is so, and while"--her eyes looked away, her face suffused slightly, her lips tightened--"while things are as they are, I am bound--bound by something, I don't know what, but it is not love, and it is not friendship--to come to his rescue. There will be legal expenses--"

Byng frowned. "Yes, but the others wouldn't see him in a hole--yet I'm not sure, either, Blantyre being Blantyre. In any case, I'm ready to do anything you wish."

She smiled gratefully. "Did you ever know any one to do a favor who wasn't asked to repeat it--paying one debt by contracting another, finding a creditor who will trust, and trading on his trust? Yet I'd rather owe you two debts than most men one." She held out her hand to him. "Well, it doesn't do to mope--'The merry heart goes all the day, the sad one tires in a mile-a.' And I am out for all day. Please wish me a happy new year."

He took her hand in both of his. "I wish you to go through this year as you ended the last--in a blaze of glory."

"Yes, really a blaze if not of glory," she said, with bright tears, yet laughing, too, a big warm humour shining in her strong face with the dark brown eyes and the thick, heavy eyebrows under a low, broad forehead like his own. They were indeed strangely alike in many ways both of mind and body.

"They say we end the year as we begin it," he said, cheerily. "You proved to Destiny that you were entitled to all she could give in the old year, and you shall have the best that's to be had in 1897. You are a woman in a million, and--"

"May I come and breakfast with you some morning?" she asked, gaily.

"Well, if ever I'm thought worthy of that honour, don't hesitate. As the Spanish say, It is all yours." He waved a hand to the surroundings.

"No, it is all yours," she said, reflectively, her eyes slowly roaming about her. "It is all you. I'm glad to have been here, to be as near as this to your real life. Real life is so comforting after the mock kind so many of us live; which singers and actors live anyhow."

She looked round the room again. "I feel--I don't know why it is, but I feel that when I'm in trouble I shall always want to come to this room. Yes, and I will surely come; for I know there's much trouble in store for me. You must let me come. You are the only man I would go to like this, and you can't think what it means to me--to feel that I'm not misunderstood, and that it seems absolutely right to come. That's because any woman could trust you--as I do. Good-bye."

In another moment she had gone, and he stood beside the table with the envelope she had left with him. Presently he opened it, and unfolded the cheque which was in it. Then he gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"Seven thousand pounds!" he exclaimed. "That's a better estimate of Krugerism than I thought she had. It'll take much more than that, though, if it's done at all; but she certainly has sense. It's seven thousand times too much for Blantyre," he added, with an exclamation of disgust. "Blantyre--that outsider!" Then he fell to thinking of all she had told him. "Poor girl--poor girl!" he said aloud. "But she must not come here, just the same. She doesn't see that it's not the thing, just because she thinks I'm a Sir Galahad--me!" He glanced at the picture of his mother, and nodded toward it tenderly. "So did she always. I might have turned Kurd and robbed caravans, or become a Turk and kept concubines, and she'd never have seen that it was so. But Al'mah mustn't come here any more, for her own sake.... I'd find it hard to explain if ever, by any chance--"

He fell to thinking of Jasmine, and looked at the clock. It was only ten, and he would not see Jasmine till six; but if he had gone to South Africa he would not have seen her at all! Fate and Wallstein had been kind.

Presently, as he went to the hall to put on his coat and hat to go out, he met Barry Whalen. Barry looked at him curiously; then, as though satisfied, he said: "Early morning visitor, eh? I just met her coming away. Card of thanks for kind services au theatre, eh?"

"Well, it isn't any business of yours what it is, Barry," came the reply in tones which congealed.

"No, perhaps not," answered his visitor, testily, for he had had a night of much excitement, and, after all, this was no way to speak to a friend, to a partner who had followed his lead always. Friendship should be allowed some latitude, and he had said hundreds of things less carefully to Byng in the past. The past--he was suddenly conscious that Byng had changed within the past few days, and that he seemed to have put restraint on himself. Well, he would get back at him just the same for the snub.

"It's none of my business," he retorted, "but it's a good deal of Adrian Fellowes' business--"

"What is a good deal of Adrian Fellowes' business?"

"Al'mah coming to your rooms. Fellowes is her man. Going to marry her, I suppose," he added, cynically.

Byng's jaw set and his eyes became cold. "Still, I'd suggest your minding your own business, Barry. Your tongue will get you into trouble some day.... You've seen Wallstein this morning--and Fleming?"

Barry replied sullenly, and the day's pressing work began, with the wires busy under the seas.

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN THE POWER-HOUSE

At a few moments before six o'clock Byng was shown into Jasmine's sitting-room. As he entered, the man who sat at the end of the front row of stalls the first night of "Manassa" rose to his feet. It was Adrian Fellowes, slim, well groomed, with the colour of an apple in his cheeks, and his gold-brown hair waving harmoniously over his unintellectual head.

"But, Adrian, you are the most selfish man I've ever known," Jasmine was saying as Byng entered.

Either Jasmine did not hear the servant announce Byng, or she pretended not to do so, and the words were said so distinctly that Byng heard them as he came forward.

"Well, he is selfish," she added to Byng, as she shook hands. "I've known him since I was a child, and he has always had the best of everything and given nothing for it." Turning again to Fellowes, she continued: "Yes, it's true. The golden apples just fall into your hands."

"Well, I wish I had the apples, since you give me the reputation," Fellowes replied, and, shaking hands with Byng, who gave him an enveloping look and a friendly greeting, he left the room.

"Such a boy--Adrian," Jasmine said, as they sat down.

"Boy--he looks thirty or more!" remarked Byng in a dry tone.

"He is just thirty. I call him a boy because he is so young in most things that matter to people. He is the most sumptuous person--entirely a luxury. Did you ever see such colouring--like a woman's! But selfish, as I said, and useful, too, is Adrian. Yes, he really is very useful. He would be a private secretary beyond price to any one who needed such an article. He has tact--as you saw--and would make a wonderful master of ceremonies, a splendid comptroller of the household and equerry and lord-chamberlain in one. There, if ever you want such a person, or if--"

She paused. As she did so she was sharply conscious of the contrast between her visitor and Ian Stafford in outward appearance. Byng's clothes were made by good hands, but they were made by tailors who knew their man was not particular, and that he would not "try on." The result was a looseness and carelessness of good things--giving him, in a way, the look of shambling power. Yet in spite of the tie a little crooked, and the trousers a little too large and too short, he had touches of that distinction which power gives. His large hands with the square-pointed fingers had obtrusive veins, but they were not common.

"Certainly," he intervened, smiling indulgently; "if ever I want a comptroller, or an equerry, or a lord-chamberlain, I'll remember 'Adrian.' In these days one can never tell. There's the Sahara. It hasn't been exploited yet. It has no emperor."

"I like you in this mood," she said, eagerly. "You seem on the surface so tremendously practical and sensible. You frighten me a little, and I like to hear you touch things off with raillery. But, seriously, if you can ever put anything in that boy's way, please do so. He has had bad luck--in your own Rand mine. He lost nearly everything in that,

speculating, and--"

Byng's face grew serious again. "But he shouldn't have speculated; he should have invested. It wants brains, good fortune, daring and wealth to speculate. But I will remember him, if you say so. I don't like to think that he has been hurt in any enterprise of mine. I'll keep him in mind. Make him one of my secretaries perhaps."

Then Barry Whalen's gossip suddenly came to his mind, and he added: "Fellowes will want to get married some day. That face and manner will lead him into ways from which there's only one outlet."

"Matrimony?" She laughed. "Oh dear, no, Adrian is much too selfish to marry."

"I thought that selfishness was one of the elements of successful marriages. I've been told so."

A curious look stole into her eyes. All at once she wondered if his words had any hidden meaning, and she felt angrily self-conscious; but she instantly put the reflection away, for if ever any man travelled by the straight Roman road of speech and thought, it was he. He had only been dealing in somewhat obvious worldly wisdom.

"You ought not to give encouragement to such ideas by repeating them," she rejoined with raillery. "This is an age of telepathy and suggestion, and the more silent we are the safer we are. Now, please, tell me everything--of the inside, I mean--about Cecil Rhodes and the Raiders. Is Rhodes overwhelmed? And Mr. Chamberlain--you have seen him? The papers say you have spent many hours at the Colonial Office. I suppose you were with him at six o'clock last evening, instead of being here with me, as you promised."

He shook his head. "Rhodes? The bigger a man is the greater the crash when he falls; and no big man falls alone."

She nodded. "There's the sense of power, too, which made everything vibrate with energy, which gave a sense of great empty places filled--of that power withdrawn and collapsed. Even the bad great man gone leaves a sense of desolation behind. Power--power, that is the thing of all," she said, her eyes shining and her small fingers interlacing with eager vitality: "power to set waves of influence in motion which stir the waters on distant shores. That seems to me the most wonderful thing."

Her vitality, her own sense of power, seemed almost incongruous. She was so delicately made, so much the dresden-china shepherdess, that intensity seemed out of relation to her nature. Yet the tiny hands playing before her with natural gestures like those of a child had, too, a decision and a firmness in keeping with the perfectly modelled head and the courageous poise of the body. There was something regnant in her, while, too, there was something sumptuous and sensuous and physically thrilling to the senses. To-day she was dressed in an exquisite blue gown, devoid of all decoration save a little chinchilla fur, which only added to its softness and richness. She wore no jewelry whatever except a sapphire brooch, and her hair shone and waved like gossamer in the sun.

"Well, I don't know," he rejoined, admiration unbounded in his eyes

for the picture she was of maidenly charm and womanly beauty, "I should say that goodness was a more wonderful thing. But power is the most common ambition, and only a handful of the hundreds of millions get it in any large way. I used to feel it tremendously when I first heard the stamps pounding the quartz in the mills on the Rand. You never heard that sound? In the clear height of that plateau the air reverberates greatly; and there's nothing on earth which so much gives a sense of power--power that crushes--as the stamps of a great mine pounding away night and day. There they go, thundering on, till it seems to you that some unearthly power is hammering the world into shape. You get up and go to the window and look out into the night. There's the deep blue sky--blue like nothing you ever saw in any other sky, and the stars so bright and big, and so near, that you feel you could reach up and pluck one with your hand; and just over the little hill are the lights of the stamp-mills, the smoke and the mad red flare, the roar of great hammers as they crush, crush, crush; while the vibration of the earth makes you feel that you are living in a world of Titans."

"And when it all stops?" she asked, almost breathlessly. "When the stamps pound no more, and the power is withdrawn? It is empty and desolate--and frightening?"

"It is anything you like. If all the mills all at once, with the thousands of stamps on the Rand reef, were to stop suddenly, and the smoke and the red flare were to die, it would be frightening in more ways than one. But I see what you mean. There might be a sense of peace, but the minds and bodies which had been vibrating with the stir of power would feel that the soul had gone out of things, and they would dwindle too."

"If Rhodes should fall, if the stamps on the Rand should cease--?"

He got to his feet. "Either is possible, maybe probable; and I don't want to think of it. As you say, there'd be a ghastly sense of emptiness and a deadly kind of peace." He smiled bitterly.

She rose now also, and fingering some flowers in a vase, arranging them afresh, said: "Well, this Jameson Raid, if it is proved that Cecil Rhodes is mixed up in it, will it injure you greatly--I mean your practical interests?"

He stood musing for a moment. "It's difficult to say at this distance. One must be on the spot to make a proper estimate. Anything may happen."

She was evidently anxious to ask him a question, but hesitated. At last she ventured, and her breath came a little shorter as she spoke.

"I suppose you wish you were in South Africa now. You could do so much to straighten things out, to prevent the worst. The papers say you have a political mind--the statesman's intelligence, the Times said. That letter you wrote, that speech you made at the Chamber of Commerce dinner--"

She watched him, dreading what his answer might be. There was silence for a moment, then he answered: "Fleming is going to South Africa, not myself. I stay here to do Wallstein's work. I was going, but Wallstein was taken ill suddenly. So I stay--I stay."

She sank down in her chair, going a little pale from excitement. The whiteness of her skin gave a delicate beauty to the faint rose of her cheeks--that rose-pink which never was to fade entirely from her face while life was left to her.

"If it had been necessary, when would you have gone?" she asked.

"At once. Fleming goes to-morrow," he added.

She looked slowly up at him. "Wallstein is a new name for a special Providence," she murmured, and the colour came back to her face. "We need you here. We--"

Suddenly a thought flashed into his mind and suffused his face. He was conscious of that perfume which clung to whatever she touched. It stole to his senses and intoxicated them. He looked at her with enamoured eyes. He had the heart of a boy, the impulsiveness of a nature which had been unschooled in women's ways. Weaknesses in other directions had taught him much, but experiences with her sex had been few. The designs of other women had been patent to him, and he had been invincible to all attack; but here was a girl who, with her friendly little fortune and her beauty, could marry with no difficulty; who, he had heard, could pick and choose, and had so far rejected all comers; and who, if she had shown preference at all, had shown it for a poor man like Ian Stafford. She had courage and simplicity and a downright mind; that was clear. And she was capable. She had a love for big things, for the things that mattered. Every word she had ever said to him had understanding, not of the world alone, and of life, but of himself, Rudyard Byng. She grasped exactly what he would say, and made him say things he would never have thought of saying to any one else. She drew him out, made the most of him, made him think. Other women only tried to make him feel. If he had had a girl like this beside him during the last ten years, how many wasted hours would have been saved, how many bottles of champagne would not have been opened, how many wild nights would have been spent differently!

Too good, too fine for him--yes, a hundred times, but he would try to make it up to her, if such a girl as this could endure him. He was not handsome, he was not clever, so he said to himself, but he had a little power. That he had to some degree rough power, of course, but power; and she loved power, force. Had she not said so, shown it, but a moment before? Was it possible that she was really interested in him, perhaps because he was different from the average Englishman and not of a general pattern? She was a woman of brains, of great individuality, and his own individuality might influence her. It was too good to be true; but there had ever been something of the gambler in him, and he had always plunged. If he ever had a conviction he acted on it instantly, staked everything, when that conviction got into his inner being. It was not, perhaps, a good way, and it had failed often enough; but it was his way, and he had done according to the light and the impulse that were in him. He had no diplomacy, he had only purpose.

He came over to her. "If I had gone to South Africa would you have remembered my name for a month?" he asked with determination and meaning.

"My friends never suffer lunar eclipse," she answered, gaily. "Dear sir, I am called Hold-Fast. My friends are century-flowers and are always blooming."

"You count me among your friends?"

"I hope so. You will let me make all England envious of me, won't you? I never did you any harm, and I do want to have a hero in my tiny circle."

"A hero--you mean me? Well, I begin to think I have some courage when I ask you to let me inside your 'tiny' circle. I suppose most people would think it audacity, not courage."

"You seem not to be aware what an important person you are--how almost sensationally important. Why, I am only a pebble on a shore like yours, a little unknown slip of a girl who babbles, and babbles in vain."

She got to her feet now. "Oh, but believe me, believe me," she said, with sweet and sudden earnestness, "I am prouder than I can say that you will let me be a friend of yours! I like men who have done things, who do things. My grandfather did big, world-wide things, and--"

"Yes, I know; I met your grandfather once. He was a big man, big as can be. He had the world by the ear always."

"He spoiled me for the commonplace," she replied. "If I had lived in Pizarro's time, I'd have gone to Peru with him, the splendid robber."

He answered with the eager frankness and humour of a boy. "If you mean to be a friend of mine, there are those who will think that in one way you have fulfilled your ambition, for they say I've spoiled the Peruvians, too."

"I like you when you say things like that," she murmured. "If you said them often--"

She looked at him archly, and her eyes brimmed with amusement and excitement.

Suddenly he caught both her hands in his and his eyes burned. "Will you--"

He paused. His courage forsook him. Boldness had its limit. He feared a repulse which could never be overcome. "Will you, and all of you here, come down to my place in Wales next week?" he blundered out.

She was glad he had faltered. It was too bewildering. She dared not yet face the question she had seen he was about to ask. Power--yes, he could give her that; but power was the craving of an ambitious soul. There were other things. There was the desire of the heart, the longing which came with music and the whispering trees and the bright stars, the girlish dreams of ardent love and the garlands of youth and joy--and Ian Stafford.

Suddenly she drew herself together. She was conscious that the servant was entering the room with a letter.

"The messenger is waiting," the servant said.

With an apology she opened the note slowly as Byng turned to the fire. She read the page with a strange, tense look, closing her eyes at last with a slight sense of dizziness. Then she said to the servant:

"Tell the messenger to wait. I will write an answer."

"I am sure we shall be glad to go to you in Wales next week," she added, turning to Byng again. "But won't you be far away from the centre of things in Wales?"

"I've had the telegraph and a private telephone wire to London put in. I shall be as near the centre as though I lived in Grosvenor Square; and there are always special trains."

"Special trains--oh, but it's wonderful to have power to do things like that! When do you go down?" she asked.

"To-morrow morning."

She smiled radiantly. She saw that he was angry with himself for his cowardice just now, and she tried to restore him. "Please, will you telephone me when you arrive at your castle? I should like the experience of telephoning by private wire to Wales."

He brightened. "Certainly, if you really wish it. I shall arrive at ten to-morrow night, and I'll telephone you at eleven."

"Splendid--splendid! I'll be alone in my room then. I've got a telephone instrument there, and so we could say good-night."

"So we can say good-night," he repeated in a low voice, and he held out his hand in good-bye. When he had gone, with a new, great hope in his heart, she sat down and tremblingly re-opened the note she had received a moment before.

"I am going abroad" it read--"to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. I think I've got my chance at last. I want to see you before I go--this evening, Jasmine. May I?"

It was signed "Ian."

"Fate is stronger than we are," she murmured; "and Fate is not kind to you, Ian," she added, wearily, a wan look coming into her face.

"Mio destino," she said at last--"mio destino!" But who was her destiny--which of the two who loved her?

BOOK II

CHAPTER VII

THREE YEARS LATER

"Extra speshul--extra speshul--all about Kruger an' his guns!"

The shrill, acrid cry rang down St. James's Street, and a newsboy with a bunch of pink papers under his arm shot hither and thither on the pavement, offering his sensational wares to all he met.

"Extra speshul--extra speshul--all about the war wot's comin'--all about Kruger's guns!"

From an open window on the second floor of a building in the street a man's head was thrust out, listening.

"The war wot's comin'!" he repeated, with a bitter sort of smile. "And all about Kruger's guns. So it is coming, is it, Johnny Bull; and you do know all about his guns, do you? If it is, and you do know, then a shattering big thing is coming, and you know quite a lot, Johnny Bull."

He hummed to himself an impromptu refrain to an impromptu tune:

"Then you know quite a lot, Johnny Bull, Johnny Bull,
Then you know quite a lot, Johnny Bull!"

Stepping out of the French window upon a balcony now, he looked down the street. The newsboy was almost below. He whistled, and the lad looked up. In response to a beckoning finger the gutter-snipe took the doorway and the staircase at a bound. Like all his kind, he was a good judge of character, and one glance had assured him that he was speeding upon a visit of profit. Half a postman's knock--a sharp, insistent stroke--and he entered, his thin weasel-like face thrust forward, his eyes glittering. The fire in such eyes is always cold, for hunger is poor fuel to the native flame of life.

"Extra speshul, m'lord--all about Kruger's guns."

He held out the paper to the figure that darkened the window, and he pronounced the g in Kruger soft, as in Scrooge.

The hand that took the paper deftly slipped a shilling into the cold, skinny palm. At its first touch the face of the paper-vender fell, for it was the same size as a halfpenny; but even before the swift fingers had had a chance to feel the coin, or the glance went down, the face regained its confidence, for the eyes looking at him were generous. He had looked at so many faces in his brief day that he was an expert observer.

"Thank y' kindly," he said; then, as the fingers made assurance of the fortune which had come to him, "Ow, thank ye werry much, y'r gryce," he added.

Something alert and determined in the face of the boy struck the giver of the coin as he opened the paper to glance at its contents, and he

paused to scan him more closely. He saw the hunger in the lad's eyes as they swept over the breakfast-table, still heavy with uneaten breakfast--bacon, nearly the whole of an omelette, and rolls, toast, marmalade and honey.

"Wait a second," he said, as the boy turned toward the door.

"Yes, y'r gryce."

"Had your breakfast?"

"I has me brekfist w'en I sells me pypers." The lad hugged the remaining papers closer under his arms, and kept his face turned resolutely away from the inviting table. His host correctly interpreted the action.

"Poor little devil--grit, pure grit!" he said under his breath. "How many papers have you got left?" he asked.

The lad counted like lightning. "Ten," he answered. "I'll soon get 'em off now. Luck's wiv me dis mornin'." The ghost of a smile lighted his face.

"I'll take them all," the other said, handing over a second shilling.

The lad fumbled for change and the fumbling was due to honest agitation. He was not used to this kind of treatment.

"No, that's all right," the other interposed.

"But they're only a h'ypenny," urged the lad, for his natural cupidity had given way to a certain fine faculty not too common in any grade of human society.

"Well, I'm buying them at a penny this morning. I've got some friends who'll be glad to give a penny to know all about Kruger's guns." He too softened the g in Kruger in consideration of his visitor's idiosyncrasies.

"You won't be mykin' anythink on them, y'r gryce," said the lad with a humour which opened the doors of Ian Stafford's heart wide; for to him heaven itself would be insupportable if it had no humorists.

"I'll get at them in other ways," Stafford rejoined. "I'll get my profit, never fear. Now what about breakfast? You've sold all your papers, you know."

"I'm fair ready for it, y'r gryce," was the reply, and now the lad's glance went eagerly towards the door, for the tension of labour was relaxed, and hunger was scraping hard at his vitals.

"Well, sit down--this breakfast isn't cold yet.... But, no, you'd better have a wash-up first, if you can wait," Stafford added, and rang a bell.

"Wot, 'ere--brekfist wiv y'r gryce 'ere?"

"Well, I've had mine"--Stafford made a slight grimace--" and there's plenty left for you, if you don't mind eating after me."

"I dusted me clothes dis mornin'," said the boy, with an attempt to justify his decision to eat this noble breakfast. "An' I washed me 'ends--but pypers is muck," he added.

A moment later he was in the fingers of Gleg the valet in the bath-room, and Stafford set to work to make the breakfast piping hot again. It was an easy task, as heaters were inseparable from his bachelor meals, and, though this was only the second breakfast he had eaten since his return to England after three years' absence, everything was in order.

For Gleg was still more the child of habit--and decorous habit--than himself. It was not the first time that Gleg had had to deal with his master's philanthropic activities. Much as he disapproved of them, he could discriminate; and there was that about the newsboy which somehow disarmed him. He went so far as to heap the plate of the lad, and would have poured the coffee too, but that his master took the pot from his hand and with a nod and a smile dismissed him; and his master's smile was worth a good deal to Gleg. It was an exacting if well-paid service, for Ian Stafford was the most particular man in Europe, and he had grown excessively so during the past three years, which, as Gleg observed, had brought great, if quiet, changes in him. He had grown more studious, more watchful, more exclusive in his daily life, and ladies of all kinds he had banished from direct personal share in his life. There were no more little tea-parties and dejeuners chez lui, duly chaperoned by some gracious cousin or aunt--for there was no embassy in Europe where he had not relatives.

"'Ipped--a bit 'ipped. 'E 'as found 'em out, the 'uzzies," Gleg had observed; for he had decided that the general cause of the change in his master was Woman, though he did not know the particular woman who had 'ipped him.

As the lad ate his wonderful breakfast, in which nearly half a pot of marmalade and enough butter for three ordinary people figured, Stafford read the papers attentively, to give his guest a fair chance at the food and to overcome his self-consciousness. He got an occasional glance at the trencherman, however, as he changed the sheets, stepped across the room to get a cigarette, or poked the small fire--for, late September as it was, a sudden cold week of rain had come and gone, leaving the air raw; and a fire was welcome.

At last, when he realized that the activities of the table were decreasing, he put down his paper. "Is it all right?" he asked. "Is the coffee hot?"

"I ain't never 'ad a meal like that, y'r gryce, not never any time," the boy answered, with a new sort of fire in his eyes.

"Was there enough?"

"I've left some," answered his guest, looking at the jar of marmalade and half a slice of toast. "I likes the coffee hot--tykes y'r longer to drink it," he added.

Ian Stafford chuckled. He was getting more than the worth of his money. He had nibbled at his own breakfast, with the perturbations of a crossing from Flushing still in his system, and its equilibrium not

fully restored; and yet, with the waste of his own meal and the neglect of his own appetite, he had given a great and happy half-hour to a waif of humanity.

As he looked at the boy he wondered how many thousands there were like him within rifle-shot from where he sat, and he thought each of them would thank whatever gods they knew for such a neglected meal. The words from the scare-column of the paper he held smote his sight:

"War Inevitable--Transvaal Bristling with Guns and Loaded to the Nozzle with War Stores--Milner and Kruger No Nearer a Settlement--Sullen and Contemptuous Treatment of British Outlander."
. . . And so on.

And if war came, if England must do this ugly thing, fulfil her bitter and terrible task, then what about such as this young outlander here, this outcast from home and goodly toil and civilized conditions, this sickly froth of the muddy and dolorous stream of lower England? So much withdrawn from the sources of the possible relief, so much less with which to deal with their miseries--perhaps hundreds of millions, mopped up by the parched and unproductive soil of battle and disease and loss.

He glanced at the paper again. "Britons Hold Your Own," was the heading of the chief article. "Yes, we must hold our own," he said, aloud, with a sigh. "If it comes, we must see it through; but the breakfasts will be fewer. It works down one way or another--it all works down to this poor little devil and his kind."

"Now, what's your name?" he asked.

"Jigger," was the reply.

"What else?"

"Nothin', y'r gryce."

"Jigger--what?"

"It's the only nyme I got," was the reply.

"What's your father's or your mother's name?"

"I ain't got none. I only got a sister."

"What's her name?"

"Lou," he answered. "That's her real name. But she got a fancy name yistiddy. She was took on at the opera yistiddy, to sing with a hunderd uvver girls on the styge. She's Lulu Luckingham now."

"Oh--Luckingham!" said Stafford, with a smile, for this was a name of his own family, and of much account in circles he frequented. "And who gave her that name? Who were her godfathers and godmothers?"

"I dunno, y'r gryce. There wasn't no religion in it. They said she'd have to be called somefink, and so they called her that. Lou was always plenty for 'er till she went there yistiddy."

"What did she do before yesterday?"

"Sold flowers w'en she could get 'em to sell. 'Twas when she couldn't sell her flowers that she piped up sort of dead wild--for she 'adn't 'ad nothin' to eat, an' she was fair crusty. It was then a gentleman, 'e 'eard 'er singin' hot, an' he says, 'That's good enough for a start,' 'e says, 'an' you come wiv me,' he says. 'Not much,' Lou says, 'not if I knows it. I seed your kind frequent.' But 'e stuck to it, an' says, 'It's stryght, an' a lydy will come for you to-morrer, if you'll be 'ere on this spot, or tell me w'ere you can be found.' An' Lou says, says she, 'You buy my flowers, so's I kin git me bread-baskit full, an' then I'll think it over.' An' he bought 'er flowers, an' give 'er five bob. An' Lou paid rent for both of us wiv that, an' 'ad brekfist; an' sure enough the lydy come next dy an' took her off. She's in the opery now, an' she'll 'ave 'er brekfist reg'lar. I seed the lydy meself. Her picture 's on the 'oardings--"

Suddenly he stopped. "W'y, that's 'er--that's 'er!" he said, pointing to the mantel-piece.

Stafford followed the finger and the glance. It was Al'mah's portrait in the costume she had worn over three years ago, the night when Rudyard Byng had rescued her from the flames. He had bought it then. It had been unpacked again by Gleg, and put in the place it had occupied for a day or two before he had gone out of England to do his country's work--and to face the bitterest disillusion of his life; to meet the heaviest blow his pride and his heart had ever known.

"So that's the lady, is it?" he said, musingly, to the boy, who nodded assent.

"Go and have a good look at it," urged Stafford.

The boy did so. "It's 'er--done up for the opery," he declared.

"Well, Lulu Luckingham is all right, then. That lady will be good to her."

"Right. As soon as I seed her, I whispers to Lou 'You keep close to that there wall,' I sez. 'There's a chimbey in it, an' you'll never be cold,' I says to Lou."

Stafford laughed softly at the illustration. Many a time the lad snuggled up to a wall which had a warm chimney, and he had got his figure of speech from real life.

"Well, what's to become of you?" Stafford asked.

"Me--I'll be level wiv me rent to-day," he answered, turning over the two shillings and some coppers in his pocket; "an' Lou and me's got a fair start."

Stafford got up, came over, and laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I'm going to give you a sovereign," he said--"twenty shillings, for your fair start; and I want you to come to me here next Sunday-week to breakfast, and tell me what you've done with it."

"Me--y'r gryce!" A look of fright almost came into the lad's face. "Twenty bob--me!"

The sovereign was already in his hand, and now his face suffused. He seemed anxious to get away, and looked round for his cap. He couldn't do here what he wanted to do. He felt that he must burst.

"Now, off you go. And you be here at nine o'clock on Sunday-week with the papers, and tell me what you've done."

"Gawd--my Gawd!" said the lad, huskily. The next minute he was out in the hall, and the door was shut behind him. A moment later, hearing a whoop, Stafford went to the window and, looking down, he saw his late visitor turning a cart-wheel under the nose of a policeman, and then, with another whoop, shooting down into the Mall, making Lambeth way.

With a smile he turned from the window. "Well, we shall see," he said. "Perhaps it will be my one lucky speculation. Who knows--who knows!"

His eye caught the portrait of Al'mah on the mantelpiece. He went over and stood looking at it musingly.

"You were a good girl," he said, aloud. "At any rate, you wouldn't pretend. You'd gamble with your immortal soul, but you wouldn't sell it--not for three millions, not for a hundred times three millions. Or is it that you are all alike, you women? Isn't there one of you that can be absolutely true? Isn't there one that won't smirch her soul and kill the faith of those that love her for some moment's excitement, for gold to gratify a vanity, or to have a wider sweep to her skirts? Vain, vain, vain--and dishonourable, essentially dishonourable. There might be tragedies, but there wouldn't be many intrigues if women weren't so dishonourable--the secret orchard rather than the open highway and robbery under arms.... Whew, what a world!"

He walked up and down the room for a moment, his eyes looking straight before him; then he stopped short. "I suppose it's natural that, coming back to England, I should begin to unpack a lot of old memories, empty out the box-room, and come across some useless and discarded things. I'll settle down presently; but it's a thoroughly useless business turning over old stock. The wise man pitches it all into the junk-shop, and cuts his losses."

He picked up the Morning Post and glanced down the middle page--the social column first--with the half-amused reflection that he hadn't done it for years, and that here were the same old names reappearing, with the same brief chronicles. Here, too, were new names, some of them, if not most of them, of a foreign turn to their syllables--New York, Melbourne, Buenos Ayres, Johannesburg. His lip curled a little with almost playful scorn. At St. Petersburg, Vienna, and elsewhere he had been vaguely conscious of these social changes; but they did not come within the ambit of his daily life, and so it had not mattered. And there was no reason why it should matter now. His England was a land the original elements of which would not change, had not changed; for the old small inner circle had not been invaded, was still impervious to the wash of wealth and snobbery and push. That refuge had its sequestered glades, if perchance it was unilluminating and rather heavily decorous; so that he could let the climbers, the toadies, the gold-spillers, and the bribers have the middle of the road.

It did not matter so much that London was changing fast. The old clock on the tower of St. James's would still give the time to his step as he went to and from the Foreign Office, and there were quiet places like Kensington Gardens where the bounding person would never think to stray. Indeed, they never strayed; they only rushed and pushed where their spreading tails could be seen by the multitude. They never got farther west than Rotten Row, which was in possession of three classes of people--those who sat in Parliament, those who had seats on the Stock Exchange, and those who could not sit their horses. Three years had not done it all, but it had done a good deal; and he was more keenly alive to the changes and developments which had begun long before he left and had increased vastly since. Wealth was more and more the master of England--new-made wealth; and some of it was too ostentatious and too pretentious to condone, much less indulge.

All at once his eye, roaming down the columns, came upon the following announcement:

"Mr. and Mrs. Rudyard Byng have returned to town from Scotland for a few days, before proceeding to Wales, where they are presently to receive at Glencader Castle the Duke and Duchess of Sheffield, the Prince and Princess of Cleaves, M. Santon, the French Foreign Minister, the Slavonian Ambassador, the Earl and Countess of Tynemouth, and Mr. Tudor Tempest."

"And Mr. Tudor Tempest," Ian repeated to himself. "Well, she would. She would pay that much tribute to her own genius. Four-fifths to the claims of the body and the social nervous system, and one-fifth to the desire of the soul. Tempest is a literary genius by what he has done, and she is a genius by nature, and with so much left undone. The Slavonian Ambassador--him, and the French Foreign Minister! That looks like a useful combination at this moment--at this moment. She has a gift for combinations, a wonderful skill, a still more wonderful perception--and a remarkable unscrupulousness. She's the naturally ablest woman I have ever known; but she wants to take short-cuts to a worldly Elysium, and it can't be done, not even with three times three millions--and three millions was her price."

Suddenly he got up and went over to a table where were several dispatch-boxes. Opening one, he drew forth from the bottom, where he had placed it nearly three years ago, a letter. He looked at the long, sliding handwriting, so graceful and fine, he caught the perfume which had intoxicated Rudyard Byng, and, stooping down, he sniffed the dispatch-box. He nodded.

"She's pervasive in everything," he murmured. He turned over several other packets of letters in the box. "I apologize," he said, ironically, to these letters. "I ought to have banished her long ago, but, to tell you the truth, I didn't realize how much she'd influence everything--even in a box." He laughed cynically, and slowly opened the one letter which had meant so much to him.

There was no show of agitation. His eye was calm; only his mouth showed any feeling or made any comment. It was a little supercilious and scornful. Sitting down by the table, he spread the letter out, and read it with great deliberation. It was the first time he had looked at it since he received it in Vienna and had placed it in the dispatch-box.

"Dear Ian," it ran, "our year of probation--that is the word isn't it?--is up; and I have decided that our ways must lie apart. I am going to marry Rudyard Byng next month. He is very kind and very strong, and not too ragingly clever. You know I should chafe at being reminded daily of my own stupidity by a very clever man. You and I have had so many good hours together, there has been such confidence between us, that no other friendship can ever be the same; and I shall always want to go to you, and ask your advice, and learn to be wise. You will not turn a cold shoulder on me, will you? I think you yourself realized that my wish to wait a year before giving a final answer was proof that I really had not that in my heart which would justify me in saying what you wished me to say. Oh yes, you knew; and the last day when you bade me good-bye you almost said as much! I was so young, so unschooled, when you first asked me, and I did not know my own mind; but I know it now, and so I go to Rudyard Byng for better or for worse--"

He suddenly stopped reading, sat back in his chair, and laughed sardonically.

"For richer, for poorer'--now to have launched out on the first phrase, and to have jibbed at the second was distinctly stupid. The quotation could only have been carried off with audacity of the ripest kind. 'For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part, amen--' That was the way to have done it, if it was to be done at all. Her cleverness forsook her when she wrote that letter. 'Our year of probation'--she called it that. Dear, dear, what a poor prevaricator the best prevaricator is! She was sworn to me, bound to me, wanted a year in which to have her fling before she settled down, and she threw me over--like that."

He did not read the rest of the letter, but got up, went over to the fire, threw it in, and watched it burn.

"I ought to have done so when I received it," he said, almost kindly now. "A thing like that ought never to be kept a minute. It's a terrible confession, damning evidence, a self-made exposure, and to keep it is too brutal, too hard on the woman. If anything had happened to me and it had been read, 'Not all the King's horses nor all the King's men could put Humpty Dumpty together again.'"

Then he recalled the brief letter he had written her in reply. Unlike him, she had not kept his answer, when it came into her hands, but, tearing it up into fifty fragments, had thrown it into the waste-basket, and paced her room in shame, anger and humiliation. Finally, she had taken the waste-basket and emptied it into the flames. She had watched the tiny fragments burn in a fire not hotter than that in her own eyes, which presently were washed by a flood of bitter tears and passionate and unavailing protest. For hours she had sobbed, and when she went out into the world the next day, it was with his every word ringing in her ears, as they had rung ever since: the sceptic comment at every feast, the ironical laughter behind every door, the whispered detraction in every loud accent of praise.

"Dear Jasmine," his letter had run, "it is kind of you to tell me of your intended marriage before it occurs, for in these distant lands news either travels slowly or does not reach one at all. I am fortunate in having my information from the very fountain of first knowledge. You have seen and done much in the past year; and the end

of it all is more fitting than the most meticulous artist could desire or conceive. You will adorn the new sphere into which you enter. You are of those who do not need training or experience: you are a genius, whose chief characteristic is adaptability. Some people, to whom nature and Providence have not been generous live up to things; to you it is given to live down to them; and no one can do it so well. We have had good times together--happy conversations and some cheerful and entertaining dreams and purposes. We have made the most of opportunity, each in his and her own way. But, my dear Jasmine, don't ever think that you will need to come to me for advice and to learn to be wise. I know of no one from whom I could learn, from whom I have learned, so I much. I am deeply your debtor for revelations which never could have come to me without your help. There is a wonderful future before you, whose variety let Time, not me, attempt to reveal. I shall watch your going on"--(he did not say goings on)--"your Alpine course, with clear memories of things and hours dearer to me than all the world, and with which I would not have parted for the mines of the Rand. I lose them now for nothing--and less than nothing. I shall be abroad for some years, and, meanwhile, a new planet will swim into the universe of matrimony. I shall see the light shining, but its heavenly orbit will not be within my calculations. Other astronomers will watch, and some no doubt will pray, and I shall read in the annals the bright story of the flower that was turned into a star!

"Always yours sincerely,
IAN STAFFORD."

From the filmy ashes of her letter to him Stafford now turned away to his writing-table. There he sat for a while and answered several notes, among them one to Alice Mayhew, now the Countess of Tynemouth, whose red parasol still hung above the mantel-piece, a relic of the Zambesi--and of other things.

Periodically Lady Tynemouth's letters had come to him while he was abroad, and from her, in much detail, he had been informed of the rise of Mrs. Byng, of her great future, her "delicious" toilettes, her great entertainments for charity, her successful attempts to gather round her the great figures in the political and diplomatic world; and her partial rejection of Byng's old mining and financial confreres and their belongings. It had all culminated in a visit of royalty to their place in Suffolk, from which she had emerged radiantly and delicately aggressive, and sweeping a wider circle with her social scythe.

Ian had read it all unperturbed. It was just what he knew she could and would do; and he foresaw for Byng, if he wanted it, a peerage in the not distant future. Alice Tynemouth was no gossip, and she was not malicious. She had a good, if wayward, heart, was full of sentiment, and was a constant and helpful friend. He, therefore, accepted her invitation now to spend the next week-end with her and her husband; and then, with letters to two young nephews in his pocket, he prepared to sally forth to buy them presents, and to get some sweets for the children of a poor invalid cousin to whom for years he had been a generous friend. For children he had a profound love, and if he had married, he would not have been content with a childless home--with a childless home like that of Rudyard Byng. That news also had come to him from Alice Tynemouth, who honestly lamented that Jasmine Byng had no "balance-wheel," which was the safety and the anchor of women "like her and me," Lady Tynemouth's letter had said.

Three millions then--and how much more now?--and big houses, and no children. It was an empty business, or so it seemed to him, who had come of a large and agreeably quarrelsome and clever family, with whom life had been checkered but never dull.

He took up his hat and stick, and went towards the door. His eyes caught Al'mah's photograph as he passed.

"It was all done that night at the opera," he said. "Jasmine made up her mind then to marry him, . . . I wonder what the end will be.... Sad little, bad little girl.... The mess of pottage at the last? Quien sabe!"

CHAPTER VIII

"HE SHALL NOT TREAT ME SO"

The air of the late September morning smote Stafford's cheeks pleasantly, and his spirits rose as he walked up St. James's Street. His step quickened imperceptibly to himself, and he nodded to or shook hands with half a dozen people before he reached Piccadilly. Here he completed the purchases for his school-boy nephews, and then he went to a sweet-shop in Regent Street to get chocolates for his young relatives. As he entered the place he was suddenly brought to a standstill, for not two dozen yards away at a counter was Jasmine Byng.

She did not see him enter, and he had time to note what matrimony, and the three years and the three million pounds, had done to her. She was radiant and exquisite, a little paler, a little more complete, but increasingly graceful and perfectly appointed. Her dress was of dark green, of a most delicate shade, and with the clinging softness and texture of velvet. She wore a jacket of the same material, and a single brilliant ornament at her throat relieved the simplicity. In the hat, too, one big solitary emerald shone against the lighter green.

She was talking now with animation and amusement to the shop-girl who was supplying her with sweets, and every attendant was watching her with interest and pleasure. Stafford reflected that this was always her way: wherever she went she attracted attention, drew interest, magnetized the onlooker. Nothing had changed in her. nothing of charm and beauty and eloquence,--how eloquent she had always been!--of esprit, had gone from her; nothing. Presently she turned her face full toward him, still not seeing him, half hidden as he was behind some piled-up tables in the centre of the shop.

Nothing changed? Yes, instantly he was aware of a change, in the eyes, at the mouth. An elusive, vague, distant kind of disturbance--he could not say trouble--had stolen into her eyes, had taken possession of the corners of the mouth; and he was conscious of something exotic, self-indulgent, and "emancipated." She had always been self-indulgent and selfish, and, in a wilful, innocent way, emancipated, in the old days; but here was a different, a fuller, a more daring expression of these qualities.... Ah, he had it now! That elusive something was a

lurking recklessness, which, perhaps, was not bold enough yet to leap into full exercise, or even to recognize itself.

So this was she to whom he had given the best of which he had been capable--not a very noble or priceless best, he was willing to acknowledge, but a kind of guarantee of the future, the nucleus of fuller things. As he looked at her now his heart did not beat faster, his pulses did not quicken, his eye did not soften, he did not even wish himself away. Love was as dead as last year's leaves--so dead that no spirit of resentment, or humiliation, or pain of heart was in his breast at this sight of her again. On the contrary, he was conscious of a perfect mastery of himself, of being easily superior to the situation.

Love was dead; youth was dead; the desire that beats in the veins of the young was dead; his disillusion and disappointment and contempt for one woman had not driven him, as it so often does, to other women--to that wild waste which leaves behind it a barren and ill-natured soil exhausted of its power, of its generous and native health. There was a strange apathy in his senses, an emotional stillness, as it were, the atrophy of all the passionate elements of his nature. But because of this he was the better poised, the more evenly balanced, the more perceptive. His eyes were not blurred or dimmed by any stress of emotion, his mind worked in a cool quiet, and his forward tread had leisurely decision and grace. He had sunk one part of himself far below the level of activity or sensation, while new resolves, new powers of mind, new designs were set in motion to make his career a real and striking success. He had the most friendly ear and the full confidence of the Prime Minister, who was also Foreign Secretary--he had got that far; and now, if one of his great international schemes could but be completed, an ambassadorship would be his reward, and one of first-class importance. The three years had done much for him in a worldly way, wonderfully much.

As he looked at the woman who had shaken his life to the centre--not by her rejection of him, but by the fashion of it, the utter selfishness and cold-blooded calculation of it, he knew that love's fires were out, and that he could meet her without the agitation of a single nerve. He despised her, but he could make allowance for her. He knew the strain that was in her, got from her brilliant and rather plangent grandfather. He knew the temptation of a vast fortune, the power that it would bring--and the notoriety, too, again an inheritance from her grandfather. He was not without magnanimity, and he could the more easily exercise it because his pulses of emotion were still.

She was by nature the most brilliantly endowed woman he had ever met, the most naturally perceptive and artistic, albeit there was a touch of gorgeousness to the inherent artistry which time, training and experience would have chastened. Would have chastened? Was it not, then, chastened? Looking at her now, he knew that it was not. It was still there, he felt; but how much else was also there--of charm, of elusiveness, of wit, of mental adroitness, of joyous eagerness to discover a new thought or a new thing! She was a creature of rare splendour, variety and vanity.

Why should he deny himself the pleasure of her society? His intellectual side would always be stimulated by her, she would always "incite him to mental riot," as she had often said. Time had flown,

love had flown, and passion was dead; but friendship stayed. Yes, friendship stayed--in spite of all. Her conduct had made him blush for her, had covered him with shame, but she was a woman, and therefore weak--he had come to that now. She was on a lower plateau of honour, and therefore she must be--not forgiven--that was too banal; but she must be accepted as she was. And, after all, there could be no more deception; for opportunity and occasion no longer existed. He would go and speak to her now.

At that moment he was aware that she had caught sight of him, and that she was startled. She had not known of his return to England, and she was suddenly overwhelmed by confusion. The words of the letter he had written her when she had thrown him over rushed through her brain now, and hurt her as much as they did the first day they had been received. She became a little pale, and turned as though to find some other egress from the shop. There being none, there was but one course, and that was to go out as though she had not seen him. He had not even been moved at all at seeing her; but with her it was different. She was disturbed--in her vanity? In her peace? In her pride? In her senses? In her heart? In any, or each, or all? But she was disturbed: her equilibrium was shaken. He had scorched her soul by that letter to her, so gently cold, so incisive, so subtly cruel, so deadly in its irony, so final--so final.

She was ashamed, and no one else in the world but Ian Stafford could so have shamed her. Power had been given to her, the power of great riches--the three millions had been really four--and everything and everybody, almost, was deferential towards her. Had it brought her happiness, or content, or joy? It had brought her excitement--much of that--and elation, and opportunity to do a thousand things, and to fatigue herself in a thousand ways; but had it brought happiness?

If it had, the face of this man who was once so much to her, and whom she had flung into outer darkness, was sufficient to cast a cloud over it. She felt herself grow suddenly weak, but she determined to go out of the place without appearing to see him.

He was conscious of it all, saw it out of a corner of his eye, and as she started forward, he turned, deliberately walked towards her, and, with a cheerful smile, held out his hand.

"Now, what good fortune!" he said, spiritedly. "Life plays no tricks, practices no deception this time. In a book she'd have made us meet on a grand staircase or at a court ball."

As he said this, he shook her hand warmly, and again and again, as would be fitting with old friends. He had determined to be master of the situation, and to turn the moment to the credit of his account--not hers; and it was easy to do it, for love was dead, and the memory of love atrophied.

Colour came back to her face. Confusion was dispelled, a quick and grateful animation took possession of her, to be replaced an instant after by the disconcerting reflection that there was in his face or manner not the faintest sign of emotion or embarrassment. From his attitude they might have been good friends who had not met for some time; nothing more.

"Yes, what a place to meet!" she said. "It really ought to have been

at a green-grocer's, and the apotheosis of the commonplace would have been celebrated. But when did you return? How long do you remain in England?"

Ah, the sense of relief to feel that he was not reproaching her for anything, not impeaching her by an injured tone and manner, which so many other men had assumed with infinitely less right or cause than he!

"I came back thirty-six hours ago, and I stay at the will of the master-mind," he answered.

The old whimsical look came into her face, the old sudden flash which always lighted her eyes when a daring phrase was born in her mind, and she instantly retorted:

"The master-mind--how self-centred you are!"

Whatever had happened, certainly the old touch of intellectual diablerie was still hers, and he laughed good-humoredly. Yes, she might be this or that, she might be false or true, she might be one who had sold herself for mammon, and had not paid tribute to the one great natural principle of being, to give life to the world, man and woman perpetuating man and woman; but she was stimulating and delightful without effort.

"And what are you doing these days?" he asked. "One never hears of you now."

This was cruel, but she knew that he was "inciting her to riot," and she replied: "That's because you are so secluded--in your kindergarten for misfit statesmen. Abandon knowledge, all ye who enter there!"

It was the old flint and steel, but the sparks were not bright enough to light the tinder of emotion. She knew it, for he was cool and buoyant and really unconcerned, and she was feverish--and determined.

"You still make life worth living," he answered, gaily.

"It is not an occupation I would choose," she replied. "It is sure to make one a host of enemies."

"So many of us make our careers by accident," he rejoined.

"Certainly I made mine not by design," she replied instantly; and there was an undercurrent of meaning in it which he was not slow to notice; but he disregarded her first attempt to justify, however vaguely, her murderous treatment of him.

"But your career is not yet begun," he remarked.

Her eyes flashed--was it anger, or pique, or hurt, or merely the fire of intellectual combat?

"I am married," she said, defiantly, in direct retort.

"That is not a career--it is casual exploration in a dark continent," he rejoined.

"Come and say that to my husband," she replied, boldly. Suddenly a thought lighted her eyes. "Are you by any chance free to-morrow night to dine with us--quite, quite en famille' Rudyard will be glad to see you--and hear you," she added, teasingly.

He was amused. He felt how much he had really piqued her and provoked her by showing her so plainly that she had lost every vestige of the ancient power over him; and he saw no reason why he should not spend an evening where she sparkled.

"I am free, and will come with pleasure," he replied.

"That is delightful," she rejoined, "and please bring a box of bons mots with you. But you will come, then--?" She was going to add, "Ian," but she paused.

"Yes, I'll come--Jasmine," he answered, coolly, having read her hesitation aright.

She flushed, was embarrassed and piqued, but with a smile and a nod she left him.

In her carriage, however, her breath came quick and fast, her tiny hand clenched, her face flushed, and there was a devastating fire in her eyes.

"He shall not treat me so. He shall show some feeling. He shall--he shall--he shall!" she gasped, angrily.

CHAPTER IX

THE APPIAN WAY

"Cape to Cairo be damned!"

The words were almost spat out. The man to whom they were addressed slowly drew himself up from a half-recumbent position in his desk-chair, from which he had been dreamily talking into the ceiling, as it were, while his visitor leaned against a row of bookshelves and beat the floor impatiently with his foot.

At the rude exclamation, Byng straightened himself, and looked fixedly at his visitor. He had been dreaming out loud again the dream which Rhodes had chanted in the ears of all those who shared with him the pioneer enterprises of South Africa. The outburst which had broken in on his monologue was so unexpected that for a moment he could scarcely realize the situation. It was not often, in these strenuous and perilous days--and for himself less often than ever before, so had London and London life worked upon him--that he, or those who shared with him the vast financial responsibilities of the Rand, indulged in dreams or prophecies; and he resented the contemptuous phrase just uttered, and the tone of the speaker even more.

Byng's blank amazement served only to incense his visitor further. "Yes, be damned to it, Byng!" he continued. "I'm sick of the British Empire and the All Red, and the 'immense future.' What I want

is the present. It's about big enough for you and me and the rest of us. I want to hold our own in Johannesburg. I want to pull thirty-five millions a year out of the eighty miles of reef, and get enough native labour to do it. I want to run the Rand like a business concern, with Kruger gone to Holland; and Leyds gone to blazes. That's what I want to see, Mr. Invincible Rudyard Byng."

The reply to this tirade was deliberate and murderously bitter. "That's what you want to see, is it, Mr. Blasphemous Barry Whalen? Well, you can want it with a little less blither and a little more manners."

A hard and ugly look was now come into the big clean-shaven face which had become sleeker with good living, and yet had indefinably coarsened in the three years gone since the Jameson raid; and a gloomy anger looked out of the deep-blue eyes as he slowly went on:

"It doesn't matter what you want--not a great deal, if the others agree generally on what ought to be done; and I don't know that it matters much in any case. What have you come to see me about?"

"I know I'm not welcome here, Byng. It isn't the same as it used to be. It isn't--"

Byng jerked quickly to his feet and lunged forward as though he would do his visitor violence; but he got hold of himself in time, and, with a sudden and whimsical toss of the head, characteristic of him, he burst into a laugh.

"Well, I've been stung by a good many kinds of flies in my time, and I oughtn't to mind, I suppose," he growled.... "Oh, well, there," he broke off; "you say you're not welcome here? If you really feel that, you'd better try to see me at my chambers--or at the office in London Wall. It can't be pleasant inhaling air that chills or stifles you. You take my advice, Barry, and save yourself annoyance. But let me say in passing that you are as welcome here as anywhere, neither more nor less. You are as welcome as you were in the days when we trekked from the Veal to Pietersburg and on into Bechuanaland, and both slept in the cape-wagon under one blanket. I don't think any more of you than I did then, and I don't think any less, and I don't want to see you any more or any fewer. But, Barry"--his voice changed, grew warmer, kinder--" circumstances are circumstances. The daily lives of all of us are shaped differently--yours as well as mine--here in this pudding-faced civilization and in the iron conventions of London town; and we must adapt ourselves accordingly. We used to flop down on our Louis Quinze furniture on the Vaal with our muddy boots on--in our front drawing-room. We don't do it in Thamesfontein, my noble buccaneer--not even in Barry Whalen's mansion in Ladbrooke Square, where Barry Whalen, Esq., puts his silk hat on the hall table, and--and, 'If you please, sir, your bath is ready!' . . . Don't be an idiot-child, Barry, and don't spoil my best sentences when I let myself go. I don't do it often these days--not since Jameson spilt the milk and the can went trundling down the area. It's little time we get for dreaming, these sodden days, but it's only dreams that do the world's work and our own work in the end. It's dreams that do it, Barry; it's dreams that drive us on, that make us see beyond the present and the stupefying, deadening grind of the day. So it'll be Cape to Cairo in good time, dear lad, and no damnation, if you please.... Why, what's got into you? And again, what have you come to

see me about, anyhow? You knew we were to meet at dinner at Wallstein's to-night. Is there anything that's skulking at our heels to hurt us?"

The scowl on Barry Whalen's dissipated face cleared a little. He came over, rested both hands on the table and leaned forward as he spoke, Byng resuming his seat meanwhile.

Barry's voice was a little thick with excitement, but he weighed his words too. "Byng, I wanted you to know beforehand what Fleming intends to bring up to-night--a nice kind of reunion, isn't it, with war ahead as sure as guns, and the danger of everything going to smash, in spite of Milner and Jo?"

A set look came into Byng's face. He caught the lapels of his big, loose, double-breasted jacket, and spread his feet a little, till he looked as though squaring himself to resist attack.

"Go on with your story," he interposed. "What is Fleming going to say--or bring up, you call it?"

"He's going to say that some one is betraying us--all we do that's of any importance and most we say that counts--to Kruger and Leyds. He's going to say that the traitor is some one inside our circle."

Byng started, and his hands clutched at the chairback, then he became quiet and watchful. "And whom does Fleming--or you--suspect?" he asked, with lowering eyelids and a slumbering malice in his eyes.

Barry straightened himself and looked Byng rather hesitatingly in the face; then he said, slowly:

"I don't know much about Fleming's suspicions. Mine, though, are at least three years old, and you know them.

"Krool?"

"Krool--for sure."

"What would be Krool's object in betraying us, even if he knew all we say and do?"

"Blood is thicker than water, Byng, and double pay to a poor man is a consideration."

"Krool would do nothing that injured me, Barry. I know men. What sort of thing has been given away to Brother Boer?"

Barry took from his pocket a paper and passed it over. Byng scanned it very carefully and slowly, and his face darkened as he read; for there were certain things set down of which only he and Wallstein and one or two others knew; which only he and one high in authority in England knew, besides Wallstein. His face slowly reddened with anger. London life, and its excitements multiplied by his wife and not avoided by himself, had worn on him, had affected his once sunny and even temper, had given him greater bulk, with a touch of flabbiness under the chin and at the neck, and had slackened the firmness of the muscles. Presently he got up, went over to a table, and helped himself to brandy and soda, motioning to Barry to do the same. There were two or three

minutes' silence, and then he said:

"There's something wrong, certainly, but it isn't Krool. No, it isn't Krool."

"Nevertheless, if you're wise you'll ship him back beyond the Vaal, my friend."

"It isn't Krool. I'll stake my life on that. He's as true to me as I am to myself; and, anyhow, there are things in this Krool couldn't know." He tossed the paper into the fire and watched it burn.

He had talked over many, if not all, of these things with Jasmine, and with no one else; but Jasmine would not gossip. He had never known her to do so. Indeed, she had counselled extreme caution so often to himself that she would, in any case, be innocent of having babbled. But certainly there had been leakage--there had been leakage regarding most critical affairs. They were momentous enough to cause him to say reflectively now, as he watched the paper burn:

"You might as well carry dynamite in your pocket as that."

"You don't mind my coming to see you?" Barry asked, in an anxious tone.

He could not afford to antagonize Byng; in any case, his heart was against doing so; though, like an Irishman, he had risked everything by his maladroitness and ill-mannered attack a little while ago.

"I wanted to warn you, so's you could be ready when Fleming jumped in," Barry continued.

"No; I'm much obliged, Barry," was Byng's reply, in a voice where trouble was well marked, however. "Wait a minute," he continued, as his visitor prepared to leave. "Go into the other room"--he pointed. "Glue your ear to the door first, then to the wall, and tell me if you can hear anything--any word I say."

Barry did as he was bidden. Presently Byng spoke in a tone rather louder than in ordinary conversation to an imaginary interlocutor for some minutes. Then Barry Whalen came back into the room.

"Well?" Byng asked. "Heard anything?"

"Not a word--scarcely a murmur."

"Quite so. The walls are thick, and those big mahogany doors fit like a glove. Nothing could leak through. Let's try the other door, leading into the hall." They went over to it. "You see, here's an inside baize-door as well. There's not room for a person to stand between the two. I'll go out now, and you stay. Talk fairly loud."

The test produced the same result.

"Maybe I talk in my sleep," remarked Byng, with a troubled, ironical laugh.

Suddenly there shot into Barry Whalen's mind a thought which startled him, which brought the colour to his face with a rush. For years he

had suspected Krool, had considered him a danger. For years he had regarded Byng as culpable, for keeping as his servant one whom the Partners all believed to be a spy; but now another, a terrible thought came to him, too terrible to put into words--even in his own mind.

There were two other people besides Krool who were very close to Byng. There was Mrs. Byng for one; there was also Adrian Fellowes, who had been for a long time a kind of handy-man of the great house, doing the hundred things which only a private secretary, who was also a kind of master-of-ceremonies and lord-in-waiting, as it were, could do. Yes, there was Adrian Fellowes, the private secretary; and there was Mrs. Byng, who knew so much of what her husband knew! And the private secretary and the wife necessarily saw much of each other. What came to Barry's mind now stunned him, and he mumbled out some words of good-bye with an almost hang-dog look to his face; for he had a chivalrous heart and mind, and he was not prone to be malicious.

"We'll meet at eight, then?" said Byng, taking out his watch. "It's a quarter past seven now. Don't fuss, Barry. We'll nose out the spy, whoever he is, or wherever to be found. But we won't find him here, I think--not here, my friend."

Suddenly Barry Whalen turned at the door. "Oh, let's go back to the veld and the Rand!" he burst out, passionately. "This is no place for us, Byng--not for either of us. You are getting flabby, and I'm spoiling my temper and my manners. Let's get out of this infernal jack-pot. Let's go where we'll be in the thick of the broiling when it comes. You've got a political head, and you've done more than any one else could do to put things right and keep them right; but it's no good. Nothing'll be got except where the red runs. And the red will run, in spite of all Jo or Milner or you can do. And when it comes, you and I will be sick if we're not there--yes, even you with your millions, Byng."

With moist eyes Byng grasped the hand of the rough-hewn comrade of the veld, and shook it warmly.

"England has got on your nerves, Barry," he said, gently. "But we're all right in London. The key-board of the big instrument is here."

"But the organ is out there, Byng, and it's the organ that makes the music, not the keys. We're all going to pieces here, every one of us. I see it. Herr Gott, I see it plain enough! We're in the wrong shop. We're not buying or selling; we're being sold. Baas--big Baas, let's go where there's room to sling a stone; where we can see what's going on round us; where there's the long sight and the strong sight; where you can sell or get sold in the open, not in the alleyways; where you can have a run for your money."

Byng smiled benevolently. Yet something was stirring his senses strangely. The smell of the karoo was in his nostrils. "You're not ending up as you began, Barry," he replied. "You started off like an Israelite on the make, and you're winding up like Moody and Sankey."

"Well, I'm right now in the wind-up. I'm no better, I'm no worse, than the rest of our fellows, but I'm Irish--I can see. The Celt can always see, even if he can't act. And I see dark days coming for this old land. England is wallowing. It's all guzzle and feed and finery,

and nobody cares a copper about anything that matters--"

"About Cape to Cairo, eh?"

"Byng, that was one of my idiocies. But you think over what I say, just the same. I'm right. We're rotten cotton stuff now in these isles. We've got fatty degeneration of the heart, and in all the rest of the organs too."

Again Byng shook him by the hand warmly. "Well, Wallstein will give us a fat dinner to-night, and you can moralize with lime-light effects after the foie gras, Barry."

Closing the door slowly behind his friend, whom he had passed into the hands of the dark-browed Krool, Byng turned again to his desk. As he did so he caught sight of his face in the mirror over the mantel-piece. A shadow swept over it; his lips tightened.

"Barry was right," he murmured, scrutinizing himself. "I've degenerated. We've all degenerated. What's the matter, anyhow? What is the matter? I've got everything--everything--everything."

Hearing the door open behind him, he turned to see Jasmine in evening dress smiling at him. She held up a pink finger in reproof.

"Naughty boy," she said. "What's this I hear--that you have thrown me over--me--to go and dine with the Wallstein! It's nonsense! You can't go. Ian Stafford is coming to dine, as I told you."

His eyes beamed protectingly, affectionately, and yet, somehow, a little anxiously, on her "But I must go, Jasmine. It's the first time we've all been together since the Raid, and it's good we should be in the full circle once again. There's work to do--more than ever there was. There's a storm coming up on the veld, a real jagged lightning business, and men will get hurt, hosts beyond recovery. We must commune together, all of us. If there's the communion of saints, there's also the communion of sinners. Fleming is back, and Wolff is back, and Melville and Reuter and Hungerford are back, but only for a few days, and we all must meet and map things out. I forgot about the dinner. As soon as I remembered it I left a note on your dressing-table."

With sudden emotion he drew her to him, and buried his face in her soft golden hair. "My darling, my little jasmine-flower," he whispered, softly, "I hate leaving you, but--"

"But it's impossible, Ruddy, my man. How can I send Ian Stafford away? It's too late to put him off."

"There's no need to put him off or to send him away--such old friends as you are. Why shouldn't he dine with you a deux? I'm the only person that's got anything to say about that."

She expressed no surprise, she really felt none. He had forgotten that, coming up from Scotland, he had told her of this dinner with his friends, and at the moment she asked Ian Stafford to dine she had forgotten it also; but she remembered it immediately afterwards, and she had said nothing, done nothing.

As Byng spoke, however, a curious expression emerged from the far depths of her eyes--emerged, and was instantly gone again to the obscurity whence it came. She had foreseen that he would insist on Stafford dining with her; but, while showing no surprise--and no perplexity--there was a touch of demureness in her expression as she answered:

"I don't want to seem too conventional, but--"

"There should be a little latitude in all social rules," he rejoined. "What nonsense! You are prudish, Jasmine. Allow yourself some latitude."

"Latitude, not license," she returned. Having deftly laid on him the responsibility for this evening's episode, this excursion into the dangerous fields of past memory and sentiment and perjured faith, she closed the book of her own debit and credit with a smile of satisfaction.

"Let me look at you," he said, standing her off from him.

Holding her hand, he turned her round like a child to be inspected. "Well, you're a dream," he added, as she released herself and swept into a curtsy, coquetting with her eyes as she did so. "You're wonderful in blue--a flower in the azure," he added. "I seem to remember that gown before--years ago--"

She uttered an exclamation of horror. "Good gracious, you wild and ruthless ruffian! A gown--this gown--years ago! My bonny boy, do you think I wear my gowns for years?"

"I wear my suits for years. Some I've had seven years. I've got a frock-coat I bought for my brother Jim's wedding, ten years ago, and it looks all right--a little small now, but otherwise 'most as good as new."

"What a lamb, what a babe, you are, Ruddy! Like none that ever lived. Why, no woman wears her gowns two seasons, and some of them rather hate wearing them two times."

"Then what do they do with them--after the two times?"

"Well, for a while, perhaps, they keep them to look at and gloat over, if they like them; then, perhaps, they give them away to their poor cousins or their particular friends--"

"Their particular friends--?"

"Why, every woman has some friends poorer than herself who love her very much, and she is good to them. Or there's the Mart--"

"Wait. What's 'the Mart'?"

"The place where ladies can get rid of fine clothes at a wicked discount."

"And what becomes of them then?"

"They are bought by ladies less fortunate."

"Ladies who wear them?"

"Why, what else would they do? Wear them--of course, dear child."

Byng made a gesture of disgust. "Well, I call it sickening. To me there's something so personal and intimate about clothes. I think I could kill any woman that I saw wearing clothes of yours--of yours."

She laughed mockingly. "My beloved, you've seen them often enough, but you haven't known they were mine; that's all."

"I didn't recognize them, because no one could wear your clothes like you. It would be a caricature. That's a fact, Jasmine."

She reached up and swept his cheek with a kiss. "What a darling you are, little big man! Yet you never make very definite remarks about my clothes."

He put his hands on his hips and looked her up and down approvingly. "Because I only see a general effect, but I always remember colour. Tell me, have you ever sold your clothes to the Mart, or whatever the miserable coffin-shop is called?"

"Well, not directly."

"What do you mean by 'not directly'?"

"Well, I didn't sell them, but they were sold for me." She hesitated, then went on hurriedly. "Adrian Fellowes knew of a very sad case--a girl in the opera who had had misfortune, illness, and bad luck; and he suggested it. He said he didn't like to ask for a cheque, because we were always giving, but selling my old wardrobe would be a sort of lucky find--that's what he called it."

Byng nodded, with a half-frown, however. "That was ingenious of Fellowes, and thoughtful, too. Now, what does a gown cost, one like that you have on?"

"This--let me see. Why, fifty pounds, perhaps. It's not a ball gown, of course."

He laughed mockingly. "Why, 'of course,' And what does a ball gown cost--perhaps?" There was a cynical kind of humour in his eye.

"Anything from fifty to a hundred and fifty--maybe," she replied, with a little burst of merriment.

"And how much did you get for the garments you had worn twice, and then seen them suddenly grow aged in their extreme youth?"

"Ruddy, do not be nasty--or scornful. I've always worn my gowns more than twice--some of them a great many times, except when I detested them. And anyhow, the premature death of a gown is very, very good for trade. That influences many ladies, of course."

He burst out laughing, but there was a satirical note in the gaiety, or something still harsher.

"We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us," he answered. "It's all such a hollow make-believe."

"What is?"

She gazed at him inquiringly, for this mood was new to her. She was vaguely conscious of some sort of change in him--not exactly toward her, but a change, nevertheless.

"The life we rich people lead is a hollow make-believe, Jasmine," he said, with sudden earnestness. "I don't know what's the matter, but we're not getting out of life all we ought to get; and we're not putting into it all we ought to put in. There's a sense of emptiness--of famine somewhere."

He caught the reflection of his face in the glass again, and his brow contracted. "We get sordid and sodden, and we lose the proportions of life. I wanted Dick Wilberforce to do something with me the other day, and he declined. 'Why, my dear fellow,' I said, 'you know you want to do it?' 'Of course I do,' he answered, 'but I can't afford that kind of thing, and you know it.' Well, I did know it, but I had forgotten. I was only thinking of what I myself could afford to do. I was setting up my own financial standard, and was forgetting the other fellows who hadn't my standard. What's the result? We drift apart, Wilberforce and I--well, I mean Wilberforce as a type. We drift into sets of people who can afford to do certain things, and we leave such a lot of people behind that we ought to have clung to, and that we would have clung to, if we hadn't been so much thinking of ourselves, or been so soddenly selfish."

A rippling laugh rang through the room. "Boanerges--oh, Boanerges Byng! Owever can you be so heloquent!"

Jasmine put both hands on his shoulders and looked up at him with that look which had fascinated him--and so many others--in their day. The perfume which had intoxicated him in the first days of his love of her, and steeped his senses in the sap of youth and Eden, smote them again, here on the verge of the desert before him. He suddenly caught her in his arms and pressed her to him almost roughly.

"You exquisite siren--you siren of all time," he said, with a note of joy in which there was, too, a stark cry of the soul. He held her face back from him.... "If you had lived a thousand years ago you would have had a thousand lovers, Jasmine. Perhaps you did--who knows! And now you come down through the centuries purified by Time, to be my jasmine-flower."

His lip trembled a little. There was a strange melancholy in his eyes, belying the passion and rapture of his words.

In all their days together she had never seen him in this mood. She had heard him storm about things at times, had watched his big impulses working; had drawn the thunder from his clouds; but there was something moving in him now which she had never seen before. Perhaps it was only a passing phase, even a moment's mood, but it made a strange impression on her. It was remembered by them both long after, when life had scattered its vicissitudes before their stumbling feet and they had passed through flood and fire.

She drew back and looked at him steadily, reflectively, and with an element of surprise in her searching look. She had never thought him gifted with perception or insight, though he had eloquence and an eye for broad effects. She had thought him curiously ignorant of human nature, born to be deceived, full of child-like illusions, never understanding the real facts of life, save in the way of business--and politics. Women he never seemed by a single phrase or word to understand, and yet now he startled her with a sudden revelation and insight of which she had not thought him capable.

"If you had lived a thousand years ago you would have had a thousand lovers. Perhaps you did--who knows! . . . And now you come down through the centuries purified by Time--"

The words slowly repeated themselves in her brain. Many and many a time she had imagined herself as having lived centuries ago, and again and again in her sleep these imaginings had reflected themselves in wild dreams of her far past--once as a priestess of Isis, once as a Slavonian queen, once as a peasant in Syria, and many times as a courtesan of Alexandria or Athens--many times as that: one of the gifted, beautiful, wonderful women whose houses were the centres of culture, influence, and power. She had imagined herself, against her will, as one of these women, such as Cleopatra, for whom the world were well lost; and who, at last, having squeezed the orange dry, but while yet the sun was coming towards noon, in scorn of Life and Time had left the precincts of the cheerful day without a lingering look.... Often and often such dreams, to her anger and confusion, had haunted her, even before she was married; and she had been alternately humiliated and fascinated by them. Years ago she had told Ian Stafford of one of the dreams of a past life--that she was a slave in Athens who saved her people by singing to the Tyrant; and Ian had made her sing to him, in a voice quite in keeping with her personality, delicate and fine and wonderfully high in its range, bird-like in its quality, with trills like a lark--a little meretricious but captivating. He had also written for her two verses which were as sharp and clear in her mind as the letter he wrote when she had thrown him over so dishonourably:

"Your voice I knew, its cadences and trill;
It stilled the tumult and the overthrow
When Athens trembled to the people's will;
I knew it--'twas a thousand years ago.

"I see the fountains, and the gardens where
You sang the fury from the Satrap's brow;
I feel the quiver of the raptured air
I heard you in the Athenian grove--I hear you now."

As the words flashed into her mind now she looked at her husband steadfastly. Were there, then, some unexplored regions in his nature, where things dwelt, of which she had no glimmering of knowledge? Did he understand more of women than she thought? Could she then really talk to him of a thousand things of the mind which she had ever ruled out of any commerce between them, one half of her being never opened up to his sight? Not that he was deficient in intellect, but, to her thought, his was a purely objective mind; or was it objective because it had not been trained or developed subjectively? Had she ever really

tried to find a region in his big nature where the fine allusiveness and subjectivity of the human mind could have free life and untrammelled exercise, could gambol in green fields of imagination and adventure upon strange seas of discovery? A shiver of pain, of remorse, went through her frame now, as he held her at arm's length and looked at her.... Had she started right? Had she ever given their natures a chance to discover each other? Warmth and passion and youth and excitement and variety--oh, infinite variety there had been!--but had the start been a fair one, had she, with a whole mind and a full soul of desire, gone to him first and last? What had been the governing influence in their marriage where she was concerned?

Three years of constant motion, and never an hour's peace; three years of agitated waters, and never in all that time three days alone together. What was there to show for the three years? That for which he had longed with a great longing had been denied him; for he had come of a large family, and had the simple primitive mind and heart. Even in his faults he had ever been primitively simple and obvious. She had been energetic, helping great charities, aiding in philanthropic enterprises, with more than a little shrewdness preventing him from being robbed right and left by adventurers of all descriptions; and yet--and yet it was all so general, so soulless, her activity in good causes. Was there a single afflicted person, one forlorn soul whom she had directly and personally helped, or sheltered from the storm for a moment, one bereaved being whose eyes she had dried by her own direct personal sympathy?

Was it this which had been more or less vaguely working in his mind a little while before when she had noticed a change in him; or was it that he was disappointed that they were two and no more--always two, and no more? Was it that which was working in his mind, and making him say hard things about their own two commendable selves?

"If you had lived a thousand years ago you would have had a thousand lovers.... And now you come down through the centuries purified by Time, to be my jasmine-flower"--

She did not break the silence for some time, but at last she said: "And what were you a thousand years ago, my man?"

He drew a hot hand across a troubled brow. "I? I was the Satrap whose fury you soothed away, or I was the Antony you lured from fighting Caesar."

It was as though he had read those lines written by Ian Stafford long ago.

Again that perfume of hers caught his senses, and his look softened wonderfully. A certain unconscious but underlying discontent appeared to vanish from his eyes, and he said, abruptly: "I have it--I have it. This dress is like the one you wore the first night that we met. It's the same kind of stuff, it's just the same colour and the same style. Why, I see it all as plain as can be--there at the opera. And you wore blue the day I tried to propose to you and couldn't, and asked you down to Wales instead. Lord, how I funk'd it!" He laughed, happily almost. "Yes, you wore blue the first time we met--like this."

"It was the same skirt, and a different bodice, of course both those

first times," she answered. Then she stepped back and daintily smoothed out the gown she was wearing, smiling at him as she did that day three years ago. She had put on this particular gown, remembering that Ian Stafford had said charming things about that other blue gown just before he bade her good-bye three years ago. That was why she wore blue this night--to recall to Ian what it appeared he had forgotten. And presently she would dine alone with Ian in her husband's house--and with her husband's blessing. Pique and pride were in her heart, and she meant Ian Stafford to remember. No man was adamant; at least she had never met one--not one, neither bishop nor octogenarian.

"Come, Ruddy, you must dress, or you'll be late," she continued, lightly, touching his cheek with her fingers; "and you'll come down and apologize, and put me right with Ian Stafford, won't you?"

"Certainly. I won't be five minutes. I'll--"

There was a tap at the door and a footman, entering, announced that Mr. Stafford was in the drawing-room.

"Show him into my sitting-room," she said. "The drawing-room, indeed," she added to her husband--"it is so big, and I am so small. I feel sometimes as though I wanted to live in a tiny, tiny house."

Her words brought a strange light to his eyes. Suddenly he caught her arm.

"Jasmine," he said, hurriedly, "let us have a good talk over things--over everything. I want to see if we can't get more out of life than we do. There's something wrong. What is it? I don't know; but perhaps we could find out if we put our heads together--eh?" There was a strange, troubled longing in his look.

She nodded and smiled. "Certainly--to-night when you get back," she said. "We'll open the machine and find what's wrong with it." She laughed, and so did he.

As she went down the staircase she mused to herself and there was a shadow in her eyes and over her face.

"Poor Ruddy! Poor Ruddy!" she said.

Once again before she entered the sitting-room, as she turned and looked back, she said:

"Poor boy . . . Yet he knew about a thousand years ago!" she added with a nervous little laugh, and with an air of sprightly eagerness she entered to Ian Stafford.

CHAPTER X

AN ARROW FINDS A BREAST

As he entered the new sphere of Jasmine's influence, charm, and existence, Ian Stafford's mind became flooded by new impressions. He

was not easily moved by vastness or splendour. His ducal grandfather's houses were palaces, the estates were a fair slice of two counties, and many of his relatives had sumptuous homes stored with priceless legacies of art. He had approached the great house which Byng had built for himself with some trepidation; for though Byng came of people whose names counted for a good deal in the north of England, still, in newly acquired fortunes made suddenly in new lands there was something that coarsened taste--an unmodulated, if not a garish, elegance which "hit you in the eye," as he had put it to himself. He asked himself why Byng had not been content to buy one of the great mansions which could always be had in London for a price, where time had softened all the outlines, had given that subdued harmony in architecture which only belongs to age. Byng could not buy with any money those wonderful Adam's mantels, over-mantels and ceilings which had a glory quite their own. There must, therefore, be an air of newness in the new mansion, which was too much in keeping with the new money, the gold as yet not worn smooth by handling, the staring, brand-new sovereigns looking like impostors.

As he came upon the great house, however, in the soft light of evening, he was conscious of no violence done to his artistic sense. It was a big building, severely simple in design, yet with the rich grace, spacious solidity, and decorative relief of an Italian palace: compact, generous, traditionally genuine and wonderfully proportionate.

"Egad, Byng, you had a good architect--and good sense!" he said to himself. "It's the real thing; and he did it before Jasmine came on the scene too."

The outside of the house was Byng's, but the inside would, in the essentials, of course, be hers; and he would see what he would see.

When the door opened, it came to him instantly that the inside and outside were in harmony. How complete was that harmony remained to be seen, but an apparently unstudied and delightful reticence was noticeable at once. The newness had been rubbed off the gold somehow, and the old furniture--Italian, Spanish--which relieved the spaciousness of the entrance gave an air of Time and Time's eloquence to this three-year-old product of modern architectural skill.

As he passed on, he had more than a glimpse of the ball-room, which maintained the dignity and the refined beauty of the staircase and the hallways; and only in the insistent audacity and intemperate colouring of some Rubens pictures did he find anything of that inherent tendency to exaggeration and Oriental magnificence behind the really delicate artistic faculties possessed by Jasmine.

The drawing-room was charming. It was not quite perfect, however. It was too manifestly and studiously arranged, and it had the finicking exactness of the favourite gallery of some connoisseur. For its nobility of form, its deft and wise softness of colouring, its half-smothered Italian joyousness of design in ceiling and cornice, the arrangement of choice and exquisite furniture was too careful, too much like the stage. He smiled at the sight of it, for he saw and knew that Jasmine had had his playful criticism of her occasionally flamboyant taste in mind, and that she had over-revised, as it were. She had, like a literary artist, polished and refined and stippled the effect, till something of personal touch had gone, and

there remained classic elegance without the sting of life and the idiosyncrasy of its creator's imperfections. No, the drawing-room would not quite do, though it was near the perfect thing. His judgment was not yet complete, however. When he was shown into Jasmine's sitting-room his breath came a little quicker, for here would be the real test; and curiosity was stirring greatly in him.

Yes, here was the woman herself, wilful, original, delightful, with a flower-like delicacy joined to a determined and gorgeous audacity. Luxury was heaped on luxury, in soft lights from Indian lamps and lanterns, in the great divan, the deep lounge, the piled-up cushions, the piano littered with incongruous if artistic bijouterie; but everywhere, everywhere, books in those appealing bindings and with that paper so dear to every lover of literature. Instinctively he picked them up one by one, and most of them were affectionately marked by marginal notes of criticism, approval, or reference; and all showing the eager, ardent mind of one who loved books. He noticed, however, that most of the books he had seen before, and some of them he had read with her in the days which were gone forever. Indeed, in one of them he found some of his own pencilled marginal notes, beneath which she had written her insistent opinions, sometimes with amazing point. There were few new books, and they were mostly novels; and it was borne in on him that not many of these annotated books belonged to the past three years. The millions had come, the power and the place; but something had gone with their coming.

He was turning over the pages of a volume of Browning when she entered; and she had an instant to note the grace and manly dignity of his figure, the poise of the intellectual head--the type of a perfect, well-bred animal, with the accomplishment of a man of purpose and executive design. A little frown of trouble came to her forehead, but she drove it away with a merry laugh, as he turned at the rustle of her skirts and came forward.

He noted her blue dress, he guessed the reason she had put it on; and he made an inward comment of scorn. It was the same blue, and it was near the same style of the dress she wore the last time he saw her. She watched to see whether it made any impression on him, and was piqued to observe that he who had in that far past always swept her with an admiring, discriminating, and deferential glance, now only gave her deference of a courteous but perfunctory kind. It made the note to all she said and did that evening--the daring, the brilliance, the light allusion to past scenes and happenings, the skilful comment on the present, the joyous dominance of a position made supreme by beauty and by gold; behind which were anger and bitterness, and wild and desperate revolt.

For, if love was dead in him, and respect, and all that makes man's association with woman worth while, humiliation and the sting of punishment and penalty were alive in her, flaying her spirit, rousing that mad streak which was in her grandfather, who had had many a combat, the outcome of wild elements of passion in him. She was not happy; she had never been happy since she married Rudyard Byng; yet she had said to herself so often that she might have been at peace, in a sense, had it not been for the letter which Ian Stafford had written her, when she turned from him to the man she married.

The passionate resolve to compel him to reproach himself in soul for his merciless, if subtle, indictment of her to bring him to the old

place where he had knelt in spirit so long ago--ah, it was so long!--came to her. Self-indulgent and pitifully mean as she had been, still this man had influenced her more than any other in the world--in that region where the best of herself lay, the place to which her eyes had turned always when she wanted a consoling hour. He belonged to her realm of the imagination, of thought, of insight, of intellectual passions and the desires of the soul. Far above any physical attraction Ian had ever possessed for her was the deep conviction that he gave her mind what no one else gave it, that he was the being who knew the song her spirit sang.... He should not go forever from her and with so cynical a completeness. He should return; he should not triumph in his self-righteousness, be a living reproach to her always by his careless indifference to everything that had ever been between them. If he treated her so because of what she had done to him, with what savagery might not she be treated, if all that had happened in the last three years were open as a book before him!

Her husband--she had not thought of that. So much had happened in the past three years; there had been so much adulation and worship and daring assault upon her heart--or emotions--from quarters of unusual distinction, that the finest sense of her was blunted, and true proportions were lost. Rudyard ought never to have made that five months' visit to South Africa a year before, leaving her alone to make the fight against the forces round her. Those five months had brought a change in her, had made her indignant at times against Rudyard.

"Why did he go to South Africa? Why did he not take me with him? Why did he leave me here alone?" she had asked herself. She did not realize that there would have been no fighting at all, that all the forces contending against her purity and devotion would never have gathered at her feet and washed against the shores of her resolution, if she had loved Rudyard Byng when she married him as she might have loved him, ought to have loved him.

The faithful love unconsciously announces its fidelity, and men instinctively are aware of it, and leave it unassailed. It is the imperfect love which subtly invites the siege, which makes the call upon human interest, selfishness, or sympathy, so often without intended unscrupulousness at first. She had escaped the suspicion, if not the censure, of the world--or so she thought; and in the main she was right. But she was now embarked on an enterprise which never would have been begun, if she had not gambled with her heart and soul three years ago; if she had not dragged away the veil from her inner self, putting her at the mercy of one who could say, "I know you--what you are."

Just before they went to the dining-room Byng came in and cheerily greeted Stafford, apologizing for having forgotten his engagement to dine with Wallstein.

"But you and Jasmine will have much to talk about," he said--"such old friends as you are; and fond of books and art and music and all that kind of thing.... Glad to see you looking so well, Stafford," he continued. "They say you are the coming man. Well, au revoir. I hope Jasmine will give you a good dinner." Presently he was gone--in a heavy movement of good-nature and magnanimity.

"Changed--greatly changed, and not for the better," said Ian Stafford to himself. "This life has told on him. The bronze of the veld has

vanished, and other things are disappearing."

At the table with the lights and the flowers and the exquisite appointments, with appetite flattered and tempted by a dinner of rare simplicity and perfect cooking, Jasmine was radiant, amusing, and stimulating in her old way. She had never seemed to him so much a mistress of delicate satire and allusiveness. He rose to the combat with an alacrity made more agile by considerable abstinence, for clever women were few, and real talk was the rarest occurrence in his life, save with men in his own profession chiefly.

But later, in her sitting-room, after the coffee had come, there was a change, and the transition was made with much skill and sensitiveness. Into Jasmine's voice there came another and more reflective note, and the drift of the conversation changed. Books brought the new current; and soon she had him moving almost unconsciously among old scenes, recalling old contests of ideas, and venturing on bold reproductions of past intellectual ideals. But though they were in this dangerous field of the past, he did not once betray a sign of feeling, not even when, poring over Coventry Patmore's poems, her hand touched his, and she read the lines which they had read together so long ago, with no thought of any significance to themselves:

"With all my will, but much against my heart,
We two now part.
My very Dear,
Our solace is the sad road lies so clear. . .
Go thou to East, I West.
We will not say
There's any hope, it is so far away. . ."

He read the verses with a smile of quiet enjoyment, saying, when he had finished:

"A really moving and intimate piece of work. I wonder what their story was--a hopeless love, of course. An affaire--an 'episode'--London ladies now call such things."

"You find London has changed much since you went away--in three years only?" she asked.

"Three years--why, it's an eternity, or a minute, as you are obliged to live it. In penal servitude it is centuries, in the Appian Way of pleasure it is a sunrise moment. Actual time has nothing to do with the clock."

She looked up to the little gold-lacquered clock on the mantel-piece. "See, it is going to strike," she said. As she spoke, the little silver hammer softly struck. "That is the clock-time, but what time is it really--for you, for instance?"

"In Elysium there is no time," he murmured with a gallantry so intentionally obvious and artificial that her pulses beat with anger.

"It is wonderful, then, how you managed the dinner-hour so exactly. You did not miss it by a fraction."

"It is only when you enter Elysium that there is no time. It was eight o'clock when I arrived--by the world's time. Since then I have been dead to time--and the world."

"You do not suggest that you are in heaven?" she asked, ironically.

"Nothing so extreme as that. All extremes are violent."

"Ah, the middle place--then you are in purgatory?"

"But what should you be doing in purgatory? Or have you only come with a drop of water to cool the tongue of Dives?" His voice trailed along so coolly that it incensed her further.

"Certainly Dives' tongue is blistering," she said with great effort to still the raging tumult within her. "Yet I would not cool it if I could."

Suddenly the anger seemed to die out of her, and she looked at him as she did in the days before Rudyard Byng came across her path--eagerly, childishly, eloquently, inquiringly. He was the one man who satisfied the intellectual and temperamental side of her; and he had taught her more than any one else in the world. She realized that she had "Tossed him violently like a ball into a far country," and that she had not now a vestige of power over him--either of his senses or his mind; that he was master of the situation. But was it so that there was a man whose senses could not be touched when all else failed? She was very woman, eager for the power which she had lost, and power was hard to get--by what devious ways had she travelled to find it!

As they leaned over a book of coloured prints of Gainsborough, Romney, and Vandyke, her soft, warm breast touched his arm and shoulder, a strand of her cobweb, golden hair swept his cheek, and a sigh came from her lips, so like those of that lass who caught and held her Nelson to the end, and died at last in poverty, friendless, homeless, and alone. Did he fancy that he heard a word breathing through her sigh--his name, Ian? For one instant the wild, cynical desire came over him to turn and clasp her in his arms, to press those lips which never but once he had kissed, and that was when she had plighted her secret troth to him, and had broken it for three million pounds. Why not? She was a woman, she was beautiful, she was a siren who had lured him and used him and tossed him by. Why not? All her art was now used, the art of the born coquette which had been exquisitely cultivated since she was a child, to bring him back to her feet--to the feet of the wife of Rudyard Byng. Why not? For an instant he had the dark impulse to treat her as she deserved, and take a kiss "as long as my exile, as sweet as my revenge"; but then the bitter memory came that this was the woman to whom he had given the best of which he was capable and the promise of that other best which time and love and life truly lived might accomplish; and the wild thing died in him.

The fever fled, and his senses became as cold as the statue of Andromeda on the pedestal at his hand. He looked at her. He did not for the moment realize that she was in reality only a girl, a child in so much; wilful, capricious, unregulated in some ways, with the hereditary taint of a distorted moral sense, and yet able, intuitive

and wise, in so many aspects of life and conversation. Looking, he determined that she should never have that absolution which any outward or inward renewal of devotion would give her. Scorn was too deep--that arrogant, cruel, adventitious attribute of the sinner who has not committed the same sin as the person he despises--

"Sweet is the refuge of scorn."

His scorn was too sweet; and for the relish of it on his tongue, the price must be paid one way or another. The sin of broken faith she had sinned had been the fruit of a great temptation, meaning more to a woman, a hundred times, than to a man. For a man there is always present the chance of winning a vast fortune and the power that it brings; but it can seldom come to a woman except through marriage. It ill became him to be self-righteous, for his life had not been impeccable--

"The shaft of slander shot
Missed only the right blot!"

Something of this came to him suddenly now as she drew away from him with a sense of humiliation, and a tear came unbidden to her eye.

She wiped the tear away, hastily, as there came a slight tapping at the door, and Krool entered, his glance enveloping them both in one lightning survey--like the instinct of the dweller in wild places of the earth, who feels danger where all is most quiet, and ever scans the veld or bush with the involuntary vigilance belonging to the life. His look rested on Jasmine for a moment before he spoke, and Stafford inwardly observed that here was an enemy to the young wife whose hatred was deep. He was conscious, too, that Jasmine realized the antipathy. Indeed, she had done so from the first days she had seen Krool, and had endeavoured, without success, to induce Byng to send the man back to South Africa, and to leave him there last year when he went again to Johannesburg. It was the only thing in which Byng had proved invulnerable, and Krool had remained a menace which she vaguely felt and tried to conquer, which, in vain, Adrian Fellowes had endeavoured to remove. For in the years in which Fellowes had been Byng's secretary his relations with Krool seemed amiable and he had made light of Jasmine's prejudices.

"The butler is out and they come me," Krool said. "Mr. Stafford's servant is here. There is a girl for to see him, if he will let. The boy, Jigger, his name. Something happens."

Stafford frowned, then turned to Jasmine. He told her who Jigger was, and of the incident the day before, adding that he had no idea of the reason for the visit; but it must be important, or nothing would have induced his servant to fetch the girl.

"I will come," he said to Krool, but Jasmine's curiosity was roused.

"Won't you see her here?" she asked.

Stafford nodded assent, and presently Krool showed the girl into the

room.

For an instant she stood embarrassed and confused, then she addressed herself to Stafford. "I'm Lou--Jigger's sister," she said, with white lips. "I come to ask if you'd go to him. 'E's been hurt bad--knocked down by a fire-engine, and the doctor says 'e can't live. 'E made yer a promise, and 'e wanted me to tell yer that 'e meant to keep it; but if so be as you'd come, and wouldn't mind a-comin', 'e'd tell yer himself. 'E made that free becos 'e had brekfis wiv ye. 'E's all right--the best as ever--the top best." Suddenly the tears flooded her eyes and streamed down her pale cheeks. "Oh, 'e was the best--my Gawd, 'e was the best! If it 'd make 'im die happy, you'd come, y'r gryce, wouldn't y'r?"

Child of the slums as she was, she was exceedingly comely and was simply and respectably dressed. Her eyes were big and brown like Stafford's; her face was a delicate oval, and her hair was a deep black, waving freely over a strong, broad forehead. It was her speech that betrayed her; otherwise she was little like the flower-girl that Adrian Fellowes had introduced to Al'mah, who had got her a place in the chorus of the opera and had also given her personal care and friendly help.

"Where is he? In the hospital?" Stafford asked.

"It was just beside our own 'ome it 'appened. We got two rooms now, Jigger and me. 'E was took in there. The doctor come, but 'e says it ain't no use. 'E didn't seem to care much, and 'e didn't give no 'ope, not even when I said I'd give him all me wages for a year."

Jasmine was beside her now, wiping her tears and holding her hand, her impulsive nature stirred, her heart throbbing with desire to help. Suddenly she remembered what Rudyard had said up-stairs three hours ago, that there wasn't a single person in the world to whom they had done an act which was truly and purely personal during the past three years: and she had a tremulous desire to help this crude, mothering, passionately pitiful girl.

"What will you do?" Jasmine said to Stafford.

"I will go at once. Tell my servant to have up a cab," he said to Krool, who stood outside the door.

"Truly, 'e will be glad," the girl exclaimed. "'E told me about the suvring, and Sunday-week for brekfis," she murmured. "You'll never miss the time, y'r gryce. Gawd knows you'll not miss it--an' 'e ain't got much left."

"I will go, too--if you will let me," said Jasmine to Stafford. "You must let me go. I want to help--so much."

"No, you must not come," he replied. "I will pick up a surgeon in Harley Street, and we'll see if it is as hopeless as she says. But you must not come to-night. To-morrow, certainly, to-morrow, if you will. Perhaps you can do some good then. I will let you know."

He held out his hand to say good-bye, as the girl passed out with Jasmine's kiss on her cheek and a comforting assurance of help.

Jasmine did not press her request. First there was the fact that Ruyard did not know, and might strongly disapprove; and secondly, somehow, she had got nearer to Stafford in the last few minutes than in all the previous hours since they had met again. Nowhere, by all her art, had she herself touched him, or opened up in his nature one tiny stream of feeling; but this girl's story and this piteous incident had softened him, had broken down the barriers which had checked and baffled her. There was something almost gentle in his smile as he said good-bye, and she thought she detected warmth in the clasp of his hand.

Left alone, she sat in the silence, pondering as she had not pondered in the past three years. These few days in town, out of the season, were sandwiched between social functions from which their lives were never free. They had ever passed from event to event like minor royalties with endless little ceremonies and hospitalities; and there had been so little time to meditate--had there even been the wish?

The house was very still, and the far-off, muffled rumble of omnibuses and cabs gave a background of dignity to this interior peace and luxurious quiet. For long she sat unmoving--nearly two hours--alone with her inmost thoughts. Then she went to the little piano in the corner where stood the statue of Andromeda, and began to play softly. Her fingers crept over the keys, playing snatches of things she knew years before, improvising soft, passionate little movements. She took no note of time. At last the clock struck twelve, and still she sat there playing. Then she began to sing a song which Alice Tynemouth had written and set to music two years before. It was simply yet passionately written, and the wail of anguished disappointment, of wasted chances was in it--

"Once in the twilight of the Austrian hills,
A word came to me, beautiful and good;
If I had spoken it, that message of the stars,
Love would have filled thy blood:
Love would have sent thee pulsing to my arms,
Thy heart a nestling bird;
A moment fled--it passed:
I seek in vain
For that forgotten word."

In the last notes the voice rose in passionate pain, and died away into an aching silence.

She leaned her arms on the piano in front of her and laid her forehead on them.

"When will it all end--what will become of me!" she cried in pain that strangled her heart. "I am so bad--so bad. I was doomed from the beginning. I always felt it so--always, even when things were brightest. I am the child of black Destiny. For me--there is nothing, nothing, for me. The straight path was before me, and I would not walk in it."

With a gesture of despair, and a sudden faintness, she got up and went

over to the tray of spirits and liqueurs which had been brought in with the coffee. Pouring out a liqueur-glass of brandy, she was about to drink it, when her ear became attracted by a noise without, a curious stumbling, shuffling sound. She put down the glass, went to the door that opened into the hall, and looked out and down. One light was still burning below, and she could see distinctly. A man was clumsily, heavily, ascending the staircase, holding on to the balustrade. He was singing to himself, breaking into the maudlin harmony with an occasional laugh--

"For this is the way we do it on the veld,
When the band begins to play;
With one bottle on the table and one below the belt,
When the band begins to play--"

It was Rudyard, and he was drunk--almost helplessly drunk.

A cry of pain rose to her lips, but her trembling hand stopped it. With a shudder she turned back to her sitting-room. Throwing herself on the divan where she had sat with Ian Stafford, she buried her face in her arms. The hours went by.

CHAPTER XI

IN WALES, WHERE JIGGER PLAYS HIS PART

"Really, the unnecessary violence with which people take their own lives, or the lives of others, is amazing. They did it better in olden days in Italy and the East. No waste or anything--all scientifically measured."

With a confident and satisfied smile Mr. Mappin, the celebrated surgeon, looked round the little group of which he was the centre at Glencader, Rudyard Byng's castle in Wales.

Rudyard blinked at him for a moment with ironical amusement, then remarked: "When you want to die, does it matter much whether you kill yourself with a bludgeon or a pin, take gas from a tap or cyanide of potassium, jump in front of a railway train or use the revolting razor? You are dead neither less nor more, and the shock to the world is the same. It's only the housemaid or the undertaker that notices any difference. I knew a man at Vleifontein who killed himself by jumping into the machinery of a mill. It gave a lot of trouble to all concerned. That was what he wanted--to end his own life and exasperate the foreman."

"Rudyard, what a horrible tale!" exclaimed his wife, turning again to the surgeon, eagerly. "It is most interesting, and I see what you mean. It is, that if we only really knew, we could take our own lives or other people's with such ease and skill that it would be hard to detect it?"

The surgeon nodded. "Exactly, Mrs. Byng. I don't say that the expert couldn't find what the cause of death was, if suspicion was aroused; but it could be managed so that 'heart failure' or some such silly verdict would be given, because there was no sign of violence, or of injury artificially inflicted."

"It is fortunate the world doesn't know these ways to euthanasia," interposed Stafford. "I fancy that murders would be more numerous than suicides, however. Suicide enthusiasts would still pursue their melodramatic indulgences--disfiguring themselves unnecessarily."

Adrian Fellowes, the amiable, ever-present secretary and "chamberlain" of Rudyard's household, as Jasmine teasingly called him, whose handsome, unintellectual face had lighted with amusement at the conversation, now interposed. "Couldn't you give us some idea how it can be done, this smooth passage of the Styx?" he asked. "We'll promise not to use it."

The surgeon looked round the little group reflectively. His eyes passed from Adrian to Jasmine, who stood beside him, to Byng, and to Ian Stafford, and stimulated by their interest, he gave a pleased smile of gratified vanity. He was young, and had only within the past three years got to the top of the tree at a bound, by a certain successful operation in royal circles.

Drawing out of his pocket a small case, he took from it a needle and held it up. "Now that doesn't look very dangerous, does it?" he asked. "Yet a firm pressure of its point could take a life, and there would be little possibility of finding how the ghastly trick was done except by the aroused expert."

"If you will allow me," he said, taking Jasmine's hand and poisoning the needle above her palm. "Now, one tiny thrust of this steel point, which has been dipped in a certain acid, would kill Mrs. Byng as surely as though she had been shot through the heart. Yet it would leave scarcely the faintest sign. No blood, no wound, just a tiny pin-prick, as it were; and who would be the wiser? Imagine an average coroner's jury and the average examination of the village doctor, who would die rather than expose his ignorance, and therefore gives 'heart failure' as the cause of death."

Jasmine withdrew her hand with a shudder. "Please, I don't like being so near the point," she said.

"Woman-like," interjected Byng ironically.

"How does it happen you carry this murdering asp about with you, Mr. Mappin?" asked Stafford.

The surgeon smiled. "For an experiment to-morrow. Don't start. I have a favorite collie which must die. I am testing the poison with the minimum. If it kills the dog it will kill two men."

He was about to put the needle back into the case when Adrian Fellowes held out a hand for it. "Let me look at it," he said. Turning the needle over in his palm, he examined it carefully. "So near and yet so far," he remarked. "There are a good many people who would pay a high price for the little risk and the dead certainty. You wouldn't, perhaps, tell us what the poison is, Mr. Mappin? We are all very

reliable people here, who have no enemies, and who want to keep their friends alive. We should then be a little syndicate of five, holding a great secret, and saving numberless lives every day by not giving the thing away. We should all be entitled to monuments in Parliament Square."

The surgeon restored the needle to the case. "I think one monument will be sufficient," he said. "Immortality by syndicate is too modern, and this is an ancient art." He tapped the case. "Turkey and the Mongol lands have kept the old cult going. In England, it's only for the dog!" He laughed freely but noiselessly at his own joke.

This talk had followed the news brought by Krool to the Baas, that the sub-manager of the great mine, whose chimneys could be seen from the hill behind the house, had thrown himself down the shaft and been smashed to a pulp. None of them except Byng had known him, and the dark news had brought no personal shock.

They had all gathered in the library, after paying an afternoon visit to Jigger, who had been brought down from London in a special carriage, and was housed near the servants' quarters with a nurse. On the night of Jigger's accident Ian Stafford on his way from Jasmine's house had caught Mr. Mappin, and the surgeon had operated at once, saving the lad's life. As it was necessary to move him in any case, it was almost as easy, and no more dangerous, to bring him to Glencader than to take him to a London hospital.

Under the surgeon's instructions Jasmine had arranged it all, and Jigger had travelled like royalty from Paddington into Wales, and there had captured the household, as he had captured Stafford at breakfast in St. James's Street.

Thinking that perhaps this was only a whim of Jasmine's, and merely done because it gave a new interest to a restless temperament, Stafford had at first rejected the proposal. When, however, the surgeon said that if the journey was successfully made, the after-results would be all to the good, Stafford had assented, and had allowed himself to be included in the house-party at Glencader.

It was a triumph for Jasmine, for otherwise Stafford would not have gone. Whether she would have insisted on Jigger going to Glencader if it had not meant that Ian would go also, it would be hard to say. Her motives were not unmixed, though there had been a real impulse to do all she could. In any case, she had lessened the distance between Ian and herself, and that gave her wilful mind a rather painful pleasure. Also, the responsibility for Jigger's well-being, together with her duties as hostess, had prevented her from dwelling on that scene in the silent house at midnight which had shocked her so--her husband reeling up the staircase, singing a ribald song.

The fullest significance of this incident had not yet come home to her. She had fought against dwelling on it, and she was glad that every moment since they had come to Glencader had been full; that Rudyard had been much away with the shooters, and occupied in trying to settle a struggle between the miners and the proprietors of the mine itself, of whom he was one. Still, things that Rudyard had said before he left the house to dine with Wallstein, leaving her with Stafford, persistently recurred to her mind.

"What's the matter?" had been Rudyard's troubled cry. "We've got everything--everything, and yet--!" Her eyes were not opened. She had had a shock, but it had not stirred the inner, smothered life; there had been no real revelation. She was agitated and disturbed--no more. She did not see that the man she had married to love and to cherish was slowly changing--was the change only a slow one now?--before her eyes; losing that brave freshness which had so appealed to London when he first came back to civilization. Something had been subtracted from his personality which left it poorer, something had been added which made it less appealing. Something had given way in him. There had been a subsidence of moral energy, and force had inwardly declined, though to all outward seeming he had played a powerful and notable part in the history of the last three years, gaining influence in many directions, without suffering excessive notoriety.

On the day Rudyard married Jasmine he would have cut off his hand rather than imagine that he would enter his wife's room helpless from drink and singing a song which belonged to loose nights on the Limpopo and the Vaal.

As the little group drew back, their curiosity satisfied, Mr. Mappin, putting the case carefully into his pocket again, said to Jasmine:

"The boy is going on so well that I am not needed longer. Mr. Wharton, my locum tenens, will give him every care."

"When did you think of going?" Jasmine asked him, as they all moved on towards the hall, where the other guests were assembled.

"To-morrow morning early, if I may. No night travel for me, if I can help it."

"I am glad you are not going to-night," she answered, graciously. "Al'mah is arriving this afternoon, and she sings for us this evening. Is it not thrilling?"

There was a general murmur of pleasure, vaguely joined by Adrian Fellowes, who glanced quickly round the little group, and met an enigmatical glance from Byng's eye. Byng was remembering what Barry Whalen had told him three years ago, and he wondered if Jasmine was cognizant of it all. He thought not; for otherwise she would scarcely bring Al'mah to Glencader and play Fellowes' game for him.

Jasmine, in fact, had not heard. Days before she had wondered that Adrian had tried to discourage her invitation to Al'mah. While it was an invitation, it was also an engagement, on terms which would have been adequate for Patti in her best days. It would, if repeated a few times, reimburse Al'mah for the sums she had placed in Byng's hands at the time of the Raid, and also, later still, to buy the life of her husband from Oom Paul. It had been insufficient, not because of the value of the article for sale, but because of the rapacity of the vender. She had paid half the cruel balance demanded; Byng and his friends had paid the rest without her knowledge; and her husband had been set free.

Byng had only seen Al'mah twice since the day when she first came to his rooms, and not at all during the past two years, save at the opera, where she tightened the cords of captivity to her gifts around

her admirers. Al'mah had never met Mrs. Byng since the day after that first production of "Manassa," when Rudyard rescued her, though she had seen her at the opera again and again. She cared nothing for society or for social patronage or approval, and the life that Jasmine led had no charms for her. The only interest she had in it was that it suited Adrian from every standpoint. He loved the splendid social environment of which Jasmine was the centre, and his services were well rewarded.

When she received Jasmine's proposal to sing at Glencader she had hesitated to accept it, for society had no charms for her; but at length three considerations induced her to do so. She wanted to see Rudyard Byng, for South Africa and its shadow was ever present with her; and she dreaded she knew not what. Blantyre was still her husband, and he might return--and return still less a man than when he deserted her those sad long years ago. Also, she wanted to see Jigger, because of his sister Lou, whose friendless beauty, so primitively set, whose transparent honesty appealed to her quick, generous impulses. Last of all she wanted to see Adrian in the surroundings and influences where his days had been constantly spent during the past three years.

Never before had she had the curiosity to do so. Adrian had, however, deftly but clearly tried to dissuade her from coming to Glencader, and his reasons were so new and unconvincing that, for the first time,--she had a nature of strange trustfulness once her faith was given--a vague suspicion concerning Adrian perplexed and troubled her. His letter had arrived some hours after Jasmine's, and then her answer was immediate--she would accept. Adrian heard of the acceptance first through Jasmine, to whom he had spoken of his long "acquaintance" with the great singer.

From Byng's look, as they moved towards the hall, Adrian gathered that rumour had reached a quarter where he had much at stake; but it did not occur to him that this would be to his disadvantage. Byng was a man of the world. Besides, he had his own reasons for feeling no particular fear where Byng was concerned. His glance ran from Byng's face to that of Jasmine; but, though her eyes met his, there was nothing behind her glance which had to do with Al'mah.

In the great hall whose windows looked out on a lovely, sunny valley still as green as summer, the rest of the house-party were gathered, and Jigger's visitors were at once surrounded.

Among the visitors were Alice, Countess of Tynemouth, also the Slavonian ambassador, whose extremely pale face, stooping shoulders, and bald head with the hair carefully brushed over from each side in a vain attempt to cover the baldness, made him seem older than he really was. Count Landrassy had lived his life in many capitals up to the limit of his vitality, and was still covetous of notice from the sex who had, in a checkered career, given him much pleasure, and had provided him with far more anxiety. But he was almost uncannily able and astute, as every man found who entered the arena of diplomacy to treat with him or circumvent him. Suavity, with an attendant mordant wit, and a mastery of tactics unfamiliar to the minds and capacities of Englishmen, made him a great factor in the wide world of haute politique; but it also drew upon him a wealth of secret hatred and outward attention. His follies were lashed by the tongues of virtue and of slander; but his abilities gave him a commanding place in the

arena of international politics.

As Byng and his party approached, the eyes of the ambassador and of Lady Tynemouth were directed towards Ian Stafford. The glance of the former was ironical and a little sardonic. He had lately been deeply engaged in checkmating the singularly skilful and cleverly devised negotiations by which England was to gain a powerful advantage in Europe, the full significance of which even he had not yet pierced. This he knew, but what he apprehended with the instinct of an almost scientific sense became unduly important to his mind. The author of the profoundly planned international scheme was this young man, who had already made the chancelleries of Europe sit up and look about them in dismay; for its activities were like those of underground wires; and every area of diplomacy, the nearest, the most remote, was mined and primed, so that each embassy played its part with almost startling effect. Tibet and Persia were not too far, and France was not too near to prevent the incalculably smooth working of a striking and far-reaching political move. It was the kind of thing that England's Prime Minister, with his extraordinary frankness, with his equally extraordinary secretiveness, insight and immobility, delighted in; and Slavonia and its ambassador knew, as an American high in place had colloquially said, "that they were up against a proposition which would take some moving."

The scheme had taken some moving. But it had not yet succeeded; and if M. Mennaval, the ambassador of Moravia, influenced by Count Landrassy, pursued his present tactics on behalf of his government, Ian Stafford's coup would never be made, and he would have to rise to fame in diplomacy by slower processes. It was the daily business of the Slavonian ambassador to see that M. Mennaval of Moravia was not captured either by tactics, by smooth words, or all those arts which lay beneath the outward simplicity of Ian Stafford and of those who worked with him.

With England on the verge of war, the outcome of the negotiations was a matter of vital importance. It might mean the very question of England's existence as an empire. England in a conflict with South Africa, the hour long desired by more than one country, in which she would be occupied to the limit of her capacity, with resources taxed to the utmost, army inadequate, and military affairs in confusion, would come, and with it the opportunity to bring the Titan to her knees. This diplomatic scheme of Ian Stafford, however, would prevent the worst in any case, and even in the disasters of war, would be working out advantages which, after the war was done, would give England many friends and fewer enemies, give her treaties and new territory, and set her higher than she was now by a political metre.

Count Landrassy had thought at first, when Ian Stafford came to Glencader, that this meeting had been purposely arranged; but through Byng's frankness and ingenuous explanations he saw that he was mistaken. The two subtle and combating diplomats had not yet conversed save in a general way by the smoking-room fire.

Lady Tynemouth's eyes fell on Ian with a different meaning. His coming to Glencader had been a surprise to her. He had accepted an invitation to visit her in another week, and she had only come to know later of the chance meeting of Ian and Jasmine in London, and the subsequent accident to Jigger which had brought Ian down to Wales. The man who had saved her life on her wedding journey, and whose walls were still

garish with the red parasol which had nearly been her death, had a place quite his own in her consideration. She had, of course, known of his old infatuation for Jasmine, though she did not know all; and she knew also that he had put Jasmine out of his life completely when she married Byng; which was not a source of regret to her. She had written him about Jasmine, again and again,--of what she did and what the world said--and his replies had been as casual and as careless as the most jealous woman could desire; though she was not consciously jealous, and, of course, had no right to be.

She saw no harm in having a man as a friend on a basis of intimacy which drew the line at any possibility of divorce-court proceedings. Inside this line she frankly insisted on latitude, and Tynemouth gave it to her without thought or anxiety. He was too fond of outdoor life, of racing and hunting and shooting and polo and travel, to have his eye unnerved by any such foolishness as jealousy.

"Play the game--play the game, Alice, and so will I, and the rest of the world be hanged!" was what Tynemouth had said to his wife; and it would not have occurred to him to suspect Stafford, or to read one of his letters to Lady Tynemouth. He had no literary gifts; in truth, he had no "culture," and he looked upon his wife's and Stafford's interest in literature and art as a game of mystery he had never learned. Inconsequent he thought it in his secret mind, but played by nice, clever, possible, "livable" people; and, therefore, not to be pooh-poohed openly or kicked out of the way. Besides, it "gave Alice something to do, and prevented her from being lonely--and all that kind of thing."

Thus it was that Lady Tynemouth, who had played the game all round according to her lights, and thought no harm of what she did, or of her weakness for Ian Stafford--of her open and rather gushing friendship for him--had an almost honest dislike to seeing him brought into close relations again with the woman who had dishonourably treated him. Perhaps she wanted his friendship wholly for herself; but that selfish consideration did not overshadow the feeling that Jasmine had cheated at cards, as it were; and that Ian ought not to be compelled to play with her again.

"But men, even the strongest, are so weak," she had said to Tynemouth concerning it, and he had said in reply, "And the weakest are so strong--sometimes."

At which she had pulled his shoulder, and had said with a delighted laugh, "Tynie, if you say clever things like that I'll fall in love with you."

To which he had replied: "Now, don't take advantage of a moment's aberration, Alice; and for Heaven's sake don't fall in love wiv me" (he made a v of a th, like Jigger). "I couldn't go to Uganda if you did."

To which she had responded, "Dear me, are you going to Uganda?" and was told with a nod that next month he would be gone. This conversation had occurred on the day of their arrival at Glencader; and henceforth Alice had forcibly monopolized Stafford whenever and wherever possible. So far, it had not been difficult, because Jasmine had, not ostentatiously, avoided being often with Stafford. It seemed to Jasmine that she must not see much of him alone. Still there was

some new cause to provoke his interest and draw him to herself. The Jigger episode had done much, had altered the latitudes of their association, but the perihelion of their natures was still far off; and she was apprehensive, watchful, and anxious.

This afternoon, however, she felt that she must talk with him. Waiting and watching were a new discipline for her, and she was not yet the child of self-denial. Fate, if there be such a thing, favoured her, however, for as they drew near to the fireplace where the ambassador and Alice Tynemouth and her husband stood, Krool entered, came forward to Byng, and spoke in a low tone to him.

A minute afterward, Byng said to them all: "Well, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we can't carry out our plans for the afternoon. There's trouble again at the mine, and I am needed, or they think I am. So I must go there--and alone, I'm sorry to say; not with you all, as I had hoped. Jasmine, you must plan the afternoon. The carriages are ready. There's the Glen o' Smiling, well worth seeing, and the Murderer's Leap, and Lover's Land--something for all tastes," he added, with a dry note to his voice.

"Take care of yourself, Ruddy man," Jasmine said, as he left them hurriedly, with an affectionate pinch of her arm. "I don't like these mining troubles," she added to the others, and proceeded to arrange the afternoon.

She did it so deftly that she and Ian and Adrian Fellowes were the only ones left behind out of a party of twelve. She had found it impossible to go on any of the excursions, because she must stay and welcome Al'mah. She meant to drive to the station herself, she said. Adrian stayed behind because he must superintend the arrangements of the ball-room for the evening, or so he said; and Ian Stafford stayed because he had letters to write--ostensibly; for he actually meant to go and sit with Jigger, and to send a code message to the Prime Minister, from whom he had had inquiries that morning.

When the others had gone, the three stood for a moment silent in the hall, then Adrian said to Jasmine, "Will you give me a moment in the ball-room about those arrangements?"

Jasmine glanced out of the corner of her eye at Ian. He showed no sign that he wanted her to remain. A shadow crossed her face, but she laughingly asked him if he would come also.

"If you don't mind--!" he said, shaking his head in negation; but he walked with them part of the way to the ball-room, and left them at the corridor leading to his own little sitting-room.

A few minutes later, as Jasmine stood alone at a window looking down into the great stone quadrangle, she saw him crossing toward the servants' quarters.

"He is going to Jigger," she said, her heart beating faster. "Oh, but he is 'the best ever,'" she added, repeating Lou's words--"the best ever!"

Her eye brightened with intention. She ran down the corridor, and presently made her way to the housekeeper's room.

CHAPTER XII

THE KEY IN THE LOCK

A quarter of an hour later Jasmine softly opened the door of the room where Jigger lay, and looked in. The nurse stood at the foot of the bed, listening to talk between Jigger and Ian, the like of which she had never heard. She was smiling, for Jigger was original, to say the least of it, and he had a strange, innocent, yet wise philosophy. Ian sat with his elbows on his knees, hands clasped, leaning towards the gallant little sufferer, talking like a boy to a boy, and getting revelations of life of which he had never even dreamed.

Jasmine entered with a little tray in one hand, bearing a bowl of delicate broth, while under an arm was a puzzle-box, which was one of the relics of a certain house-party in which a great many smart people played at the simple life, and sought to find a new sensation in making believe they were the village rector's brood of innocents. She was dressed in a gown almost as simple in make as that of the nurse, but of exquisite material--the soft green velvet which she had worn when she met Ian in the sweetshop in Regent Street. Her hair was a perfect gold, wavy and glistening and prettily fine, and her eyes were shining--so blue, so deep, so alluring.

The boy saw her first, and his eyes grew bigger with welcome and interest.

"It's her--me lydy," he said with a happy gasp, for she seemed to him like a being from another sphere. When she came near him the faint, delicious perfume exhaling from her garments was like those flower-gardens and scented fields to which he had once been sent for a holiday by some philanthropic society.

Ian rose as the nurse came forward quickly to relieve Jasmine of the tray and the box. His first glance was enigmatical--almost suspicious--then, as he saw the radiance in her face and the burden she carried, a new light came into his eyes. In this episode of Jigger she had shown all that gentle charm, sympathy, and human feeling which he had once believed belonged so much to her. It seemed to him in the old days that at heart she was simple, generous, and capable of the best feelings of woman, and of living up to them; and there began to grow at the back of his mind now the thought that she had been carried away by a great temptation--the glitter and show of power and all that gold can buy, and a large circle for the skirts of woman's pride and vanity. If she had married him instead of Byng, they would now be living in a small house in Curzon Street, or some such fashionable quarter, with just enough to enable them to keep their end up with people who had five thousand a year--with no box at the opera, or house in the country, or any of the great luxuries, and with a thriving nursery which would be a promise of future expense--if she had married him! . . . A kinder, gentler spirit was suddenly awake in him, and he did not despise her quite so much. On her part, she saw him coming nearer, as, standing in the door of a cottage in a valley, one sees trailing over the distant hills, with the light behind, a welcome and beloved figure with face turned towards the home in the green glade.

A smile came to his lips, as suspicion stole away ashamed, and he said: "This will not do. Jigger will be spoiled. We shall have to see Mr. Mappin about it."

As she yielded to him the puzzle-box, which she had refused to the nurse, she said: "And pray who sets the example? I am a very imitative person. Besides, I asked Mr. Mappin about the broth, so it's all right; and Jigger will want the puzzle-box when you are not here," she added, quizzically.

"Diversion or continuity?" he asked, with a laugh, as she held the bowl of soup to Jigger's lips. At this point the nurse had discreetly left the room.

"Continuity, of course," she replied. "All diplomatists are puzzles, some without solution."

"Who said I was a diplomatist?" he asked, lightly.

"Don't think that I'm guilty of the slander," she rejoined. "It was the Moravian ambassador who first suggested that what you were by profession you were by nature."

Jasmine felt Ian hold his breath for a moment, then he said in a low tone, "M. Mennaval--you know him well?"

She did not look towards him, but she was conscious that he was eying her intently. She put aside the bowl, and began to adjust Jigger's pillow with deft fingers, while the lad watched her with a worship worth any money to one attacked by ennui and stale with purchased pleasures.

"I know him well--yes, quite well," she replied. "He comes sometimes of an afternoon, and if he had more time--or if I had--he would no doubt come oftener. But time is the most valuable thing I have, and I have less of it than anything else."

"A diminishing capital, too," he returned with a laugh; while his mind was suddenly alert to an idea which had flown into his vision, though its full significance did not possess him yet.

"The Moravian ambassador is not very busy," he added with an undertone of meaning.

"Perhaps; but I am," she answered with like meaning, and looked him in the eyes, steadily, serenely, determinedly. All at once there had opened out before her a great possibility. Both from the Count Landrassy and from the Moravian ambassador she had had hints of some deep, international scheme of which Ian Stafford was the engineer-in-chief, though she did not know definitely what it was. Both ambassadors had paid their court to her, each in a different way, and M. Mennaval would have been as pertinacious as he was vain and somewhat weak (albeit secretive, too, with the feminine instinct so strong in him) if she had not checked him at all points. From what Count Landrassy had said, it would appear that Ian Stafford's future hung in the balance--dependent upon the success of his great diplomatic scheme.

Could she help Ian? Could she help him? Had the time come when she could pay her debt, the price of ransom from the captivity in which he held her true and secret character? It had been vaguely in her mind before; but now, standing beside Jigger's bed, with the lad's feverish hand in hers, there spread out before her a vision of a lien lifted, of an ugly debt redeemed, of freedom from this man's scorn. If she could do some great service for him, would not that wipe out the unsettled claim? If she could help to give him success, would not that, in the end, be more to him than herself? For she would soon fade, the dust would soon gather over her perished youth and beauty; but his success would live on, ever freshening in his sight, rising through long years to a great height, and remaining fixed and exalted. With a great belief she believed in him and what he could do. He was a Sisyphus who could and would roll the huge stone to the top of the hill--and ever with easier power.

The old touch of romance and imagination which had been the governing forces of her grandfather's life, the passion of an idea, however essentially false and meretricious and perilous to all that was worth while keeping in life, set her pulses beating now. As a child her pulses used to beat so when she had planned with her good-for-nothing brother some small escapade looming immense in the horizon of her enjoyment. She had ever distorted or inflamed the facts of life by an overheated fancy, by the spirit of romance, by a gift--or curse--of imagination, which had given her also dark visions of a miserable end, of a clouded and piteous close to her brief journey. "I am doomed--doomed," had been her agonized cry that day before Ian Stafford went away three years ago, and the echo of that cry was often in her heart, waking and sleeping. It had come upon her the night when Rudyard reeled, intoxicated, up the staircase. She had the penalties of her temperament shadowing her footsteps always, dimming the radiance which broke forth for long periods, and made her so rare and wonderful a figure in her world. She was so young, and so exquisite, that Fate seemed harsh and cruel in darkening her vision, making pitfalls for her feet.

Could she help him? Had her moment come when she could force him to smother his scorn and wait at her door for bounty? She would make the effort to know.

"But, yes, I am very busy," she repeated. "I have little interest in Moravia--which is fortunate; for I could not find the time to study it."

"If you had interest in Moravia, you would find the time with little difficulty," he answered, lightly, yet thinking ironically that he himself had given much time and study to Moravia, and so far had not got much return out of it. Moravia was the crux of his diplomacy. Everything depended on it; but Landrassy, the Slavonian ambassador, had checkmated him at every move towards the final victory.

"It is not a study I would undertake con amore," she said, smiling down at Jigger, who watched her with sharp yet docile eyes. Then, suddenly turning towards him again, she said:

"But you are interested in Moravia--do you find it worth the time?"

"Did Count Landrassy tell you that?" he asked.

"And also the ambassador for Moravia; but only in the vaguest and least consequential way," she replied.

She regarded him steadfastly. "It is only just now--is it a kind of telepathy"--that I seem to get a message from what we used to call the power-house, that you are deeply interested in Moravia and Slavonia. Little things which have been said seem to have new meaning now, and I feel"--she smiled significantly--"that I am standing on the brink of some great happening, and only a big secret, like a cloud, prevents me from seeing it, realizing it. Is it so?" she added, in a low voice.

He regarded her intently. His look held hers. It would seem as though he tried to read the depths of her soul; as though he was asking if what had once proved so false could in the end prove true; for it came to him with sudden force, with sure conviction, that she could help him as no one else could; that at this critical moment, when he was trembling between success and failure, her secret influence might be the one reinforcement necessary to conduct him to victory. Greater and better men than himself had used women to further their vast purposes; could one despise any human agency, so long as it was not dishonourable, in the carrying out of great schemes?

It was for Britain--for her ultimate good, for the honour and glory of the Empire, for the betterment of the position of all men of his race in all the world, their prestige, their prosperity, their patriotism; and no agency should be despised. He knew so well what powers of intrigue had been used against him, by the embassy of Slavonia and those of other countries. His own methods had been simple and direct; only the scheme itself being intricate, complicated, and reaching further than any diplomatist, except his own Prime Minister, had dreamed. If carried, it would recast the international position in the Orient, necessitating new adjustments in Europe, with cession of territory and gifts for gifts in the way of commercial treaties and the settlement of outstanding difficulties.

His key, if it could be made to turn in the lock, would open the door to possibilities of prodigious consequence.

He had been three years at work, and the end must come soon. The crisis was near. A game can only be played for a given time, then it works itself out, and a new one must take its place. His top was spinning hard, but already the force of the gyration was failing, and he must presently make his exit with what the Prime Minister called his Patent, or turn the key in the lock and enter upon his kingdom. In three months--in two months--in one month--it might be too late, for war was coming; and war would destroy his plans, if they were not fulfilled now. Everything must be done before war came, or be forever abandoned.

This beautiful being before him could help him. She had brains, she was skilful, inventive, supple, ardent, yet intellectually discreet. She had as much as told him that the ambassador of Moravia had paid her the compliment of admiring her with some ardour. It would not grieve him to see her make a fool and a tool of the impressionable yet adroit diplomatist, whose vanity was matched by his unreliability, and who had a passion for philandering--unlike Count Landrassy, who had no inclination to philander, who carried his citadels by direct attack in great force. Yes, Jasmine could help him, and, as in the

dead years when it seemed that she would be the courier star of his existence, they understood each other without words.

"It is so," he said at last, in a low voice, his eyes still regarding her with almost painful intensity.

"Do you trust me--now--again?" she asked, a tremor in her voice and her small hand clasping ever and ever tighter the fingers of the lad, whose eyes watched her with such dog-like adoration.

A mournful smile stole to his lips--and stayed. "Come where we can be quiet and I will tell you all," he said. "You can help me, maybe."

"I will help you," she said, firmly, as the nurse entered the room again and, approaching the bed, said, "I think he ought to sleep now"; and forthwith proceeded to make Jigger comfortable.

When Stafford bade Jigger good-bye, the lad said: "I wish I could 'ear the singing to-night, y'r gryce. I mean the primmer donner. Lou says she's a fair wonder."

"We will open your window," Jasmine said, gently. "The ball-room is just across the quadrangle, and you will be able to hear perfectly."

"Thank you, me lydy," he answered, gratefully, and his eyes closed.

"Come," said Jasmine to Stafford. "I will take you where we can talk undisturbed."

They passed out, and both were silent as they threaded the corridors and hallways; but in Jasmine's face was a light of exaltation and of secret triumph.

"We must give Jigger a good start in life," she said, softly, as they entered her sitting-room. Jigger had broken down many barriers between her and the man who, a week ago, had been eternities distant from her.

"He's worth a lot of thought," Ian answered, as the pleasant room enveloped him, and they seated themselves on a big couch before the fire.

Again there was a long silence; then, not looking at her, but gazing into the fire, Ian Stafford slowly unfolded the wide and wonderful enterprise of diplomacy in which his genius was employed. She listened with strained attention, but without moving. Her eyes were fixed on his face, and once, as the proposed meaning of the scheme was made dear by the turn of one illuminating phrase, she gave a low exclamation of wonder and delight. That was all until, at last, turning to her as though from some vision that had chained him, he saw the glow in her eyes, the profound interest, which was like the passion of a spirit moved to heroic undertaking. Once again it was as in the years gone by--he trusted her, in spite of himself; in spite of himself he had now given his very life into her hands, was making her privy to great designs which belonged to the inner chambers of the chancelleries of Europe.

Almost timorously, as it seemed, she put out her hand and touched his shoulder. "It is wonderful--wonderful," she said. "I can, I will help you. Will let you let me win back your trust--Ian?"

"I want your help, Jasmine," he replied, and stood up. "It is the last turn of the wheel. It may be life or death to me professionally."

"It shall be life," she said, softly.

He turned slowly from her and went towards the door.

"Shall we not go for a walk," she intervened--"before I drive to the station for Al'mah?"

He nodded, and a moment afterward they were passing along the corridors. Suddenly, as they passed a window, Ian stopped. "I thought Mr. Mappin went with the others to the Glen?" he said.

"He did," was the reply.

"Who is that leaving his room?" he continued, as she followed his glance across the quadrangle. "Surely, it's Fellowes," he added.

"Yes, it looked like Mr. Fellowes," she said, with a slight frown of wonder.

CHAPTER XIII

"I WILL NOT SING"

"I will not sing--it's no use, I will not." Al'mah's eyes were vivid with anger, and her lips, so much the resort of humour, were set in determination. Her words came with low vehemence.

Adrian Fellowes' hand nervously appealed to her. His voice was coaxing and gentle.

"Al'mah, must I tell Mrs. Byng that?" he asked. "There are a hundred people in the ball-room. Some of them have driven thirty miles to hear you. Besides, you are bound in honour to keep your engagement."

"I am bound to keep nothing that I don't wish to keep--you understand!" she replied, with a passionate gesture. "I am free to do what I please with my voice and with myself. I will leave here in the morning. I sang before dinner. That pays my board and a little over," she added, with bitterness. "I prefer to be a paying guest. Mrs. Byng shall not be my paying hostess."

Fellowes shrugged his shoulders, but his lips twitched with excitement. "I don't know what has come over you, Al'mah," he said helplessly and with an anxiety he could not disguise. "You can't do that kind of thing. It isn't fair, it isn't straight business; from a social standpoint, it isn't well-bred."

"Well-bred!" she retorted with a scornful laugh and a look of angry disdain. "You once said I had the manners of Madame Sans Gene, the washer-woman--a sickly joke, it was. Are you going to be my guide in manners? Does breeding only consist in having clothes made in Savile

Row and eating strawberries out of season at a pound a basket?"

"I get my clothes from the Stores now, as you can see," he said, in a desperate attempt to be humorous, for she was in a dangerous mood. Only once before had he seen her so, and he could feel the air charged with catastrophe. "And I'm eating humble pie in season now at nothing a dish," he added. "I really am; and it gives me shocking indigestion."

Her face relaxed a little, for she could seldom resist any touch of humour, but the stubborn and wilful light in her eyes remained.

"That sounds like last year's pantomime," she said, sharply, and, with a jerk of her shoulders, turned away.

"For God's sake wait a minute, Al'mah!" he urged, desperately. "What has upset you? What has happened? Before dinner you were yourself; now--" he threw up his hands in despair--"Ah, my dearest, my star--"

She turned upon him savagely, and it seemed as though a storm of passion would break upon him; but all at once she changed, came up close to him, and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I do not think I trust you," she said, quite quietly.

His eyes could not meet hers fairly. He felt them shrinking from her inquisition. "You have always trusted me till now. What has happened?" he asked, apprehensively and with husky voice.

"Nothing has happened," she replied in a low, steady voice. "Nothing. But I seem to realize you to-night. It came to me suddenly, at dinner, as I listened to you, as I saw you talk--I had never before seen you in surroundings like these. But I realized you then: I had a revelation. You need not ask me what it was. I do not know quite. I cannot tell. It is all vague, but it is startling, and it has gone through my heart like a knife. I tell you this, and I tell you quite calmly, that if you prove to be what, for the first time, I have a vision you are, I shall never look upon your face again if I can help it. If I come to know that you are false in nature and in act, that all you have said to me is not true, that you have degraded me--Oh," she fiercely added, breaking off and speaking with infinite anger and scorn--"it was only love, honest and true, however mistaken, which could make what has been between us endurable in my eyes! What I have thought was true love, and its true passion, helped me to forget the degradation and the secret shame--only the absolute honesty of that love could make me forget. But suppose I find it only imitation; suppose I see that it is only selfishness, only horrible, ugly self-indulgence; suppose you are a man who plays with a human soul! If I find that to be so, I tell you I shall hate you; and I shall hate myself; but I shall hate you more--a thousand times more."

She paused with agony and appealing, with confusion and vague horror in her face. Her look was direct and absorbing, her eyes like wells of sullen fire.

"Al'mah," he replied with fluttered eagerness, "let us talk of this later--not now--later. I will answer anything--everything. I can and I will prove to you that this is only a mad idea of yours, that--"

"No, no, no, not mad," she interrupted. "There is no madness in it. I had a premonition before I came. It was like a cloud on my soul. It left me when we met here, when I heard your voice again; and for a moment I was happy. That was why I sang before dinner that song of Lassen's, 'Thine Eyes So Blue and Tender.' But it has come back. Something deep within me says, 'He is not true.' Something whispers, 'He is false by nature; it is not in him to be true to anything or anybody.'"

He made an effort to carry off the situation lightly. With a great sense of humour, she had also an infinite capacity for taking things seriously--with an almost sensational gravity. Yet she had always responded to his cheerful raillery when he had declined to be tragical. He essayed the old way now.

"This is just absurd, old girl;"--she shrank--"you really are mad. Your home is Colney Hatch or thereabouts. Why, I'm just what I always was to you--your constant slave, your everlasting lover, and your friend. I'll talk it all over with you later. It's impossible now. They're ready for you in the ball-room. The accompanist is waiting. Do, do, do be reasonable. I will see you--afterwards--late."

A determined poignant look came into her eyes. She drew still farther away from him. "You will not, you shall not, see me 'afterwards--late.' No, no, no; I will trust my instinct now. I am natural, I am true, I hide nothing. I take my courage in both hands. I do not hide my head in the sands. I have given, because I chose to give, and I made and make no presences to myself. I answer to myself, and I do not play false with the world or with you. Whatever I am the world can know, for I deceive no one, and I have no fears. But you--oh, why, why is it I feel now, suddenly, that you have the strain of the coward in you! Why it comes to me now I do not know; but it is here"--she pressed her hand tremblingly to her heart--"and I will not act as though it wasn't here. I'm not of this world."

She waved a hand towards the ball-room. "I am not of the world that lives in terror of itself. Mine is a world apart, where one acts and lives and sings the passion and sorrows and joys of others--all unreal, unreal. The one chance of happiness we artists have is not to act in our own lives, but to be true--real and true. For one's own life as well as one's work to be all grease-paint--no, no, no. I have hid all that has been between us, because of things that have nothing to do with fear or courage, and for your sake; but I haven't acted, or pretended. I have not flaunted my private life, my wretched sin--"

"The sin of an angel--"

She shrank from the blatant insincerity of the words, and still more from the tone. Why had it not all seemed insincere before?

"But I was true in all I did, and I believed you were," she continued.

"And you don't believe it now?"

"To-night I do not. What I shall feel to-morrow I cannot tell. Maybe I shall go blind again, for women are never two days alike in their minds or bodies." She threw up her hands with a despairing helplessness. "But we shall not meet till to-morrow, and then I go back to London. I am going to my room now. You may tell Mrs. Byng that

I am not well enough to sing--and indeed I am not well," she added, huskily. "I am sick at heart with I don't know what; but I am wretched and angry and dangerous--and bad."

Her eyes fastened his with a fateful bitterness and gloom. "Where is Mr. Byng?" she added, sharply. "Why was he not at dinner?"

He hailed the change of idea gladly. He spoke quickly, eagerly. "He was kept at the mine. There's trouble--a strike. He was needed. He has great influence with the men, and the masters, too. You heard Mrs. Byng say why he had not returned."

"No; I was thinking of other things. But I wanted--I want to see him. When will he be back?"

"At any moment, I should think. But, Al'mah, no matter what you feel about me, you must keep your engagement to sing here. The people in there, a hundred of the best people of the county--"

"The best people of the county--such abject snobbery!" she retorted, sharply. "Do you think that would influence me? You ought to know me well enough--but that's just it, you do not know me. I realize it at last. Listen now. I will not sing to-night, and you will go and tell Mrs. Byng so."

Once again she turned away, but her exit was arrested by another voice, a pleasant voice, which said:

"But just one minute, please. Mr. Fellowes is quite right.... Fellowes, won't you go and say that Madame Al'mah will be there in five minutes?"

It was Ian Stafford. He had come at Jasmine's request to bring Al'mah, and he had overheard her last words. He saw that there had been a scene, and conceived that it was the kind of quarrel which could be better arranged by a third disinterested person.

After a moment's hesitation, with an anxious yet hopeful look, Fellowes disappeared, Al'mah's brown eyes following him with dark inquisition. Presently she looked at Ian Stafford with a flash of malice. Did this elegant and diplomatic person think that all he had to do was to speak, and she would succumb to his blandishment? He should see.

He smiled, and courteously motioned her to a chair.

"You said to Mr. Fellowes that I should sing in five minutes," she remarked maliciously and stubbornly, but she moved forward to the chair, nevertheless.

"Yes, but there is no reason why we should not sit for three out of the five minutes. Energy should be conserved in a tiring world."

"I have some energy to spare--the overflow," she returned with a protesting flash of the eyes, as, however, she slowly seated herself.

"We call it power and magnetism in your case," he answered in that low, soothing voice which had helped to quiet storms in more than one chancellerie of Europe. . . . "What are you going to sing to-night?"

he added.

"I am not going to sing," she answered, nervously. "You heard what I said to Mr. Fellowes."

"I was an unwilling eavesdropper; I heard your last words. But surely you would not be so unoriginal, so cliché, as to say the same thing to me that you said to Mr. Fellowes!"

His smile was winning and his humour came from a deep well. On the instant she knew it to be real, and his easy confidence, his assumption of dominancy had its advantage.

"I'll say it in a different way to you, but it will be the same thing. I shall not sing to-night," she retorted, obstinately.

"Then a hundred people will go hungry to bed," he rejoined. "Hunger is a dreadful thing--and there are only three minutes left out of the five," he added, looking at his watch.

"I am not the baker or the butler," she replied with a smile, but her firm lips did not soften.

He changed his tactics with adroitness. If he failed now, it would be final. He thought he knew where she might be really vulnerable.

"Byng will be disappointed and surprised when he hears of the famine that the prima donna has left behind her. Byng is one of the best that ever was. He is trying to do his fellow-creatures a good turn down there at the mine. He never did any harm that I ever heard of--and this is his house, and these are his guests. He would, I'll stake my life, do Al'mah a good turn if he could, even if it cost him something quite big. He is that kind of a man. He would be hurt to know that you had let the best people of the county be parched, when you could give them drink."

"You said they were hungry a moment ago," she rejoined, her resolution slowly breaking under the one influence which could have softened her.

"They would be both hungry and thirsty," he urged. "But, between ourselves, would you like Byng to come home from a hard day's work, as it were, and feel that things had gone wrong here while he was away on humanity's business? Just try to imagine him having done you a service--"

"He has done me more than one service," she interjected. "You know it as well as I do. You were there at the opera, three years ago, when he saved me from the flames, and since then--"

Stafford looked at his watch again with a smile. "Besides, there's a far more important reason why you should sing to-night. I promised some one who's been hurt badly, and who never heard you sing, that he should hear you to-night. He is lying there now, and--"

"Jigger?" she asked, a new light in her eyes, something fleeing from her face and leaving a strange softness behind it.

"Quite so," he replied. "That's a lad really worth singing for. He's an original, if ever there was one. He worships you for what

you have done for his sister, Lou. I'd undergo almost any humiliation not to disappoint Jigger. Byng would probably get over his disappointment--he'd only feel that he hadn't been used fairly, and he's used to that; but Jigger wouldn't sleep to-night, and it's essential that he should. Think of how much happiness and how much pain you can give, just by trilling a simple little song with your little voice oh, madame la cantatrice?"

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She brushed them away hastily. "I've been upset and angry and disturbed--and I don't know what," she said, abruptly. "One of my black moods was on me. They only come once in a blue moon; but they almost kill me when they do." . . . She stopped and looked at him steadily for a moment, the tears still in her eyes. "You are very understanding and gentle--and sensible," she added, with brusque frankness and cordiality. "Yes, I will sing for Rudyard Byng and for Jigger; and a little too for a very clever diplomatist." She gave a spasmodic laugh.

"Only half a minute left," he rejoined with gay raillery. "I said you'd sing to them in five minutes, and you must. This way."

He offered her his arm, she took it, and in cheerful silence he hurried her to the ball-room.

Before her first song he showed her the window which looked across to that out of which Jigger gazed with trembling eagerness. The blinds and curtains were up at these windows, and Jigger could see her as she sang.

Never in all her wonderful career had Al'mah sung so well--with so much feeling and an artist's genius--not even that night of all when she made her debut. The misery, the gloom, the bitterness of the past hour had stirred every fibre of her being, and her voice told with thrilling power the story of a soul.

Once after an outburst of applause from the brilliant audience, there came a tiny echo of it from across the courtyard. It was Jigger, enraptured by a vision of heaven and the sounds of it. Al'mah turned towards the window with a shining face, and waved a kiss out of the light and glory where she was, to the sufferer in the darkness. Then, after a whispered word to the accompanist she began singing Gounod's memorable song, "There is a Green Hill Far Away." It was not what the audience expected; it was in strangest contrast to all that had gone before; it brought a hush like a benediction upon the great chamber. Her voice seemed to ache with the plaintive depth of the song, and the soft night filled its soul with melody.

A wonderful and deep solemnity was suddenly diffused upon the assembly of world-worn people, to most of whom the things that mattered were those which gave them diversion. They were wont to swim with the tide of indolence, extravagance, self-seeking, and sordid pleasure now flowing through the hardy isles, from which had come much of the strength of the Old World and the vision and spirit of the New World.

Why had she chosen this song? Because, all at once, as she thought of Jigger lying there in the dark room, she had a vision of her own child lying near to death in the grasp of pneumonia five years ago; and the misery of that time swept over her--its rebellion, its hideous fear, its bitter loneliness. She recalled how a woman, once a great singer,

now grown old in years as in sorrow, had sung this very song to her then, in the hour of her direst apprehension. She sang it now to her own dead child, and to Jigger. When she ceased, there was not a sound save of some woman gently sobbing. Others were vainly trying to choke back their tears.

Presently, as Al'mah stood still in the hush which was infinitely more grateful to her than any applause, she saw Krool advancing hurriedly up the centre aisle. He was drawn and haggard, and his eyes were sunken and wild. Turning at the platform, he said in a strange, hollow voice:

"At the mine--an accident. The Baas he go down to save--he not come up."

With a cry Jasmine staggered to her feet. Ian Stafford was beside her in an instant.

"The Baas--the Baas!" said Krool, insistently, painfully. "I have the horses--come."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BAAS

There had been an explosion in the Glencader Mine, and twenty men had been imprisoned in the stark solitude of the underground world. Or was it that they lay dead in that vast womb of mother-earth which takes all men of all time as they go, and absorbs them into her fruitful body, to produce other men who will in due days return to the same great mother to rest and be still? It mattered little whether malevolence had planned the outrage in the mine, or whether accident alone had been responsible; the results were the same. Wailing, weebegone women wrung their hands, and haggard, determined men stood by with bowed heads, ready to offer their lives to save those other lives far down below, if so be it were possible.

The night was serene and quiet, clear and cold, with glimmering stars and no moon, and the wide circle of the hills was drowsy with night and darkness. All was at peace in the outer circle, but at the centre was travail and storm and outrage and death. What nature had made beautiful, man had made ugly by energy and all the harsh necessities of progress. In the very heart of this exquisite and picturesque country-side the ugly, grim life of the miner had established itself, and had then turned an unlovely field of industrial activity into a cock-pit of struggle between capital and labour. First, discontent, fed by paid agitators and scarcely steadied by responsible and level-headed labour agents and leaders; then active disturbance and threatening; then partial strike, then minor outrages, then some foolishness on the part of manager or man, and now tragedy darkening the field, adding bitterness profound to the discontent and strife.

Rudyard Byng had arrived on the scene in the later stages of the struggle, when a general strike with all its attendant miseries, its dangers and provocations, was hovering. Many men in his own mine in South Africa had come from this very district, and he was known to be

the most popular of all the capitalists on the Rand. His generosity to the sick and poor of the Glencader Mine had been great, and he had given them a hospital and a club with adequate endowment. Also, he had been known to take part in the rough sports of the miners, and had afterwards sat and drunk beer with them--as much as any, and carrying it better than any.

If there was any one who could stay the strike and bring about a settlement it was he; and it is probable he would have stayed it, had it not been for a collision between a government official and a miners' leader. Things had grown worse, until the day of catastrophe, when Byng had been sent for by the leaders of both parties to the quarrel. He had laboured hours after hour in the midst of grave unrest and threats of violence, for some of the men had taken to drinking heavily--but without success. Still he had stayed on, going here and there, mostly among the men themselves, talking to them in little groups, arguing simply with them, patiently dealing with facts and figures, quietly showing them the economic injustice which lay behind their full demands, and suggesting compromises.

He was received with good feeling, but in the workers' view it was "class against class--labour against capital, the man against the master." In their view Byng represented class, capital and master, not man; his interests were not identical with theirs; and though some were disposed to cheer him, the majority said he was "as good a sort as that sort can be," but shrugged their shoulders and remained obstinate. The most that he did during the long afternoon and evening was to prevent the worst; until, as he sat eating a slice of ham in a miner's kitchen, there came the explosion: the accident or crime--which, like the lances in an angry tumour, let out the fury, enmity, and rebellion, and gave human nature its chance again. The shock of the explosion had been heard at Glencader, but nothing was thought of it, as there had been much blasting in the district for days.

"There's twenty men below," said the grimy manager who had brought the news to Byng. Together they sped towards the mine, little groups running beside them, muttering those dark sayings which, either as curses or laments, are painful comments on the relations of life on the lower levels with life on the higher plateaux.

Among the volunteers to go below, Byng was of the first, and against the appeal of the mine-manager, and of others who tried to dissuade him, he took his place with two miners with the words:

"I know this pit better than most; and I'd rather be down there knowing the worst, than waiting to learn it up here. I'm going; so lower away, lads."

He had disappeared, and for a long time there was no sign; but at last there came to the surface three of the imprisoned miners and two dead bodies, and these were followed by others still alive; but Byng did not come up. He remained below, leading the search, the first in the places of danger and exploration, the last to retreat from any peril of falling timbers or from fresh explosion. Twelve of the twenty men were rescued. Six were dead, and their bodies were brought to the surface and to the arms of women whose breadwinners were gone; whose husbands or sons or brothers had been struck out into darkness without time to strip themselves of the impedimenta of the soul. Two were left

below, and these were brothers who had married but three months before. They were strong, buoyant men of twenty-five, with life just begun, and home still welcome and alluring--warm-faced, bonny women to meet them at the door, and lay the cloth, and comfort their beds, and cheer them away to work in the morning. These four lovers had been the target for the good-natured and half-affectionate scoffing of the whole field; for the twins, Jabez and Jacob, were as alike as two peas, and their wives were cousins, and were of a type in mind, body, and estate. These twin toilers were left below, with Rudyard Byng forcing his way to the place where they had worked. With him was one other miner of great courage and knowledge, who had gone with other rescue parties in other catastrophes.

It was this man who was carried to the surface when another small explosion occurred. He brought the terrible news that Byng, the rescuer of so many, was himself caught by falling timbers and imprisoned near a spot where Jabez and Jacob Holyhoke were entombed.

Word had gone to Glencader, and within an hour and a half Jasmine, Al'mah, Stafford, Lord Tynemouth, the Slavonian Ambassador, Adrian Fellowes, Mr. Tudor Tempest and others were at the pit's mouth, stricken by the same tragedy which had made so many widows and orphans that night. Already two attempts had been made to descend, but they had not been successful. Now came forward a burly and dour-looking miner, called Brengyn, who had been down before, and had been in command. His look was forbidding, but his face was that of a man on whom you could rely; and his eyes had a dogged, indomitable expression. Behind him were a dozen men, sullen and haggard, their faces showing nothing of that pity in their hearts which drove them to risk all to save the lives of their fellow-workers. Was it all pity and humanity? Was there also something of that perdurable cohesion of class against class; the powerful if often unlovely unity of faction, the shoulder-to-shoulder combination of war; the tribal fanaticism which makes brave men out of unpromising material? Maybe something of this element entered into the heroism which had been displayed; but whatever the impulse or the motive, the act and the end were the same--men's lives were in peril, and they were risking their own to rescue them.

When Jasmine and her friends arrived, Ian Stafford addressed himself to the groups of men at the pit's mouth, asking for news. Seeing Brengyn approach Jasmine, he hurried over, recognizing in the stalwart miner a leader of men.

"It's a chance in a thousand," he heard Brengyn say to Jasmine, whose white face showed no trace of tears, and who held herself with courage. There was something akin in the expression of her face and that of other groups of women, silent, rigid and bitter, who stood apart, some with children's hands clasped in theirs, facing the worst with regnant resolution. All had that horrible quietness of despair so much more poignant than tears and wailing. Their faces showed the weariness of labour and an ill-nourished daily life, but there was the same look in them as in Jasmine's. There was no class in this communion of suffering and danger.

"Not one chance in a thousand," Brengyn added, heavily. "I know where they are, but--"

"You think they are--dead?" Jasmine asked in a hollow voice.

"I think, alive or dead, it's all against them as goes down to bring them out. It's more lives to be wasted."

Stafford heard, and he stepped forward. "If there's a chance in a thousand, it's good enough for a try," he said. "If you were there, Mr. Byng would take the chance in the thousand for you."

Brengyn looked Stafford up and down slowly. "What is it you've got to say?" he asked, gloomily.

"I am going down, if there's anybody will lead," Stafford replied. "I was brought up in a mining country. I know as much as most of you about mines, and I'll make one to follow you, if you'll lead--you've been down, I know."

Brengyn's face changed. "Mr. Byng isn't our class, he's with capital," he said, "but he's a man. He went down to help save men of my class, and to any of us he's worth the risk. But how many of his own class is taking it on?"

"I, for one," said Lord Tynemouth, stepping forward.

"I--I," answered three other men of the house-party.

Al'mah, who was standing just below Jasmine, had her eyes fixed on Adrian Fellowes, and when Brengyn called for volunteers, her heart almost stood still in suspense. Would Adrian volunteer?

Brengyn's look rested on Adrian for an instant, but Adrian's eyes dropped. Brengyn had said one chance in a thousand, and Adrian said to himself that he had never been lucky--never in all his life. At games of chance he had always lost. Adrian was for the sure thing always.

Al'mah's face flushed with anger and shame at the thing she saw, and a weakness came over her, as though the springs of life had been suddenly emptied.

Brengyn once again fastened the group from Glencader with his eyes. "There's a gentleman in danger," he said, grimly, again. "How many gentlemen volunteer to go down--ay, there's five!" he added, as Stafford and Tynemouth and the others once again responded.

Jasmine saw, but at first did not fully realize what was happening. But presently she understood that there was one near, owing everything to her husband, who had not volunteered to help to save him--on the thousandth chance. She was stunned and stricken.

"Oh, for God's sake, go!" she said, brokenly, but not looking at Adrian Fellowes, and with a heart torn by misery and shame.

Brengyn turned to the men behind him, the dark, determined toilers who sustained the immortal spirit of courage and humanity on thirty shillings a week and nine hours' work a day. "Who's for it, mates?" he asked, roughly. "Who's going wi' me?"

Every man answered hoarsely, "Ay," and every hand went up. Brengyn's back was on Fellowes, Al'mah, and Jasmine now. There was that which filled the cup of trembling for Al'mah in the way he nodded to the

men.

"Right, lads," he said with a stern joy in his voice. "But there's only one of you can go, and I'll pick him. Here, Jim," he added to a small, wiry fellow not more than five feet four in height--"here, Jim Gawley, you're comin' wi' me, an' that's all o' you as can come. No, no," he added, as there was loud muttering and dissent. "Jim's got no missis, nor mother, and he's tough as leather and can squeeze in small places, and he's all right, too, in tight corners." Now he turned to Stafford and Tynemouth and the others. "You'll come wi' me," he said to Stafford--" if you want. It's a bad look-out, but we'll have a try. You'll do what I say?" he sharply asked Stafford, whose face was set.

"You know the place," Stafford answered. "I'll do what you say."

"My word goes?"

"Right. Your word goes. Let's get on."

Jasmine took a step forward with a smothered cry, but Alice Tynemouth laid a hand on her arm.

"He'll bring Rudyard back, if it can be done," she whispered.

Stafford did not turn round. He said something in an undertone to Tynemouth, and then, without a glance behind, strode away beside Brengyn and Jim Gawley to the pit's mouth.

Adrian Fellowes stepped up to Tynemouth. "What do you think the chances are?" he asked in a low tone.

"Go to--bed!" was the gruff reply of the irate peer, to whom cowardice was the worst crime on earth, and who was enraged at being left behind. Also he was furious because so many working-men had responded to Brengyn's call for volunteers and Adrian Fellowes had shown the white feather. In the obvious appeal to the comparative courage of class his own class had suffered.

"Or go and talk to the women," he added to Fellowes. "Make 'em comfortable. You've got a gift that way."

Turning on his heel, Lord Tynemouth hastened to the mouth of the pit and watched the preparations for the descent.

Never was night so still; never was a sky so deeply blue, nor stars so bright and serene. It was as though Peace had made its habitation on the wooded hills, and a second summer had come upon the land, though wintertime was near. Nature seemed brooding, and the generous odour of ripened harvests came over the uplands to the watchers in the valley. All was dark and quiet in the sky and on the hills; but in the valley were twinkling lights and the stir and murmur of troubled life--that sinister muttering of angry and sullen men which has struck terror to the hearts of so many helpless victims of revolution, when it has been the mutterings of thousands and not of a few rough, discontented toilers. As Al'mah sat near to the entrance of the mine, wrapped in a warm cloak, and apart from the others who watched and waited also, she seemed to realize the agony of the problem which was being worked out in these labour-centres where, between capital and

the work of men's hands, there was so apparent a gulf of disproportionate return.

The stillness of the night was broken now by the hoarse calls of the men, now by the wailing of women, and Al'mah's eyes kept turning to those places where lights were shining, which, as she knew, were houses of death or pain. For hours she and Jasmine and Lady Tynemouth had gone from cottage to cottage where the dead and wounded were, and had left everywhere gifts, and the promises of gifts, in the attempt to soften the cruelty of the blow to those whose whole life depended on the weekly wage. Help and the pledge of help had lightened many a dark corner that night; and an unexplainable antipathy which had suddenly grown up in Al'mah's mind against Jasmine after her arrival at Glencader was dissipated as the hours wore on.

Pale of face, but courageous and solicitous, Jasmine, accompanied by Al'mah, moved among the dead and dying and the bitter and bereaved living, with a gentle smile and a soft word or touch of the hand. Men near to death, or suffering torture, looked gratefully at her or tried to smile; and more than once Mr. Mappin, whose hands were kept busy and whose skill saved more than a handful of lives that night, looked at her in wonder.

Jasmine already had a reputation in the great social world for being of a vain lightness, having nothing of that devotion to good works which Mr. Mappin had seen so often on those high levels where the rich and the aristocratic lived. There was, then, more than beauty and wit and great social gift, gaiety and charm, in this delicate personality? Yes, there was something good and sound in her, after all. Her husband's life was in infinite danger,--had not Brengyn said that his chances were only one in a thousand?--death stared her savagely in the face; yet she bore herself as calmly as those women who could not afford the luxury of tears or the self-indulgence of a despairing indolence; to whom tragedy was but a whip of scorpions to drive them into action. How well they all behaved, these society butterflies--Jasmine, Lady Tynemouth, and the others! But what a wonderful motherliness and impulsive sympathy steadied by common sense did Al'mah the singing-woman show!

Her instinct was infallible, her knowledge of how these poor people felt was intuitive, and her great-heartedness was to be seen in every motion, heard in every tone of her voice. If she had not had this work of charity to do, she felt she would have gone shrieking through the valley, as, this very midnight, she had seen a girl with streaming hair and bare breast go crying through the streets, and on up the hills to the deep woods, insane with grief and woe.

Her head throbbed. She felt as though she also could tear the coverings from her own bosom to let out the fever which was there; for in her life she had loved two men who had trampled on her self-respect, had shattered all her pride of life, had made her ashamed to look the world in the face. Blantyre, her husband, had been despicable and cruel, a liar and a deserter; and to-night she had seen the man to whom she had given all that was left of her heart and faith disgrace himself and his class before the world by a cowardice which no woman could forgive.

Adrian Fellowes had gone back to Glencader to do necessary things, to prepare the household for any emergency; and she was grateful for the

respite. If she had been thrown with him in the desperate mood of the moment, she would have lost her self-control. Happily, fate had taken him away for a few hours; and who could tell what might not happen in a few hours? Meanwhile, there was humanity's work to be done.

About four o'clock in the morning, when she came out from a cottage where she had assisted Mr. Mappin in a painful and dangerous operation, she stood for a moment in reverie, looking up at the hills, whose peace had been shrilly broken a few hours before by that distracted waif of the world, fleeing from the pain of life.

An ample star of rare brilliancy came stealing up over the trees against the sky-line, twinkling and brimming with light.

"No," she said, as though in reply to an inner voice, "there's nothing for me--nothing. I have missed it all." Her hands clasped her breast in pain, and she threw her face upwards. But the light of the star caught her eyes, and her hands ceased to tremble. A strange quietness stole over her.

"My child, my lost beloved child," she whispered.

Her eyes swam with tears now, the lines of pain at her mouth relaxed, the dark look in her eyes stole away. She watched the star with sorrowful eyes. "How much misery does it see!" she said. Suddenly, she thought of Rudyard Byng. "He saved my life," she murmured. "I owe him--ah, Adrian might have paid the debt!" she cried, in pain. "If he had only been a man to-night--"

At that moment there came a loud noise up the valley from the pit's mouth--a great shouting. An instant later two figures ran past her. One was Jasmine, the other was a heavy-footed miner. Gathering her cloak around her Al'mah sped after them.

A huddled group at the pit's mouth, and men and women running toward it; a sharp voice of command, and the crowd falling back, making way for men who carried limp bodies past; then suddenly, out of wild murmurs and calls, a cry of victory like the call of a muezzin from the tower of a mosque--a resonant monotony, in which a dominant principle cries.

A Welsh preaching hillman, carried away by the triumph of the moment, gave the great tragedy the bugle-note of human joy and pride.

Ian Stafford and Brengyn and Jim Gawley had conquered. The limp bodies carried past Al'mah were not dead. They were living, breathing men whom fresh air and a surgeon's aid would soon restore. Two of them were the young men with the bonny wives who now with murmured endearments grasped their cold hands. Behind these two was carried Rudyard Byng, who could command the less certain concentration of a heart. The men whom Rudyard had gone to save could control a greater wealth, a more precious thing than anything he had. The boundaries of the interests of these workers were limited, but their souls were commingled with other souls bound to them by the formalities; and every minute of their days, every atom of their forces, were moving round one light, the light upon the hearthstone. These men were carried ahead of Byng now, as though by the ritual of nature taking their rightful place in life's procession before him.

Something of what the working-women felt possessed Jasmine, but it was an impulse born of the moment, a flood of feeling begotten by the tragedy. It had in it more of remorse than aught else; it was, in part, the agitation of a soul surprised into revelation. Yet there was, too, a strange, deep, undefined pity welling up in her heart,—pity for Rudyard, and because of what she did not say directly even to her own soul. But pity was there, with also a sense of inevitableness, of the continuance of things which she was too weak to alter.

Like the two women of the people ahead, she held Rudyard's hand, as she walked beside him, till he was carried into the manager's office near by. She was conscious that on the other side of Rudyard was a tall figure that staggered and swayed as it moved on, and that two dark eyes were turned towards her ever and anon.

Into those eyes she had looked but once since the rescue, but all that was necessary of gratitude was said in that one glance: "You have saved Rudyard—you, Ian," it said.

With Al'mah it was different. In the light of the open door of the manager's office, she looked into Ian Stafford's face. "He saved my life, you remember," she said; "and you have saved his. I love you."

"I love you!" Greatness of heart was speaking, not a woman's emotions. The love she meant was of the sort which brings no darkness in its train. Men and women can speak of it without casting down their eyes or feeling a flush in their cheeks.

To him came also the two women whose husbands, Jacob and Jabez, were restored to them.

"Man, we luv ye," one said, and the other laid a hand on his breast and nodded assent, adding, "Ay, we luv ye."

That was all; but greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend—and for his enemies, maybe. Enemies these two rescued men were in one sense—young socialists—enemies to the present social order, with faces set against the capitalist and the aristocrat and the landlord; yet in the crisis of life dipping their hands in the same dish, drinking from the same cup, moved by the same sense of elementary justice, pity, courage, and love.

"Man, we luv ye!" And the women turned away to their own—to their capital, which in the slump of Fate had suffered no loss. It was theirs, complete and paying large dividends.

To the crowd, Brengyn, with gruff sincerity, said, loudly: "Jim Gawley, he done as I knowed he'd do. He done his best, and he done it prime. We couldn't ha' got on wi'out him. But first there was Mr. Byng as had sense and knowledge more than any; an' he couldn't be denied; an' there was Mr. Stafford—him—" pointing to Ian, who, with misty eyes, was watching the women go back to their men. "He done his bit better nor any of us. And Mr. Byng and Jacob and Jabez, they can thank their stars that Mr. Stafford done his bit. Jim's all right an' I done my duty, I hope, but these two that ain't of us, they done more—Mr. Byng and Mr. Stafford. Here's three cheers, lads—no, this ain't a time for cheerin'; but ye all ha' got hands."

His hand caught Ian's with the grip of that brotherhood which is as old as Adam, and the hand of miner after miner did the same.

The strike was over--at a price too big for human calculation; but it might have been bigger still.

Outside the open door of the manager's office Stafford watched and waited till he saw Rudyard, with a little laugh, get slowly to his feet and stretch his limbs heavily. Then he turned away gloomily to the darkness of the hills. In his soul there was a depression as deep as in that of the singing-woman.

"Al'mah had her debt to pay, and I shall have mine," he said, wearily.

BOOK III

CHAPTER XV

THE WORLD WELL LOST

People were in London in September and October who seldom arrived before November. War was coming. Hundreds of families whose men were in the army came to be within touch of the War Office and Aldershot, and the capital of the Empire was overrun by intriguers, harmless and otherwise. There were ladies who hoped to influence officers in high command in favour of their husbands, brothers, or sons; subalterns of title who wished to be upon the staff of some famous general; colonels of character and courage and scant ability, craving commands; high-placed folk connected with great industrial, shipping, or commercial firms, who were used by these firms to get "their share" of contracts and other things which might be going; and patriotic amateurs who sought to make themselves notorious through some civilian auxiliary to war organization, like a voluntary field hospital or a home of convalescence. But men, too, of the real right sort, longing for chance of work in their profession of arms; ready for anything, good for anything, brave to a miracle: and these made themselves fit by hard riding or walking or rowing, or in some school of physical culture, that they might take a war job on, if, and when, it was going.

Among all these Ian Stafford moved with an undercurrent of agitation and anxiety unseen in his face, step, motion, or gesture. For days he was never near the Foreign Office, and then for days he was there almost continuously; yet there was scarcely a day when he did not see Jasmine. Also there were few days in the week when Jasmine did not see M. Mennaval, the ambassador for Moravia--not always at her own house, but where the ambassador chanced to be of an evening, at a fashionable restaurant, or at some notable function. This situation had not been difficult to establish; and, once established, meetings between the lady and monsieur were arranged with that skill which belongs to woman and to diplomacy.

Once or twice at the beginning Jasmine's chance question concerning the ambassador's engagements made M. Mennaval keen to give information as to his goings and comings. Thus if they met naturally, it was also so constantly that people gossiped; but at first, certainly, not to Jasmine's grave disadvantage, for M. Mennaval was thought to be less dangerous than impressionable.

In that, however, he was somewhat maligned, for his penchant for beautiful and "select" ladies had capacities of development almost unguessed. Previously Jasmine had never shown him any marked preference; and when, at first, he met her in town on her return from Wales he was no more than watchfully courteous and admiring. When, however, he found her in a receptive mood, and evidently taking pleasure in his society, his vanity expanded greatly. He at once became possessed by an absorbing interest in the woman who, of all others in London, had gifts which were not merely physical, but of a kind that stimulate the mind and rouse those sensibilities so easily dulled by dull and material people. Jasmine had her material side; but there was in her the very triumph of the imaginative also; and through it the material became alive, buoyant and magnetic.

Without that magnetic power which belonged to the sensuous part of her she would not have gained control of M. Mennaval's mind, for it was keen, suspicious, almost abnormally acute; and, while lacking real power, it protected itself against the power of others by assembled and well-disciplined adroitness and evasions.

Very soon, however, Jasmine's sensitive beauty, which in her desire to intoxicate him became voluptuousness, enveloped his brain in a mist of rainbow reflections. Under her deft questions and suggestions he allowed her to see the springs of his own diplomacy and the machinery inside the Moravian administration. She caught glimpses of its ambitions, its unscrupulous use of its position in international relations, to gain advantage for itself, even by a dexterity which might easily bear another name, and by sudden disregard of international attachments not unlike treachery.

Rudyard was too busy to notice the more than cavalier attitude of M. Mennaval; and if he had noticed it, there would have been no intervention. Of late a lesion of his higher moral sense made him strangely insensitive to obvious things. He had an inborn chivalry, but the finest, truest chivalry was not his--that which carefully protects a woman from temptation, by keeping her unostentatiously away from it; which remembers that vanity and the need for admiration drive women into pitfalls out of which they climb again maimed for life, if they climb at all.

He trusted Jasmine absolutely, while there was, at the same time, a great unrest in his heart and life--an unrest which the accident at the Glencader Mine, his own share in a great rescue, and her gratitude for his safety did little to remove. It produced no more than a passing effect upon Jasmine or upon himself. The very convention of making light of bravery and danger, which has its value, was in their case an evil, preventing them from facing the inner meaning of it all. If they had been less rich, if their house had been small, if their acquaintances had been fewer, if . . .

It was not by such incidents that they were to be awakened, and with the wild desire to make Stafford grateful to her, and owe her his

success, the tragedy yonder must, in the case of Jasmine, have been obscured and robbed of its force. At Glencader Jasmine had not got beyond desire to satisfy a vanity, which was as deep in her as life itself. It was to regain her hold upon a man who had once acknowledged her power and, in a sense, had bowed to her will. But that had changed, and, down beneath all her vanity and wilfulness, there was now a dangerous regard and passion for him which, under happy circumstances, might have transformed her life--and his. Now it all served to twist her soul and darken her footsteps. On every hand she was engaged in a game of dissimulation, made the more dangerous by the thread of sincerity and desire running through it all. Sometimes she started aghast at the deepening intrigue gathering in her path; at the deterioration in her husband; and at the hollow nature of her home life; but the excitement of the game she was playing, the ardour of the chase, was in her veins, and her inherited spirit of great daring kept her gay with vitality and intellectual adventure.

Day after day she had strengthened the cords by which she was drawing Ian to her; and in the confidence begotten of her services to him, of her influence upon M. Mennaval and the progress of her efforts, a new intimacy, different from any they had ever known, grew and thrived. Ian scarcely knew how powerful had become the feeling between them. He only realized that delight which comes from working with another for a cherished cause, the goal of one's life, which has such deeper significance when the partner in the struggle is a woman. They both experienced that most seductive of all influences, a secret knowledge and a pact of mutual silence and purpose.

"You trust me now?" Jasmine asked at last one day, when she had been able to assure Ian that the end was very near, that M. Mennaval had turned his face from Slavonia, and had carried his government with him--almost. In the heir-apparent to the throne of Moravia, whose influence with the Moravian Prime Minister was considerable, there still remained one obdurate element; but Ian's triumph only lacked the removal of this one obstructive factor, and thereafter England would be secure from foreign attack, if war came in South Africa. In that case Ian's career might culminate at the head of the Foreign Office itself, or as representative of the throne in India, if he chose that splendid sphere.

"You do trust me, Ian?" Jasmine repeated, with a wistfulness as near reality as her own deceived soul could permit.

With a sincerity as deep as one can have who embarks on enterprises in which one regrets the means in contemplation of the end, Ian replied:

"Yes, yes, I trust you, Jasmine, as I used to do when I was twenty and you were five. You have brought back the boy in me. All the dreams of youth are in my heart again, all the glow of the distant sky of hope. I feel as though I lived upon a hill-top, under some greenwood tree, and--"

"And 'sported with Amaryllis in the shade,'" she broke in with a little laugh of triumph, her eyes brighter than he had ever seen them. They were glowing with a fire of excitement which was like a fever devouring the spirit, with little dark, flying banners of fate or tragedy behind.

Strange that he caught the inner meaning of it as he looked into her

eyes now. In the depths of those eyes, where long ago he had drowned his spirit, it was as though he saw an army of reckless battalions marching to a great battle; but behind all were the black wings of vultures--pinions of sorrow following the gay brigades. Even as he gazed at her, something ominous and threatening caught his heart, and, with the end of his great enterprise in sight, a black premonition smothered him.

But with a smile he said: "Well, it does look as though we are near the end of the journey."

"And 'journeys end in lovers' meeting,'" she whispered softly, lowered her eyes, and then raised them again to his.

The light in them blinded him. Had he not always loved her--before any one came, before Rudyard came, before the world knew her? All that he had ever felt in the vanished days rushed upon him with intolerable force. Through his life-work, through his ambition, through helping him as no one else could have done at the time of crisis, she had reached the farthest confines of his nature. She had woven, thread by thread, the magic carpet of that secret companionship by which the best as the worst of souls are sometimes carried into a land enchanted--for a brief moment, before Fate stoops down and hangs a veil of plague over the scene of beauty, passion, and madness.

Her eyes, full of liquid fire, met his. They half closed as her body swayed slightly towards him.

With a cry, almost rough in its intensity, he caught her in his arms and buried his face in the soft harvest of her hair. "Jasmine--Jasmine, my love!" he murmured.

Suddenly she broke from him. "Oh no--oh no, Ian! The work is not done. I can't take my pay before I have earned it--such pay--such pay."

He caught her hands and held them fast. "Nothing can alter what is. It stands. Whatever the end, whatever happens to the thing I want to do, I--"

He drew her closer.

"You say this before we know what Moravia will do; you--oh, Ian, tell me it is not simply gratitude, and because I tried to help you; not only because--"

He interrupted her with a passionate gesture. "It belonged at first to what you were doing for me. Now it is by itself, that which, for good or ill, was to be between you and me--the foreordained thing."

She drew back her head with a laugh of vanity and pride and bursting joy. "Ah, it doesn't matter now!" she said. "It doesn't matter."

He looked at her questioningly.

"Nothing matters now," she repeated, less enigmatically. She stretched her arms up joyously, radiantly.

"The world well lost!" she cried.

Her reckless mood possessed him also. They breathed that air which intoxicates, before it turns heavy with calamity and stifles the whole being; by which none ever thrived, though many have sought nourishment in daring draughts of it.

"The world well lost!" he repeated; and his lips sought hers.

Her determined patience had triumphed. Hour by hour, by being that to his plans, to his work of life, which no one else could be, she had won back what she had lost when the Rand had emptied into her lap its millions, at the bidding of her material soul. With infinite tact and skill she had accomplished her will. The man she had lost was hers again. What it must mean, what it must do, what price must be paid for this which her spirit willed had never yet been estimated. But her will had been supreme, and she took all out of the moment which was possible to mortal pleasure.

Like the Columbus, however, who plants his flag upon the cliffs of a new land, and then, leaving his vast prize unharvested, retreats upon the sea by which he came, so Ian suddenly realized that here was no abiding-place for his love. It was no home for his faith, for those joys which the sane take gladly, when it is right to take them, and the mad long for and die for when their madness becomes unbearable.

A cloud suddenly passed over him, darkened his eyes, made his bones like water. For, whatever might come, he knew in his heart of hearts that the "old paths" were the only paths which he could tread in peace--or tread at all without the ruin of all he had slowly builded.

Jasmine, however, did not see his look or realize the sudden physical change which passed over him, leaving him cold and numbed; for a servant now entered with a note.

Seeing the handwriting on the envelope, with an exclamation of excitement and surprise, Jasmine tore the letter open. One glance was sufficient.

"Moravia is ours--ours, Ian!" she cried, and thrust the letter into his hands.

"Dearest lady," it ran, "the Crown has intervened successfully. The Heir Apparent has been set aside. The understanding may now be ratified. May I dine with you to-night?"

"Yours, M.

"P.S.--You are the first to know, but I have also sent a note to our young friend, Ian Stafford. Mais, he cannot say, 'Alone I did it.'

"M."

"Thank God--thank God, for England!" said Ian solemnly, the greater thing in him deeply stirred. "Now let war come, if it must; for we can do our work without interference."

"Thank God," he repeated, fervently, and the light in his eyes was clearer and burned brighter than the fire which had filled them during the past few moments.

Then he clasped her in his arms again.

As Ian drove swiftly in a hansom to the Foreign Office, his brain putting in array and reviewing the acts which must flow from this international agreement now made possible, the note Mennaval had written Jasmine flashed before his eyes: "Dearest lady.... May I dine with you to-night? . . . M."

His face flushed. There was something exceedingly familiar--more in the tone of the words than the words themselves--which irritated and humiliated him. What she had done for him apparently warranted this intimate, self-assured tone on the part of Mennaval, the philanderer. His pride smarted. His rose of triumph had its thorns.

A letter from Mennaval was at the Foreign Office awaiting him. He carried it to the Prime Minister, who read it with grave satisfaction.

"It is just in time, Stafford," he remarked. "You ran it close. We will clinch it instantly. Let us have the code."

As the Prime Minister turned over the pages of the code, he said, dryly: "I hear from Pretoria, through Mr. Byng, that President Kruger may send the ultimatum tomorrow. I fear he will have the laugh on us, for ours is not ready. We have to make sure of this thing first.... I wonder how Landrassy will take it."

He chuckled deeply. "Landrassy made a good fight, but you made a better one, Stafford. I shouldn't wonder if you got on in diplomacy," he added, with quizzical humour.... "Ah, here is the code! Now to clinch it all before Oom Paul's challenge arrives."

CHAPTER XVI

THE COMING OF THE BAAS

"The Baas--where the Baas?"

Barry Whalen turned with an angry snort to the figure in the doorway. "Here's the sweet Krool again," he said. "Here's the faithful, loyal offspring of the Vaal and the karoo, the bulwark of the Baas.... For God's sake smile for once in your life!" he growled with an oath, and, snatching up a glass of whiskey and water, threw the contents at the half-caste.

Krool did not stir, and some of the liquid caught him in the face. Slowly he drew out an old yellow handkerchief and wiped his cheeks, his eyes fixed with a kind of impersonal scrutiny on Barry Whalen and the scene before him.

The night was well forward, and an air of recklessness and dissipation pervaded this splendid room in De Lancy Scovel's house. The air was thick with tobacco-smoke, trays were scattered about, laden with stubs of cigars and ashes, and empty and half-filled glasses were everywhere. Some of the party had already gone, their gaming instinct satisfied for the night, their pockets lighter than when they came;

and the tables where they had sat were in a state of disorder more suggestive of a "dive" than of the house of one who lived in Grosvenor Square.

No servant came to clear away the things. It was a rule of the establishment that at midnight the household went to bed, and the host and his guests looked after themselves thereafter. The friends of De Lancy Scovel called him "Cupid," because of his cherubic face, but he was more gnome than cherub at heart. Having come into his fortune by being a henchman to abler men than himself, he was almost over-zealous to retain it, knowing that he could never get it again; yet he was hospitable with the income he had to spend. He was the Beau Brummel of that coterie which laid the foundation of prosperity on the Rand; and his house was a marvel of order and crude elegance--save when he had his roulette and poker parties, and then it was the shambles of murdered niceties. Once or twice a week his friends met here; and it was not mendaciously said that small fortunes were lost and won within these walls "between drinks."

The critical nature of things on the Rand did not lessen the gaming or the late hours, the theatrical entertainments and social functions at which Al'mah or another sang at a fabulous fee; or from which a dancer took away a pocketful of gold--partly fee. Only a few of all the group, great and small, kept a quiet pace and cherished their nerves against possible crisis or disaster; and these were consumed by inward anxiety, because all the others looked to them for a lead, for policy, for the wise act and the manoeuvre that would win.

Rudyard Byng was the one person who seemed equally compacted of both elements. He was a powerful figure in the financial inner circle; but he was one of those who frequented De Lancy Scovel's house; and he had, in his own house, a roulette-table and a card-room like a banqueting-hall. Wallstein, Wolff, Barry Whalen, Fleming, Hungerford, Reuter, and the others of the inner circle he laughed at in a good-natured way for coddling themselves, and called them--not without some truth--valetudinarians. Indeed, the hard life of the Rand in the early days, with the bad liqueur and the high veld air, had brought to most of the Partners inner physical troubles of some kind; and their general abstention was not quite voluntary moral purpose.

Of them all, except De Lancy Scovel, Rudyard was most free from any real disease or physical weakness which could call for the care of a doctor. With a powerful constitution, he had kept his general health fairly, though strange fits of depression had consumed him of late, and the old strong spring and resilience seemed going, if not gone, from his mind and body. He was not that powerful virile animal of the day when he caught Al'mah in his arms and carried her off the stage at Covent Garden. He was vaguely conscious of the great change in him, and Barry Whalen, who, with all his faults, would have gone to the gallows for him, was ever vividly conscious of it, and helplessly resented the change. At the time of the Jameson Raid Rudyard Byng had gripped the situation with skill, decision, and immense resource, giving as much help to the government of the day as to his colleagues and all British folk on the Rand.

But another raid was nearing, a raid upon British territory this time. The Rand would be the centre of a great war; and Rudyard Byng was not the man he had been, in spite of his show of valour and vigour at the Glencader Mine. Indeed, that incident had shown a certain

physical degeneracy--he had been too slow in recovering from the few bad hours spent in the death-trap. The government at Whitehall still consulted him, still relied upon his knowledge and his natural tact; but secret as his conferences were with the authorities, they were not so secret that criticism was not viciously at work. Women jealous of Jasmine, financiers envious of Rudyard, Imperial politicians resentful of his influence, did their best to present him in the worst light possible. It was more than whispered that he sat too long over his wine, and that his desire for fiery liquid at other than meal-times was not in keeping with the English climate, but belonged to lands of drier weather and more absorptive air.

"What damned waste!" was De Lancy Scovel's attempt at wit as Krool dried his face and put the yellow handkerchief back into his pocket. The others laughed idly and bethought themselves of their own glasses, and the croupier again set the ball spinning and drew their eyes.

"Faites vos jeux!" the croupier called, monotonously, and the jingle of coins followed.

"The Baas--where the Baas?" came again the harsh voice from the doorway.

"Gone--went an hour ago," said De Lancy Scovel, coming forward. "What is it, Krool?"

"The Baas--"

"The Baas!" mocked Barry Whalen, swinging round again. "The Baas is gone to find a rope to tie Oom Paul to a tree, as Oom Paul tied you at Lichtenburg."

Slowly Krool's eyes went round the room, and then settled on Barry Whalen's face with owl-like gravity. "What the Baas does goes good," he said. "When the Baas ties, Alles zal recht kom."

He turned away now with impudent slowness, then suddenly twisted his body round and made a grimace of animal-hatred at Barry Whalen, his teeth showing like those of a wolf.

"The Baas will live long as he want," he added, "but Oom Paul will have your heart--and plenty more," he added, malevolently, and moved into the darkness without, closing the door behind him.

A shudder passed through the circle, for the uncanny face and the weird utterance had the strange reality of fate. A gloom fell on the gamblers suddenly, and they slowly drew into a group, looking half furtively at one another.

The wheel turned on the roulette-table, the ball clattered.

"Rien ne va plus!" called the croupier; but no coins had fallen on the green cloth, and the wheel stopped spinning for the night, as though by common consent.

"Krool will murder you some day, Barry," said Fleming, with irritation. "What's the sense in saying things like that to a servant?"

"How long ago did Rudyard leave?" asked De Lancy Scovel, curiously. "I didn't see him go. He didn't say good-night to me. Did he to you--to any of you?"

"Yes, he said to me he was going," rejoined Barry Whalen.

"And to me," said Melville, the Pole, who in the early days on the Rand had been a caterer. His name then had been Joseph Sobieski, but this not fitting well with the English language, he had searched the directory of London till he found the impeachably English combination of Clifford Melville. He had then cut his hair and put himself into the hands of a tailor in Conduit Street, and they had turned him into--what he was.

"Yes, Byng thed good-night to me--deah old boy," he repeated. "'I'm so damned thleepy, and I have to be up early in the morning,' he thed to me."

"Byng's example's good enough. I'm off," said Fleming, stretching up his arms and yawning.

"Byng ought to get up earlier in the morning--much earlier," interposed De Lancy Scovel, with a meaning note in his voice.

"Why?" growled out Barry Whalen.

"He'd see the Outlander early-bird after the young domestic worm," was the slow reply.

For a moment a curious silence fell upon the group. It was as though some one had heard what had been said--some one who ought not to have heard.

That is exactly what had happened. Rudyard had not gone home. He had started to do so; but, remembering that he had told Krool to come at twelve o'clock if any cables arrived, that he might go himself to the cable-office, if necessary, and reply, he passed from the hallway into a little room off the card-room, where there was a sofa, and threw himself down to rest and think. He knew that the crisis in South Africa must come within a few hours; that Oom Paul would present an ultimatum before the British government was ready to act; and that preparations must be made on the morrow to meet all chances and consequences. Preparations there had been, but conditions altered from day to day, and what had been arranged yesterday morning required modification this evening.

He was not heedless of his responsibilities because he was at the gaming-table; but these were days when he could not bear to be alone. Yet he could not find pleasure in the dinner-parties arranged by Jasmine, though he liked to be with her--liked so much to be with her, and yet wondered how it was he was not happy when he was beside her. This night, however, he had especially wished to be alone with her, to dine with her a deux, and he had been disappointed to find that she had arranged a little dinner and a theatre-party. With a sigh he had begged her to arrange her party without him, and, in unusual depression, he had joined "the gang," as Jasmine called it, at De Lancy Scovel's house.

Here he moved in a kind of gloom, and had a feeling as though he were walking among pitfalls. A dread seemed to descend upon him and deaden his natural buoyancy. At dinner he was fitful in conversation, yet inclined to be critical of the talk around him. Upon those who talked excitedly of war and its consequences, with perverse spirit he fell like a sledge-hammer, and proved their information or judgment wrong. Then, again, he became amiable and almost sentimental in his attitude toward them all, gripping the hands of two or three with a warmth which more than surprised them. It was as though he was subconsciously aware of some great impending change. It may be there whispered through the clouded space that lies between the dwelling-house of Fate and the place where a man's soul lives the voice of that Other Self, which every man has, warning him of darkness, or red ruin, or a heartbreak coming on.

However that may be, he had played a good deal during the evening, had drunk more than enough brandy and soda, had then grown suddenly heavy-hearted and inert. At last he had said good-night, and had fallen asleep in the little dark room adjoining the card-room.

Was it that Other Self which is allowed to come to us as our trouble or our doom approaches, who called sharply in his ear as De Lancy Scovel said, "Byng ought to get up earlier in the morning--much earlier."

Rudyard wakened upon the words without stirring--just a wide opening of the eyes and a moveless body. He listened with, as it were, a new sense of hearing, so acute, so clear, that it was as though his friends talked loudly in his very ears.

"He'd see the Outlander early-bird after the young domestic worm."

His heart beat so loud that it seemed his friends must hear it, in the moment's silence following these suggestive words.

"Here, there's enough of this," said Barry Whalen, sharply, upon the stillness. "It's nobody's business, anyhow. Let's look after ourselves, and we'll have enough to do, or I don't know any of us."

"But it's no good pretending," said Fleming. "There isn't one of us but 'd put ourselves out a great deal for Byng. It isn't human nature to sit still and do naught, and say naught, when things aren't going right for him in the place where things matter most."

"Can't he see? Doesn't he see--anything?" asked a little wizened lawyer, irritably, one who had never been married, the solicitor of three of their great companies.

"See--of course he doesn't see. If he saw, there'd be hell--at least," replied Barry Whalen, scornfully.

"He's as blind as a bat," sighed Fleming.

"He got into the wrong garden and picked the wrong flower--wrong for him," said another voice. "A passion-flower, not the flower her name is," added De Lancy Scovel, with a reflective cynicism.

"They they there's no doubt about it--she's throwing herself away. Ruddy isn't in it, deah old boy, so they they," interposed

Clifford Melville, alias Joseph Sobieski of Posen." Diplomathy is all very well, but thith kind of diplomathy is not good for the thoul." He laughed as only one of his kidney can laugh.

Upon the laugh there came a hoarse growl of anger. Barry Whalen was standing above Mr. Clifford Melville with rage in every fibre, threat in every muscle.

"Shut up--curse you, Sobieski! It's for us, for any and every one, to cut the throats of anybody that says a word against her. We've all got to stand together. Byng forever, is our cry, and Byng's wife is Byng--before the world. We've got to help him--got to help him, I say."

"Well, you've got to tell him first. He's got to know it first," interposed Fleming; "and it's not a job I'm taking on. When Byng's asleep he takes a lot of waking, and he's asleep in this thing."

"And the world's too wide awake," remarked De Lancy Scovel, acidly. "One way or another Byng's got to be waked. It's only him can put it right."

No one spoke for a moment, for all saw that Barry Whalen was about to say something important, coming forward to the table impulsively for the purpose, when a noise from the darkened room beyond fell upon the silence.

De Lancy Scovel heard, Fleming heard, others heard, and turned towards the little room. Sobieski touched Barry Whalen's arm, and they all stood waiting while a hand slowly opened wide the door of the little room, and, white with a mastered agitation, Byng appeared.

For a moment he looked them all full in the face, yet as though he did not see them; and then, without a word, as they stepped aside to make way for him, he passed down the room to the outer hallway.

At the door he turned and looked at them again. Scorn, anger, pride, impregnated with a sense of horror, were in his face. His white lips opened to speak, but closed again, and, turning, he stepped out of their sight.

No one followed. They knew their man.

"My God, how he hates us!" said Barry Whalen, and sank into a chair at the table, with his head between his hands.

The cheeks of the little wizened lawyer glistened with tears, and De Lancy Scovel threw open a window and leaned out, looking into the night remorsefully.

CHAPTER XVII

IS THERE NO HELP FOR THESE THINGS?

Slowly, heavily, like one drugged, Rudyard Byng made his way through the streets, oblivious of all around him. His brain was like some

engine pounding at high pressure, while all his body was cold and lethargic. His anger at those he left behind was almost madness, his humiliation was unlike anything he had ever known. In one sense he was not a man of the world. All his thoughts and moods and habits had been essentially primitive, even in the high social and civilized surroundings of his youth; and when he went to South Africa, it was to come into his own--the large, simple, rough, adventurous life. His powerful and determined mind was confined in its scope to the big essential things. It had a rare political adroitness, but it had little intellectual subtlety. It had had no preparation for the situation now upon him, and its accustomed capacity was suddenly paralyzed. Like some huge ship staggered by the sea, it took its punishment with heavy, sullen endurance. Socially he had never, as it were, seen through a ladder; and Jasmine's almost uncanny brilliance of repartee and skill in the delicate contest of the mind had ever been a wonder to him, though less so of late than earlier in their married life. Perhaps this was because his senses were more used to it, more blunted; or was it because something had gone from her--that freshness of mind and body, that resilience of temper and spirit, without which all talk is travail and weariness? He had never thought it out, though he was dimly conscious of some great loss--of the light gone from the evening sky.

Yes, it was always in the evening that he had most longed to see "his girl"; when the day's work was done; when the political and financial stress had subsided; or when he had abstracted himself from it all and turned his face towards home. For the big place in Park Lane had really been home to him, chiefly because, or alone because, Jasmine had made it what it was; because in every room, in every corner, was the product of her taste and design. It had been home because it was associated with her. But of late ever since his five months' visit to South Africa without her the year before--there had come a change, at first almost imperceptible, then broadening and deepening.

At first it had vexed and surprised him; but at length it had become a feeling natural to, and in keeping with, a scheme of life in which they saw little of each other, because they saw so much of other people. His primitive soul had rebelled against it at first, not bitterly, but confusedly; because he knew that he did not know why it was; and he thought that if he had patience he would come to understand it in time. But the understanding did not come, and on that ominous, prophetic day before they went to Glencader, the day when Ian Stafford had dined with Jasmine alone after their meeting in Regent Street, there had been a wild, aching protest against it all. Not against Jasmine--he did not blame her; he only realized that she was different from what he had thought she was; that they were both different from what they had been; and that--the light had gone from the evening sky.

But from first to last he had always trusted her. It had never crossed his mind, when she "made up" to men in her brilliant, provoking, intoxicating way, that there was any lack of loyalty to him. It simply never crossed his mind. She was his wife, his girl, his flower which he had plucked; and there it was, for the universe to see, for the universe to heed as a matter of course. For himself, since he had married her, he had never thought of another woman for an instant, except either to admire or to criticize her; and his criticism was, as Jasmine had said, "infantile." The sum of it was, he was married to the woman of his choice, she was married to the man of her choice; and

there it was, there it was, a great, eternal, settled fact. It was not a thing for speculation or doubt or reconsideration.

Always, when he had been troubled of late years, his mind had involuntarily flown to South Africa, as a bird flies to its nest in the distant trees for safety, from the spoiler or from the storm. And now, as he paced the streets with heavy, almost blundering tread,--so did the weight of slander drag him down--his thoughts suddenly saw a picture which had gone deep down into his soul in far-off days. It was after a struggle with Lobengula, when blood had been shed and lives lost, and the backbone of barbarism had been broken south of the Zambesi for ever and ever and ever. He had buried two companions in arms whom he had loved in that way which only those know who face danger on the plain, by the river, in the mountain, or on the open road together. After they had been laid to rest in the valley where the great baboons came down to watch the simple cortege pass, where a stray lion stole across the path leading to the grave, he had gone on alone to a spot in the Matoppos, since made famous and sacred.

Where John Cecil Rhodes sleeps on that high plateau of convex hollow stone, with the great natural pillars standing round like sentinels, and all the rugged unfinished hills tumbling away to an unpeopled silence, he came that time to rest his sorrowing soul. The woods, the wild animal life, had been left behind, and only a peaceful middle world between God and man greeted his stern eyes.

Now, here in London, at that corner where the lonely white statue stands by Londonderry House, as he moved in a dream of pain, with vast weights like giant manacles hampering every footstep, inwardly raging that into his sweet garden of home the vile elements of slander had been thrown, yet with a terrible and vague fear that something had gone terribly wrong with him, that far-off day spent at the Matoppos flashed upon his sight.

Through streets upon streets he had walked, far, far out of his way, subconsciously giving himself time to recover before he reached his home; until the green quiet of Hyde Park, the soft depths of its empty spaces, the companionable and commendable trees, greeted his senses. Then, here, suddenly there swam before his eyes the bright sky over those scarred and jagged hills beyond the Matoppos, purple and grey, and red and amethyst and gold, and his soul's sight went out over the interminable distance of loneliness and desolation which only ended where the world began again, the world of fighting men. He saw once more that tumbled waste of primeval creation, like a crazed sea agitated by some Horror underneath, and suddenly transfixed in its plunging turmoil--a frozen concrete sorrow, with all active pain gone. He heard the loud echo of his feet upon that hollow plateau of rock, with convex skin of stone laid upon convex skin, and then suddenly the solid rock which gave no echo under his tread, where Rhodes lies buried. He saw all at once, in the shining horizon at different points, black, angry, marauding storms arise and roar and burst: while all the time above his head there was nothing but sweet sunshine, into which the mists of the distant storms drifted, and rainbows formed above him. Upon those hollow rocks the bellow of the storms was like the rumbling of the wheels of a million gun-carriages; and yet high overhead there were only the bright sun and faint drops of rain falling like mystic pearls.

And then followed--he could hear it again, so plainly, as his eyes now

sought the friendly shades of the beeches and the elms yonder in Hyde Park!--upon the air made denser by the storm, the call of a lonely bird from one side of the valley. The note was deep and strong and clear, like the bell-bird of the Australian salt-bush plains beyond the Darling River, and it rang out across the valley, as though a soul desired its mate; and then was still. A moment, and there came across the valley from the other side, stealing deep sweetness from the hollow rocks, the answer of the bird which had heard her master's call. Answering, she called too, the viens ici of kindred things; and they came nearer and nearer and nearer, until at last their two voices were one.

In that wild space there had been worked out one of the great wonders of creation, and under the dim lamps of Park Lane, in his black, shocked mood, Rudyard recalled it all by no will of his own. Upon his eye and brain the picture had been registered, and in its appointed time, with an automatic suggestion of which he was ignorant and innocent, it came to play its part and to transform him.

The thought of it all was like a cool hand laid upon his burning brow. It gave him a glimpse of the morning of life.

The light was gone from the evening sky: but was it gone forever?

As he entered his house now he saw upon a Spanish table in the big hall a solitary bunch of white roses--a touch of simplicity in an area of fine artifice. Regarding it a moment, black thoughts receded, and choosing a flower from the vase he went slowly up the stairs to Jasmine's room.

He would give her this rose as the symbol of his faith and belief in her, and then tell her frankly what he had heard at De Lancy Scovel's house.

For the moment it did not occur to him that she might not be at home. It gave him a shock when he opened the door and found her room empty. On her bed, like a mesh of white clouds, lay the soft linen and lace and the delicate clothes of the night; and by the bed were her tiny blue slippers to match the blue dressing-gown. Some gracious things for morning wear hung over a chair; an open book with a little cluster of violets and a tiny mirror lay upon a table beside a sofa; a footstool was placed at a considered angle for her well-known seat on the sofa where the soft-blue lamp-shade threw the light upon her book; and a little desk with dresden-china inkstand and penholder had little pockets of ribbon-tied letters and bills--even business had an air of taste where Jasmine was. And there on a table beside her bed was a large silver-framed photograph of himself turned at an angle toward the pillow where she would lay her head.

How tender and delicate and innocent it all was! He looked round the room with new eyes, as though seeing everything for the first time. There was another photograph of himself on her dressing-table. It had no companion there; but on another table near were many photographs; four of women, the rest of men: celebrities, old friends like Ian Stafford--and M. Mennaval.

His face hardened. De Lancy Scovel's black slander swept through his veins like fire again, his heart came up in his throat, his fingers clinched.

Presently, as he stood with clouded face and mist in his eyes, Jasmine's maid entered, and, surprised at seeing him, retreated again, but her eyes fastened for a moment strangely on the white rose he held in his hand. Her glance drew his own attention to it again. Going over to the gracious and luxurious bed, with its blue silk canopy, he laid the white rose on her pillow. Somehow it was more like an offering to the dead than a lover's tribute to the living. His eyes were fogged, his lips were set. But all he was then in mind and body and soul he laid with the rose on her pillow.

As he left the rose there, his eyes wandered slowly over this retreat of rest and sleep: white robe-de-nuit, blue silk canopy, blue slippers, blue dressing-gown--all blue, the colour in which he had first seen her.

Slowly he turned away at last and went to his own room. But the picture followed him. It kept shining in his eyes. Krool's face suddenly darkened it.

"You not ring, Baas," Krool said.

Without a word Rudyard waved him away, a sudden and unaccountable fury in his mind. Why did the sight of Krool vex him so?

"Come back," he said, angrily, before the door of the bedroom closed.

Krool returned.

"Weren't there any cables? Why didn't you come to Mr. Scovel's at midnight, as I told you?"

"Baas, I was there at midnight, but they all say you come home, Baas. There the cable--two." He pointed to the dressing-table.

Byng snatched them, tore them open, read them.

One had the single word, "Tomorrow." The other said, "Prepare." The code had been abandoned. Tragedy needs few words.

They meant that to-morrow Kruger's ultimatum would be delivered and that the worst must be faced.

He glanced at the cables in silence, while Krool watched him narrowly, covertly, with a depth of purpose which made his face uncanny.

"That will do, Krool; wake me at seven," he said, quietly, but with suppressed malice in his tone.

Why was it that at that moment he could, with joy, have taken Krool by the neck and throttled him? All the bitterness, anger and rage that he had felt an hour ago concentrated themselves upon Krool--without reason, without cause. Or was it that his deeper Other Self had whispered something to his mind about Krool--something terrible and malign?

In this new mood he made up his mind that he would not see Jasmine till the morning. How late she was! It was one o'clock, and yet this was not the season. She had not gone to a ball, nor were these the

months of late parties.

As he tossed in his bed and his head turned restlessly on his pillow, Krool's face kept coming before him, and it was the last thing he saw, ominous and strange, before he fell into a heavy but troubled sleep.

Perhaps the most troubled moment of the night came an hour after he went to bed.

Then it was that a face bent over him for a minute, a fair face, with little lines contracting the ripe lips, which were redder than usual, with eyes full of a fevered brightness. But how harmonious and sweetly ordered was the golden hair above! Nothing was gone from its lustre, nothing robbed it of its splendour. It lay upon her forehead like a crown. In its richness it seemed a little too heavy for the tired face beneath, almost too imperial for so slight and delicate a figure.

Rudyard stirred in his sleep, murmuring as she leaned over him; and his head fell away from her hand as she stretched out her fingers with a sudden air of pity--of hopelessness, as it might seem from her look. His face restlessly turned to the wall--a vexed, stormy, anxious face and head, scarred by the whip of that overlord more cruel and tyrannous than Time, the Miserable Mind.

She drew back with a little shudder. "Poor Ruddy!" she said, as she had said that evening when Ian Stafford came to her after the estranging and scornful years, and she had watched Rudyard leave her--to her fate and to her folly.

"Poor Ruddy!"

With a sudden frenzied motion of her hands she caught her breath, as though some pain had seized her. Her eyes almost closed with the shame that reached out from her heart, as though to draw the veil of her eyelids over the murdered thing before her--murdered hope, slaughtered peace: the peace of that home they had watched burn slowly before their eyes in the years which the locust had eaten.

Which the locust had eaten--yes, it was that. More than once she had heard Rudyard tell of a day on the veld when the farmer surveyed his abundant fields with joy, with the gay sun flaunting it above; and suddenly there came a white cloud out of the west, which made a weird humming, a sinister sound. It came with shining scales glistening in the light and settled on the land acre upon acre, morgen upon morgen; and when it rose again the fields, ready for the harvest, were like a desert--the fields which the locust had eaten. So had the years been, in which Fortune had poured gold and opportunity and unlimited choice into her lap. She had used them all; but she had forgotten to look for the Single Secret, which, like a key, unlocks all doors in the House of Happiness.

"Poor Ruddy!" she said, but even as she said it for the second time a kind of anger seemed to seize her.

"Oh, you fool--you fool!" she whispered, fiercely. "What did you know of women! Why didn't you make me be good? Why didn't you master me--the steel on the wrist--the steel on the wrist!"

With a little burst of misery and futile rage she went from the room,

her footsteps uneven, her head bent. One of the open letters she carried dropped from her hand onto the floor of the hall outside. She did not notice it. But as she passed inside her door a shadowy figure at the end of the hall watched her, saw the letter drop, and moved stealthily forward towards it. It was Krool.

How heavy her head was! Her worshipping maid, near dead with fatigue, watched her furtively, but avoided the eyes in the mirror which had a half-angry look, a look at once disturbed and elated, reckless and pitiful. Lablanche was no reader of souls, but there was something here beyond the usual, and she moved and worked with unusual circumspection and lightness of touch. Presently she began to unloose the coils of golden hair; but Jasmine stopped her with a gesture of weariness.

"No, don't," she said. "I can't stand your touch tonight, Lablanche. I'll do the rest myself. My head aches so. Good-night."

"I will be so light with it, madame," Lablanche said, protestingly.

"No, no. Please go. But the morning, quite early."

"The hour, madame?"

"When the letters come, as soon as the letters come, Lablanche--the first post. Wake me then."

She watched the door close, then turned to the mirror in front of her and looked at herself with eyes in which brooded a hundred thoughts and feelings: thoughts contradictory, feelings opposed, imaginings conflicting, reflections that changed with each moment; and all under the spell of a passion which had become in the last few hours the most powerful influence her life had ever known. Right or wrong, and it was wrong, horribly wrong; wise or unwise, and how could the wrong be wise! she knew she was under a spell more tyrannous than death, demanding more sacrifices than the gods of Hellas.

Self-indulgent she had been, reckless and wilful and terribly modern, taking sweets where she found them. She had tried to squeeze the orange dry, in the vain belief that Wealth and Beauty can take what they want, when they want it, and that happiness will come by purchase; only to find one day that the thing you have bought, like a slave that revolts, stabs you in your sleep, and you wake with wide-eyed agony only to die, or to live--with the light gone from the evening sky.

Suddenly, with the letters in her hand with which she had entered the room, she saw the white rose on her pillow. Slowly she got up from the dressing-table and went over to the bed in a hushed kind of way. With a strange, inquiring, half-shrinking look she regarded the flower. One white rose. It was not there when she left. It had been brought from the hall below, from the great bunch on the Spanish table. Those white roses, this white rose, had come from one who, selfish as he was, knew how to flatter a woman's vanity. From that delicate tribute of flattery and knowledge Rudyard had taken this flowering stem and brought it to her pillow.

It was all too malevolently cynical. Her face contracted in pain and shame. She had a soul to which she had never given its chance. It had

never bloomed. Her abnormal wilfulness, her insane love of pleasure, her hereditary impulses, had been exercised at the expense of the great thing in her, the soul so capable of memorable and beautiful deeds.

As she looked at the flower, a sense of the path by which she had come, of what she had left behind, of what was yet to chance, shuddered into her heart.

That a flower given by Adrian Fellowes should be laid upon her pillow by her husband, by Rudyard Byng, was too ghastly or too devilishly humorous for words; and both aspects of the thing came to her. Her face became white, and almost mechanically she put the letters she held on a writing-table near; then coming to the bed again she looked at the rose with a kind of horror. Suddenly, however, she caught it up, and bursting into a laugh which was shrill and bitter she threw it across the room. Still laughing hysterically, with her golden hair streaming about her head, folding her round like a veil which reached almost to her ankles, she came back to the chair at the dressing-table and sat down.

Slowly drawing the wonderful soft web of hair over her shoulders, she began to weave it into one wide strand, which grew and grew in length till it was like a great rope of spun gold. Inch by inch, foot by foot it grew, until at last it lay coiled in her lap like a golden serpent, with a kind of tension which gave it life, such as Medusa's hair must have known as the serpent-life entered into it. There is--or was--in Florence a statue of Medusa, seated, in her fingers a strand of her hair, which is beginning to coil and bend and twist before her horror-stricken eyes; and this statue flashed before Jasmine's eyes as she looked at the loose ends of gold falling beyond the blue ribbon with which she had tied the shining rope.

With the mad laughter of a few moments before still upon her lips, she held the flying threads in her hand, and so strained was her mind that it would not have caused her surprise if they had wound round her fingers or given forth forked tongues. She laughed again--a low and discordant laugh it was now.

"Such imaginings--I think I must be mad," she murmured.

Then she leaned her elbows on the dressing-table and looked at herself in the glass.

"Am I not mad?" she asked herself again. Then there stole across her face a strange, far-away look, bringing a fresh touch of beauty to it, and flooding it for a moment with that imaginative look which had been her charm as a girl, a look of far-seeing and wonder and strange light.

"I wonder--if I had had a mother!" she said, wistfully, her chin in her hand. "If my mother had lived, what would I have been?"

She reached out to a small table near, and took from it a miniature at which she looked with painful longing. "My dear, my very dear, you were so sweet, so good," she said. "Am I your daughter, your own daughter--me? Ah, sweetheart mother, come back to me! For God's sake come--now. Speak to me if you can. Are you so very far away? Whisper--only whisper, and I shall hear.

"Oh, she would, she would, if she could!" her voice wailed, softly.
"She would if she could, I know. I was her youngest child, her only little girl. But there is no coming back. And maybe there is no going forth; only a blackness at the last, when all stops--all stops, for ever and ever and ever, amen! . . . Amen--so be it. Ah, I even can't believe in that! I can't even believe in God and Heaven and the hereafter. I am a pagan, with a pagan's heart and a pagan's ways."

She shuddered again and closed her eyes for a moment. "Ruddy had a glimpse, one glimpse, that day, the day that Ian came back. Ruddy said to me that day, 'If you had lived a thousand years ago you would have had a thousand lovers.' . . . And it is true--by all the gods of all the worlds, it is true. Pleasure, beauty, is all I ever cared for--pleasure, beauty, and the Jasmine-flower. And Ian--and Ian, yes, Ian! I think I had soul enough for one true thing, even if I was not true."

She buried her face in her hands for a moment, as though to hide a great burning.

"But, oh, I wonder if I did ever love Ian, even! I wonder.... Not then, not then when I deserted him and married Ruddyard, but now--now? Do--do I love him even now, as we were to-day with his arms round me, or is it only beauty and pleasure and--me? . . . Are they really happy who believe in God and live like--like her?" She gazed at her mother's portrait again. "Yes, she was happy, but only for a moment, and then she was gone--so soon. And I shall never see her, I who never saw her with eyes that recall.... And if I could see her, would I? I am a pagan--would I try to be like her, if I could? I never really prayed, because I never truly felt there was a God that was not all space, and that was all soul and understanding. And what is to come of it, or what will become of me? . . . I can't go back, and going on is madness. Yes, yes, it is madness, I know--madness and badness--and dust at the end of it all. Beauty gone, pleasure gone.... I do not even love pleasure now as I did. It has lost its flavour; and I do not even love beauty as I did. How well I know it! I used to climb hills to see a sunset; I used to walk miles to find the wood anemones and the wild violets; I used to worship a pretty child . . . a pretty child!"

She shrank back in her chair and pondered darkly. "A pretty child.... Other people's pretty children, and music and art and trees and the sea, and the colours of the hills, and the eyes of wild animals . . . and a pretty child. I wonder, I wonder if--"

But she got no farther with that thought. "I shall hate everything on earth if it goes from me, the beauty of things; and I feel that it is going. The freshness of sense has gone, somehow. I am not stirred as I used to be, not by the same things. If I lose that sense I shall kill myself. Perhaps that would be the easiest way now. Just the overdose of--"

She took a little phial from the drawer of the dressing-table. "Just the tiny overdose and 'good-bye, my lover, good-bye.'" Again that hard little laugh of bitterness broke from her. "Or that needle Mr. Mappin had at Glencader. A thrust of the point, and in an instant gone, and no one to know, no one to discover, no one to add blame to blame, to pile shame upon shame. Just blackness--blackness all at once, and no

light or anything any more. The fruit all gone from the trees, the garden all withered, the bower all ruined, the children all dead--the pretty children all dead forever, the pretty children that never were born, that never lived in Jasmine's garden."

As there had come to Rudyard premonition of evil, so to-night, in the hour of triumph, when, beyond peradventure, she had got for Ian Stafford what would make his career great, what through him gave England security in her hour of truth, there came now to her something of the real significance of it all.

She had got what she wanted. Her pride had been appeased, her vanity satisfied, her intellect flattered, her skill approved, and Ian was hers. But the cost?

Words from Swinburne's threnody on Baudelaire came to her mind. How often she had quoted them for their sheer pagan beauty! It was the kind of beauty which most appealed to her, which responded to the element of fatalism in her, the sense of doom always with her since she was a child, in spite of her gaiety, her wit, and her native eloquence. She had never been happy, she had never had a real illusion, never aught save the passion of living, the desire to conquer unrest:

"And now, no sacred staff shall break in blossom,
No choral salutation lure to light
The spirit sick with perfume and sweet night,
And Love's tired eyes and hands and barren bosom.
There is no help for these things, none to mend and none to mar
Not all our songs, oh, friend, can make Death clear or make Life durable
But still with rose and ivy and wild vine,
And with wild song about this dust of thine,
At least I fill a place where white dreams dwell,
And wreath an unseen shrine."

"And Love's tired eyes and hands and barren bosom. . . . There is no help for these things, none to mend and none to mar..." A sob rose in her throat. "Oh, the beauty of it, the beauty and the misery and the despair of it!" she murmured.

Slowly she wound and wound the coil of golden hair about her neck, drawing it tighter, fold on fold, tighter and tighter.

"This would be the easiest way--this," she whispered. "By my own hair! Beauty would have its victim then. No one would kiss it any more, because it killed a woman. . . . No one would kiss it any more."

She felt the touch of Ian Stafford's lips upon it, she felt his face buried in it. Her own face suffused, then Adrian Fellowes' white rose, which Rudyard had laid upon her pillow, caught her eye where it lay on the floor. With a cry as of a hurt animal she ran to her bed, crawled into it, and huddled down in the darkness, shivering and afraid.

Something had discovered her to herself for the first time. Was it her own soul? Had her Other Self, waking from sleep in the eternal spaces, bethought itself and come to whisper and warn and help? Or was it Penalty, or Nemesis, or that Destiny which will have its toll for all it gives of beauty, or pleasure, or pride, or place, or pageantry?

"Love's tired eyes and hands and barren bosom"--

The words kept ringing in her ears. They soothed her at last into a sleep which brought no peace, no rest or repose.

CHAPTER XVIII

LANDRASSY'S LAST STROKE

Midnight--one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock. Big Ben boomed the hours, and from St. James's Palace came the stroke of the quarters, lighter, quicker, almost pensive in tone. From St. James's Street below came no sounds at last. The clatter of the hoofs of horses had ceased, the rumble of drays carrying their night freights, the shouts of the newsboys making sensation out of rumours made in a newspaper office, had died away. Peace came, and a silver moon gave forth a soft light, which embalmed the old thoroughfare, and added a tenderness to its workaday dignity. In only one window was there a light at three o'clock. It was the window of Ian Stafford's sitting-room.

He had not left the Foreign Office till nearly ten o'clock, then had had a light supper at his club, had written letters there, and after a long walk up and down the Mall had, with reluctant feet, gone to his chambers.

The work which for years he had striven to do for England had been accomplished. The Great Understanding was complete. In the words of the secretary of the American Embassy, "Mennaval had delivered the goods," and an arrangement had been arrived at, completed this very night, which would leave England free to face her coming trial in South Africa without fear of trouble on the flank or in the rear.

The key was turned in the lock, and that lock had been the original device and design of Ian Stafford. He had done a great work for civilization and humanity; he had made improbable, if not impossible, a European war. The Kaiser knew it, Franz Joseph knew it, the Czar knew it; the White House knew it, and its master nodded with satisfaction, for John Bull was waking up--"getting a move on." America might have her own family quarrel with John Bull, but when it was John Bull versus the world, not even James G. Blaine would have been prepared to see the old lion too deeply wounded. Even Landrassy, ambassador of Slavonia, had smiled grimly when he met Ian Stafford on the steps of the Moravian Embassy. He was artist enough to appreciate a well-played game, and, in any case, he had had done all that mortal man could in the way of intrigue and tact and device. He had worked the international press as well as it had ever been worked; he had distilled poison here and rosewater there; he had again and again baffled the British Foreign Office, again and again cut the ground from under Ian Stafford's feet; and if he could have staved off the pact, the secret international pact, by one more day, he would have gained the victory for himself, for his country, for the alliance behind him.

One day, but one day, and the world would never have heard of Ian Stafford. England would then have approached her conflict with the cup of trembling at her lips, and there would be a new disposition of

power in Europe, a new dominating force in the diplomacy and the relations of the peoples of the world. It was Landrassy's own last battle-field of wit and scheming, of intellect and ambition. If he failed in this, his sun would set soon. He was too old to carry on much longer. He could not afford to wait. He was at the end of his career, and he had meant this victory to be the crown of his long services to Slavonia and the world.

But to him was opposed a man who was at the beginning of his career, who needed this victory to give him such a start as few men get in that field of retarded rewards, diplomacy. It had been a man at the end of the journey, and a man at the beginning, measuring skill, playing as desperate a game as was ever played. If Landrassy won--Europe a red battle-field, England at bay; if Ian Stafford won--Europe at peace, England secure. Ambition and patriotism intermingled, and only He who made human nature knew how much was pure patriotism and how much pure ambition. It was a great stake. On this day of days to Stafford destiny hung shivering, each hour that passed was throbbing with unparalleled anxiety, each minute of it was to be the drum-beat of a funeral march or the note of a Te Deum.

Not more uncertain was the roulette-wheel spinning in De Lancy Scovel's house than the wheel of diplomacy which Ian Stafford had set spinning. Rouge et noire--it was no more, no less. But Ian had won; England had won. Black had been beaten.

Landrassy bowed suavely to Ian as they met outside Mennaval's door in the early evening of this day when the business was accomplished, the former coming out, the latter going in.

"Well, Stafford," Landrassy said in smooth tones and with a jerk of the head backward, "the tables are deserted, the croupier is going home. But perhaps you have not come to play?"

Ian smiled lightly. "I've come to get my winnings--as you say," he retorted.

Landrassy seemed to meditate pensively. "Ah yes, ah yes, but I'm not sure that Mennaval hasn't bolted with the bank and your winnings, too!"

His meaning was clear--and hateful. Before Ian had a chance to reply, Landrassy added in a low, confidential voice, saturated with sardonic suggestion, "To tell you the truth, I had ceased to reckon with women in diplomacy. I thought it was dropped with the Second Empire; but you have started a new dispensation--evidemment, evidemment. Still Mennaval goes home with your winnings. Eh bien, we have to pay for our game! Allons gai!"

Before Ian could reply--and what was there to say to insult couched in such highly diplomatic language?--Landrassy had stepped sedately away, swinging his gold-headed cane and humming to himself.

"Duelling had its merits," Ian said to himself, as soon as he had recovered from the first effect of the soft, savage insolence. "There is no way to deal with our Landrassys except to beat them, as I have done, in the business of life."

He tossed his head with a little pardonable pride, as it were, to

soothe his heart, and then went in to Mennaval. There, in the arrangements to be made with Moravia he forgot the galling incident; and for hours afterward it was set aside. When, however, he left his club, his supper over, after scribbling letters which he put in his pocket absent-mindedly, and having completed his work at the Foreign Office, it came back to his mind with sudden and scorching force.

Landrassy's insult to Jasmine rankled as nothing had ever rankled in his mind before, not even that letter which she had written him so long ago announcing her intended marriage to Byng. He was fresh from the first triumph of his life: he ought to be singing with joy, shouting to the four corners of the universe his pride, walking on air, finding the world a good, kind place made especially for him--his oyster to open, his nut which he had cracked; yet here he was fresh from the applause of his chief, with a strange heaviness at his heart, a gloom upon his mind.

Victory in his great fight--and love; he had them both and so he said to himself as he opened the door of his rooms and entered upon their comfort and quiet. He had love, and he had success; and the one had helped to give him the other, helped in a way which was wonderful, and so brilliantly skilful and delicate. As he poured out a glass of water, however, the thought stung him that the nature of the success and its value depended on the nature of the love and its value. As the love was, so was the success, no higher, no different, since the one, in some deep way, begot the other. Yes, it was certain that the thing could not have been done at this time without Jasmine, and if not at this time, then the chances were a thousand to one that it never could be done at any time; for Britain's enemies would be on her back while she would have to fight in South Africa. The result of that would mean a shattered, humiliated land, with a people in pawn to the will of a rising power across the northern sea. That it had been prevented just in the nick of time was due to Jasmine, his fate, the power that must beat in his veins till the end of all things.

Yet what was the end to be? To-day he had buried his face in her wonderful cloud of hair and had kissed her; and with it, almost on the instant, had come the end of his great struggle for England and himself; and for that he was willing to pay any price that time and Nemesis might demand--any price save one.

As he thought of that one price his lips tightened, his brow clouded, his eyes half closed with shame.

Rudyard Byng was his friend, whose bread he had eaten, whom he had known since they were boys at school. He remembered acutely Rudyard's words to him that fateful night when he had dined with Jasmine alone--"You will have much to talk about, to say to each other, such old friends as you are." He recalled how Rudyard had left them, trusting them, happy in the thought that Jasmine would have a pleasant evening with the old friend who had first introduced him to her, and that the old friend would enjoy his eager hospitality. Rudyard had blown his friend's trumpet wherever men would listen to him; had proclaimed Stafford as the coming man: and this was what he had done to Rudyard!

This was what he had done; but what did he propose to do? What of the future? To go on in miserable intrigue, twisting the nature, making demands upon life out of all those usual ways in which walk love and

companionship--paths that lead through gardens of poppies, maybe, but finding grey wilderness at the end? Never, never the right to take the loved one by the hand before all the world and say: "We two are one, and the reckoning of the world must be made with both." Never to have the right to stand together in pride before the wide-eyed many and say: "See what you choose to see, say what you choose to say, do what you choose to do, we do not care." The open sharing of worldly success; the inner joys which the world may not see--these things could not be for Jasmine and for him.

Yet he loved her. Every fibre in his being thrilled to the thought of her. But as his passion beat like wild music in his veins, a blindness suddenly stole into his sight, and in deep agitation he got up, opened the window, and looked out into the night. For long he stood gazing into the quiet street, and watched a daughter of the night, with dilatory steps and neglected mien, go up towards the more frequented quarter of Piccadilly. Life was grim in so much of it, futile in more, feeble at the best, foolish in the light of a single generation or a single century or a thousand years. It was only reasonable in the vast proportions of eternity. It had only little sips of happiness to give, not long draughts of joy. Who drank deep, long draughts--who of all the men and women he had ever known? Who had had the primrose path without the rain of fire, the cinders beneath the feet, the gins and the nets spread for them?

Yet might it not be that here and there people were permanently happy? And had things been different, might not he and Jasmine have been of the radiant few? He desired her above all things; he was willing to sacrifice all--all for her, if need be; and yet there was that which he could not, would not face. All or nothing--all or nothing. If he must drink of the cup of sorrow and passion mixed, then it would be from the full cup.

With a stifled exclamation he sat down and began to write. Again and again he stopped to think, his face lined and worn and old; then he wrote on and on. Ambition, hope, youth, the Foreign Office, the chancelleries of Europe, the perils of impending war, were all forgotten, or sunk into the dusky streams of subconsciousness. One thought dominated him. He was playing the game that has baffled all men, the game of eluding destiny; and, like all men, he must break his heart in the playing.

"Jasmine," he wrote, "this letter, this first real letter of love which I have ever written you, will tell you how great that love is. It will tell you, too, what it means to me, and what I see before us. To-day I surrendered to you all of me that would be worth your keeping, if it was so that you might take and keep it. When I kissed you, I set the seal upon my eternal offering to you. You have given me success. It is for that I thank you with all my soul, but it is not for that I love you. Love flows from other fountains than gratitude. It rises from the well which has its springs at the beginning of the world, where those beings lived who loved before there were any gods at all, or any faiths, or any truths save the truth of being.

"But it is because what I feel belongs to something in me deeper than I have ever known that, since we parted a few hours ago, I see all in a new light. You have brought to me what perhaps could only have come as it did--through fire and cloud and storm. I did not will it so,

indeed, I did not wish it so, as you know; but it came in spite of all. And I shall speak to you of it as to my own soul. I want no illusions, no self-deception, no pretense to be added to my debt to you. With wide-open eyes I want to look at it. I know that this love of mine for you is my fate, the first and the last passion of my soul. And to have known it with all its misery,--for misery there must be; misery, Jasmine, there is--to have known it, to have felt it, the great overwhelming thing, goes far to compensate for all the loss it so terribly exposes. It has brought me, too, the fruit of life's ambition. With the full revelation of all that I feel for you came that which gives me place in the world, confers on me the right to open doors which otherwise were closed to me. You have done this for me, but what have I done for you? One thing at least is forced upon me, which I must do now while I have the sight to see and the mind to understand.

"I cannot go on with things as they are. I cannot face Rudyard and give myself to hourly deception. I think that yesterday, a month ago, I could have done so, but not now. I cannot walk the path which will be paved with things revolting to us both. My love for you, damnable as it would seem in the world's eyes, prevents it. It is not small enough to be sustained or made secure in its fulfilment by the devices of intrigue. And I know that if it is so with me, it must be a thousand times so with you. Your beauty would fade and pass under the stress and meanness of it; your heart would reproach me even when you smiled; you would learn to hate me even when you were resting upon my hungry heart. You would learn to loathe the day when you said, Let me help you. Yet, Jasmine, I know that you are mine; that you were mine long ago, even when you did not know, and were captured by opportunity to do what, with me, you felt you could not do. You were captured by it; but it has not proved what it promised. You have not made the best of the power into which you came, and you could not do so, because the spring from which all the enriching waters of married life flow was dry. Poor Jasmine--poor illusion of a wild young heart which reached out for the golden city of the mirage!

"But now.... Two ways spread out, and only two, and one of these two I must take--for your sake. There is the third way, but I will not take it--for your sake and for my own. I will not walk in it ever. Already my feet are burned by the fiery path, already I am choked by the smoke and the ashes. No. I cannot atone for what has been, but I can try and gather up the chances that are left.

"You must come with me away--away, to start life afresh, somewhere, somehow; or I must go alone on some enterprise from which I shall not return. You cannot bear what is, but, together, having braved the world, we could look into each other's eyes without shrinking, knowing that we had been at least true to each other, true at the last to the thing that binds us, taking what Fate gave without repining, because we had faced all that the world could do against us. It would mean that I should leave diplomacy forever, give up all that so far has possessed me in the business of life; but I should not lament. I have done the one big thing I wanted to do, I have cut a swath in the field. I have made some principalities and powers reckon with me. It may be I have done all I was meant to do in doing that--it may be. In any case, the thing I did would stand as an accomplished work--it would represent one definite and original thing; one piece of work in design all my own, in accomplishment as much yours as mine.... To go then--together--with only the one big violence to the conventions of

the world, and take the law into our own hands? Rudyard, who understands Life's violence, would understand that; what he could never understand would be perpetual artifice, unseemly secretiveness. He himself would have been a great filibuster in the olden days; he would have carried off the wives and daughters of the chiefs and kings he conquered; but he would never have stolen into the secret garden at night and filched with the hand of the sneak-thief--never.

"To go with me--away, and start afresh. There will be always work to do, always suffering humanity to be helped. We should help because we would have suffered, we should try to set right the one great mistake you made in not coming to me and so fulfilling the old promise. To set that error right, even though it be by wronging Rudyard by one great stroke--that is better than hourly wronging him now with no surcease of that wrong. No, no, this cannot go on. You could not have it so. I seem to feel that you are writing to me now, telling me to begone forever, saying that you had given me gifts--success and love; and now to go and leave you in peace.

"Peace, Jasmine, it is that we cry for, pray for, adjure the heavens for in the end. And all this vast, passionate love of mine is the strife of the soul for peace, for fruition.

"That peace we may have in another way: that I should go forever, now, before the terrible bond of habit has done its work, and bound us in chains that never fall, that even remain when love is dead and gone, binding the cold cadre to the living pain. To go now, with something accomplished, and turn my back forever on the world, with one last effort to do the impossible thing for some great cause, and fail and be lost forever--do you not understand? Face it, Jasmine, and try to see it in its true light.... I have a friend, John Caxton--you know him. He is going to the Antarctic to find the futile thing, but the necessary thing so far as the knowledge of the world is concerned. With him, then, that long quiet and in the far white spaces to find peace--forever.

"You? . . . Ah, Jasmine, habit, the habit of enduring me, is not fixed, and in my exit there would be the agony of the moment, and then the comforting knowledge that I had done my best to set things right. Perhaps it is the one way to set things right; the fairest to you, the kindest, and that which has in it most love. The knowledge of a great love ended--yours and mine--would help you to give what you can give with fuller soul. And, maybe, to be happy with Rudyard at the last! Maybe, to be happy with him, without this wonderful throbbing pulse of being, but with quiet, and to get a measure of what is due to you in the scheme of things. Destiny gives us in life so much and no more: to some a great deal in a little time, to others a little over a great deal of time, but never the full cup and the shining sky over long years. One's share small it must be, but one's share! And it may be, in what has come to-day, in the hour of my triumph, in the business of life, in the one hour of revealing love, it may be I have had my share.... And if that is so, then peace should be my goal, and peace I can have yonder in the snows. No one would guess that it was not accident, and I should feel sure that I had stopped in time to save you from the worst. But it must be the one or the other.

"The third way I cannot, will not, take, nor would you take it willingly. It would sear your heart and spirit, it would spoil all that makes you what you are. Jasmine, once for all I am your lover and

your friend. I give you love and I give you friendship--whatever comes; always that, always friendship. Tempus fugit sed amicitia est.

"In my veins is a river of fire, and my heart is wrenched with pain; but in my soul is that which binds me to you, together or apart, in life, in death.... Good-night.... Good-morrow.

"Your Man,

"IAN.

"P.S.--I will come for your reply at eleven to-morrow.

"IAN."

He folded the letter slowly and placed it in an envelope which was lying loose on the desk with the letters he had written at the Trafalgar Club, and had forgotten to post. When he had put the letter inside the envelope and stamped it, he saw that the envelope was one carrying the mark of the Club. By accident he had brought it with the letters written there. He hesitated a moment, then refrained from opening the letter again, and presently went out into the night and posted all his letters.

CHAPTER XIX

TO-MORROW . . . PREPARE!

Krool did not sleep. What he read in a letter he had found in a hallway, what he knew of those dark events in South Africa, now to culminate in a bitter war, and what, with the mysterious psychic instinct of race, he divined darkly and powerfully, all kept his eyes unsleeping and his mind disordered. More than any one, he knew of the inner story of the Baas' vrouw during the past week and years; also he had knowledge of what was soon to empty out upon the groaning earth the entrails of South Africa; but how he knew was not to be discovered. Even Rudyard, who thought he read him like a book, only lived on the outer boundaries of his character. Their alliance was only the durable alliance of those who have seen Death at their door, and together have driven him back.

Barry Whalen had regarded Krool as a spy; all Britishers who came and went in the path to Rudyard's door had their doubts or their dislike of him; and to every servant of the household he was a dark and isolated figure. He never interfered with the acts of his fellow-servants, except in so far as those acts affected his master's comfort; and he paid no attention to their words except where they affected himself.

"When you think it's a ghost, it's only Krool wanderin' w'ere he ain't got no business," was the angry remark of the upper-housemaid, whom his sudden appearance had startled in a dim passage one day.

"Lor! what a turn you give me, Mr. Krool, spookin' about where there's no call for you to be," she had said to him, and below stairs she had enlarged upon his enormities greatly.

"And Mrs. Byng, she not like him better as we do," was the comment of Lablanche, the lady's maid. "A snake in the grass--that is what Madame think."

Slowly the night passed for Krool. His disturbed brain was like some dark wood through which flew songless birds with wings of night; through which sped the furtive dwellers of the grass and the earth-covert. The real and the imaginative crowded the dark purlieus. He was the victim of his blood, his beginnings off there beyond the Vaal, where the veld was swept by the lightning and the storm, the home of wild dreams, and of a loneliness terrible and strange, to which the man who once had tasted its awful pleasures returned and returned again, until he was, at the last, part of its loneliness, its woeful agitations and its reposeless quiet.

It was not possible for him to think or be like pure white people, to do as they did. He was a child of the kopje, the spruit, and the dun veld, where men dwelt with weird beings which were not men--presences that whispered, telling them of things to come, blowing the warnings of Destiny across the waste, over thousands and thousands of miles. Such as he always became apart and lonely because of this companionship of silence and the unseen. More and more they withdrew themselves, unwittingly and painfully, from the understanding and companionship of the usual matter-of-fact, commonplace, sensible people--the settler, the emigrant, and the British man. Sinister they became, but with the helplessness of those in whom the under-spirit of life has been working, estranging them, even against their will, from the rest of the world.

So Krool, estranged, lonely, even in the heart of friendly, pushing, jostling London, still was haunted by presences which whispered to him, not with the old clearness of bygone days, but with confused utterances and clouded meaning; and yet sufficient in dark suggestion for him to know that ill happenings were at hand, and that he would be in the midst of them, an instrument of Fate. All night strange shapes trooped past his clouded eyes, and more than once, in a half-dream, he called out to his master to help him as he was helped long ago when that master rescued him from death.

Long before the rest of the house was stirring, Krool wandered hither and thither through the luxurious rooms, vainly endeavouring to occupy himself with his master's clothes, boots, and belongings. At last he stole into Byng's room and, stooping, laid something on the floor; then reclaiming the two cables which Rudyard had read, crumpled up, and thrown away, he crept stealthily from the room. His face had a sombre and forbidding pleasure as he read by the early morning light the discarded messages with their thunderous warnings--"To-morrow . . . Prepare!"

He knew their meaning well enough. "To-morrow" was here, and it would bring the challenge from Oom Paul to try the might of England against the iron courage of those to whom the Vierkleur was the symbol of sovereignty from sea to sea and the ruin of the Rooinek.

"Prepare!" He knew vastly more than those responsible men in position or in high office, who should know a thousand times as much more. He knew so much that was useful--to Oom Paul; but what he knew he did not himself convey, though it reached those who welcomed it eagerly and

grimly. All that he knew, another also near to the Baas also knew, and knew it before Krool; and reaped the reward of knowing.

Krool did not himself need to betray the Baas direct; and, with the reasoning of the native in him, he found it possible to let another be the means and the messenger of betrayal. So he soothed his conscience.

A little time before they had all gone to Glencader, however, he had discovered something concerning this agent of Paul Kruger in the heart of the Outlander camp, whom he employed, which had roused in him the worst passions of an outcast mind. Since then there had been no trafficking with the traitor--the double traitor, whom he was now plotting to destroy, not because he was a traitor to his country, but because he was a traitor to the Baas. In his evil way, he loved his master as a Caliban might love an Apollo. That his devotion took forms abnormal and savage in their nature was due to his origin and his blood. That he plotted to secure the betrayal of the Baas' country and the Outlander interest, while he would have given his life for the Baas, was but the twisted sense of a perverted soul.

He had one obsession now--to destroy Adrian Fellowes, his agent for Paul Kruger in the secret places of British policy and in the house of the Partners, as it were. But how should it be done? What should be the means? On the very day in which Oom Paul would send his ultimatum, the means came to his hand.

"Prepare!" the cable to the Baas had read. The Baas would be prepared for the thunderbolt to be hurled from Pretoria; but he would have no preparation for the thunderbolt which would fall at his feet this day in this house, where white roses welcomed the visitor at the door-way and the beauty of Titians and Botticellis and Rubens' and Goyas greeted him in the luxuriant chambers. There would be no preparation for that war which rages most violently at a fireside and in the human heart.

CHAPTER XX

THE FURNACE DOOR

It was past nine o'clock when Rudyard wakened. It was nearly ten before he turned to leave his room for breakfast. As he did so he stooped and picked up an open letter lying on the floor near the door.

His brain was dazed and still surging with the terrible thoughts which had agonized him the night before. He was as in a dream, and was only vaguely conscious of the fugitive letter. He was wondering whether he would go at once to Jasmine or wait until he had finished breakfast. Opening the door of his room, he saw the maid entering to Jasmine with a gown over her arm.

No, he would not go to her till she was alone, till she was dressed and alone. Then he would tell her all, and take her in his arms, and talk with her--talk as he had never talked before. Slowly, heavily, he went to his study, where his breakfast was always eaten. As he sat down he opened, with uninterested inquiry, the letter he had picked up inside the door of his room. As he did so he vaguely wondered why

Krool had overlooked it as he passed in and out. Perhaps Krool had dropped it. His eyes fell on the opening words. . . His face turned ashen white. A harsh cry broke from him.

At eleven o'clock to the minute Ian Stafford entered Byng's mansion and was being taken to Jasmine's sitting-room, when Rudyard appeared on the staircase, and with a peremptory gesture waved the servant away. Ian was suddenly conscious of a terrible change in Rudyard's appearance. His face was haggard and his warm colour had given place to a strange blackish tinge which seemed to underlie the pallor--the deathly look to be found in the faces of those stricken with a mortal disease. All strength and power seemed to have gone from the face, leaving it tragic with uncontrolled suffering. Panic emotion was uppermost, while desperate and reckless purpose was in his eyes. The balance was gone from the general character and his natural force was like some great gun loose from its fastenings on the deck of a sea-stricken ship. He was no longer the stalwart Outlander who had done such great work in South Africa and had such power in political London and in international finance. The demoralization which had stealthily gone on for a number of years was now suddenly a debacle of will and body. Of the superb physical coolness and intrepid mind with which he had sprung upon the stage of Covent Garden Opera House to rescue Al'mah nothing seemed left; or, if it did remain, it was shocked out of its bearings. His eyes were almost glassy as he looked at Ian Stafford, and animal-like hatred was the dominating note of his face and carriage.

"Come with me, Stafford: I want to speak to you," he said, hoarsely. "You've arrived when I wanted you--at the exact time."

"Yes, I said I would come at eleven," responded Stafford, mechanically. "Jasmine expects me at eleven."

"In here," Byng said, pointing to a little morning-room.

As Stafford entered, he saw Krool's face, malign and sombre, show in a doorway of the hall. Was he mistaken in thinking that Krool flashed a look of secret triumph and yet of obscure warning? Warning? There was trouble, strange and dreadful trouble, here; and the wrenching thought had swept into his brain that he was the cause of it all, that he was to be the spring and centre of dreadful happenings.

He was conscious of something else purely objective as he entered the room--of music, the music of a gay light opera being played in the adjoining room, from which this little morning-room was separated only by Indian bead-curtains. He saw idle sunlight play upon these beads, as he sat down at the table to which Rudyard motioned him. He was also subconsciously aware who it was that played the piano beyond there with such pleasant skill. Many a time thereafter, in the days to come, he would be awakened in the night by the sound of that music, a love-song from the light opera "A Lady of London," which had just caught the ears of the people in the street.

Of one thing he was sure: the end of things had come--the end of all things that life meant to him had come. Rudyard knew! Rudyard, sitting there at the other side of the table and leaning toward him with a face where, in control of all else, were hate and panic emotion--he knew.

The music in the next room was soft, persistent and searching. As Ian waited for Rudyard to speak he was conscious that even the words of the silly, futile love-song:

"Not like the roses shall our love be, dear
Never shall its lovely petals fade,
Singing, it will flourish till the world's last year
Happy as the song-birds in the glade."

Through it all now came Rudyard's voice.

"I have a letter here," the voice said, and he saw Rudyard slowly take it from his pocket. "I want you to read it, and when you have read it, I want you to tell me what you think of the man who wrote it."

He threw a letter down on the table--a square white envelope with the crest of the Trafalgar Club upon it. It lay face downward, waiting for his hand.

So it had come. His letter to Jasmine which told all--Rudyard had read it. And here was the end of everything--the roses faded before they had bloomed an hour. It was not for them to flourish "till the world's last year."

His hand reached out for the letter. With eyes almost blind he raised it, and slowly and mechanically took the document of tragedy from the envelope. Why should Rudyard insist on his reading it? It was a devilish revenge, which he could not resent. But time--he must have time; therefore he would do Rudyard's bidding, and read this thing he had written, look at it with eyes in which Penalty was gathering its mists.

So this was the end of it all--friendship gone with the man before him; shame come to the woman he loved; misery to every one; a home-life shattered; and from the souls of three people peace banished for evermore.

He opened out the pages with a slowness that seemed almost apathy, while the man opposite clinched his hands on the table spasmodically. Still the music from the other room with cheap, flippant sensuousness stole through the burdened air:

"Singing, it will flourish till the world's last year--"

He looked at the writing vaguely, blindly. Why should this be exacted of him, this futile penalty? Then all at once his sight cleared; for this handwriting was not his--this letter was not his; these wild, passionate phrases--this terrible suggestiveness of meaning, these references to the past, this appeal for further hours of love together, this abjectly tender appeal to Jasmine that she would wear one of his white roses when he saw her the next day--would she not see him between eleven and twelve o'clock?--all these words were not his.

They were written by the man who was playing the piano in the next room; by the man who had come and gone in this house like one who had the right to do so; who had, as it were, fed from Rudyard Byng's hand; who lived on what Byng paid him; who had been trusted with the innermost life of the household and the life and the business of the master of it.

The letter was signed, Adrian.

His own face blanched like the face of the man before him. He had braced himself to face the consequences of his own letter to the woman he loved, and he was face to face with the consequences of another man's letter to the same woman, to the woman who had two lovers. He was face to face with Rudyard's tragedy, and with his own.... She, Jasmine, to whom he had given all, for whom he had been ready to give up all--career, fame, existence--was true to none, unfaithful to all, caring for none, but pretending to care for all three--and for how many others? He choked back a cry.

"Well--well?" came the husband's voice across the table. "There's one thing to do, and I mean to do it." He waved a hand towards the music-room. "He's in the next room there. I mean to kill him--to kill him--now. I wanted you to know why, to know all, you, Stafford, my old friend and hers. And I'm going to do it now. Listen to him there!"

His words came brokenly and scarce above a whisper, but they were ghastly in their determination, in their loathing, their blind fury. He was gone mad, all the animal in him alive, the brain tossing on a sea of disorder.

"Now!" he said, suddenly, and, rising, he pushed back his chair. "Give that to me."

He reached out his hand for the letter, but his confused senses were suddenly arrested by the look in Ian Stafford's face, a look so strange, so poignant, so insistent, that he paused. Words could not have checked his blind haste like that look. In the interval which followed, the music from the other room struck upon the ears of both, with exasperating insistence:

"Not like the roses shall our love be, dear--"

Stafford made no motion to return the letter. He caught and held Rudyard's eyes.

"You ask me to tell you what I think of the man who wrote this letter," he said, thickly and slowly, for he was like one paralyzed, regaining his speech with blanching effort: "Byng, I think what you think--all you think; but I would not do what you want to do."

As he had read the letter the whole horror of the situation burst upon him. Jasmine had deceived her husband when she turned to himself, and that was to be understood--to be understood, if not to be pardoned. A woman might marry, thinking she cared, and all too soon, sometimes before the second day had dawned, learn that shrinking and repugnance which not even habit can modify or obscure. A girl might be mistaken, with her heart and nature undeveloped, and with that closer intimate life with another of another sex still untried. With the transition from maidenhood to wifeness, fateful beyond all transitions, yet unmade, she might be mistaken once; as so many have been in the revelations of first intimacy; but not twice, not the second time. It was not possible to be mistaken in so vital a thing twice. This was merely a wilful, miserable degeneracy. Rudyard had been wronged--terribly wronged--by himself, by Jasmine; but he had loved Jasmine since she was a child, before Rudyard came--in truth, he all

but possessed her when Rudyard came; and there was some explanation, if no excuse, for that betrayal; but this other, it was incredible, it was monstrous. It was incredible but yet it was true. Thoughts that overturned all his past, that made a melee of his life, rushed and whirled through his mind as he read the letter with assumed deliberation when he saw what it was. He read slowly that he might make up his mind how to act, what to say and do in this crisis. To do--what? Jasmine had betrayed him long ago when she had thrown him over for Rudyard, and now she had betrayed him again after she had married Rudyard, and betrayed Rudyard, too; and for whom this second betrayal? His heart seemed to shrink to nothingness. This business dated far beyond yesterday. The letter furnished that sure evidence.

What to do? Like lightning his mind was made up. What to do? Ah, but one thing to do--only one thing to do--save her at any cost, somehow save her! Whatever she was, whatever she had done, however she had spoiled his life and destroyed forever his faith, yet he too had betrayed this broken man before him, with the look in his eyes of an animal at bay, ready to do the last irretrievable thing. Even as her shameless treatment of himself smote him; lowered him to that dust which is ground from the heels of merciless humanity--even as it sickened his soul beyond recovery in this world, up from the lowest depths of his being there came the indestructible thing. It was the thing that never dies, the love that defies injury, shame, crime, deceit, and desertion, and lives pityingly on, knowing all, enduring all, desiring no touch, no communion, yet prevailing--the indestructible thing.

He knew now in a flash what he had to do. He must save her. He saw that Rudyard was armed, and that the end might come at any moment. There was in the wronged husband's eyes the wild, reckless, unseeing thing which disregards consequences, which would rush blindly on the throne of God itself to snatch its vengeance. He spoke again: and just in time.

"I think what you think, Byng, but I would not do what you want to do. I would do something else."

His voice was strangely quiet, but it had a sharp insistence which caused Rudyard to turn back mechanically to the seat he had just left. Stafford saw the instant's advantage which, if he did not pursue, all would be lost. With a great effort he simulated intense anger and indignation.

"Sit down, Byng," he said, with a gesture of authority. He leaned over the table, holding the other's eyes, the letter in one clinched hand. "Kill him--," he said, and pointed to the other room, from which came the maddening iteration of the jingling song--"you would kill him for his hellish insolence, for this infamous attempt to lead your wife astray, but what good will it do to kill him?"

"Not him alone, but her too," came the savage, uncontrolled voice from the uncontrolled savagery of the soul.

Suddenly a great fear shot up in Stafford's heart. His breath came in sharp, breaking gasps. Had he--had he killed Jasmine?

"You have not--not her?"

"No--not yet." The lips of the avenger suddenly ceased twitching, and they shut with ominous certainty.

An iron look came into Stafford's face. He had his chance now. One word, one defense only! It would do all, or all would be lost--sunk in a sea of tragedy. Diplomacy had taught him the gift of control of face and gesture, of meaning in tone and word. He made an effort greater than he had ever put forward in life. He affected an enormous and scornful surprise.

"You think--you dare to think that she--that Jasmine--"

"Think, you say! The letter--that letter--"

"This letter--this letter, Byng--are you a fool? This letter, this preposterous thing from the universal philanderer, the effeminate erotic! It is what it is, and it is no more. Jasmine--you know her. Indiscreet--yes; always indiscreet in her way, in her own way, and always daring. A coquette always. She has coquetted all her life; she cannot help it. She doesn't even know it. She led him on from sheer wilfulness. What did it matter to her that he was of no account! She led him on, to be at her feet like the rest, like bigger and better men--like us all. Was there ever a time when she did not want to master us? She has coquetted since--ah, you do not know as I do, her old friend! She has coquetted since she was a little child. Coquetted, and no more. We have all been her slaves--yes, long before you came--all of us. Look at Mennaval! She--"

With a distracted gesture Byng interrupted. "The world believes the worst. Last night, by accident, I heard at De Lancy Scovel's house that she and Mennaval--and now this--!"

But into the rage, the desperation in the wild eyes, was now creeping an eager look--not of hope, but such a look as might be in eyes that were striving to see through darkness, looking for a glimmer of day in the black hush of morning before the dawn. It was pitiful to see the strong man tossing on the flood of disordered understanding, a willing castaway, yet stretching out a hand to be saved.

"Oh, last night, Mennaval, you say, and to-day--this!" Stafford held up the letter. "This means nothing against her, except indiscretion, and indiscretion which would have been nothing if the man had not been what he is. He is of the slime. He does not matter, except that he has dared--!"

"He has dared, by God--!"

All Byng's rage came back, the lacerated pride, the offended manhood, the self-esteem which had been spattered by the mud of slander, by the cynical defense, or the pitying solicitude of his friends--of De Lancy Scovel, Barry Whalen, Sobieski the Polish Jew, Fleming, Wolff, and the rest. The pity of these for him--for Rudyard Byng, because the flower in his garden, his Jasmine-flower, was swept by the blast of calumny! He sprang from his chair with an ugly oath.

But Stafford stepped in front of him. "Sit down, Byng, or damn yourself forever. If she is innocent--and she is--do you think she would ever live with you again, after you had dragged her name into the dust of the criminal courts and through the reek of the ha'penny

press? Do you think Jasmine would ever forgive you for suspecting her? If you want to drive her from you forever, then kill him, and go and tell her that you suspect her. I know her--I have known her all her life, long before you came. I care what becomes of her. She has many who care what becomes of her--her father, her brother, many men, and many women who have seen her grow up without a mother. They understand her, they believe in her, because they have known her over all the years. They know her better than you. Perhaps they care for her--perhaps any one of them cares for her far more than you do."

Now there came a new look into the big, staring eyes. Byng was as one fascinated; light was breaking in on his rage, his besmirched pride, his vengeance; hope was stealing tremblingly into his face.

"She was more to me than all the world--than twenty worlds. She--"

He hesitated, then his voice broke and his body suddenly shook violently, as tears rose in the far, deep wells of feeling and tried to reach the fevered eyes. He leaned his head in his big, awkward hands.

Stafford saw the way of escape for Jasmine slowly open out, and went on quickly. "You have neglected her"--Rudyard's head came up in angry protest--"not wilfully; but you have neglected her. You have been too easy. You should lead, not follow, where a woman is concerned. All women are indiscreet, all are a little dishonourable on opportunity; but not in the big way, only in the small, contemptible way, according to our code. We men are dishonourable in the big way where they are concerned. You have neglected her, Byng, because you have not said, 'This way, Jasmine. Come with me. I want you; and you must come, and come now.' She wanted your society, wanted you all the time; but while you did not have her on the leash she went playing--playing. That is it, and that is all. And now, if you want to keep her, if you want her to live on with you, I warn you not to tell her you know of the insult this letter contains, nor ever say what would make her think you suspected her. If you do, you will bid good-bye to her forever. She has bold blood in her veins, rash blood. Her grandfather--"

"I know--I know." The tone was credulous, understanding now. Hope stole into the distorted face.

"She would resent your suspicion. She, then, would do the mad thing, not you. She would be as frenzied as you were a moment ago; and she would not listen to reason. If you dared to hint outside in the world, that you believed her guilty, there are some of her old friends who would feel like doing to you what you want to do to that libertine in there, to Al'mah's lover--"

"Good God, Stafford--wait!"

"I don't mean Barry Whalen, Fleming, De Lancy Scovel, and the rest. They are not her old friends, and they weren't yours once--that breed; but the others who are the best, of whom you come, over there in Herefordshire, in Dorset, in Westmorland, where your and her people lived, and mine. You have been too long among the Outlanders, Byng. Come back, and bring Jasmine with you. And as for this letter--"

Byng reached out his hand for it.

"No, it contains an insult to your wife. If you get it into your hands, you will read it again, and then you will do some foolish thing, for you have lost grip of yourself. Here is the only place for such stuff--an outburst of sensuality!"

He threw the letter suddenly into the fire. Rudyard sprang to his feet as though to reclaim it, but stood still bewildered, as he saw Stafford push it farther into the coals.

Silent, they watched shrivel such evidence as brings ruin upon men and women in courts of law.

"Leave the whole thing--leave Fellowes to me," Stafford said, after a slight pause. "I will deal with him. He shall leave the country to-night. I will see to that. He shall go for three years at least. Do not see him. You will not contain yourself, and for your own chance of happiness with the woman you love, you must do nothing, nothing at all now."

"He has keys, papers--"

"I will see to that; I will see to everything. Now go, at once. There is enough for you to do. The war, Oom Paul's war, will be on us to day. Do you hear, Byng--to-day! And you have work to do for this your native country and for South Africa, your adopted country. England and the Transvaal will be at each other's throat before night. You have work to do. Do it. You are needed. Go, and leave this wretched business in my hands. I will deal with Fellowes--adequately."

The rage had faded from Byng's fevered eyes, and now there was a moisture in them, a look of incalculable relief. To believe in Jasmine, that was everything to him. He had not seen her yet, not since he left the white rose on her pillow last night--Adrian Fellowes' tribute; and after he had read the letter, he had had no wish to see her till he had had his will and done away with Fellowes forever. Then he would see her--for the last time: and she should die, too,--with himself. That had been his purpose. Now all was changed. He would not see her now, not till Fellowes was gone forever. Then he would come again, and say no word which would let her think he knew what Fellowes had written. Yes, Stafford was right. She must not know, and they must start again, begin life again together, a new understanding in his heart, new purposes in their existence. In these few minutes Stafford had taught him much, had showed him where he had been wrong, had revealed to him Jasmine's nature as he never really understood it.

At the door, as Stafford helped him on with a light overcoat, he took a revolver from his pocket.

"That's the proof of what I meant to do," he said; "and this is proof of what I mean to do," he added, as he handed over the revolver and Stafford's fingers grasped it with a nervous force which he misinterpreted.

"Ah yes," he exclaimed, sadly, "you don't quite trust me yet--not quite, Stafford; and I don't wonder; but it's all right.... You've been a good, good friend to us both," he added. "I wish Jasmine might know how good a friend you've been. But never mind. We'll pay the debt sometime, somehow, she and I. When shall I see you again?"

At that moment a clear voice rang out cheerily in the distance. "Rudyard--where are you, Ruddy?" it called.

A light broke over Byng's haggard face. "Not yet?" he asked Stafford.

"No, not yet," was the reply, and Byng was pushed through the open door into the street.

"Ruddy--where are you, Ruddy?" sang the voice like a morning song.

Then there was silence, save for the music in the room beyond the little room where the two men had sat a few moments ago.

The music was still poured forth, but the tune was changed. Now it was "Pagliacci"--that wonderful passage where the injured husband pours out his soul in agony.

Stafford closed the doors of the little room where he and Byng had sat, and stood an instant listening to the music. He shuddered as the passionate notes swept over his senses. In this music was the note of the character of the man who played--sensuous emotion, sensual delight. There are men who by nature are as the daughters of the night, primary prostitutes, with no minds, no moral sense; only a sensuous organization which has a gift of shallow beauty, while the life is never deep enough for tears nor high enough for real joy.

In Stafford's pocket was the revolver which Byng had given him. He took it out, and as he did so, a flush swept over his face, and every nerve of his body tingled.

"That way out?" he thought. "How easy--and how selfish.... If one's life only concerned oneself.... But it's only partly one's own from first to last." . . . Then his thoughts turned again to the man who was playing "Pagliacci." "I have a greater right to do it than Byng, and I'd have a greater joy in doing it; but whatever he is, it is not all his fault." Again he shuddered. "No man makes love like that to a woman unless she lets him, . . . until she lets him." Then he looked at the fire where the cruel testimony had shrivelled into smoke. "If it had been read to a jury . . . Ah, my God! How many he must have written her like that ... How often...."

With an effort he pulled himself together. "What does it matter now! All things have come to an end for me. There is only one way. My letter to her showed it. But this must be settled first. Then to see her for the last time, to make her understand...."

He went to the beaded curtain, raised it, and stepped into the flood of warm sunlight. The voluptuous, agonizing music came in a wave over him. Tragedy, poignant misery, rang through every note, swelled in a stream which drowned the senses. This man-devil could play, Stafford remarked, cynically, to himself.

"A moment--Fellows," he said, sharply.

The music frayed into a discord and stopped.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE

There was that in Stafford's tone which made Fellowes turn with a start. It was to this room that Fellowes had begged Jasmine to come this morning, in the letter which Krool had so carefully placed for his master to find, after having read it himself with minute scrutiny. It was in this room they had met so often in those days when Rudyard was in South Africa, and where music had been the medium of an intimacy which had nothing for its warrant save eternal vanity and curiosity, the evil genius of the race of women. Here it was that Krool's antipathy to Jasmine and fierce hatred of Fellowes had been nurtured. Krool had haunted the room, desiring the end of it all; but he had been disarmed by a smiling kindness on Jasmine's part, which shook his purpose again and again.

It had all been a problem which Krool's furtive mind failed to master. If he went to the Baas with his suspicions, the chance was that he would be flayed with a sjambok and turned into the streets; if he warned Jasmine, the same thing might happen, or worse. But fate had at last played into his hands, on the very day that Oom Paul had challenged destiny, when all things were ready for the ruin of the hated English.

Fate had sent him through the hallway between Jasmine's and Rudyard's rooms in the moment when Jasmine had dropped Fellowes' letter; and he had seen it fall. He knew not what it was, but it might be of importance, for he had seen Fellowes' handwriting on an envelope among those waiting for Jasmine's return home. In a far dark corner he had waited till he saw Lablanche enter her mistress' room hurriedly, without observing the letter. Then he caught it up and stole away to the library, where he read it with malevolent eyes.

He had left this fateful letter where Rudyard would see it when he rose in the morning. All had worked out as he had planned, and now, with his ear against the door which led from the music-room, he strained to hear what passed between Stafford and Fellowes.

"Well, what is it?" asked Fellowes, with an attempt to be casual, though there was that in Stafford's face which gave him anxiety, he knew not why. He had expected Jasmine, and, instead, here was Stafford, who had been so much with her of late; who, with Mennaval, had occupied so much of her time that she had scarcely spoken to him, and, when she did so, it was with a detachment which excluded him from intimate consideration.

His face wore a mechanical smile, as his pale blue eyes met the dark intensity of Stafford's. But slowly the peach-bloom of his cheeks faded and his long, tapering fingers played nervously with the leather-trimming of the piano-stool.

"Anything I can do for you, Stafford?" he added, with attempted nonchalance.

"There is nothing you can do for me," was the meaning reply, "but there is something you can do advantageously for yourself, if you will think it worth while."

"Most of us are ready to do ourselves good turns. What am I to do?"

"You will wish to avoid it, and yet you will do yourself a good turn in not avoiding it."

"Is that the way you talk in diplomatic circles--cryptic, they call it, don't they?"

Stafford's chin hardened, and a look of repulsion and disdain crossed over his face.

"It is more cryptic, I confess, than the letter which will cause you to do yourself a good turn."

Now Fellowes' face turned white. "What letter?" he asked, in a sharp, querulous voice.

"The letter you wrote Mrs. Byng from the Trafalgar Club yesterday."

Fellowes made a feint, an attempt at bravado. "What business is it of yours, anyhow? What rights have you got in Mrs. Byng's letters?"

"Only what I get from a higher authority."

"Are you in sweet spiritual partnership with the Trinity?"

"The higher authority I mean is Mr. Byng. Let us have no tricks with words, you fool."

Fellowes made an ineffective attempt at self-possession.

"What the devil . . . why should I listen to you?" There was a peevish stubbornness in the tone.

"Why should you listen to me? Well, because I have saved your life. That should be sufficient reason for you to listen."

"Damnation--speak out, if you've got anything to say! I don't see what you mean, and you are damned officious. Yes, that's it--damned officious." The peevishness was becoming insolent recklessness.

Slowly Stafford drew from his pocket the revolver Rudyard had given him. As Fellowes caught sight of the glittering steel he fell back against the piano-stool, making a clatter, his face livid.

Stafford's lips curled with contempt. "Don't squirm so, Fellowes. I'm not going to use it. But Mr. Byng had it, and he was going to use it. He was on his way to do it when I appeared. I stopped him . . . I will tell you how. I endeavoured to make him believe that she was absolutely innocent, that you had only been an insufferably insolent, presumptuous, and lecherous cad--which is true. I said that, though you deserved shooting, it would only bring scandal to Rudyard Byng's honourable wife, who had been insulted by the lover of Al'mah and the would-be betrayer of an honest girl--of Jigger's sister.... Yes, you may well start. I know of what stuff you are, how you had the soul and body of one of the most credulous and wonderful women in the world in your hands, and you went scavenging. From Al'mah to the flower-girl! . . . I think I should like to kill you myself for what you tried to

do to Jigger's sister; and if it wasn't here"--he handled the little steel weapon with an eager fondness--" I think I'd do it. You are a pest."

Cowed, shivering, abject, Fellowes nervously fell back. His body crashed upon the keys of the piano, producing a hideous discord. Startled, he sprang aside and with trembling hands made gestures of appeal.

"Don't--don't! Can't you see I'm willing! What is it you want me to do? I'll do it. Put it away.... Oh, my God--Oh!" His bloodless lips were drawn over his teeth in a grimace of terror.

With an exclamation of contempt Stafford put the weapon back into his pocket again. "Pull yourself together," he said. "Your life is safe for the moment; but I can say no more than that. After I had proved the lady's innocence--you understand, after I had proved the lady's innocence to him--"

"Yes, I understand," came the hoarse reply.

"After that, I said I would deal with you; that he could not be trusted to do so. I said that you would leave England within twenty-four hours, and that you would not return within three years. That was my pledge. You are prepared to fulfil it?"

"To leave England! It is impossible--"

"Perhaps to leave it permanently, and not by the English Channel, either, might be worse," was the cold, savage reply. "Mr. Byng made his terms."

Fellowes shivered. "What am I to do out of England--but, yes, I'll go, I'll go," he added, as he saw the look in Stafford's face and thought of the revolver so near to Stafford's hand.

"Yes, of course you will go," was the stern retort. "You will go, just as I say."

"What shall I do abroad?" wailed the weak voice.

"What you have always done here, I suppose--live on others," was the crushing reply. "The venue will be changed, but you won't change, not you. If I were you, I'd try and not meet Jigger before you go. He doesn't know quite what it is, but he knows enough to make him reckless."

Fellowes moved towards the door in a stumbling kind of way. "I have some things up-stairs," he said.

"They will be sent after you to your chambers. Give me the keys to the desk in the secretary's room."

"I'll go myself, and--"

"You will leave this house at once, and everything will be sent after you--everything. Have no fear. I will send them myself, and your letters and private papers will not be read.... You feel you can rely on me for that--eh?"

"Yes . . . I'll go now . . . abroad . . . where?"

"Where you please outside the United Kingdom."

Fellowes passed heavily out through the other room, where his letter had been read by Stafford, where his fate had been decided. He put on his overcoat nervously and went to the outer door.

Stafford came up to him again. "You understand, there must be no attempt to communicate here.... You will observe this?"

Fellowes nodded. "Yes, I will.... Good-night," he added, absently.

"Good-day," answered Stafford, mechanically.

The outer door shut, and Stafford turned again to the little room where so much had happened which must change so many lives, bring so many tears, divert so many streams of life.

How still the house seemed now! It had lost all its charm and homelikeness. He felt stifled. Yet there was the warm sun streaming through the doorway of the music-room, making the beaded curtains shine like gold.

As he stood in the doorway of the little morning-room, looking in with bitter reflection and dreading beyond words what now must come--his meeting with Jasmine, the story he must tell her, and the exposure of a truth so naked that his nature revolted from it, he heard a footstep behind him. It was Krool.

Stafford looked at the saturnine face and wondered how much he knew; but there was no glimmer of revelation in Krool's impassive look. The eyes were always painful in their deep animal-like glow, and they seemed more than usually intense this morning; that was all.

"Will you present my compliments to Mrs. Byng, and say--"

Krool, with a gesture, stopped him.

"Mrs. Byng is come now," he said, making a gesture towards the staircase. Then he stole away towards the servants' quarters of the house. His work had been well done, of its kind, and he could now await consequences.

Stafford turned to the staircase and saw--in blue, in the old sentimental blue--Jasmine slowly descending, a strange look of apprehension in her face.

Immediately after calling out for Rudyard a little while before, she had discovered the loss of Adrian Fellowes' letter. Hours before this she had read and re-read Ian's letter, that document of pain and purpose, of tragical, inglorious, fatal purpose. She was suddenly conscious of an air of impending catastrophe about her now. Or was it that the catastrophe had come? She had not asked for Adrian Fellowes' letter, for if any servant had found it, and had not returned it, it was useless asking; and if Rudyard had found it--if Rudyard had found it . . . !

Where was Rudyard? Why had he not come to her, Why had he not eaten the breakfast which still lay untouched on the table of his study? Where was Rudyard?

Ian's eyes looked straight into hers as she came down the staircase, and there was that in them which paralyzed her. But she made an effort to ignore the apprehension which filled her soul.

"Good-morning. Am I so very late?" she said, gaily, to him, though there was a hollow note in her voice.

"You are just in time," he answered in an even tone which told nothing.

"Dear me, what a gloomy face! What has happened? What is it? There seems to be a Cassandra atmosphere about the place--and so early in the day, too."

"It is full noon--and past," he said, with acute meaning, as her daintily shod feet met the floor of the hallway and glided towards him. How often he had admired that pretty flitting of her feet!

As he looked at her he was conscious, with a new force, of the wonder of that hair on a little head as queenly as ever was given to the modern world. And her face, albeit pale, and with a strange tremulousness in it now, was like that of some fairy dame painted by Greuze. All last night's agony was gone from the rare blue eyes, whose lashes drooped so ravishingly betimes, though that droop was not there as she looked at Ian now.

She beat a foot nervously on the floor. "What is it--why this Euripidean air in my simple home? There's something wrong, I see. What is it? Come, what is it, Ian?"

Hesitatingly she laid a hand upon his arm, but there was no loving-kindness in his look. The arms which yesterday--only yesterday--had clasped her passionately and hungrily to his breast now hung inert at his side. His eyes were strange and hard.

"Will you come in here," he said, in an arid voice, and held wide the door of the room where he and Rudyard had settled the first chapter of the future and closed the book of the past.

She entered with hesitating step. Then he shut the door with an accentuated softness, and came to the table where he had sat with Rudyard. Mechanically she took the seat which Rudyard had occupied, and looked at him across the table with a dread conviction stealing over her face, robbing it of every vestige of its heavenly colour, giving her eyes a staring and solicitous look.

"Well, what is it? Can't you speak and have it over?" she asked, with desperate impatience.

"Fellowes' letter to you--Rudyard found it," he said, abruptly.

She fell back as though she had been struck, then recovered herself. "You read it?" she gasped.

"Rudyard made me read it. I came in when he was just about to kill

Fellowes."

She gave a short, sharp cry, which with a spasm of determination her fingers stopped.

"Kill him--why?" she asked in a weak voice, looking down at her trembling hands which lay clasped on the table before her.

"The letter--Fellowes' letter to you."

"I dropped it last night," she said, in a voice grown strangely impersonal and colourless. "I dropped it in Rudyard's room, I suppose."

She seemed not to have any idea of excluding the terrible facts, but to be speaking as it were to herself and of something not vital, though her whole person was transformed into an agony which congealed the lifeblood.

Her voice sounded tuneless and ragged. "He read it--Rudyard read a letter which was not addressed to him! He read a letter addressed to me--he read my letter.... It gave me no chance."

"No chance--?"

A bitter indignation was added to the cheerless discord of her tones. "Yes, I had a chance, a last chance--if he had not read the letter. But now, there is no chance.... You read it, too. You read the letter which was addressed to me. No matter what it was--my letter, you read it."

"Rudyard said to me in his terrible agitation, 'Read that letter, and then tell me what you think of the man who wrote it.' . . . I thought it was the letter I wrote to you, the letter I posted to you last night. I thought it was my letter to you."

Her eyes had a sudden absent look. It was as though she were speaking in a trance. "I answered that letter--your letter. I answered it this morning. Here is the answer . . . here." She laid a letter on the table before him, then drew it back again into her lap. "Now it does not matter. But it gives me no chance...."

There was a world of despair and remorse in her voice. Her face was wan and strained. "No chance, no chance," she whispered.

"Rudyard did not kill him?" she asked, slowly and cheerlessly, after a moment, as though repeating a lesson. "Why?"

"I stopped him. I prevented him."

"You prevented him--why?" Her eyes had a look of unutterable confusion and trouble. "Why did you prevent it--you?"

"That would have hurt you--the scandal, the grimy press, the world."

Her voice was tuneless, and yet it had a strange, piteous poignancy. "It would have hurt me--yes. Why did you not want to hurt me?"

He did not answer. His hands had gone into his pockets, as though to steady their wild nervousness, and one had grasped the little weapon of steel which Rudyard had given him. It produced some strange, malignant effect on his mind. Everything seemed to stop in him, and he was suddenly possessed by a spirit which carried him into that same region where Rudyard had been. It was the region of the abnormal. In it one moves in a dream, majestically unresponsive to all outward things, numb, unconcerned, disregarding all except one's own agony, which seems to neutralize the universe and reduce all life's problems to one formula of solution.

"What did you say to him that stopped him?" she asked in a whisper of awed and dreadful interest, as, after an earthquake, a survivor would speak in the stillness of dead and unburied millions.

"I said the one thing to say," he answered after a moment, involuntarily laying the pistol on the table before him--doing it, as it were, without conscious knowledge.

It fascinated Jasmine, the ugly, deadly little vehicle of oblivion. Her eyes fastened on it, and for an instant stared at it transfixed; then she recovered herself and spoke again.

"What was the one thing to say?" she whispered.

"That you were innocent--absolutely, that--"

Suddenly she burst into wild laughter--shrill, acrid, cheerless, hysterical, her face turned upward, her hands clasped under her chin, her body shaking with what was not laughter, but the terrifying agitation of a broken organism.

He waited till she had recovered somewhat, and then he repeated his words.

"I said that you were innocent absolutely; that Fellowes' letter was the insolence and madness of a voluptuary, that you had only been wilful and indiscreet, and that--"

In a low, mechanical tone from which was absent any agitation, he told her all he had said to Rudyard, and what Rudyard had said to him. Every word had been burned into his brain, and nearly every word was now repeated, while she sat silent, looking at her hands clasped on the table before her. When he came to the point where Rudyard went from the house, leaving Stafford to deal with Fellowes, she burst again into laughter, mocking, wilful, painful.

"You were left to set things right, to be the lord high executioner--you, Ian!"

How strange his name sounded on her lips now--foreign, distant, revealing the nature of the situation more vividly than all the words which had been said, than all that had been done.

"Rudyard did not think of killing you, I suppose," she went on, presently, with a bitter motion of the lips, and a sardonic note creeping into the voice.

"No, I thought of that," he answered, quietly, "as you know." His eyes

sought the weapon on the table involuntarily. "That would have been easy enough," he added. "I was not thinking of myself, or of Fellowes, but only of you--and Rudyard."

"Only of me--and Rudyard," she repeated with drooping eyes, which suddenly became alive again with feeling and passion and wildness. "Wasn't it rather late for that?"

The words stung him beyond endurance. He rose and leaned across the table towards her.

"At least I recognized what I had done, what you had done, and I tried to face it. I did not disguise it. My letter to you proves that. But nevertheless I was true to you. I did not deceive you--ever. I loved you--ah, I loved you as few women have been loved! . . . But you, you might have made a mistake where Rudyard was concerned, made the mistake once, but if you wronged him, you wronged me infinitely more. I was ready to give up all, throw all my life, my career, to the winds, and prove myself loyal to that which was more than all; or I was willing to eliminate myself from the scene forever. I was willing to pay the price--any price--just to stand by what was the biggest thing in my life. But you were true to nothing--to nothing--to nobody."

"If one is untrue--once, why be true at all ever?" she said with an aching laugh, through which tears ran, though none dropped from her eyes. "If one is untrue to one, why not to a thousand?"

Again a mocking laugh burst from her. "Don't you see? One kiss, a wrong? Why not, then, a thousand kisses! The wrong came in the moment that the one kiss was given. It is the one that kills, not the thousand after."

There came to her mind again--and now with what sardonic force--Rudyard's words that day before they went to Glencader: "If you had lived a thousand years ago you would have had a thousand lovers."

"And so it is all understood between you and Rudyard," she added, mechanically. "That is what you have arranged for me--that I go on living as before with Rudyard, while I am not to know from him anything has happened; but to accept what has been arranged for me, and to be repentant and good and live in sackcloth. It has been arranged, has it, that Rudyard is to believe in me?"

"That has not been arranged."

"It has been arranged that I am to live with him as before, and that he is to pretend to love me as before, and--"

"He does love you as before. He has never changed. He believed in you, was so pitifully eager to believe in you even when the letter--"

"Where is the letter?"

He pointed to the fire.

"Who put it in the fire?" she asked. "You?"

He inclined his head.

"Ah yes, always so clever! A burst of indignation at his daring to suspect me even for an instant, and with a flourish into the fire, the evidence. Here is yours--your letter. Would you like to put it into the fire also?" she asked, and drew his letter from the folds of her dress.

"But, no, no, no--" She suddenly sprang to her feet, and her eyes had a look of agonized agitation. "When I have learned every word by heart, I will burn it myself--for your sake." Her voice grew softer, something less discordant came into it. "You will never understand. You could never understand me, or that letter of Adrian Fellowes to me, and that he could dare to write me such a letter. You could never understand it. But I understand you. I understand your letter. It came while I was--while I was broken. It healed me, Ian. Last night I wanted to kill myself. Never mind why. You would not understand. You are too good to understand. All night I was in torture, and then this letter of yours--it was a revelation. I did not think that a man lived like you, so true, so kind, so mad. And so I wrote you a letter, ah, a letter from my soul! and then came down to this--the end of all. The end of everything--forever."

"No, the beginning if you will have it so.... Rudyard loves you . . ."

She gave a cry of agony. "For God's sake--oh, for God's sake, hush! . . . You think that now I could . . ."

"Begin again with new purpose."

"Purpose! Oh, you fool! You fool! You fool--you who are so wise sometimes! You want me to begin again with Rudyard: and you do not want me to begin again--with you?"

He was silent, and he looked her in the eyes steadily.

"You do not want me to begin again with you, because you believe me--because you believed the worst from that letter, from Adrian Fellowes' letter.... You believed, yet you hypnotized Rudyard into not believing. But did you, after all? Was it not that he loves me, and that he wanted to be deceived, wanted to be forced to do what he has done? I know him better than you. But you are right, he would have spoken to me about it if you had not warned him."

"Then begin again--"

"You do not want me any more." The voice had an anguish like the cry of the tragic music in "Elektra." "You do not want what you wanted yesterday--for us together to face it all, Ian. You do not want it? You hate me."

His face was disturbed by emotion, and he did not speak for a moment.

In that moment she became transformed. With a sudden tragic motion she caught the pistol from the table and raised it, but he wrenched it from her hand.

"Do you think that would mend anything?" he asked, with a new pity in his heart for her. "That would only hurt those who have been hurt enough already. Be a little magnanimous. Do not be selfish. Give

others a chance."

"You were going to do it as an act of unselfishness," she moaned. "You were going to die in order to mend it all. Did you think of me in that? Did you think I would or could consent to that? You believed in me, of course, when you wrote it. But did you think that was magnanimous--when you had got a woman's love, then to kill yourself in order to cure her? Oh, how little you know! . . . But you do not want me now. You do not believe in me now. You abhor me. Yet if that letter had not fallen into Rudyard's hands we might perhaps have now been on our way to begin life again together. Does that look as though there was some one else that mattered--that mattered?"

He held himself together with all his power and will. "There is one way, and only one way," he said, firmly. "Rudyard loves you. Begin again with him." His voice became lower. "You know the emptiness of your home. There is a way to make some recompense to him. You can pay your debt. Give him what he wants so much. It would be a link. It would bind you. A child . . ."

"Oh, how you loathe me!" she said, shudderingly. "Yesterday--and now . . . No, no, no," she added, "I will not, cannot live with Rudyard. I cannot wrench myself from one world into another like that. I will not live with him any more.... There--listen."

Outside the newsboys were calling:

"Extra speshul! Extra speshul! All about the war! War declared! Extra speshul!"

"War! That will separate many," she added. "It will separate Rudyard and me.... No, no, there will be no more scandal.... But it is the way of escape--the war."

"The way of escape for us all, perhaps," he answered, with a light of determination in his eyes. "Good-bye," he added, after a slight pause. "There is nothing more to say."

He turned to go, but he did not hold out his hand, nor even look at her.

"Tell me," she said, in a strange, cold tone, "tell me, did Adrian Fellowes--did he protect me? Did he stand up for me? Did he defend me?"

"He was concerned only for himself," Ian answered, hesitatingly.

Her face hardened. Pitiful, haggard lines had come into it in the last half-hour, and they deepened still more.

"He did not say one word to put me right?"

Ian shook his head in negation. "What did you expect?" he said.

She sank into a chair, and a strange cruelty came into her eyes, something so hard that it looked grotesque in the beautiful setting of her pain-worn, exquisite face.

So utter was her dejection that he came back from the door and bent

over her.

"Jasmine," he said, gently, "we have to start again, you and I--in different paths. They will never meet. But at the end of the road--peace. Peace the best thing of all. Let us try and find it, Jasmine."

"He did not try to protect me. He did not defend me," she kept saying to herself, and was only half conscious of what Ian said to her.

He touched her shoulder. "Nothing can set things right between you and me, Jasmine," he added, unsteadily, "but there's Rudyard--you must help him through. He heard scandal about Mennaval last night at De Lancy Scovel's. He didn't believe it. It rests with you to give it all the lie.... Good-bye."

In a moment he was gone. As the door closed she sprang to her feet. "Ian--Ian--come back," she cried. "Ian, one word--one word."

But the door did not open again. For a moment she stood like one transfixed, staring at the place whence he had vanished, then, with a moan, she sank in a heap on the floor, and rocked to and fro like one demented.

Once the door opened quietly, and Krool's face showed, sinister and furtive, but she did not see it, and the door closed again softly.

At last the paroxysms passed, and a haggard face looked out into the world of life and being with eyes which were drowned in misery.

"He did not defend me--the coward!" she murmured; then she rose with a sudden effort, swayed, steadied herself, and arranged her hair in the mirror over the mantelpiece. "The low coward!" she said again. "But before he leaves . . . before he leaves England . . ."

As she turned to go from the room, Rudyard's portrait on the wall met her eyes. "I can't go on, Rudyard," she said to it. "I know that now."

Out in the streets, which Ian Stafford travelled with hasty steps, the newsboys were calling:

"War declared! All about the war!"

"That is the way out for me," Stafford said, aloud, as he hastened on. "That opens up the road.... I'm still an artillery officer."

He directed his swift steps toward Pall Mall and the War Office.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH FELLOWES GOES A JOURNEY

Kruger's ultimatum, expected though it was, shook England as nothing had done since the Indian mutiny, but the tremour of national excitement presently gave way to a quiet, deep determination.

An almost Oriental luxury had gone far to weaken the fibre of that strong and opulent middle-class who had been the backbone of England, the entrenched Philistines. The value of birth as a moral asset which had a national duty and a national influence, and the value of money which had a social responsibility and a communal use, were unrealized by the many nouveaux riches who frequented the fashionable purlieus; who gave vast parties where display and extravagance were the principal feature; who ostentatiously offered large sums to public objects. Men who had made their money where copper or gold or oil or wool or silver or cattle or railways made commercial kings, supported schemes for the public welfare brought them by fine ladies, largely because the ladies were fine; and they gave substantial sums--upon occasion--for these fine ladies' fine causes. Rich men, or reputed rich men, whose wives never appeared, who were kept in secluded quarters in Bloomsbury or Maida Vale, gave dinners at the Savoy or the Carlton which the scrapings of the aristocracy attended; but these gave no dinners in return.

To get money to do things, no matter how,--or little matter how; to be in the swim, and that swim all too rapidly washing out the real people--that was the almost universal ambition. But still the real people, however few or many, in the time of trouble came quietly into the necessary and appointed places with the automatic precision of the disciplined friend of the state and of humanity; and behind them were folk of the humbler sort, the lower middle-class, the labouring-man. Of these were the landpoor peer, with his sense of responsibility cultivated by daily life and duty in his county, on the one hand; the professional man of all professions, the little merchant, the sailor, the clerk and artisan, the digger and delver, on the other; and, in between, those people in the shires who had not yet come to be material and gross, who had old-fashioned ideas of the duty of the citizen and the Christian. In the day of darkness these came and laid what they had at the foot of the altar of sacrifice.

This at least the war did: it served as a sieve to sift the people, and it served as the solvent of many a life-problem.

Ian Stafford was among the first to whom it offered "the way out," who went to it for the solution of their own set problem. Suddenly, as he stood with Jasmine in the little room where so many lives were tossed into the crucible of Fate that morning, the newsboy's voice shouting, "War declared!" had told him the path he must tread.

He had astonished the War Office by his request to be sent to the Front with his old arm, the artillery, and he was himself astonished by the instant assent that was given. And now on this October day he was on his way to do two things--to see whether Adrian Fellowes was keeping his promise, and to visit Jigger and his sister.

There had not been a week since the days at Glencader when he had not gone to the sordid quarters in the Mile End Road to see Jigger, and to hear from him how his sister was doing at the opera, until two days before, when he had learned from Lou herself what she had suffered at the hands of Adrian Fellowes. That problem would now be settled forever; but there remained the question of Jigger, and that must be settled, whatever the other grave problems facing him. Jigger must be cared for, must be placed in a position where he could have his start in life. Somehow Jigger was associated with all the movements of his

life now, and was taken as part of the problem. What to do? He thought of it as he went eastward, and it did not seem easy to settle it. Jigger himself, however, cut the Gordian knot.

When he was told that Stafford was going to South Africa, and that it was a question as to what he--Jigger--should now do, in what sphere of life his abnormally "cute" mind must run, he answered, instantly.

"I'm goin' wiv y'r gryce," he said. "That's it--stryght. I'm goin' out there wiv you."

Ian shook his head and smiled sadly. "I'm afraid that's not for you, Jigger. No, think again."

"Ain't there work in Souf Afriker--maybe not in the army itself, y'r gryce? Couldn't I have me chanct out there? Lou's all right now, I bet; an' I could go as easy as can be."

"Yes, Lou will be all right now," remarked Stafford, with a reflective irony.

"I ain't got no stiddy job here, and there's work in Souf Afriker, ain't they? Couldn't I get a job holdin' horses, or carryin' a flag, or cleanin' the guns, or nippin' letters about--couldn't I, y'r gryce? I'm only askin' to go wiv you, to work, same as ever I did before I was run over. Ain't I goin' wiv you, y'r gryce?"

With a sudden resolve Stafford laid a hand on his shoulder. "Yes, you are going 'wiv' me, Jigger. You just are, horse, foot, and artillery. There'll be a job somewhere. I'll get you something to do, or--"

"Or bust, y'r gryce?"

So the problem lessened, and Ian's face cleared a little. If all the difficulties perplexing his life would only clear like that! The babe and the suckling had found the way so simple, so natural; and it was a comforting way, for he had a deep and tender regard for this quaint, clever waif who had drifted across his path.

To-morrow he would come and fetch Jigger: and Jigger's face followed him into the coming dusk, radiant and hopeful and full of life--of life that mattered. Jigger would go out to "Souf Afriker" with all his life before him, but he, Ian Stafford, would go with all his life behind him, all mile-stones passed except one.

So, brooding, he walked till he came to an underground station, and there took a train to Charing Cross. Here he was only a little distance away from the Embankment, where was to be found Adrian Fellowes; and with bent head he made his way among the motley crowd in front of the station, scarcely noticing any one, yet resenting the jostle and the crush. Suddenly in the crowd in front of him he saw Krool stealing along with a wide-awake hat well down over his eyes. Presently the sinister figure was lost in the confusion. It did not occur to him that perhaps Krool might be making for the same destination as himself; but the sight of the man threw his mind into an eddy of torturing thoughts.

The flare of light, white and ghastly, at Charing Cross was shining on

a moving mass of people, so many of whom were ghastly also--derelicts of humanity, ruins of womanhood, casuals, adventurers, scavengers of life, prowlers who lived upon chance, upon cards, upon theft, upon women, upon libertines who waited in these precincts for some foolish and innocent woman whom they could entrap. Among them moved also the thousand other good citizens bent upon catching trains or wending their way home from work; but in the garish, cruel light, all, even the good, looked evil in a way, and furtive and unstable. To-night, the crowd were far more restless than usual, far more irritating in their purposeless movements. People sauntered, jerked themselves forward, moved in and out, as it were, intent on going everywhere and nowhere; and the excitement possessing them, the agitation in the air, made them seem still more exasperating, and bewildering. Newsboys with shrill voices rasped the air with invitations to buy, and everywhere eager, nervous hands held out their half-pennies for the flimsy sensational rags.

Presently a girl jostled Stafford, then apologized with an endearing word which brought a sick sensation to his brain; but he only shook his head gravely at her. After all, she had a hard trade and it led nowhere--nowhere.

"Coming home with me, darling?" she added in response to his meditative look. Anything that was not actual rebuff was invitation to her blunted sense. "Coming home with me--?"

Home! A wave of black cynicism, of sardonic mirth passed through Stafford's brain. Home--where the business of this poor wayfarer's existence was carried on, where the shopkeeper sold her wares in the inner sanctuary! Home.... He shook the girl's hand from his elbow and hastened on.

Yet why should he be angered with her, he said to himself. It was not moral elevation which had made him rough with her, but only that word Home she used.... The dire mockery of it burned his mind like a corrosive acid. He had had no home since his father died years ago,--his mother had died when he was very young--and his eldest brother had taken possession of the family mansions, placing them in the control of his foreign wife, who sat in his mother's chair and in her place at table.

He had wished so often in the past for a home of his own, where he could gather round him young faces and lose himself in promoting the interests of those for whom he had become forever responsible. He had longed for the Englishman's castle, for his own little realm of interest where he could be supreme; and now it was never to be.

The idea gained in sacred importance as it receded forever from all possibility. In far-off days it had been associated with a vision in blue, with a face like a dresden-china shepherdess and hair like Aphrodite's. Laughter and wit and raillery had been part of the picture; and long evenings in the winter-time, when they two would read the books they both loved, and maybe talk awhile of world events in which his work had place; in which his gifts were found, shaping, influencing, producing. The garden, the orchard--he loved orchards--the hedges of flowering ivy and lilacs; and the fine grey and chestnut horses driven by his hand or hers through country lanes; the smell of the fallen leaves in the autumn evenings; or the sting of the bracing January wind across the moors or where the woodcock

awaited its spoiler. All these had been in the vision. It was all over now. He had seen an image, it had vanished, and he was in the desert alone.

A band was playing "The Banks o' Garry Owen," and the tramp of marching men came to his ears. The crowd surged round him, pushed him, forced him forward, carried him on, till the marching men came near, were alongside of him--a battalion of Volunteers, going to the war to see "Kruger's farmers bite the dust!"--a six months' excursion, as they thought. Then the crowd, as it cheered jostled him against the wall of the shops, and presently he found himself forced down Buckingham Street. It was where he wished to go in order to reach Adrian Fellowes' apartments. He did not notice, as he was practically thrown into the street, that Krool was almost beside him.

The street was not well lighted, and he looked neither to right nor left. He was thinking hard of what he would say to Adrian Fellowes, if, and when, he saw him.

But not far behind him was a figure that stole along in the darker shadows of the houses, keeping at some distance. The same figure followed him furtively till he came into that part of the Embankment where Adrian Fellowes' chambers were; then it fell behind a little, for here the lights were brighter. It hung in the shadow of a door-way and watched him as he approached the door of the big building where Adrian Fellowes lived.

Presently, as he came nearer, Stafford saw a hansom standing before the door. Something made him pause for a moment, and when, in the pause, the figure of a woman emerged from the entrance and hastily got into the hansom, he drew back into the darkness of a doorway, as the man did who was now shadowing him; and he waited till it turned round and rolled swiftly away. Then he moved forward again. When not far from the entrance, however, another cab--a four-wheeler--discharged its occupant at a point nearer to the building than where he waited. It was a woman. She paid the cabman, who touched his hat with quick and grateful emphasis, and, wheeling his old crock round, clattered away. The woman glanced along the empty street swiftly, and then hurried to the doorway which opened to Adrian Fellowes' chambers.

Instantly Stafford recognized her. It was Jasmine, dressed in black and heavily veiled. He could not mistake the figure--there was none other like it; or the turn of her head--there was only one such head in all England. She entered the building quickly.

There was nothing to do but wait until she came out again. No passion stirred in him, no jealousy, no anger. It was all dead. He knew why she had come; or he thought he knew. She would tell the man who had said no word in defense of her, done nothing to protect her, who let the worst be believed, without one protest of her innocence, what she thought of him. She was foolish to go to him, but women do mad things, and they must not be expected to do the obviously sensible thing when the crisis of their lives has come. Stafford understood it all.

One thing he was certain Jasmine did not know--the intimacy between Fellowes and Al'mah. He himself had been tempted to speak of it in their terrible interview that morning; but he had refrained. The ignominy, the shame, the humiliation of that would have been beyond her endurance. He understood; but he shrank at the thought of the

nature of the interview which she must have, at the thought of the meeting at all.

He would have some time to wait, no doubt, and he made himself easy in the doorway, where his glance could command the entrance she had used. He mechanically took out a cigar-case, but after looking at the cigars for a moment put them away again with a sigh. Smoking would not soothe him. He had passed beyond the artificial.

His waiting suddenly ended. It seemed hardly three minutes after Jasmine's entrance when she appeared in the doorway again, and, after a hasty glance up and down the street, sped away as swiftly as she could, and, at the corner, turned up sharply towards the Strand. Her movements had been agitated, and, as she hurried on, she thrust her head down into her muff as a woman would who faced a blinding rain.

The interview had been indeed short. Perhaps Fellowes had already gone abroad. He would soon find out.

He mounted the deserted staircase quickly and knocked at Fellowes' door. There was no reply. There was a light, however, and he knocked again. Still there was no answer. He tried the handle of the door. It turned, the door gave, and he entered. There was no sound. He knocked at an inner door. There was no reply, yet a light showed in the room. He turned the handle. Entering the room, he stood still and looked round. It seemed empty, but there were signs of packing, of things gathered together hastily.

Then, with a strange sudden sense of a presence in the room, he looked round again. There in a far corner of the large room was a couch, and on it lay a figure--Adrian Fellowes, straight and still--and sleeping.

Stafford went over. "Fellowes," he said, sharply.

There was no reply. He leaned over and touched a shoulder. "Fellowes!" he exclaimed again, but something in the touch made him look closely at the face half turned to the wall. Then he knew.

Adrian Fellowes was dead.

Horror came upon Stafford, but no cry escaped him. He stooped once more and closely looked at the body, but without touching it. There was no sign of violence, no blood, no disfigurement, no distortion, only a look of sleep--a pale, motionless sleep.

But the body was warm yet. He realized that as his hand had touched the shoulder. The man could only have been dead a little while.

Only a little while: and in that little while Jasmine had left the house with agitated footsteps.

"He did not die by his own hand," Stafford said aloud.

He rang the bell loudly. No one answered. He rang and rang again, and then a lazy porter came.

"MORE WAS LOST AT MOHACKSFIELD"

Eastminster House was ablaze. A large dinner had been fixed for this October evening, and only just before half-past eight Jasmine entered the drawing-room to receive her guests. She had completely forgotten the dinner till very late in the afternoon, when she observed preparations for which she had given instructions the day before. She was about to leave the house upon the mission which had drawn her footsteps in the same direction as those of Ian Stafford, when the butler came to her for information upon some details. These she gave with an instant decision which was part of her equipment, and then, when the butler had gone, she left the house on foot to take a cab at the corner of Piccadilly.

When she returned home, the tables in the dining-room were decorated, the great rooms were already lighted, and the red carpet was being laid down at the door. The footmen looked up with surprise as she came up the steps, and their eyes followed her as she ascended the staircase with marked deliberation.

"Well, that's style for you," said the first footman. "Takin' an airin' on shanks' hosses."

"And a quarter of an hour left to put on the tirara," sniggered the second footman. "The lot is asked for eight-thirty."

"Swells, the bunch, windin' up with the brother of an Emperor--'struth!"

"I'll bet the Emperor's brother ain't above takin' a tip about shares on the Rand, me boy."

"I'll bet none of 'em ain't. That's why they come--not forgetting th' grub and the fizz."

"What price a title for the Byng Baas one of these days! They like tips down there where the old Markis rumbles through his beard--and a lot of hands to be greased. And grease it costs a lot, political grease does. But what price a title--Sir Ruyard Byng, Bart., wot oh!"

"Try another shelf higher up, and it's more like it. Wot a head for a coronet 'ers! W'y--"

But the voice of the butler recalled them from the fields of imagination, and they went with lordly leisure upon the business of the household.

Socially this was to be the day of Jasmine's greatest triumph. One of the British royal family was, with the member of another great reigning family, honouring her table--though the ladies of neither were to be present; and this had been a drop of chagrin in her cup. She had been unaware of the gossip there had been of late,--though it was unlikely the great ladies would have known of it--and she would have been slow to believe what Ian had told her this day, that men had talked lightly of her at De Lancy Scovel's house. Her eyes had been shut; her wilful nature had not been sensitive to the quality of the social air about her. People

came--almost "everybody" came--to her house, and would come, of course, until there was some open scandal; until her husband intervened. Yet everybody did not come. The royal princesses had not found it convenient to come; and this may have meant nothing, or very much indeed. To Jasmine, however, as she hastily robed herself for dinner, her mind working with lightning swiftness, it did not matter at all; if all the kings and queens of all the world had promised to come and had not come, it would have meant nothing to her this night of nights.

In her eyes there was the look of one who has seen some horrible thing, though she gave her orders with coherence and decision as usual, and with great deftness she assisted her maid in the hasty toilette. Her face was very pale, save for one or two hectic spots which took the place of the nectarine bloom so seldom absent from her cheeks, and in its place was a new, shining, strange look like a most delicate film--the transfiguring kind of look which great joy or great pain gives.

Coming up the staircase from the street, she had seen Krool enter her husband's room more hastily than usual, and had heard him greeted sharply--something that sounded strange to her ears, for Rudyard was uniformly kind to Krool. Never had Rudyard's voice sounded as it did now. Of course it was her imagination, but it was like a voice which came from some desolate place, distant, arid and alien. That was not the voice in which he had wooed her on the day when they heard of Jameson's Raid. That was not the voice which had spoken to her in broken tones of love on the day Ian first dined with her after her marriage--that fateful, desperate day. This was a voice which had a cheerless, fretful note, a savage something in it. Presently they two would meet, and she knew how it would be--an outward semblance, a superficial amenity and confidence before their guests; the smile of intimacy, when there was no intimacy, and never, never, could be again; only acting, only make-believe, only the artifice of deceit.

Yet when she was dressed--in pure white, with only a string of pearls, the smallest she had, round her neck--she was like that white flower which had been placed on her pillow last night.

Turning to leave the bedroom she caught sight of her face and figure again in the big mirror, and she seemed to herself like some other woman. There was that strange, distant look of agony in her eyes, that transfiguring look in the face; there was the figure somehow gone slimmer in these few hours; and there was a frail appearance which did not belong to her.

As she was about to leave the room to descend the stairs, there came a knock at the door. A bunch of white violets was handed in, with a pencilled note in Rudyard's handwriting.

White violets--white violets!

The note read, "Wear these to-night, Jasmine."

White violets--how strange that he should send them! These they send for the young, the innocent, and the dead. Rudyard had sent them to her--from how far away! He was there just across the hallway, and yet he might have been in Bolivia, so far as their real life was concerned.

She was under no illusion. This day, and perhaps a few, a very few others, must be lived under the same roof, in order that they could separate without scandal; but things could never go on as in the past. She had realized that the night before, when still that chance of which she had spoken to Stafford was hers; when she had wound the coil of her wonderful hair round her throat, and had imagined that self-destruction which has tempted so many of more spiritual make than herself. It was melodramatic, emotional, theatrical, maybe; but the emotional, the theatrical, the egotistic mortal has his or her tragedy, which is just as real as that which comes to those of more spiritual vein, just as real as that which comes to the more classical victim of fate. Jasmine had the deep defects of her qualities. Her suffering was not the less acute because it found its way out with impassioned demonstration.

There was, however, no melodrama in the quiet trembling with which she took the white violets, the symbol of love and death. She was sure that Rudyard was not aware of their significance and meaning, but that did not modify the effect upon her. Her trouble just now was too deep for tears, too bitter for words, too terrible for aught save numb endurance. Nothing seemed to matter in a sense, and yet the little routine of life meant so much in its iron insistence. The habits of convention are so powerful that life's great issues are often obscured by them. Going to her final doom a woman would stop to give the last careful touch to her hair--the mechanical obedience to long habit. It is not vanity, not littleness, but habit; never shown with subtler irony than in the case of Madame de Langrois, who, pacing the path to her execution at Lille, stooped, picked up a pin from the ground, and fastened it in her gown--the tyranny of habit.

Outside her own room Jasmine paused for a moment and looked at the closed door of Rudyard's room. Only a step--and yet she was kept apart from him by a shadow so black, so overwhelming, that she could not penetrate it. It smothered her sight. No, no, that little step could not be taken; there was a gulf between them which could not be bridged.

There was nothing to say to Rudyard except what could be said upon the surface, before all the world, as it were; things which must be said through an atmosphere of artificial sounds, which would give no response to the agonized cries of the sentient soul. She could make believe before the world, but not alone with Rudyard. She shrank within herself at the idea of being alone with him.

As she went down-stairs a scene in a room on the Thames Embankment, from which she had come a half hour ago, passed before her vision. It was as though it had been imprinted on the film of her eye and must stay there forever.

When would the world know that Adrian Fellowes lay dead in the room on the Embankment? And when they knew it, what would they say? They would ask how he died--the world would ask how he died. The Law would ask how he died.

How had he died? Who killed him? Or did he die by his own hand? Had Adrian Fellowes, the rank materialist, the bon viveur, the man-luxury, the courage to kill himself by his own hand? If not, who killed him? She shuddered. They might say that she killed him.

She had seen no one on the staircase as she had gone up, but she had dimly seen another figure outside in the terrace as she came out, and there was the cabman who drove her to the place. That was all.

Now, entering the great drawing-room of her own house she shuddered as though from an icy chill. The scene there on the Embankment--her own bitter anger, her frozen hatred; then the dead man with his face turned to the wall; the stillness, the clock ticking, her own cold voice speaking to him, calling; then the terrified scrutiny, the touch of the wrist, the realization, the moment's awful horror, the silence which grew more profound, the sudden paralysis of body and will.... And then--music, strange, soft, mysterious music coming from somewhere inside the room, music familiar and yet unnatural, a song she had heard once before, a pathetic folk-song of eastern Europe, "More Was Lost at Mohacksfield." It was a tale of love and loss and tragedy and despair.

Startled and overcome, she had swayed, and would have fallen, but that with an effort of the will she had caught at the table and saved herself. With the music still creeping in unutterable melancholy through the room, she had fled, closing the door behind her very softly as though not to disturb the sleeper. It had followed her down the staircase and into the street, the weird, unnatural music.

It was only when she had entered a cab in the Strand that she realized exactly what the music was. She remembered that Fellowes had bought a music-box which could be timed to play at will--even days ahead, and he had evidently set the box to play at this hour. It did so, a strange, grim commentary on the stark thing lying on the couch, nerveless as though it had been dead a thousand years. It had ceased to play before Stafford entered the room, but, strangely enough, it began again as he said over the dead body, "He did not die by his own hand."

Standing before the fireplace in the drawing-room, awaiting the first guest, Jasmine said to herself: "No, no, he had not the courage to kill himself."

Some one had killed him. Who was it? Who killed him--Rudyard--Ian--who? But how? There was no sign of violence. That much she had seen. He lay like one asleep. Who was it killed him?

"Lady Tynemouth."

Back to the world from purgatory again. The butler's voice broke the spell, and Lady Tynemouth took her friend in her arms and kissed her.

"So handsome you look, my darling--and all in white. White violets, too. Dear, dear, how sweet, and oh, how triste! But I suppose it's chic. Certainly, it is stunning. And so simple. Just the weeny, teeny string of pearls, like a young under-secretary's wife, to show what she might do if she had a fair chance. Oh, you clever, wonderful Jasmine!"

"My dressmaker says I have no real taste in colours, so I compromised," was Jasmine's reply, with a really good imitation of a smile.

As she babbled on, Lady Tynemouth had been eyeing her friend with swift inquiry, for she had never seen Jasmine look as she did to-night, so ethereal, so tragically ethereal, with dark lines under the eyes, the curious transparency of the skin, and the feverish brightness and far-awayness of the look. She was about to say something in comment, but other guests entered, and it was impossible. She watched, however, from a little distance, while talking gaily to other guests; she watched at the dinner-table, as Jasmine, seated between her two royalties, talked with gaiety, with pretty irony, with respectful badinage; and no one could be so daring with such ceremonious respect at the same time as she. Yet through it all Lady Tynemouth saw her glance many times with a strange, strained inquiry at Rudyard, seated far away opposite her; at another big, round table.

"There's something wrong here," Lady Tynemouth said to herself, and wondered why Ian Stafford was not present. Mennaval was there, eagerly seeking glances. These Jasmine gave with a smiling openness and apparent good-fellowship, which were not in the least compromising. Lady Tynemouth saw Mennaval's vain efforts, and laughed to herself, and presently she even laughed with her neighbour about them.

"What an infant it is!" she said to her table companion. "Jasmine Byng doesn't care a snap of her finger about Mennaval."

"Does she care a snap for anybody?" asked the other. Then he added, with a kind of query in the question apart from the question itself: "Where is the great man--where's Stafford to-night?"

"Counting his winnings, I suppose." Lady Tynemouth's face grew soft. "He has done great things for so young a man. What a distance he has gone since he pulled me and my red umbrella back from the Zambesi Falls!"

Then proceeded a gay conversation, in which Lady Tynemouth was quite happy. When she could talk of Ian Stafford she was really enjoying herself. In her eyes he was the perfect man, whom other women tried to spoil, and whom, she flattered herself, she kept sound and unspoiled by her frank platonic affection.

"Our host seems a bit abstracted to-night," said her table companion after a long discussion about what Stafford had done and what he still might do.

"The war--it means so much to him," said Lady Tynemouth. Yet she had seen the note of abstraction too, and it had made her wonder what was happening in this household.

The other demurred.

"But I imagine he has been prepared for the war for some time. He didn't seem excessively worried about it before dinner, yet he seemed upset too, so pale and anxious-looking."

"I'll make her talk, make her tell me what it is, if there is anything," said Lady Tynemouth to herself. "I'll ask myself to stay with her for a couple of days."

Superficial as Lady Tynemouth seemed to many, she had real sincerity,

and she was a friend in need to her friends. She loved Jasmine as much as she could love any woman, and she said now, as she looked at Jasmine's face, so alert, so full of raillery, yet with such an undertone of misery:

"She looks as if she needed a friend."

After dinner she contrived to get her arm through that of her hostess, and gave it an endearing pressure. "May I come to you for a few days, Jasmine?" she asked.

"I was going to ask if you would have me," answered Jasmine, with a queer little smile. "Rudyard will be up to his ears for a few days, and that's a chance for you and me to do some shopping, and some other things together, isn't it?"

She was thinking of appearances, of the best way to separate from Rudyard for a little while, till the longer separation could be arranged without scandal. Ian Stafford had said that things could go on in this house as before, that Rudyard would never hint to her what he knew, or rather what the letter had told him or left untold: but that was impossible. Whatever Rudyard was willing to do, there was that which she could not do. Twenty-four hours had accomplished a complete revolution in her attitude towards life and in her sense of things. Just for these immediate days to come, when the tragedy of Fellowes' death would be made a sensation of the hour, there must be temporary expedients; and Lady Tynemouth had suggested one which had its great advantages.

She could not bear to remain in Rudyard's house; and in his heart of hearts Rudyard would wish the same, even if he believed her innocent; but if she must stay for appearance' sake, then it would be good to have Lady Tynemouth with her. Rudyard would be grateful for time to get his balance again. This bunch of violets was the impulse of a big, magnanimous nature; but it would be followed by the inevitable reaction, which would be the real test and trial.

Love and forgiveness--what had she to do with either! She did not wish forgiveness because of Adrian Fellowes. No heart had been involved in that episode. It had in one sense meant nothing to her. She loved another man, and she did not wish forgiveness of him either. No, no, the whole situation was impossible. She could not stay here. For his own sake Rudyard would not, ought not, to wish her to stay. What might the next few days bring forth?

Who had killed Adrian Fellowes? He was not man enough to take his own life--who had killed him? Was it her husband, after all? He had said to Ian Stafford that he would do nothing, but, with the maggot of revenge and jealousy in their brains, men could not be trusted from one moment to another.

The white violets? Even they might be only the impulse of the moment, one of those acts of madness of jealous and revengeful people. Men had kissed their wives and then killed them--fondled them, and then strangled them. Rudyard might have made up his mind since morning to kill Fellowes, and kill herself, also. Fellowes was gone, and now might come her turn. White violets were the flowers of death, and the first flowers he had ever given her were purple violets, the flowers of life and love.

If Rudyard had killed Adrian Fellowes, there would be an end to everything. If he was suspected, and if the law stretched out its hand of steel to clutch him--what an ignominious end to it all; what a mean finish to life, to opportunity, to everything worth doing!

And she would have been the cause of everything.

The thought scorched her soul.

Yet she talked on gaily to her guests until the men returned from their cigars; as though Penalty and Nemesis were outside even the range of her imagination; as though she could not hear the snap of the handcuffs on Rudyard's--or Ian's--wrists.

Before and after dinner only a few words had passed between her and Rudyard, and that was with people round them. It was as though they spoke through some neutralizing medium, in which all real personal relation was lost. Now Rudyard came to her, however, and in a matter-of-fact voice said: "I suppose Al'mah will be here. You haven't heard to the contrary, I hope? These great singers are so whimsical."

There was no time for Jasmine to answer, for through one of the far entrances of the drawing-room Al'mah entered. Her manner was composed--if possible more composed than usual, and she looked around her calmly. At that moment a servant handed Byng a letter. It contained only a few words, and it ran:

"DEAR BYNG,--Fellowes is gone. I found him dead in his rooms. An inquest will be held to-morrow. There are no signs of violence; neither of suicide or anything else. If you want me, I shall be at my rooms after ten o'clock to-night. I have got all his papers." Yours ever,

"IAN STAFFORD."

Jasmine watched Rudyard closely as he read. A strange look passed over his face, but his hand was steady as he put the note in his pocket. She then saw him look searchingly at Al'mah as he went forward to greet her.

On the instant Rudyard had made up his mind what to do. It was clear that Al'mah did not know that Fellowes was dead, or she would not be here; for he knew of their relations, though he had never told Jasmine. Jasmine did not suspect the truth, or Al'mah would not be where she was; and Fellowes would never have written to Jasmine the letter for which he had paid with his life.

Al'mah was gently appreciative of the welcome she received from both Byng and Jasmine, and she prepared to sing.

"Yes, I think I am in good voice," she said to Jasmine, presently. Then Rudyard went, giving his wife's arm a little familiar touch as he passed, and said:

"Remember, we must have some patriotic things tonight. I'm sure Al'mah will feel so, too. Something really patriotic and stirring. We shall need it--yes we shall need cheering very badly before we've done. We're not going to have a walk-over in South Africa. Cheering up

is what we want, and we must have it."

Again he cast a queer, inquiring look at Al'mah, to which he got no response, and to himself he said, grimly: "Well, it's better she should not know it--here."

His mind was in a maze. He moved as in a dream. He was pale, but he had an air of determination. Once he staggered with dizziness, then he righted himself and smiled at some one near. That some one winked at his neighbour.

"It's true, then, what we hear about him," the neighbour said, and suggestively raised fingers to his mouth.

Al'mah sang as perhaps she had seldom sung. There was in her voice an abandon and tragic intensity, a wonderful resonance and power, which captured her hearers as they had never been captured before. First she sang a love-song, then a song of parting. Afterwards came a lyric of country, which stirred her audience deeply. It was a challenge to every patriot to play his part for home and country. It was an appeal to the spirit of sacrifice; it was an inspiration and an invocation. Men's eyes grew moist.

And now another, a final song, a combination of all--of love, and loss and parting and ruin, and war and patriotism and destiny. With the first low notes of it Jasmine rose slowly from her seat, like one in a dream, and stood staring blindly at Al'mah. The great voice swelled out in a passion of agony, then sank away into a note of despair that gripped the heart.

"But more was lost at Mohacksfield--"

Jasmine had stood transfixed while the first words were sung, then, as the last line was reached, staring straight in front of her, as though she saw again the body of Adrian Fellowes in the room by the river, she gave a cry, which sounded half laughter and half torture, and fell heavily on the polished floor.

Rudyard ran forward and lifted her in his arms. Lady Tynemouth was beside him in an instant.

"Yes, that's right--you come," he said to her, and he carried the limp body up-stairs, the white violets in her dress crushed against his breast.

"Poor child--the war, of course; it means so much to them."

Thus, a kindly dowager, as she followed the Royalties down-stairs.

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE WHO CAME SEARCHING

"A lady to see you, sir."

"A lady? What should we be doing with ladies here, Gleg?"

"I'm sure I have no use for them, sir," replied Gleg, sourly. He was in no good humour. That very morning he had been told that his master was going to South Africa, and that he would not be needed there, but that he should remain in England, drawing his usual pay. Instead of receiving this statement with gratitude, Gleg had sniffed in a manner which, in any one else, would have been impertinence; and he had not even offered thanks.

"Well, what do you think she wants? She looks respectable?"

"I don't know about that, sir. It's her ladyship, sir."

"It's what 'ladyship,' Gleg?"

"Her ladyship, sir--Lady Tynemouth."

Stafford looked at Gleg meditatively for a minute, and then said quietly:

"Let me see, you have been with me sixteen years, Gleg. You've forgotten me often enough in that time, but you've never forgotten yourself before. Come to me to-morrow at noon.... I shall allow you a small pension. Show her ladyship in."

Gone waxen in face, Gleg crept out of the room.

"Seven-and-six a week, I suppose," he said to himself as he went down the stairs. "Seven-and-six for a bit of bonhommy."

With great consideration he brought Lady Tynemouth up, and shut the door with that stillness which might be reverence, or something at its antipodes.

Lady Tynemouth smiled cheerily at Ian as she held out her hand.

"Gleg disapproves of me very greatly. He thinks I am no better than I ought to be."

"I am sure you are," answered Stafford, drily.

"Well, if you don't know, Ian, who does? I've put my head in the lion's mouth before, just like this, and the lion hasn't snapped once," she rejoined, settling herself cozily in a great, green leather-chair. "Nobody would believe it; but there it is. The world couldn't think that you could be so careless of your opportunities, or that I would pay for the candle without burning it."

"On the contrary, I think they would believe anything you told them."

She laughed happily. "Wouldn't you like to call me Alice, 'same as ever,' in the days of long ago? It would make me feel at home after Gleg's icy welcome."

He smiled, looked down at her with admiration, and quoted some lines of Swinburne, alive with cynicism:

"And the worst and the best of this is,
That neither is most to blame

If she has forgotten my kisses,
And I have forgotten her name."

Lady Tynemouth made a plaintive gesture. "I should probably be able to endure the bleak present, if there had been any kisses in the sunny past," she rejoined, with mock pathos. "That's the worst of our friendship, Ian. I'm quite sure the world thinks I'm one of your spent flames, and there never was any fire, not so big as the point of a needle, was there? It's that which hurts so now, little Ian Stafford--not so much fire as would burn on the point of a needle."

"On the point of a needle," Ian repeated, half-abstractedly. He went over to his writing-desk, and, opening a blotter, regarded it meditatively for an instant. As he did so she tapped the floor impatiently with her umbrella, and looked at him curiously, but with a little quirk of humour at the corners of her mouth.

"The point of a needle might carry enough fire to burn up a good deal," he said, reflectively. Then he added, slowly: "Do you remember Mr. Mappin and his poisoned needle at Glencader?"

"Yes, of course. That was a day of tragedy, when you and Rudyard Byng won a hundred Royal Humane Society medals, and we all felt like martyrs and heroes. I had the most creepy dreams afterwards. One night it was awful. I was being tortured with Mr. Mappin's needle horribly by--guess whom? By that half-caste Krool, and I waked up with a little scream, to find Tynie busy pinching me. I had been making such a wurra-wurra, as he called it."

"Well, it is a startling idea that there's poison powerful enough to make a needle-point dipped in it deadly."

"I don't believe it a bit, but--"

Pausing, she flicked a speck of fluff from her black dress--she was all in black, with only a stole of pure white about her shoulders. "But tell me," she added, presently--"for it's one of the reasons why I'm here now--what happened at the inquest to-day? The evening papers are not out, and you were there, of course, and gave evidence, I suppose. Was it very trying? I'm sure it was, for I've never seen you look so pale. You are positively haggard, Ian. You don't mind that from an old friend, do you? You look terribly ill, just when you should look so well."

"Why should I look so well?" He gazed at her steadily. Had she any glimmering of the real situation? She was staying now in Byng's house, and two days had gone since the world had gone wrong; since Jasmine had sunk to the floor unconscious as Al'mah sang, "More was lost at Mohacksfield."

"Why should you look so well? Because you are the coming man, they say. It makes me so proud to be your friend--even your neglected, if not quite discarded, friend. Every one says you have done such splendid work for England, and that now you can have anything you want. The ball is at your feet. Dear man, you ought to look like a morning-glory, and not as you do. Tell me, Ian, are you ill, or is it only the reaction after all you've done?"

"No doubt it's the reaction," he replied.

"I know you didn't like Adrian Fellowes much," she remarked, watching him closely. "He behaved shockingly at the Glencader Mine affair--shockingly. Tynie was for pitching him out of the house, and taking the consequences; but, all the same, a sudden death like that all alone must have been dreadful. Please tell me, what was the verdict?"

"Heart failure was the verdict; with regret for a promising life cut short, and sympathy with the relatives."

"I never heard that he had heart trouble," was the meditative response. "But--well, of course, it was heart failure. When the heart stops beating, there's heart failure. What a silly verdict!"

"It sounded rather worse than silly," was Ian's comment.

"Did--did they cut him up, to see if he'd taken morphia, or an overdose of laudanum or veronal or something? I had a friend who died of taking quantities of veronal while you were abroad so long--a South American, she was."

He nodded. "It was all quite in order. There were no signs of poison, they said, but the heart had had a shock of some kind. There had been what they called lesion, and all that kind of thing, and not sufficient strength for recovery."

"I suppose Mr. Mappin wasn't present?" she asked, curiously. "I know it is silly in a way, but don't you remember how interested Mr. Fellowes was in that needle? Was Mr. Mappin there?"

"There was no reason why he should be there."

"What witnesses were called?"

"Myself and the porter of Fellowes' apartments, his banker, his doctor--"

"And Al'mah?" she asked, obliquely.

He did not reply at once, but regarded her inquiringly.

"You needn't be afraid to speak about Al'mah," she continued. "I saw something queer at Glencader. Then I asked Tynie, and he told me that--well, all about her and Adrian Fellowes. Was Al'mah there? Did she give evidence?"

"She was there to be called, if necessary," he responded, "but the coroner was very good about it. After the autopsy the authorities said evidence was unnecessary, and--"

"You arranged that, probably?"

"Yes; it was not difficult. They were so stupid--and so kind."

She smoothed out the folds of her dress reflectively, then got up as if with sudden determination, and came near to him. Her face was pale now, and her eyes were greatly troubled.

"Ian," she said, in a low voice, "I don't believe that Adrian Fellowes died a natural death, and I don't believe that he killed himself. He would not have that kind of courage, even in insanity. He could never go insane. He could never care enough about anything to do so. He--did--not--kill--himself. There, I am sure of it. And he did not die a natural death, either."

"Who killed him?" Ian asked, his face becoming more drawn, but his eyes remaining steady and quiet.

She put her hand to her eyes for a moment. "Oh, it all seems so horrible! I've tried to shake it off, and not to think my thoughts, and I came to you to get fresh confidence; but as soon as I saw your face I knew I couldn't have it. I know you are upset too, perhaps not by the same thoughts, but through the same people."

"Tell me all you think or know. Be quite frank," he said, heavily. "I will tell you why later. It is essential that you should be wholly frank with me."

"As I have always been. I can't be anything else. Anyhow, I owe you so much that you have the right to ask me what you will.... There it is, the fatal thing," she added.

Her eyes were raised to the red umbrella which had nearly carried her over into the cauldron of the Zambesi Falls.

"No, it is the world that owes me a heavy debt," he responded, gallantly. "I was merely selfish in saving you."

Her eyes filled with tears, which she brushed away with a little laugh.

"Ah, how I wish it was that! I am just mean enough to want you to want me, while I didn't want you. That's the woman, and that's all women, and there's no getting away from it. But still I would rather you had saved me than any one else who wasn't bound, like Tynie, to do so."

"Well, it did seem absurd that you should risk so much to keep a sixpenny umbrella," he rejoined, drily.

"How we play on the surface while there's so much that is wearing our hearts out underneath," she responded, wearily. "Listen, Ian, you know what I mean. Whoever killed Adrian Fellowes, or didn't, I am sure that Jasmine saw him dead. Three nights ago when she fainted and went ill to bed, I stayed with her, slept in the same room, in the bed beside hers. The opiate the doctor gave her was not strong enough, and two or three times she half waked, and--and it was very painful. It made my heart ache, for I knew it wasn't all dreams. I am sure she saw Adrian Fellowes lying dead in his room.... Ian, it is awful, but for some reason she hated him, and she saw him lying dead. If any one knows the truth, you know. Jasmine cares for you--no, no, don't mind my saying it. She didn't care a fig for Mennaval, or any of the others, but she does care for you--cares for you. She oughtn't to, but she does, and she should have married you long ago before Rudyard Byng came. Please don't think I am interfering, Ian. I am not. You never had a better friend than I am. But there's something ghastly wrong. Rudyard is looking like a giant that's had blood-letting, and he never goes near Jasmine, except when some one is with her. It's a bad sign when two

people must have some third person about to insulate their self-consciousness and prevent those fatal moments when they have to be just their own selves, and have it out."

"You think there's been trouble between them?" His voice was quite steady, his manner composed.

"I don't think quite that. But there is trouble in that palace. Rudyard is going to South Africa."

"Well, that is not unnatural. I should expect him to do so. I am going to South Africa also."

For a moment she looked at him without speaking, and her face slowly paled. "You are going to the Front--you?"

"Yes--'Back to the army again, sergeant, back to the army again.' I was a gunner, you know, and not a bad one, either, if I do say it."

"You are going to throw up a great career to go to the Front? When you have got your foot at the top of the ladder, you climb down?" Her voice was choking a little.

He made a little whimsical gesture. "There's another ladder to climb. I'll have a try at it, and do my duty to my country, too. I'll have a double-barrelled claim on her, if possible."

"I know that you are going because you will not stay when Rudyard goes," she rejoined, almost irritably.

"What a quixotic idea! Really you are too impossible and wrong-headed."

He turned an earnest look upon her. "No, I give you my word, I am not going because Rudyard is going. I didn't know he was going till you told me. I got permission to go three hours after Kruger's message came."

"You are only feckless--only feckless, as the Scotch say," she rejoined with testy sadness. "Well, since everybody is going, I am going too. I am going with a hospital-ship."

"Well, that would pay off a lot of old debts to the Almighty," he replied, in kindly taunt.

"I haven't been worse than most women, Ian," she replied. "Women haven't been taught to do things, to pay off their debts. Men run up bills and pay them off, and run them up again and again and pay them off; but we, while we run up bills, our ways of paying them off are so few, and so uninteresting."

Suddenly she took from her pocket a letter. "Here is a letter for you," she said. "It was lying on Jasmine's table the night she was taken ill. I don't know why I did it, but I suppose I took it up so that Rudyard should not see it; and then I didn't say anything to Jasmine about it at once. She said nothing, either; but to-day I told her I'd seen the letter addressed to you, and had posted it. I said it to see how she would take it. She only nodded, and said nothing at first. Then after a while she whispered, 'Thank you, my dear,' but in

such a queer tone. Ian, she meant you to have the letter, and here it is."

She put it into his hands. He remembered it. It was the letter which Jasmine had laid on the table before him at that last interview when the world stood still. After a moment's hesitation he put it in his pocket.

"If she wished me to have it--" he said in a low voice.

"If not, why, then, did she write it? Didn't she say she was glad I posted it?"

A moment followed, in which neither spoke. Lady Tynemouth's eyes were turned to the window; Stafford stood looking into the fire.

"Tynie is sure to go to South Africa with his Yeomanry," she continued at last. "He'll be back in England next week. I can be of use out there, too. I suppose you think I'm useless because I've never had to do anything, but you are quite wrong. It's in me. If I'd been driven to work when I was a girl, if I'd been a labourer's daughter, I'd have made hats--or cream-cheeses. I'm not really such a fool as you've always thought me, Ian; at any rate, not in the way you've thought me."

His look was gentle, as he gazed into her eyes. "I've never thought you anything but a very sensible and alluring woman, who is only wilfully foolish at times," he said. "You do dangerous things."

"But you never knew me to do a really wrong thing, and if you haven't, no one has."

Suddenly her face clouded and her lips trembled. "But I am a good friend, and I love my friends. So it all hurts. Ian, I'm most upset. There's something behind Adrian Fellowes' death that I don't understand. I'm sure he didn't kill himself; but I'm also sure that some one did kill him." Her eyes sought his with an effort and with apprehension, but with persistency too. "I don't care what the jury said--I know I'm right."

"But it doesn't matter now," he answered, calmly. "He will be buried to-morrow, and there's an end of it all. It will not even be the usual nine days' wonder. I'd forget it, if I were you."

"I can't easily forget it while you remember it," she rejoined, meaningly. "I don't know why or how it affects you, but it does affect you, and that's why I feel it; that's why it haunts me."

Gleg appeared. "A gentleman to see you, sir," he said, and handed Ian a card.

"Where is he?"

"In the dining-room, sir."

"Very good. I will see him in a moment."

When they were alone again, Lady Tynemouth held out her hand. "When do you start for South Africa?" she asked.

"In three days. I join my battery in Natal."

"You will hear from me when I get to Durban," she said, with a shy, inquiring glance.

"You are really going?"

"I mean to organize a hospital-ship and go."

"Where will you get the money?"

"From some social climber," she replied, cynically. His hand was on the door-knob, and she laid her own on it gently. "You are ill, Ian," she said. "I have never seen you look as you do now."

"I shall be better before long," he answered. "I never saw you look so well."

"That's because I am going to do some work at last," she rejoined. "Work at last. I'll blunder a bit, but I'll try a great deal, and perhaps I'll do some good.... And I'll be there to nurse you if you get fever or anything," she added, laughing nervously--"you and Tynie."

When she was gone he stood looking at the card in his hand, with his mind seeing something far beyond. Presently he rang for Gleg.

"Show Mr. Mappin in," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEREIN THE LOST IS FOUND

In a moment the great surgeon was seated, looking reflectively round him. Soon, however, he said brusquely, "I hope your friend Jigger is going on all right?"

"Yes, yes, thanks to you."

"No, no, Mr. Stafford, thanks to you and Mrs. Byng chiefly. It was care and nursing that did it. If I could have hospitals like Glencader and hospital nurses like Mrs. Byng and Al'mah and yourself, I'd have few regrets at the end of the year. That was an exciting time at Glencader."

Stafford nodded, but said nothing. Presently, after some reference to the disaster at the mine at Glencader and to Stafford's and Byng's bravery, Mr. Mappin said. "I was shocked to hear of Mr. Fellowes' death. I was out of town when it happened--a bad case at Leeds; but I returned early this morning." He paused, inquiringly but Ian said nothing, and he continued, "I have seen the body."

"You were not at the inquest, I think," Ian remarked, casually.

"No, I was not in time for that, but I got permission to view the

body."

"And the verdict--you approve?"

"Heart failure--yes." Mr. Mappin's lip curled. "Of course. But he had no heart trouble. His heart wasn't even weak. His life showed that."

"His life showed--?" Ian's eyebrows went up.

"He was very much in society, and there's nothing more strenuous than that. His heart was all right. Something made it fail, and I have been considering what it was."

"Are you suggesting that his death was not natural?"

"Quite artificial, quite artificial, I should say."

Ian took a cigarette, and lighted it slowly. "According to your theory, he must have committed suicide. But how? Not by an effort of the will, as they do in the East, I suppose?"

Mr. Mappin sat up stiffly in his chair. "Do you remember my showing you all at Glencader a needle which had on its point enough poison to kill a man?"

"And leave no trace--yes."

"Do you remember that you all looked at it with interest, and that Mr. Fellowes examined it more attentively than any one else?"

"I remember."

"Well, I was going to kill a collie with it next day."

"A favourite collie grown old, rheumatic--yes, I remember."

"Well, the experiment failed."

"The collie wasn't killed by the poison?"

"No, not by the poison, Mr. Stafford."

"So your theory didn't work except on paper."

"I think it worked, but not with the collie."

There was a pause, while Stafford looked composedly at his visitor, and then he said: "Why didn't it work with the collie?"

"It never had its chance."

"Some mistake, some hitch?"

"No mistake, no hitch; but the wrong needle."

"The wrong needle! I should not say that carelessness was a habit with you." Stafford's voice was civil and sympathetic.

"Confidence breeds carelessness," was Mr. Mappin's enigmatical retort.

"You were over-confident then?"

"Quite clearly so. I thought that Glencader was beyond reproach."

There was a slight pause, and then Stafford, flicking away some cigarette ashes, continued the catechism. "What particular form of reproach do you apply to Glencader?"

"Thieving."

"That sounds reprehensible--and rude."

"If you were not beyond reproach, it would be rude, Mr. Stafford."

Stafford chafed at the rather superior air of the expert, whose habit of bedside authority was apt to creep into his social conversation; but, while he longed to give him a shrewd thrust, he forbore. It was hard to tell how much he might have to do to prevent the man from making mischief. The compliment had been smug, and smugness irritated Stafford.

"Well, thanks for your testimonial," he said, presently, and then he determined to cut short the tardy revelation, and prick the bubble of mystery which the great man was so slowly blowing.

"I take it that you think some one at Glencader stole your needle, and so saved your collie's life," he said.

"That is what I mean," responded Mr. Mappin, a little discomposed that his elaborate synthesis should be so sharply brought to an end.

There was almost a grisly raillery in Stafford's reply. "Now, the collie--were you sufficiently a fatalist to let him live, or did you prepare another needle, or do it in the humdrum way?"

"I let the collie live."

"Hoping to find the needle again?" asked Stafford, with a smile.

"Perhaps to hear of it again."

"Hello, that is rather startling! And you have done so?"

"I think so. Yes, I may say that."

"Now how do you suppose you lost that needle?"

"It was taken from my pocket-case, and another substituted.

"Returning good for evil. Could you not see the difference in the needles?"

"There is not, necessarily, difference in needles. The substitute was the same size and shape, and I was not suspicious."

"And what form does your suspicion take now?"

The great man became rather portentously solemn--he himself would have

said "becomingly grave." "My conviction is that Mr. Fellowes took my needle."

Stafford fixed the other with his gaze. "And killed himself with it?"

Mr. Mappin frowned. "Of that I cannot be sure, of course."

"Could you not tell by examining the body?"

"Not absolutely from a superficial examination."

"You did not think a scientific examination necessary?"

"Yes, perhaps; but the official inquest is over, the expert analysis or examination is finished by the authorities, and the superficial proofs, while convincing enough to me, are not complete and final; and so, there you are."

Stafford got and held his visitor's eyes, and with slow emphasis said: "You think that Fellowes committed suicide with your needle?"

"No, I didn't say that."

"Then I fear my intelligence must be failing rapidly. You said--"

"I said I was not sure that he killed himself. I am sure that he was killed by my needle; but I am not sure that he killed himself. Motive and all that kind of thing would come in there."

"Ah--and all that kind of thing! Why should you discard motive for his killing himself?"

"I did not say I discarded motive, but I think Mr. Fellowes the last man in the world likely to kill himself."

"Why, then, do you think he stole the needle?"

"Not to kill himself."

Stafford turned his head away a little. "Come now; this is too tall. You are going pretty far in suggesting that Fellowes took your needle to kill some one else."

"Perhaps. But motive might not be so far to seek."

"What motive in this case?" Stafford's eyes narrowed a little with the inquiry.

"Well, a woman, perhaps."

"You know of some one, who--"

"No. I am only assuming from Mr. Fellowes' somewhat material nature that there must be a woman or so."

"Or so--why 'or so?'" Stafford pressed him into a corner.

"There comes the motive--one too many, when one may be suspicious, or jealous, or revengeful, or impossible."

"Did you see any mark of the needle on the body?"

"I think so. But that would not do more than suggest further delicate, detailed, and final examination."

"You have no trace of the needle itself?"

"None. But surely that isn't strange. If he had killed himself, the needle would probably have been found. If he did not kill himself, but yet was killed by it, there is nothing strange in its not being recovered."

Stafford took on the gravity of a dry-as-dust judge. "I suppose that to prove the case it would be necessary to produce the needle, as your theory and your invention are rather new."

"For complete proof the needle would be necessary, though not indispensable."

Stafford was silent for an instant, then he said: "You have had a look for the little instrument of passage?"

"I was rather late for that, I fear."

"Still, by chance, the needle might have been picked up. However, it would look foolish to advertise for a needle which had traces of atric acid on it, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Mappin looked at Stafford quite coolly, and then, ignoring the question, said, deliberately: "You discovered the body, I hear. You didn't by any chance find the needle, I suppose?"

Stafford returned his look with a cool stare. "Not by any chance," he said, enigmatically.

He had suddenly decided on a line of action which would turn this astute egoist from his half-indicated purpose. Whatever the means of Fellowes' death, by whomsoever caused, or by no one, further inquiry could only result in revelations hurtful to some one. As Mr. Mappin had surmised, there was more than one woman,--there may have been a dozen, of course--but chance might just pitch on the one whom investigation would injure most.

If this expert was quieted, and Fellowes was safely bestowed in his grave, the tragic incident would be lost quickly in the general excitement and agitation of the nation. The war-drum would drown any small human cries of suspicion or outraged innocence. Suppose some one did kill Adrian Fellowes? He deserved to die, and justice was satisfied, even if the law was marauded. There were at least four people who might have killed Fellowes without much remorse. There was Rudyard, there was Jasmine, there was Lou the erstwhile flower-girl--and himself. It was necessary that Mappin, however, should be silenced, and sent about his business.

Stafford suddenly came over to the table near to his visitor, and with an assumed air of cold indignation, though with a little natural irritability behind all, said "Mr. Mappin, I assume that you have not gone elsewhere with your suspicions?"

The other shook his head in negation.

"Very well, I should strongly advise you, for your own reputation as an expert and a man of science, not to attempt the rather cliché occupation of trying to rival Sherlock Holmes. Your suspicions may have some distant justification, but only a man of infinite skill, tact, and knowledge, with an almost abnormal gift for tracing elusive clues and, when finding them, making them fit in with fact--only a man like yourself, a genius at the job, could get anything out of it. You are not prepared to give the time, and you could only succeed in causing pain and annoyance beyond calculation. Just imagine a Scotland Yard detective with such a delicate business to do. We have no Hamards here, no French geniuses who can reconstruct crimes by a kind of special sense. Can you not see the average detective blundering about with his ostentatious display of the obvious; his mind, which never traced a motive in its existence, trying to elucidate a clue? Well, it is the business of the Law to detect and punish crime. Let the Law do it in its own way, find its own clues, solve the mysteries given it to solve. Why should you complicate things? The official fellows could never do what you could do, if you were a detective. They haven't the brains or initiative or knowledge. And since you are not a detective, and can't devote yourself to this most delicate problem, if there be any problem at all, I would suggest--I imitate your own rudeness--that you mind your own business."

He smiled, and looked down at his visitor with inscrutable eyes.

At the last words Mr. Mappin flushed and looked consequential; but under the influence of a smile, so winning that many a chancellerie of Europe had lost its irritation over some skilful diplomatic stroke made by its possessor, he emerged from his atmosphere of offended dignity and feebly returned the smile.

"You are at once complimentary and scathing, Mr. Stafford," he said; "but I do recognize the force of what you say. Scotland Yard is beneath contempt. I know of cases--but I will not detain you with them now. They bungle their work terribly at Scotland Yard. A detective should be a man of imagination, of initiative, of deep knowledge of human nature. In the presence of a mystery he should be ready to find motives, to construct them and put them into play, as though they were real--work till a clue was found. Then, if none is found, find another motive and work on that. The French do it. They are marvels. Hamard is a genius, as you say. He imagines, he constructs, he pursues, he squeezes out every drop of juice in the orange.... You see, I agree with you on the whole, but this tragedy disturbed me, and I thought that I had a real clue. I still believe I have, but cui bono?"

"Cui bono indeed, if it is bungled. If you could do it all yourself, good. But that is impossible. The world wants your skill to save life, not to destroy it. Fellowes is dead--does it matter so infinitely, whether by his own hand or that of another?"

"No, I frankly say I don't think it does matter infinitely. His type is no addition to the happiness of the world."

They looked at each other meaningly, and Mappin responded once again to Stafford's winning smile.

It pleased him prodigiously to feel Stafford lay a firm hand on his arm and say: "Can you, perhaps, dine with me to-night at the Travellers' Club? It makes life worth while to talk to men like you who do really big things."

"I shall be delighted to come for your own reasons," answered the great man, beaming, and adjusting his cuffs carefully.

"Good, good. It is capital to find you free." Again Stafford caught the surgeon's arm with a friendly little grip.

Suddenly, however, Mr. Mappin became aware that Stafford had turned desperately white and worn. He had noticed this spent condition when he first came in, but his eyes now rediscovered it. He regarded Stafford with concern.

"Mr. Stafford," he said, "I am sure you do not realize how much below par you are.... You have been under great strain--I know, we all know, how hard you have worked lately. Through you, England launches her ship of war without fear of complications; but it has told on you heavily. Nothing is got without paying for it. You need rest, and you need change."

"Quite so--rest and change. I am going to have both now," said Stafford with a smile, which was forced and wan.

"You need a tonic also, and you must allow me to give you one," was the brusque professional response.

With quick movement he went over to Stafford's writing-table, and threw open the cover of the blotter.

In a flash Stafford was beside him, and laid a hand upon the blotter, saying with a smile, of the kind which had so far done its work--

"No, no, my friend, I will not take a tonic. It's only a good sleep I want; and I'll get that to-night. But I give my word, if I'm not all right to-morrow, if I don't sleep, I'll send to you and take your tonic gladly."

"You promise?"

"I promise, my dear Mappin."

The great man beamed again: and he really was solicitous for his new-found friend.

"Very well, very well--Stafford," he replied. "It shall be as you say. Good-bye, or, rather, au revoir!"

"A la bonne heure!" was the hearty response, as the door opened for the great surgeon's exit.

When the door was shut again, and Stafford was alone, he staggered over to the writing-desk. Opening the blotter, he took something up carefully and looked at it with a sardonic smile.

"You did your work quite well," he said, reflectively.

It was such a needle as he had seen at Glencader in Mr. Mappin's hand. He had picked it up in Adrian Fellowes' room.

"I wonder who used you," he said in a hard voice. "I wonder who used you so well. Was it--was it Jasmine?"

With a trembling gesture he sat down, put the needle in a drawer, locked it, and turned round to the fire again.

"Was it Jasmine?" he repeated, and he took from his pocket the letter which Lady Tynemouth had given him. For a moment he looked at it unopened--at the beautiful, smooth handwriting so familiar to his eyes; then he slowly broke the seal, and took out the closely written pages.

CHAPTER XXVI

JASMINE'S LETTER

"Ian, oh, Ian, what strange and dreadful things you have written to me!" Jasmine's letter ran--the letter which she told him she had written on that morning when all was lost. "Do you realize what you have said, and, saying it, have you thought of all it means to me? You have tried to think of what is best, I know, but have you thought of me? When I read your letter first, a flood of fire seemed to run through my veins; then I became as though I had been dipped in ether, and all the winds of an arctic sea were blowing over me.

"To go with you now, far away from the world in which we live and in which you work, to begin life again, as you say--how sweet and terrible and glad it would be! But I know, oh, I know myself and I know you! I am like one who has lived forever. I am not good, and I am not foolish, I am only mad; and the madness in me urges me to that visionary world where you and I could live and work and wander, and be content with all that would be given us--joy, seeing, understanding, revealing, doing.

"But Ian, it is only a visionary world, that world of which you speak. It does not exist. The overmastering love, the desire for you that is in me, makes for me the picture as it is in your mind; but down beneath all, the woman in me, the everlasting woman, is sure there is no such world.

"Listen, dear child--I call you that, for though I am only twenty-five I seem as aged as the Sphinx, and, like the Sphinx that begets mockery, so my soul, which seems to have looked out over unnumbered centuries, mocks at this world which you would make for you and me. Listen, Ian. It is not a real world, and I should not--and that is the pitiful, miserable part of it--I should not make you happy, if I were in that world with you. To my dire regret I know it. Suddenly you have roused in me what I can honestly say I have never felt before--strange, reckless, hungry feelings. I am like some young dweller of the jungle which, cut off from its kind tries, with a passion that eats and eats and eats away his very flesh to get back to its kind, to his mate, to that other wild child of nature which waits for the one appeasement of primeval desire.

"Ilan, I must tell you the whole truth about myself as I understand it. I am a hopeless, painful contradiction; I have always been so. I have always wanted to be good, but something has always driven me where the flowers have a poisonous sweetness, where the heart grows bad. I want to cry to you, ilan, to help me to be good; and yet something drives me on to want to share with you the fruit which turns to dust and ashes in the long end. And behind all that again, some tiny little grain of honour in me says that I must not ask you to help me; says that I ought never to look into your eyes again, never touch your hand, nor see you any more; and from the little grain of honour comes the solemn whisper, 'Do not ruin him; do not spoil his life.'

"Your letter has torn my heart, so that it can never again be as it was before, and because there is some big, noble thing in you, some little, not ignoble thing is born in me. ilan, you could never know the anguished desire I have to be with you always, but, if I keep sane at all, I will not go--no, I will not go with you, unless the madness carries me away. It would kill you. I know, because I have lived so many thousands of years. My spirit and my body might be satisfied, the glory in having you all my own would be so great; but there would be no joy for you. To men like you, work is as the breath of life. You must always be fighting for something, always climbing higher, because you see some big thing to do which is so far above you.

"Yes, men like you get their chance sooner or later, because you work, and are ready to take the gifts of Fate when they appear and before they pass. You will be always for climbing, if some woman does not drag you back. That woman may be a wife, or it may be a loving and living ghost of a wife like me. ilan, I could not bear to see what would come at last--the disappointment in your face the look of hope gone from your eyes; your struggle to climb, and the struggle of no avail. Sisyphus had never such a task as you would have on the hill of life, if I left all behind here and went with you. You would try to hide it; but I would see you growing older hourly before my eyes. You would smile--I wonder if you know what sort of wonderful, alluring thing your smile is, ilan?--and that smile would drive me to kill myself, and so hurt you still more. And so it is always an everlasting circle of penalty and pain when you take the laws of life you get in the mountains in your hands and break them in pieces on the rocks in the valleys, and make new individual laws out of harmony with the general necessity.

"Isn't it strange, ilan, that I who can do wrong so easily still know so well and value so well what is right? It is my mother in me and my grandfather in me, both of them fighting for possession. Let me empty out my heart before you, because I know--I do not know why, but I do know, as I write--that some dark cloud lowers, gathers round us, in which we shall be lost, shall miss the touch of hand and never see each other's face again. I know it, oh so surely! I did not really love you years ago, before I married Rudyard; I did not love you when I married him; I did not love him, I could not really love any one. My heart was broken up in a thousand pieces to give away in little bits to all who came. But I cared for you more than I cared for any one else--so much more; because you were so able and powerful, and were meant to do such big things; and I had just enough intelligence to want to understand you; to feel what you were thinking, to grasp its meaning, however dimly. Yet I have no real intellect. I am only quick and rather clever--sharp, as Jigger would say, and with some cunning,

too. I have made so many people believe that I am brilliant. When I think and talk and write, I only give out in a new light what others like you have taught me; give out a loaf where you gave me a crumb; blow a drop of water into a bushel of bubbles. No, I did not love you, in the big way, in those old days, and maybe it is not love I feel for you now; but it is a great and wonderful thing, so different from the feeling I once had. It is very powerful, and it is also very cruel, because it smothers me in one moment, and in the next it makes me want to fly to you, heedless of consequences.

"And what might those consequences be, Ian, and shall I let you face them? The real world, your world, England, Europe, would have no more use for all your skill and knowledge and power, because there would be a woman in the way. People who would want to be your helpers, and to follow you, would turn away when they saw you coming; or else they would say the superficial things which are worse than blows in the face to a man who wants to feel that men look to him to help solve the problems perplexing the world. While it may not be love I feel for you, whatever it is, it makes me a little just and unselfish now. I will not--unless a spring-time madness drives me to it to-day--I will not go with you.

"As for the other solution you offer, deceiving the world as to your purposes, to go far away upon some wild mission, and to die!

"Ah, no, you must not cheat the world so; you must not cheat yourself so! And how cruel it would be to me! Whatever I deserve--and in leaving you to marry Rudyard I deserved heavy punishment--still I do not deserve the torture which would follow me to the last day of my life if, because of me, you sacrificed that which is not yours alone, but which belongs to all the world. I loathe myself when I think of the old wrong that I did you; but no leper woman could look upon herself with such horror as I should upon myself, if, for the new wrong I have done you, you were to take your own life.

"These are so many words, and perhaps they will not read to you as real. That is perhaps because I am only shallow at the best; am only, as you once called me, 'a little burst of eloquence.' But even I can suffer, and I believe that even I can love. You say you cannot go on as things are; that I must go with you or you must die; and yet you do not wish me to go with you. You have said that, too. But do you not wonder what would become of me, if either of these alternatives is followed? A little while ago I could deceive Rudyard, and put myself in pretty clothes with a smile, and enjoy my breakfast with him and look in his face boldly, and enjoy the clothes, and the world and the gay things that are in it, perhaps because I had no real moral sense. Isn't it strange that out of the thing which the world would condemn as most immoral, as the very degradation of the heart and soul and body, there should spring up a new sense that is moral--perhaps the first true glimmering of it? Oh, dear love of my life, comrade of my soul, something has come to me which I never had before, and for that, whatever comes, my lifelong gratitude must be yours! What I now feel could never have come except through fire and tears, as you yourself say, and I know so well that the fire is at my feet, and the tears--I wept them all last night, when I too wanted to die.

"You are coming at eleven to-day, Ian--at eleven. It is now eight. I will try and send this letter to reach you before you leave your rooms. If not, I will give it to you when you come--at eleven. Why did

you not say noon--noon--twelve of the clock? The end and the beginning! Why did you not say noon, Ian? The light is at its zenith at noon, at twelve; and the world is dark at twelve--at midnight. Twelve at noon; twelve at night; the light and the dark--which will it be for us, Ian? Night or noon? I wonder, oh, I wonder if, when I see you I shall have the strength to say, 'Yes, go, and come again no more.' Or whether, in spite of everything, I shall wildly say, 'Let us go away together.' Such is the kind of woman that I am. And you--dear lover, tell me truly what kind of man are you?

"Your JASMINE."

He read the letter slowly, and he stopped again and again as though to steady himself. His face became strained and white, and once he poured brandy and drank it off as though it were water. When he had finished the letter he went heavily over to the fire and dropped it in. He watched it burn, until only the flimsy carbon was left.

"If I had not gone till noon," he said aloud, in a nerveless voice--"if I had not gone till noon . . . Fellowes--did she--or was it Byng?"

He was so occupied with his thoughts that he was not at first conscious that some one was knocking.

"Come in," he called out at last.

The door opened and Rudyard Byng entered.

"I am going to South Africa, Stafford," he said, heavily. "I hear that you are going, too; and I have come to see whether we cannot go out together."

CHAPTER XXVII

KROOL

"A message from Mr. Byng to say that he may be a little late, but he says will you go on without him? He will come as soon as possible."

The footman, having delivered himself, turned to withdraw, but Barry Whalen called him back, saying, "Is Mr. Krool in the house?"

The footman replied in the affirmative. "Did you wish to see him, sir?" he asked.

"Not at present. A little later perhaps," answered Barry, with a glance round the group, who eyed him curiously.

At a word the footman withdrew. As the door closed, little black, oily Sobieski dit Melville said with an attempt at a joke, "Is 'Mr.' Krool to be called into consultation?"

"Don't be so damned funny, Melville," answered Barry. "I didn't ask the question for nothing."

"These aren't days when anybody guesses much," remarked Fleming. "And I'd like to know from Mr. Kruger, who knows a lot of things, and doesn't gas, whether he means the mines to be safe."

They all looked inquiringly at Wallstein, who in the storms which rocked them all kept his nerve and his countenance with a power almost benign. His large, limpid eye looked little like that belonging to an eagle of finance, as he had been called.

"It looked for a while as though they'd be left alone," said Wallstein, leaning heavily on the table," but I'm not so sure now." He glanced at Barry Whalen significantly, and the latter surveyed the group enigmatically.

"There's something evidently waiting to be said," remarked Wolff, the silent Partner in more senses than one. "What's the use of waiting?"

Two or three of those present looked at Ian Stafford, who, standing by the window, seemed oblivious of them all. Byng had requested him to be present, with a view to asking his advice concerning some international aspect of the situation, and especially in regard to Holland and Germany. The group had welcomed the suggestion eagerly, for on this side of the question they were not so well equipped as on others. But when it came to the discussion of inner local policy there seemed hesitation in speaking freely before him. Wallstein, however, gave a reassuring nod and said, meaningly:

"We took up careful strategical positions, but our camp has been overlooked from a kopje higher than ours."

"We have been the victims of treachery for years," burst out Fleming, with anger. "Nearly everything we've done here, nearly everything the Government has done here, has been known to Kruger--ever since the Raid."

"I think it could have been stopped," said the once Sobieski, with an ugly grimace, and an attempt at an accent which would suit his new name. "Byng's to blame. We ought to have put down our feet from the start. We're Byng-ridden."

"Keep a civil tongue, Israel," snarled Barry Whalen. "You know nothing about it, and that is the state in which you most shine--in your natural state of ignorance, like the heathen in his blindness. But before Byng comes I'd better give you all some information I've got."

"Isn't it for Byng to hear?" asked Fleming.

"Very much so; but it's for you all to decide what's to be done. Perhaps Mr. Stafford can help us in the matter, as he has been with Byng very lately." Wallstein looked inquiringly towards Stafford.

The group nodded appreciatively, and Stafford came forward to the table, but without seating himself. "Certainly you may command me," he said. "What is the mystery?"

In short and abrupt sentences Barry Whalen, with an occasional interjection and explanation from Wallstein, told of the years of leakage in regard to their plans, of moves circumvented by information which could only have been got by treacherous means either in South

Africa or in London.

"We didn't know for sure which it was," said Barry, "but the proof has come at last. One of Kruger's understrappers from Holland was successfully tapped, and we've got proof that the trouble was here in London, here in this house where we sit--Byng's home."

There was a stark silence, in which more than one nodded significantly, and looked round furtively to see how the others took the news.

"Here is absolute proof. There were two in it here--Adrian Fellowes and Krool."

"Adrian Fellowes!"

It was Ian Stafford's voice, insistent and inquiring.

"Here is the proof, as I say." Barry Whalen leaned forward and pushed a paper over on the table, to which were attached two or three smaller papers and some cablegrams. "Look at them. Take a good look at them and see how we've been done--done brown. The hand that dipped in the same dish, as it were, has handed out misfortune to us by the bucketful. We've been carted in the house of a friend."

The group, all standing, leaned over, as Barry Whalen showed them the papers, one by one, then passed them round for examination.

"It's deadly," said Fleming. "Men have had their throats cut or been hanged for less. I wouldn't mind a hand in it myself."

"We warned Byng years ago," interposed Barry, "but it was no use. And we've paid for it par and premium."

"What can be done to Krool?" asked Fleming.

"Nothing particular--here," said Barry Whalen, ominously.

"Let's have the dog in," urged one of the group.

"Without Byng's permission?" interjected Wallstein.

There was a silence. The last time any of them, except Wallstein, had seen Byng, was on the evening when he had overheard the slanders concerning Jasmine, and none had pleasant anticipation of this meeting with him now. They recalled his departure when Barry Whalen had said, "God, how he hates us." He was not likely to hate them less, when they proved that Fellowes and Krool had betrayed him and them all. They had a wholesome fear of him in more senses than one, because, during the past few years, while Wallstein's health was bad, Byng's position had become more powerful financially, and he could ruin any one of them, if he chose. A man like Byng in "going large" might do the Samson business. Besides, he had grown strangely uncertain in his temper of late, and, as Barry Whalen had said, "It isn't good to trouble a wounded bull in the ring."

They had him on the hip in one way through the exposure of Krool, but they were all more or less dependent on his financial movements. They were all enraged at Byng because he had disregarded all warnings

regarding Krool; but what could they do? Instinctively they turned now to Stafford, whose reputation for brains and diplomacy was so great and whose friendship with Byng was so close.

Stafford had come to-day for two reasons: to do what he could to help Byng--for the last time; and to say to Byng that they could not travel together to South Africa. To make the long journey with him was beyond his endurance. He must put the world between Rudyard and himself; he must efface all companionship. With this last act, begotten of the blind confidence Rudyard had in him, their intercourse must cease forever. This would be easy enough in South Africa. Once at the Front, it was as sure as anything on earth that they would never meet again. It was torture to meet him, and the day of the inquest, when Byng had come to his rooms after his interview with Lady Tynemouth and Mr. Mappin, he had been tried beyond endurance.

"Shall we have Krool in without Byng's permission? Is it wise?" asked Wallstein again. He looked at Stafford, and Stafford instantly replied:

"It would be well to see Krool, I think. Your action could then be decided by Krool's attitude and what he says."

Barry Whalen rang the bell, and the footman came. After a brief waiting Krool entered the room with irritating deliberation and closed the door behind him.

He looked at no one, but stood contemplating space with a composure which made Barry Whalen almost jump from his seat in rage.

"Come a little closer," said Wallstein in a soothing voice, but so Wallstein would have spoken to a man he was about to disembowel.

Krool came nearer, and now he looked round at them all slowly and inquiringly. As no one spoke for a moment he shrugged his shoulders.

"If you shrug your shoulders again, damn you, I'll sjambok you here as Kruger did at Vleifontein," said Barry Whalen in a low, angry voice. "You've been too long without the sjambok."

"This is not the Vaal, it is Englan'," answered Krool, huskily. "The Law--here!"

"Zo you stink ze law of England would help you--eh?" asked Sobieski, with a cruel leer, relapsing into his natural vernacular.

"I mean what I say, Krool," interposed Barry Whalen, fiercely, motioning Sobieski to silence. "I will sjambok you till you can't move, here in England, here in this house, if you shrug your shoulders again, or lift an eyebrow, or do one damned impudent thing."

He got up and rang a bell. A footman appeared. "There is a rhinoceros-hide whip, on the wall of Mr. Byng's study. Bring it here," he said, quietly, but with suppressed passion.

"Don't be crazy, Whalen," said Wallstein, but with no great force, for he would richly have enjoyed seeing the spy and traitor under the whip. Stafford regarded the scene with detached, yet deep and melancholy interest.

While they waited, Krool seemed to shrink a little; but as he watched like some animal at bay, Stafford noticed that his face became venomous and paler, and some sinister intention showed in his eyes.

The whip was brought and laid upon the table beside Barry Whalen, and the footman disappeared, looking curiously at the group and at Krool.

Barry Whalen's fingers closed on the whip, and now a look of fear crept over Krool's face. If there was one thing calculated to stir with fear the Hottentot blood in him, it was the sight of the sjambok. He had native tendencies and predispositions out of proportion to the native blood in him--maybe because he had ever been treated more like a native than a white man by his Boer masters in the past.

As Stafford viewed the scene, it suddenly came home to him how strange was this occurrence in Park Lane. It was medieval, it belonged to some land unslaked of barbarism. He realized all at once how little these men around him represented the land in which they were living, and how much they were part of the far-off land which was now in the throes of war.

To these men this was in one sense an alien country. Through the dulled noises of London there came to their ears the click of the wheels of a cape-wagon, the crack of the Kaffir's whip, the creak of the disselboom. They followed the spoor of a company of elephants in the East country, they watched through the November mist the blesbok flying across the veld, a herd of quaggas taking cover with the rhebok, or a cloud of locusts sailing out of the sun to devastate the green lands. Through the smoky smell of London there came to them the scent of the wattle, the stinging odour of ten thousand cattle, the reek of a native kraal, the sharp sweetness of orange groves, the aromatic air of the karoo, laden with the breath of a thousand wild herbs. Through the drizzle of the autumn rain they heard the wild thunderbolt tear the trees from earthly moorings. In their eyes was the livid lightning that searched in spasms of anger for its prey, while there swept over the brown, aching veld the flood which filled the spruits, which made the rivers seas, and ploughed fresh channels through the soil. The luxury of this room, with its shining mahogany tables, its tapestried walls, its rare fireplace and massive overmantel brought from Italy, its exquisite stained-glass windows, was only part of a play they were acting; it was not their real life.

And now there was not one of them that saw anything incongruous in the whip of rhinoceros-hide lying on the table, or clinched in Barry Whalen's hand. On the contrary, it gave them a sense of supreme naturalness. They had lived in a land where the sjambok was the symbol of progress. It represented the forward movement of civilization in the wilderness. It was the vierkleur of the pioneer, without which the long train of capewagons, with the oxen in longer coils of effort, would never have advanced; without which the Kaffir and the Hottentot would have sacrificed every act of civilization. It prevented crime, it punished crime, it took the place of the bowie-knife and the derringier of that other civilization beyond the Mississippi; it was the lock to the door in the wild places, the open sesame to the territories where native chiefs ruled communal tribes by playing tyrant to the commune. It was the rod of Aaron staying the plague of barbarism. It was the sceptre of the veldt. It drew blood, it ate

human flesh, it secured order where there was no law, and it did the work of prison and penitentiary. It was the symbol of authority in the wilderness.

It was race.

Stafford was the only man present who saw anything incongruous in the scene, and yet his travels in the East his year in Persia, Tibet and Afghanistan, had made him understand things not revealed to the wise and prudent of European domains. With Krool before them, who was of the veld and the karoo, whose natural habitat was but a cross between a krall and the stoep of a dopper's home, these men were instantly transported to the land where their hearts were in spite of all, though the flesh-pots of the West End of London had turned them into by-paths for a while. The skin had been scratched by Krool's insolence and the knowledge of his treachery, and the Tartar showed--the sjambok his scimitar.

In spite of himself, Stafford was affected by it all. He understood. This was not London; the scene had shifted to Potchefstroom or Middleburg, and Krool was transformed too. The sjambok had, like a wizard's wand, as it were, lifted him away from England to spaces where he watched from the grey rock of a kopje for the glint of an assegai or the red of a Rooinek's tunic: and he had done both in his day.

"We've got you at last, Krool," said Wallstein. "We have been some time at it, but it's a long lane that has no turning, and we have you--"

"Like that--like that, jackal!" interjected Barry Whalen, opening and shutting his lean fingers with a gesture of savage possession.

"What?" asked Krool, with a malevolent thrust forward of his head. "What?"

"You betrayed us to Kruger," answered Wallstein, holding the papers. "We have here the proof at last."

"You betrayed England and her secrets, and yet you think that the English law would protect you against this," said Barry Whalen, harshly, handling the sjambok.

"What I betray?" Krool asked again. "What I tell?"

With great deliberation Wallstein explained.

"Where proof?" Krool asked, doggedly.

"We have just enough to hang you," said Wallstein, grimly, and lifted and showed the papers Barry Whalen had brought.

An insolent smile crossed Krool's face.

"You find out too late. That Fellowes is dead. So much you get, but the work is done. It not matter now. It is all done--altogether. Oom Paul speaks now, and everything is his--from the Cape to the Zambesi, everything his. It is too late. What can to do?" Suddenly ferocity showed in his face. "It come at last. It is the end of the English

both sides the Vaal. They will go down like wild hogs into the sea with Joubert and Botha behind them. It is the day of Oom Paul and Christ. The God of Israel gives to his own the tents of the Rooineks."

In spite of the fierce passion of the man, who had suddenly disclosed a side of his nature hitherto hidden--the savage piety of the copper Boer impregnated with stereotyped missionary phrasing, Ian Stafford almost laughed outright. In the presence of Jews like Sobieski it seemed so droll that this half-caste should talk about the God of Israel, and link Oom Paul's name with that of Christ the great liberator as partners in triumph.

In all the years Krool had been in England he had never been inside a place of worship or given any sign of that fanaticism which, all at once, he made manifest. He had seemed a pagan to all of his class, had acted as a pagan.

Barry Whalen, as well as Ian Stafford, saw the humour of the situation, while they were both confounded by the courageous malice of the traitor. It came to Barry's mind at the moment, as it came to Ian Stafford's, that Krool had some card to play which would, to his mind, serve him well; and, by instinct, both found the right clue. Barry's anger became uneasiness, and Stafford's interest turned to anxiety.

There was an instant's pause after Krool's words, and then Wolff the silent, gone wild, caught the sjambok from the hands of Barry Whalen. He made a movement towards Krool, who again suddenly shrank, as he would not have shrunk from a weapon of steel.

"Wait a minute," cried Fleming, seizing the arm of his friend. "One minute. There's something more." Turning to Wallstein, he said, "If Krool consents to leave England at once for South Africa, let him go. Is it agreed? He must either be dealt with adequately, or get out. Is it agreed?"

"I do what I like," said Krool, with a snarl, in which his teeth showed glassily against his drawn lips. "No one make me do what I not want."

"The Baas--you have forgotten him," said Wallstein.

A look combined of cunning, fear and servility crossed Krool's face, but he said, morosely:

"The Baas--I will do what I like."

There was a singular defiance and meaning in his tone, and the moment seemed critical, for Barry Whalen's face was distorted with fury. Stafford suddenly stooped and whispered a word in Wallstein's ear, and then said:

"Gentlemen, if you will allow me, I should like a few words with Krool before Mr. Byng comes. I think perhaps Krool will see the best course to pursue when we have talked together. In one sense it is none of my business, in another sense it is everybody's business. A few minutes, if you please, gentlemen." There was something almost authoritative in his tone.

"For Byng's sake--his wife--you understand," was all Stafford had said

under his breath, but it was an illumination to Wallstein, who whispered to Stafford.

"Yes, that's it. Krool holds some card, and he'll play it now."

By his glance and by his word of assent, Wallstein set the cue for the rest, and they all got up and went slowly into the other room. Barry Whalen was about to take the sjambok, but Stafford laid his hand upon it, and Barry and he exchanged a look of understanding.

"Stafford's a little bit of us in a way," said Barry in a whisper to Wallstein as they left the room. "He knows, too, what a sjambok's worth in Krool's eyes."

When the two were left alone, Stafford slowly seated himself, and his fingers played idly with the sjambok.

"You say you will do what you like, in spite of the Baas?" he asked, in a low, even tone.

"If the Baas hurt me, I will hurt. If anybody hurt me, I will hurt."

"You will hurt the Baas, eh? I thought he saved your life on the Limpopo."

A flush stole across Krool's face, and when it passed again he was paler than before. "I have save the Baas," he answered, sullenly.

"From what?"

"From you."

With a powerful effort, Stafford controlled himself. He dreaded what was now to be said, but he felt inevitably what it was.

"How--from me?"

"If that Fellowes' letter come into his hands first, yours would not matter. She would not go with you."

Stafford had far greater difficulty in staying his hand than had Barry Whalen, for the sjambok seemed the only reply to the dark suggestion. He realized how, like the ostrich, he had thrust his head into the sand, imagining that no one knew what was between himself and Jasmine. Yet here was one who knew, here was one who had, for whatever purpose, precipitated a crisis with Fellowes to prevent a crisis with himself.

Suddenly Stafford thought of an awful possibility. He fastened the gloomy eyes of the man before him, that he might be able to see any stir of emotion, and said: "It did not come out as you expected?"

"Altogether--yes."

"You wished to part Mr. and Mrs. Byng. That did not happen."

"The Baas is going to South Africa."

"And Mr. Fellowes?"

"He went like I expect."

"He died--heart failure, eh?"

A look of contempt, malevolence, and secret reflection came into Krool's face. "He was kill," he said.

"Who killed him?"

Krool was about to shrug his shoulders, but his glance fell on the sjambok, and he made an ugly gesture with his lean fingers. "There was yourself. He had hurt you--you went to him.... Good! There was the Baas, he went to him. The dead man had hurt him.... Good!"

Stafford interrupted him by an exclamation. "What's that you say--the Baas went to Mr. Fellowes?"

"As I tell the vrouw, Mrs. Byng, when she say me go from the house to-day--I say I will go when the Baas send me."

"The Baas went to Mr. Fellowes--when?"

"Two hours before you go, and one hour before the vrouw, she go."

Like some animal looking out of a jungle, so Krool's eyes glowed from beneath his heavy eyebrows, as he drawled out the words.

"The Baas went--you saw him?"

"With my own eyes."

"How long was he there?"

"Ten minutes."

"Mrs. Byng--you saw her go in?"

"And also come out."

"And me--you followed me--you saw me, also?"

"I saw all that come, all that go in to him."

With a swift mind Stafford saw his advantage--the one chance, the one card he could play, the one move he could make in checkmate, if, and when, necessary. "So you saw all that came and went. And you came and went yourself!"

His eyes were hard and bright as he held Krool's, and there was a sinister smile on his lips.

"You know I come and go--you say me that?" said Krool, with a sudden look of vague fear and surprise. He had not foreseen this.

"You accuse yourself. You saw this person and that go out, and you think to hold them in your dirty clutches; but you had more reason than any for killing Mr. Fellowes."

"What?" asked Krool, furtively.

"You hated him because he was a traitor like yourself. You hated him because he had hurt the Baas."

"That is true altogether, but--"

"You need not explain. If any one killed Mr. Fellowes, why not you? You came and went from his rooms, too."

Krool's face was now yellowish pale. "Not me . . . it was not me."

"You would run a worse chance than any one. Your character would damn you--a partner with him in crime. What jury in the world but would convict you on your own evidence? Besides, you knew--"

He paused to deliver a blow on the barest chance. It was an insidious challenge which, if it failed, might do more harm to others, might do great harm, but he plunged. "You knew about the needle."

Krool was cowed and silent. On a venture Stafford had struck straight home.

"You knew that Mr. Fellowes had stolen the needle from Mr. Mappin at Glencader," he added.

"How you know that?" asked Krool, in a husky, ragged voice.

"I saw him steal it--and you?"

"No. He tell me."

"What did he mean to do with it?"

A look came into Krool's eyes, malevolent and barbaric.

"Not to kill himself," he reflected. "There is always some one a man or a woman want kill."

There was a hideous commonplaceness in the tone which struck a chill to Stafford's heart.

"No doubt there is always some one you want to kill. Now listen, Krool. You think you've got a hold over me--over Mrs. Byng. You threaten. Well, I have passed through the fire of the coroner's inquest. I have nothing to fear. You have. I saw you in the street as you watched. You came behind me--"

He remembered now the footsteps that paused when he did, the figure behind his in the dark, as he watched for Jasmine to come out from Fellowes' rooms, and he determined to plunge once more.

"I recognized you, and I saw you in the Strand just before that. I did not speak at the inquest, because I wanted no scandal. If I had spoken, you would have been arrested. Whatever happened your chances were worse than those of any one. You can't frighten me, or my friends in there, or the Baas, or Mrs. Byng. Look after your own skin. You are the vile scum of the earth,"--he determined to take a strong line now, since he had made a powerful impression on the creature before

him--"and you will do what the Baas likes, not what you like. He saved your life. Bad as you are, the Baas is your Baas for ever and ever, and what he wants to do with you he will do. When his eyes look into yours, you will think the lightning speaks. You are his slave. If he hates you, you will die; if he curses you, you will wither."

He played upon the superstitious element, the native strain again. It was deeper in Krool than anything else.

"Do you think you can defy them?" Stafford went on, jerking a finger towards the other room. "They are from the veld. They will have you as sure as the crack of a whip. This is England, but they are from the veld. On the veld you know what they would do to you. If you speak against the Baas, it is bad for you; if you speak against the Baas' vrouw it will be ten times worse. Do you hear?"

There was a strange silence, in which Stafford could feel Krool's soul struggling in the dark, as it were--a struggle as of black spirits in the grey dawn.

"I wait the Baas speak," Krool said at last, with a shiver.

There was no time for Stafford to answer. Wallstein entered the room hurriedly. "Byng has come. He has been told about him," he said in French to Stafford, and jerking his head towards Krool.

Stafford rose. "It's all right," he answered in the same language. "I think things will be safe now. He has a wholesome fear of the Baas."

He turned to Krool. "If you say to the Baas what you have said to me about Mr. Fellowes or about the Baas's vrouw, you will have a bad time. You will think that wild hawks are picking out your vitals. If you have sense, you will do what I tell you."

Krool's eyes were on the door through which Wallstein had come. His gaze was fixed and tortured. Stafford had suddenly roused in him some strange superstitious element. He was like a creature of a lower order awaiting the approach of the controlling power. It was, however, the door behind him which opened, and he gave a start of surprise and terror. He knew who it was. He did not turn round, but his head bent forward, as though he would take a blow from behind, and his eyes almost closed. Stafford saw with a curious meticulousness the long eyelashes touch the grey cheek.

"There's no fight in him now," he said to Byng in French. "He was getting nasty, but I've got him in order. He knows too much. Remember that, Byng."

Byng's look was as that of a man who had passed through some chamber of torture, but the flabbiness had gone suddenly from his face, and even from his figure, though heavy lines had gathered round the mouth and scarred the forehead. He looked worn and much thinner, but there was a look in his eyes which Stafford had never seen there--a new look of deeper seeing, of revelation, of realization. With all his ability and force, Byng had been always much of a boy, so little at one with the hidden things--the springs of human conduct, the contradictions of human nature, the worst in the best of us, the forces that emerge without warning in all human beings, to send them on untoward courses and at sharp tangents to all the habits of their existence and their

character. In a real sense he had been very primitive, very objective in all he thought and said and did. With imagination, and a sensitive organization out of keeping with his immense physique, it was still only a visualizing sense which he had, only a thing that belongs to races such as those of which Krool had come.

A few days of continuous suffering begotten by a cataclysm, which had rent asunder walls of life enclosing vistas he had never before seen; these had transformed him. Pain had given him dignity of a savage kind, a grim quiet which belonged to conflict and betokened grimmer purpose. In the eyes was the darkness of the well of despair; but at his lips was iron resolution.

In reply to Stafford he said quietly: "All right, I understand. I know how to deal with Krool."

As Stafford withdrew, Byng came slowly down the room till he stood at the end of the table opposite to Krool.

Standing there, he looked at the Boer with hard eyes.

"I know all, Krool," he said. "You sold me and my country--you tried to sell me and my country to Oom Paul. You dog, that I snatched from the tiger death, not once but twice."

"It is no good. I am a Hottentot. I am for the Boer, for Oom Paul. I would have die for you, but--"

"But when the chance came to betray the thing I cared for more than I would twenty lives--my country--you tried to sell me and all who worked with me."

"It would be same to you if the English go from the Vaal," said the half-caste, huskily, not looking into the eyes fixed on him. "But it matter to me that the Boer keep all for himself what he got for himself. I am half Boer. That is why."

"You defend it--tell me, you defend it?"

There was that in the voice, some terrible thing, which drew Krool's eyes in spite of himself, and he met a look of fire and wrath.

"I tell why. If it was bad, it was bad. But I tell why, that is all. If it is not good, it is bad, and hell is for the bad; but I tell why."

"You got money from Oom Paul for the man--Fellowes?" It was hard for him to utter the name.

Krool nodded.

"Every year--much?"

Again Krool nodded.

"And for yourself--how much?"

"Nothing for myself; no money, Baas."

"Only Oom Paul's love!"

Krool nodded again.

"But Oom Paul flayed you at Vleifontein; tied you up and skinned you with a sjambok.... That didn't matter, eh? And you went on loving him. I never touched you in all the years. I gave you your life twice. I gave you good money. I kept you in luxury--you that fed in the cattle-kraal; you that had mealies to eat and a shred of biltong when you could steal it; you that ate a steinbok raw on the Vaal, you were so wild for meat . . . I took you out of that, and gave you this."

He waved an arm round the room, and went on: "You come in and go out of my room, you sleep in the same cart with me, you eat out of the same dish on trek, and yet you do the Judas trick. Slim--god of gods, how slim! You are the snake that crawls in the slime. It's the native in you, I suppose.... But see, I mean to do to you as Oom Paul did. It's the only thing you understand. It's the way to make you straight and true, my sweet Krool."

Still keeping his eyes fixed on Krool's eyes, his hand reached out and slowly took the sjambok from the table. He ran the cruel thing through his fingers as does a prison expert the cat-o'-nine-tails before laying on the lashes of penalty. Into Krool's eyes a terror crept which never had been there in the old days on the veld when Oom Paul had flayed him. This was not the veld, and he was no longer the veld-dweller with skin like the rhinoceros, all leather and bone and endurance. And this was not Oom Paul, but one whom he had betrayed, whose wife he had sought to ruin, whose subordinate he had turned into a traitor. Oom Paul had been a mere savage master; but here was a master whose very tongue could excoriate him like Oom Paul's sjambok; whom, at bottom, he loved in his way as he had never loved anything; whom he had betrayed, not realizing the hideous nature of his deed; having argued that it was against England his treachery was directed, and that was a virtue in his eyes; not seeing what direct injury could come to Byng through it. He had not seen, he had not understood, he was still uncivilized; he had only in his veins the morality of the native, and he had tried to ruin his master's wife for his master's sake; and when he had finished with Fellowes as a traitor, he was ready to ruin his confederate--to kill him--perhaps did kill him!

"It's the only way to deal with you, Hottentot dog!"

The look in Krool's eyes only increased Byng's lust of punishment. What else was there to do? Without terrible scandal there was no other way to punish the traitor, but if there had been another way he would still have done this. This Krool understood; behind every command the Baas had ever given him this thing lay--the sjambok, the natural engine of authority.

Suddenly Byng said with a voice of almost guttural anger: "You dropped that letter on my bedroom floor--that letter, you understand? . . . Speak."

"I did it, Baas."

Byng was transformed. Slowly he laid down the sjambok, and as slowly took off his coat, his eyes meanwhile fastening those of the wretched

man before him. Then he took up the sjambok again.

"You know what I am going to do with you?"

"Yes, Baas."

It never occurred to Byng that Krool would resist; it did not occur to Krool that he could resist. Byng was the Baas, who at that moment was the Power immeasurable. There was only one thing to do--to obey.

"You were told to leave my house by Mrs. Byng, and you did not go."

"She was not my Baas."

"You would have done her harm, if you could?"

"So, Baas."

With a low cry Byng ran forward, the sjambok swung through the air, and the terrible whip descended on the crouching half-caste.

Krool gave one cry and fell back a little, but he made no attempt to resist.

Suddenly Byng went to a window and threw it open.

"You can jump from there or take the sjambok. Which?" he said with a passion not that of a man wholly sane. "Which?"

Krool's wild, sullen, trembling look sought the window, but he had no heart for that enterprise--thirty feet to the pavement below.

"The sjambok, Baas," he said.

Once again Byng moved forward on him, and once again Krool's cry rang out, but not so loud. It was like that of an animal in torture.

In the next room, Wallstein and Stafford and the others heard it, and understood. Whispering together they listened, and Stafford shrank away to the far side of the room; but more than one face showed pleasure in the sound of the whip and the moaning.

It went on and on.

Barry Whalen, however, was possessed of a kind of fear, and presently his face became troubled. This punishment was terrible. Byng might kill the man, and all would be as bad as could be. Stafford came to him.

"You had better go in," he said. "We ought to intervene. If you don't, I will. Listen...."

It was a strange sound to hear in this heart of civilization. It belonged to the barbaric places of the earth, where there was no law, where every pioneer was his own cad.

With set face Barry Whalen entered the room. Byng paused for an instant and looked at him with burning, glazed eyes that scarcely realized him.

"Open that door," he said, presently, and Barry Whalen opened the door which led into the big hall.

"Open all down to the street," Byng said, and Barry Whalen went forward quickly.

Like some wild beast Krool crouched and stumbled and moaned as he ran down the staircase, through the outer hall, while a servant with scared face saw Byng rain savage blows upon the hated figure.

On the pavement outside the house, Krool staggered, stumbled, and fell down; but he slowly gathered himself up, and turned to the doorway, where Byng stood panting with the sjambok in his hand.

"Baas!--Baas!" Krool said with livid face, and then he crept painfully away along the street wall.

A policeman crossed the road with a questioning frown and the apparent purpose of causing trouble, but Barry Whalen whispered in his ear, and told him to call that evening and he would hear all about it. Meanwhile a five-pound note in a quick palm was a guarantee of good faith.

Presently a half-dozen people began to gather near the door, but the benevolent policeman moved them on.

At the top of the staircase Jasmine met her husband. She shivered as he came up towards her.

"Will you come to me when you have finished your business?" she said, and she took the sjambok gently from his hand.

He scarcely realized her. He was in a dream; but he smiled at her, and nodded, and passed on to where the others awaited him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"THE BATTLE CRY OF FREEDOM"

Slowly Jasmine returned to her boudoir. Laying the sjambok on the table among the books in delicate bindings and the bowls of flowers, she stood and looked at it with confused senses for a long time. At last a wan smile stole to her lips, but it did not reach her eyes. They remained absorbed and searching, and were made painfully sad by the wide, dark lines under them. Her fair skin was fairer than ever, but it was delicately faded, giving her a look of pensiveness, while yet there was that in her carriage and at her mouth which suggested strength and will and new forces at work in her. She carried her head, weighted by its splendour of golden hair, as an Eastern woman carries a goulah of water. There was something pathetic yet self-reliant in the whole figure. The passion slumbering in the eyes, however, might at any moment burst forth in some wild relinquishment of control and self-restraint.

"He did what I should have liked to do," she said aloud. "We are not

so different, after all. He is primitive at bottom, and so am I. He gets carried away by his emotions, and so do I."

She took up the whip, examined it, felt its weight, and drew it with a swift jerk through the air.

"I did not even shrink when Krool came stumbling down the stairs, with this cutting his flesh," she said to herself. "Somehow it all seemed natural and right. What has come to me? Are all my finer senses dead? Am I just one of the crude human things who lived a million years ago, and who lives again as crude as those; with only the outer things changed? Then I wore the skins of wild animals, and now I do the same, just the same; with what we call more taste perhaps, because we have ceased to see the beauty in the natural thing."

She touched the little band of grey fur at the sleeve of her clinging velvet gown. "Just a little distance away--that is all."

Suddenly a light flashed up in her eyes, and her face flushed as though some one had angered her. She seized the whip again. "Yes, I could have seen him whipped to death before my eyes--the coward, the abject coward. He did not speak for me; he did not defend me; he did not deny. He let Ian think--death was too kind to him. How dared he hurt me so! . . . Death is so easy a way out, but he would not have taken it. No, no, no, it was not suicide; some one killed him. He could never have taken his own life--never. He had not the courage.... No; he died of poison or was strangled. Who did it? Who did it? Was it Rudyard? Was it. . . ? Oh, it wears me out--thinking, thinking, thinking!"

She sat down and buried her face in her hands. "I am doomed--doomed," she moaned. "I was doomed from the start. It must always have been so, whatever I did. I would do it again, whatever I did; I know I would do it again, being what I was. It was in my veins, in my blood from the start, from the very first days of my life."

All at once there flashed through her mind again, as on that night so many centuries ago, when she had slept the last sleep of her life as it was, Swinburne's lines on Baudelaire:

"There is no help for these things, none to mend and none to mar; Not all our songs, oh, friend, can make death clear Or make life durable...."

"There is no help for these things," she repeated with a sigh which seemed to tear her heart in twain. "All gone--all. What is there left to do? If death could make it better for any one, how easy! But everything would be known--somehow the world would know, and every one would suffer more. Not now--no, not now. I must live on, but not here. I must go away. I must find a place to go where Rudyard will not come. There is no place so far but it is not far enough. I am twenty-five, and all is over--all is done for me. I have nothing that I want to keep, there is nothing that I want to do except to go--to go and to be alone. Alone, always alone now. It is either that, or be Jezebel, or--"

The door opened, and the servant brought a card to her. "His Excellency, the Moravian ambassador," the footman said.

"Monsieur Mennaval?" she asked, mechanically, as though scarcely realizing what he had said.

"Yes, ma'am, Mr. Mennaval."

"Please say I am indisposed, and am sorry I cannot receive him to-day," she said.

"Very good, ma'am." The footman turned to go, then came back.

"Shall I tell the maid you want her?" he asked, respectfully.

"No, why should you?" she asked.

"I thought you looked a bit queer, ma'am," he responded, hastily. "I beg your pardon, ma'am."

She rewarded him with a smile. "Thank you, James, I think I should like her after all. Ask her to come at once."

When he had gone she leaned back and shut her eyes. For a moment she was perfectly motionless, then she sat up again and looked at the card in her hand.

"M. Mennaval--M. Mennaval," she said, with a note so cynical that it betrayed more than her previous emotion, to such a point of despair her mind had come.

M. Mennaval had played his part, had done his service, had called out from her every resource of coquetry and lure; and with wonderful art she had cajoled him till he had yielded to influence, and Ian had turned the key in the international lock. M. Mennaval had been used with great skill to help the man who was now gone from her forever, whom perhaps she would never see again; and who wanted never to see her again, never in all time or space. M. Mennaval had played his game for his own desire, and he had lost; but what had she gained where M. Mennaval had lost? She had gained that which now Ian despised, which he would willingly, so far as she was concerned, reject with contempt.... And yet, and yet, while Ian lived he must still be grateful to her that, by whatever means, she had helped him to do what meant so much to England. Yes, he could not wholly dismiss her from his mind; he must still say, "This she did for me--this thing, in itself not commendable, she did for me; and I took it for my country."

Her eyes were open, and her garden had been invaded by those revolutionaries of life and time, Nemesis, Penalty, Remorse. They marauded every sacred and secret corner of her mind and soul. They came with whips to scourge her. Nothing was private to her inner self now. Everything was arrayed against her. All life doubled backwards on her, blocking her path.

M. Mennaval--what did she care for him! Yet here he was at her door asking payment for the merchandise he had sold to her: his judgment, his reputation as a diplomatist, his freedom, the respect of the world--for how could the world respect a man at whom it laughed, a man who had hoped to be given the key to a secret door in a secret garden!

As Jasmine sat looking at the card, the footman entered again with a note.

"His Excellency's compliments," he said, and withdrew.

She opened the letter hesitatingly, held it in her hand for a moment without reading it, then, with an impulsive effort, did so. When she had finished, she gave a cry of anger and struck her tiny clinched hand upon her knee.

The note ran:

"Chere amie, you have so much indisposition in these days. It is all too vexing to your friends. The world will be surprised, if you allow a migraine to come between us. Indeed, it will be shocked. The world understands always so imperfectly, and I have no gift of explanation. Of course, I know the war has upset many, but I thought you could not be upset so easily--no, it cannot be the war; so I must try and think what it is. If I cannot think by tomorrow at five o'clock, I will call again to ask you. Perhaps the migraine will be better. But, if you will that migraine to be far away, it will fly, and then I shall be near. Is it not so? You will tell me to-morrow at five, will you not, belle amie?"

"A toi, M. M."

The words scorched her eyes. They angered her, scourged her. One of life's Revolutionaries was insolently ravaging the secret place where her pride dwelt. Pride--what pride had she now? Where was the room for pride or vanity? . . . And all the time she saw the face of a dead man down by the river--a face now beneath the sod. It flashed before her eyes at moments when she least could bear it, to agitate her soul.

M. Mennaval--how dare he write to her so! "Chere amie" and "A toi"--how strange the words looked now, how repulsive and strange! It did not seem possible that once before he had written such words to her. But never before had these epithets or others been accompanied by such meaning as his other words conveyed.

"I will not see him to-morrow. I will not see him ever again, if I can help it," she said bitterly, and trembling with agitation. "I shall go where I shall not be found. I will go to-night."

The door opened. Her maid entered. "You wanted me, madame?" asked the girl, in some excitement and very pale.

"Yes, what is the matter? Why so agitated?" Jasmine asked.

The maid's eyes were on the sjambok. She pointed to it. "It was that, madame. We are all agitated. It was terrible. One had never seen anything like that before in one's life, madame--never. It was like the days--yes, of slavery. It was like the galleys of Toulon in the old days. It was--"

"There, don't be so eloquent, Lablanche. What do you know of the galleys of Toulon or the days of slavery?"

"Madame, I have heard, I have read, I--"

"Yes, but did you love Krool so?"

The girl straightened herself with dramatic indignation. "Madame, that man, that creature, that toad--!"

"Then why so exercised? Were you so pained at his punishment? Were all the household so pained?"

"Every one hated him, madame," said the girl, with energy.

"Then let me hear no more of this impudent nonsense," Jasmine said, with decision.

"Oh, madame, to speak to me like this!" Tears were ready to do needful service.

"Do you wish to remain with me, Lablanche?"

"Ah, madame, but yes--"

"Then my head aches, and I don't want you to make it worse.... And, see, Lablanche, there is that grey walking-suit; also the mauve dressing-gown, made by Loison; take them, if you can make them fit you; and be good."

"Madame, how kind--ah, no one is like you, madame--!"

"Well, we shall see about that quite soon. Put out at once every gown of mine for me to see, and have trunks ready to pack immediately; but only three trunks, not more."

"Madame is going away?"

"Do as I say, Lablanche. We go to-night. The grey gown and the mauve dressing-gown that Loison made, you will look well in them. Quick, now, please."

In a flutter Lablanche left the room, her eyes gleaming.

She had had her mind on the grey suit for some time, but the mauve dressing-gown as well--it was too good to be true.

She almost ran into Lady Tynemouth's arms as the door opened. With a swift apology she sped away, after closing the door upon the visitor.

Jasmine rose and embraced her friend, and Lady Tynemouth subsided into a chair with a sigh.

"My dear Jasmine, you look so frail," she said. "A short time ago I feared you were going to blossom into too ripe fruit, now you look almost a little pinched. But it quite becomes you, mignon--quite. You have dark lines under your eyes, and that transparency of skin--it is quite too fetching. Are you glad to see me?"

"I would have seen no one to-day, no one, except you or Rudyard."

"Love and duty," said Lady Tynemouth, laughing, yet acutely alive to the something so terribly wrong, of which she had spoken to Ian Stafford.

"Why is it my duty to see you, Alice?" asked Jasmine, with the dry

glint in her tone which had made her conversation so pleasing to men.

"You clever girl, how you turn the tables on me," her friend replied, and then, seeing the sjambok on the table, took it up. "What is this formidable instrument? Are you flagellating the saints?"

"Not the saints, Alice."

"You don't mean to say you are going to scourge yourself?"

Then they both smiled--and both immediately sighed. Lady Tynemouth's sympathy was deeply roused for Jasmine, and she meant to try and win her confidence and to help her in her trouble, if she could; but she was full of something else at this particular moment, and she was not completely conscious of the agony before her.

"Have you been using this sjambok on Mennaval?" she asked with an attempt at lightness. "I saw him leaving as I came in. He looked rather dejected--or stormy, I don't quite know which."

"Does it matter which? I didn't see Mennaval today."

"Then no wonder he looked dejected and stormy. But what is the history of this instrument of torture?" she asked, holding up the sjambok again.

"Krool."

"Krool! Jasmine, you surely don't mean to say that you--"

"Not I--it was Rudyard. Krool was insolent--a half-caste, you know."

"Krool--why, yes, it was he I saw being helped into a cab by a policeman just down there in Piccadilly. You don't mean that Rudyard--"

She pushed the sjambok away from her.

"Yes--terribly."

"Then I suppose the insolence was terrible enough to justify it."

"Quite, I think." Jasmine's voice was calm.

"But of course it is not usual--in these parts."

"Rudyard is not usual in these parts, or Krool either. It was a touch of the Vaal."

Lady Tynemouth gave a little shudder. "I hope it won't become fashionable. We are altogether too sensational nowadays. But, seriously, Jasmine, you are not well. You must do something. You must have a change."

"I am going to do something--to have a change."

"That's good. Where are you going, dear?"

"South.... And how are you getting on with your hospital-ship?"

Lady Tynemouth threw up her hands. "Jasmine, I'm in despair. I had set my heart upon it. I thought I could do it easily, and I haven't done it, after trying as hard as can be. Everything has gone wrong, and now Tynie cables I mustn't go to South Africa. Fancy a husband forbidding a wife to come to him."

"Well, perhaps it's better than a husband forbidding his wife to leave him."

"Jasmine, I believe you would joke if you were dying."

"I am dying."

There was that in the tone of Jasmine's voice which gave her friend a start. She eyed her suddenly with a great anxiety.

"And I'm not jesting," Jasmine added, with a forced smile. "But tell me what has gone wrong with all your plans. You don't mind what Tynemouth says. Of course you will do as you like."

"Of course; but still Tynie has never 'issued instructions' before, and if there was any time I ought to humour him it is now. He's so intense about the war! But I can't explain everything on paper to him, so I've written to say I'm going to South Africa to explain, and that I'll come back by the next boat, if my reasons are not convincing."

In other circumstances Jasmine would have laughed. "He will find you convincing," she said, meaningly.

"I said if he found my reasons convincing."

"You will be the only reason to him."

"My dear Jasmine, you are really becoming sentimental. Tynie would blush to discover himself being silly over me. We get on so well because we left our emotions behind us when we married."

"Yours, I know, you left on the Zambesi," said Jasmine, deliberately.

A dull fire came into Lady Tynemouth's eyes, and for an instant there was danger of Jasmine losing a friend she much needed; but Lady Tynemouth had a big heart, and she knew that her friend was in a mood when anything was possible, or everything impossible.

So she only smiled, and said, easily: "Dearest Jasmine, that umbrella episode which made me love Ian Stafford for ever and ever without even amen came after I was married, and so your pin doesn't prick, not a weeny bit. No, it isn't Tynie that makes me sad. It's the Climbers who won't pay."

"The Climbers? You want money for--"

"Yes, the hospital-ship; and I thought they'd jump at it; but they've all been jumping in other directions. I asked the Steuvenfeldts, the Boulters, the Felix Fowles, the Brutons, the Sheltons, and that fellow Mackerel, who has so much money he doesn't know what to do with it and twenty others; and Mackerel was the only one who would give me anything at all large. He gave me ten thousand pounds. But I want

fifty--fifty, my beloved. I'm simply broken-hearted. It would do so much good, and I could manage the thing so well, and I could get other splendid people to help me to manage it--there's Effie Lyndhall and Mary Meacham. The Mackerel wanted to come along, too, but I told him he could come out and fetch us back--that there mustn't be any scandal while the war was on. I laugh, my dear, but I could cry my eyes out. I want something to do--I've always wanted something to do. I've always been sick of an idle life, but I wouldn't do a hundred things I might have done. This thing I can do, however, and, if I did it, some of my debt to the world would be paid. It seems to me that these last fifteen years in England have been awful. We are all restless; we all have been going, going--nowhere; we have all been doing, doing--nothing; we have all been thinking, thinking, thinking--of ourselves. And I've been a playbody like the rest; I've gone with the Climbers because they could do things for me; I've wanted more and more of everything--more gadding, more pleasure, more excitement. It's been like a brass-band playing all the time, my life this past ten years. I'm sick of it. It's only some big thing that can take me out of it. I've got to make some great plunge, or in a few years more I'll be a middle-aged peeress with nothing left but a double chin, a tongue for gossip, and a string of pearls. There must be a bouleversement of things as they are, or good-bye to everything except emptiness. Don't you see, Jasmine, dearest?"

"Yes yes, I see." Jasmine got up, went to her desk, opened a drawer, took out a book, and began to write hastily. "Go on," she said as she wrote; "I can hear what you are saying."

"But are you really interested?"

"Even Tynemouth would find you interesting and convincing. Go on."

"I haven't anything more to say, except that nothing lies between me and flagellation and the sack cloth,"--she toyed with the sjambok--"except the Climbers; and they have failed me. They won't play--or pay."

Jasmine rose from the desk and came forward with a paper in her hand. "No, they have not failed you, Alice," she said, gently. "The Climbers seldom really disappoint you. The thing is, you must know how to talk to them, to say the right thing, the flattering, the tactful, and the nice sentimental thing,--they mostly have middle-class sentimentality--and then you get what you want. As you do now. There...."

She placed in her friend's hand a long, narrow slip of paper. Lady Tynemouth looked astonished, gazed hard at the paper, then sprang to her feet, pale and agitated.

"Jasmine--you--this--sixty thousand pounds!" she cried. "A cheque for sixty thousand pounds--Jasmine!"

There was a strange brilliance in Jasmine's eyes, a hectic flush on her cheek.

"It must not be cashed for forty-eight hours; but after that the money will be there."

Lady Tynemouth caught Jasmine's shoulders in her trembling yet strong

fingers, and looked into the wild eyes with searching inquiry and solicitude.

"But, Jasmine, it isn't possible. Will Rudyard--can you afford it?"

"That will not be Rudyard's money which you will get. It will be all my own."

"But you yourself are not rich. Sixty thousand pounds--why?"

"It is because it is a sacrifice to me that I give it; because it is my own; because it is two-thirds of what I possess. And if all is needed before we have finished, then all shall go."

Alice Tynemouth still held the shoulders, still gazed into the eyes which burned and shone, which seemed to look beyond this room into some world of the soul or imagination. "Jasmine, you are not crazy, are you?" she asked, excitedly. "You will not repent of this? It is not a sudden impulse?"

"Yes, it is a sudden impulse; it came to me all at once. But when it came I knew it was the right thing, the only thing to do. I will not repent of it. Have no fear. It is final. It is sure. It means that, like you, I have found a rope to drag myself out of this stream which sweeps me on to the rapids."

"Jasmine, do you mean that you will--that you are coming, too?"

"Yes, I am going with you. We will do it together. You shall lead, and I shall help. I have a gift for organization. My grandfather? he--"

"All the world knows that. If you have anything of his gift, we shall not fail. We shall feel that we are doing something for our country--and, oh, so much for ourselves! And we shall be near our men. Tynie and Ruddy Byng will be out there, and we shall be ready for anything if necessary. But Rudyard, will he approve?" She held up the cheque.

Jasmine made a passionate gesture. "There are times when we must do what something in us tells us to do, no matter what the consequences. I am myself. I am not a slave. If I take my own way in the pleasures of life, why should I not take it in the duties and the business of life?"

Her eyes took on a look of abstraction, and her small hand closed on the large, capable hand of her friend. "Isn't work the secret of life? My grandfather used to say it was. Always, always, he used to say to me, 'Do something, Jasmine. Find a work to do, and do it. Make the world look at you, not for what you seem to be, but for what you do. Work cures nearly every illness and nearly every trouble'--that is what he said. And I must work or go mad. I tell you I must work, Alice. We will work together out there where great battles will be fought."

A sob caught her in the throat, and Alice Tynemouth wrapped her round with tender arms. "It will do you good, darling," she said, softly. "It will help you through--through it all, whatever it is."

For an instant Jasmine felt that she must empty out her heart; tell

the inner tale of her struggle; but the instant of weakness passed as suddenly as it came, and she only said--repeating Alice Tynemouth's words: "Yes, through it all, through it all, whatever it is." Then she added: "I want to do something big. I can, I can. I want to get out of this into the open world. I want to fight. I want to balance things somehow--inside myself...."

All at once she became very quiet. "But we must do business like business people. This money: there must be a small committee of business men, who--"

Alice Tynemouth finished the sentence for her. "Who are not Climbers?"

"Yes. But the whole organization must be done by ourselves--all the practical, unfinancial work. The committee will only be like careful trustees."

There was a new light in Jasmine's eyes. She felt for the moment that life did not end in a cul de sac. She knew that now she had found a way for Rudyard and herself to separate without disgrace, without humiliation to him. She could see a few steps ahead. When she gave Lablanche instructions to put out her clothes a little while before, she did not know what she was going to do; but now she knew. She knew how she could make it easier for Rudyard when the inevitable hour came,--and it was here--which should see the end of their life together. He need not now sacrifice himself so much for her sake.

She wanted to be alone, and, as if divining her thought, Lady Tynemouth embraced her, and a moment later there was no sound in the room save the ticking of the clock and the crackle of the fire.

How silent it was! The world seemed very far away. Peace seemed to have taken possession of the place, and Jasmine's stillness as she sat by the fire staring into the embers was a part of it. So lost was she that she was not conscious of an opening door and of a footstep. She was roused by a low voice.

"Jasmine!"

She did not start. It was as though there had come a call, for which she had waited long, and she appeared to respond slowly to it, as one would to a summons to the scaffold. There was no outward agitation now, there was only a cold stillness which seemed little to belong to the dainty figure which had ever been more like a decoration than a living utility in the scheme of things. The crisis had come which she had dreaded yet invited--that talk which they two must have before they went their different ways. She had never looked Rudyard in the eyes direct since the day when Adrian Fellowes died. They had met, but never quite alone; always with some one present, either the servants or some other. Now they were face to face.

On Rudyard's lips was a faint smile, but it lacked the old bonhomie which was part of his natural equipment; and there were still sharp, haggard traces of the agitation which had accompanied the expulsion of Krool.

For an instant the idea possessed her that she would tell him everything there was to tell, and face the consequences, no matter what they might be. It was not in her nature to do things by halves,

and since catastrophe was come, her will was to drink the whole cup to the dregs. She did not want to spare herself. Behind it all lay something of that terrible wilfulness which had controlled her life so far. It was the unlovely soul of a great pride. She did not want to be forgiven for anything. She did not want to be condoned. There was a spirit of defiance which refused to accept favours, preferring punishment to the pity or the pardon which stooped to make it easier for her. It was a dangerous pride, and in the mood of it she might throw away everything, with an abandonment and recklessness only known to such passionate natures.

The mood came on her all at once as she stood and looked at Ruydard. She read, or she thought she read in his eyes, in his smile, the superior spirit condescending to magnanimity, to compassion; and her whole nature was instantly up in arms. She almost longed on the instant to strip herself bare, as it were, and let him see her as she really was, or as, in her despair, she thought she really was. The mood in which she had talked to Lady Tynemouth was gone, and in its place a spirit of revolt was at work. A certain sullenness which Ruydard and no one else had ever seen came into her eyes, and her lips became white with an ominous determination. She forgot him and all that he would suffer if she told him the whole truth; and the whole truth would, in her passion, become far more than the truth: she was again the egoist, the centre of the universe. What happened to her was the only thing which mattered in all the world. So it had ever been; and her beauty and her wit and her youth and the habit of being spoiled had made it all possible, without those rebuffs and that confusion which fate provides sooner or later for the egoist.

"Well," she said, sharply, "say what you wish to say. You have wanted to say it badly. I am ready."

He was stunned by what seemed to him the anger and the repugnance in her tone.

"You remember you asked me to come, Jasmine, when you took the sjambok from me."

He nodded towards the table where it lay, then went forward and picked it up, his face hardening as he did so.

Like a pendulum her mood swung back. By accident he had said the one thing which could have moved her, changed her at the moment. The savage side of him appealed to her. What he lacked in brilliance and the lighter gifts of raillery and eloquence and mental give-and-take, he had balanced by his natural forces--from the power-house, as she had called it long ago. Pity, solicitude, the forced smile, magnanimity, she did not want in this black mood. They would have made her cruelly audacious, and her temper would have known no license; but now, suddenly, she had a vision of him as he stamped down the staircase, his coat off, laying the sjambok on the shoulders of the man who had injured her so, who hated her so, and had done so over all the years. It appealed to her.

In her heart of hearts she was sure he had done it directly or indirectly for her sake; and that was infinitely more to her than that he should stoop from the heights to pick her up. He was what he was because Heaven had made him so; and she was what she was because Heaven had forgotten to make her otherwise; and he could not know or

understand how she came to do things that he would not do. But she could know and understand why his hand fell on Krool like that of Cain on Abel. She softened, changed at once.

"Yes, I remember," she said. "I've been upset. Krool was insolent, and I ordered him to go. He would not."

"I've been a fool to keep him all these years. I didn't know what he was--a traitor, the slimmest of the slim, a real Hottentot-Boer. I was pigheaded about him, because he seemed to care so much about me. That counts for much with the most of us."

"Alice Tynemouth saw a policeman help him into a cab in Piccadilly and take him away. Will there be trouble?"

A grim look crossed his face. "I think not," he responded. "There are reasons. He has been stealing information for years, and sending it to Kruger, he and--"

He stopped short, and into his face came a look of sullen reticence.

"Yes, he and--and some one else? Who else?" Her face was white. She had a sudden intuition.

He met her eyes. "Adrian Fellowes--what Fellowes knew, Krool knew, and one way or another, by one means or another, Fellowes knew a great deal."

The knowledge of Adrian Fellowes' treachery and its full significance had hardly come home to him, even when he punished Krool, so shaken was he by the fact that the half-caste had been false to him. Afterwards, however, as the Partners all talked together up-stairs, the enormity of the dead man's crime had fastened on him, and his brain had been stunned by the terrible thought that directly or indirectly Jasmine had abetted the crime. Things he had talked over with her, and with no one else, had got to Kruger's knowledge, as the information from South Africa showed. She had at least been indiscreet, had talked to Fellowes with some freedom or he could not have known what he did. But directly, knowingly abetted Fellowes? Of course, she had not done that; but her foolish confidences had abetted treachery, had wronged him, had helped to destroy his plans, had injured England.

He had savagely punished Krool for insolence to her and for his treachery, but a new feeling had grown up in him in the last half-hour. Under the open taunts of his colleagues, a deep resentment had taken possession of him that his work, so hard to do, so important and critical, should have been circumvented by the indiscretions of his wife.

Upon her now this announcement came with crushing force. Adrian Fellowes had gained from her--she knew it all too well now--that which had injured her husband; from which, at any rate, he ought to have been immune. Her face flushed with a resentment far greater than that of Rudyard's, and it was heightened by a humiliation which overwhelmed her. She had been but a tool in every sense, she, Jasmine Byng, one who ruled, had been used like a--she could not form the comparison in her mind--by a dependent, a hanger-on of her husband's bounty; and it was through her, originally, that he had been given a real chance in

life by Rudyard.

"I am sorry," she said, calmly, as soon as she could get her voice.
"I was the means of your employing him."

"That did not matter," he said, rather nervously. "There was no harm in that, unless you knew his character before he came to me."

"You think I did?"

"I cannot think so. It would have been too ruthless--too wicked."

She saw his suffering, and it touched her. "Of course I did not know that he could do such a thing--so shameless. He was a low coward. He did not deserve decent burial," she added. "He had good fortune to die as he did."

"How did he die?" Rudyard asked her, with a face so unlike what it had always been, so changed by agitation, that it scarcely seemed his. His eyes were fixed on hers.

She met them resolutely. Did he ask her in order to see if she had any suspicion of himself? Had he done it? If he had, there would be some mitigation of her suffering. Or was it Ian Stafford who had done it? One or the other--but which?

"He died without being made to suffer," she said. "Most people who do wrong have to suffer."

"But they live on," he said, bitterly.

"That is no great advantage unless you want to live," she replied. "Do you know how he died?" she added, after a moment, with sharp scrutiny.

He shook his head and returned her scrutiny with added poignancy. "It does not matter. He ceases to do any more harm. He did enough."

"Yes, quite enough," she said, with a withered look, and going over to her writing-table, stood looking at him questioningly. He did not speak again, however.

Presently she said, very quietly, "I am going away."

"I do not understand."

"I am going to work."

"I understand still less."

She took from the writing-table her cheque-book, and handed it to him. He looked at it, and read the counterfoil of the cheque she had given to Alice Tynemouth.

He was bewildered. "What does this mean?" he asked.

"It is for a hospital-ship."

"Sixty thousand pounds! Why, it is nearly all you have."

"It is two-thirds of what I have."

"Why--in God's name, why?"

"To buy my freedom," she answered, bitterly.

"From what?"

"From you."

He staggered back and leaned heavily against a bookcase.

"Freedom from me!" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

He had had terribly bitter and revengeful feelings during the last hour, but all at once his real self emerged, the thing that was deepest in him. "Freedom from me? Has it come to that?"

"Yes, absolutely. Do you remember the day you first said to me that something was wrong with it all,--the day that Ian Stafford dined after his return from abroad? Well, it has been all wrong--cruelly wrong. We haven't made the best of things together, when everything was with us to do so. I have spoiled it all. It hasn't been what you expected."

"Nor what you expected?" he asked, sharply.

"Nor what I expected; but you are not to blame for that."

Suddenly all he had ever felt for her swept through his being, and sullenness fled away. "You have ceased to love me, then.... See, that is the one thing that matters, Jasmine. All else disappears beside that. Do you love me? Do you love me still? Do you love me, Jasmine? Answer that."

He looked like the ghost of his old dead self, pleading to be recognized.

His misery oppressed her. "What does one know of one's self in the midst of all this--of everything that has nothing to do with love?" she asked.

What she might have said in the dark mood which was coming on her again it is hard to say, but from beneath the window of the room which looked on Park Lane, there came the voice of a street-minstrel, singing to a travelling piano, played by sympathetic fingers, the song:

"She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps, And lovers around her are sighing--"

The simple pathos of the song had nothing to do with her own experience or her own case, but the flood of it swept through her veins like tears. She sank into a chair and listened for a moment with eyes shining, then she sprang up in an agitation which made her tremble and her face go white.

"No, no, no, Rudyard, I do not love you," she said, swiftly. "And because I do not love you, I will not stay. I never loved you, never

truly loved you at any time. I never knew myself--that is all that I can say. I never was awake till now. I never was wholly awake till I saw you driving Krool into the street with the sjambok."

She flung up her hands. "For God's sake, let me be truthful at last. I don't want to hurt you--I have hurt you enough, but I do not love you; and I must go. I am going with Alice Tynemouth. We are going together to do something. Maybe I shall learn what will make life possible."

He reached out his arms towards her with a sudden tenderness.

"No, no, no, do not touch me," she cried. "Do not come near me. I must be alone now, and from now on and on.... You do not understand, but I must be alone. I must work it out alone, whatever it is."

She got up with a quick energy, and went over to the writing-table again. "It may take every penny I have got, but I shall do it, because it is the thing I feel I must do."

"You have millions, Jasmine," he said, in a low, appealing voice.

She looked at him almost fiercely again. "No, I have what is my own, my very own, and no more," she responded, bitterly. "You will do your work, and I will do mine. You will stay here. There will be no scandal, because I shall be going with Alice Tynemouth, and the world will not misunderstand."

"There will be no scandal, because I am going, too," he said, firmly.

"No, no, you cannot, must not, go," she urged.

"I am going to South Africa in two days," he replied. "Stafford was going with me, but he cannot go for a week or so. He will help you, I am sure, with forming your committee and arranging, if you will insist on doing this thing. He is still up-stairs there with the rest of them. I will get him down now, I--"

"Ian Stafford is here--in this house?" she asked, with staring eyes. What inconceivable irony it all was! She could have shrieked with that laughter which is more painful far than tears.

"Yes, he is up-stairs. I made him come and help us--he knows the international game. He will help you, too. He is a good friend--you will know how good some day."

She went white and leaned against the table.

"No, I shall not need him," she said. "We have formed our committee."

"But when I am gone, he can advise you, he can--"

"Oh--oh!" she murmured, and swayed forward, fainting.

He caught her and lowered her gently into a chair.

"You are only mad," he whispered to ears which heard not as he bent over her. "You will be sane some day."

BOOK IV

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MENACE OF THE MOUNTAIN

Far away, sharply cutting the ether, rise the great sterile peaks and ridges. Here a stark, bare wall like a prison which shuts in a city of men forbidden the blithe world of sun and song and freedom; yonder, a giant of a lost world stretched out in stony ease, sleeping on, while over his grey quiet, generations of men pass. First came savage, warring, brown races alien to each other; then following, white races with faces tanned and burnt by the sun, and smothered in unkempt beard and hair--men restless and coarse and brave, and with ancient sins upon them; but with the Bible in their hands and the language of the prophets on their lips; with iron will, with hatred as deep as their race-love is strong; they with their cattle and their herds, and the clacking wagons carrying homes and fortunes, whose women were housewives and warriors too. Coming after these, men of fairer aspect, adventurous, self-willed, intent to make cities in the wilderness; to win open spaces for their kinsmen, who had no room to swing the hammer in the workshops of their far-off northern island homes; or who, having room, stood helpless before the furnaces where the fires had left only the ashes of past energies.

Up there, these mountains which, like Marathon, look on the sea. But lower the gaze from the austere hills, slowly to the plains below. First the grey of the mountains, turning to brown, then the bare bronze rock giving way to a tumbled wilderness of boulders, where lizards lie in the sun, where the meerkat startles the gazelle. Then the bronze merging into a green so deep and strong that it resembles a blanket spread upon the uplands, but broken by kopjes, shelterless and lonely, rising here and there like watch-towers. After that, below and still below, the flat and staring plain, through which runs an ugly rift turning and twisting like a snake, and moving on and on, till lost in the arc of other hills away to the east and the south: a river in the waste, but still only a muddy current stealing between banks baked and sterile, a sinister stream, giving life to the veld, as some gloomy giver of good gifts would pay a debt of atonement.

On certain Dark Days of 1899-1900, if you had watched these turgid waters flow by, your eyes would have seen tinges of red like blood; and following the stain of red, gashed lifeless things, which had been torn from the ranks of sentient beings.

Whereupon, lifting your eyes from the river, you would have seen the answer to your question--masses of men mounted and unmounted, who moved, or halted, or stood like an animal with a thousand legs controlled by one mind. Or again you would have observed those myriad masses plunging across the veld, still in cohering masses, which shook and broke and scattered, regathering again, as though drawn by a magnet, but leaving stark remnants in their wake.

Great columns of troops which had crossed the river and pushed on into a zone of fierce fire, turn and struggle back again across the stream; other thousands of men, who had not crossed, succour their wounded, and retreat steadily, bitterly to places of safety, the victims of blunders from which come the bloody punishment of valour.

Beyond the grey mountains were British men and women waiting for succour from forces which poured death in upon them from the malevolent kopjes, for relief from the ravages of disease and hunger. They waited in a straggling town of the open plain circled by threatening hills, where the threat became a blow, and the blow was multiplied a million times. Gaunt, fighting men sought to appease the craving of starvation by the boiled carcasses of old horses; in caves and dug-outs, feeble women, with undying courage, kept alive the flickering fires of life in their children; and they smiled to cheer the tireless, emaciated warriors who went out to meet death, or with a superior yet careful courage stayed to receive or escape it.

When night came, across the hills and far away in the deep blue, white shaking streams of light poured upward, telling the besieged forces over there at Lordkop that rescue would come, that it was moving on to the mountain. How many times had this light in the sky flashed the same grave pledge in the mystic code of the heliograph, "We are gaining ground--we will reach you soon." How many times, however, had the message also been, "Not yet--but soon."

Men died in this great camp from wounds and from fever, and others went mad almost from sheer despair; yet whenever the Master Player called, they sprang to their places with a new-born belief that he who had been so successful in so many long-past battles would be right in the end with his old rightness, though he had been wrong so often on the Dreitval.

Others there were who were sick of the world and wished "to be well out of it"--as they said to themselves. Some had been cruelly injured, and desire of life was dead in them; others had given injury, and remorse had slain peace. Others still there were who, having done evil all their lives, knew that they could not retrace their steps, and yet shrank from a continuance of the old bad things.

Some indeed, in the red futile sacrifice, had found what they came to find; but some still were left whose recklessness did not avail. Comrades fell beside them, but, unscathed, they went on fighting. Injured men were carried in hundreds to the hospitals, but no wounds brought them low. Bullets were sprayed around them, but none did its work for them. Shells burst near, yet no savage shard mutilated their bodies.

Of these was Ian Stafford.

Three times he had been in the fore-front of the fight where Death came sweeping down the veld like rain, but It passed him by. Horses and men fell round his guns, yet he remained uninjured.

He was patient. If Death would not hasten to meet him, he would wait. Meanwhile, he would work while he could, but with no thought beyond the day, no vision of the morrow.

He was one of the machines of war. He was close to his General, he was the beloved of his men, still he was the man with no future; though he studied the campaign with that thoroughness which had marked his last years in diplomacy.

He was much among his own wounded, much with others who were comforted by his solicitude, by the courage of his eye, and the grasp of his firm, friendly hand. It was at what the soldiers called the Stay Awhile Hospital that he came in living touch again with the life he had left behind.

He knew that Rudyard Byng had come to South Africa; but he knew no more. He knew that Jasmine had, with Lady Tynemouth, purchased a ship and turned it into a hospital at a day's notice; but as to whether these two had really come to South Africa, and harboured at the Cape, or Durban, he had no knowledge. He never looked at the English newspapers which arrived at Dreitval River. He was done with that old world in which he once worked; he was concerned only for this narrow field where an Empire's fate was being solved.

Night, the dearest friend of the soldier, had settled on the veld. A thousand fires were burning, and there were no sounds save the murmuring voices of myriads of men, and the stamp of hoofs where the Cavalry and Mounted Infantry horses were picketed. Food and fire, the priceless comfort of a blanket on the ground, and a saddle or kit for a pillow gave men compensation for all the hardships and dangers of the day; and they gave little thought to the morrow.

The soldier lives in the present. His rifle, his horse, his boots, his blanket, the commissariat, a dry bit of ground to sleep on--these are the things which occupy his mind. His heroism is incidental, the commonplace impulse of the moment. He does things because they are there to do, not because some great passion, some exaltation, seizes him. His is the real simple life. So it suddenly seemed to Stafford as he left his tent, after he had himself inspected every man and every horse in his battery that lived through the day of death, and made his way towards the Stay Awhile Hospital.

"This is the true thing," he said to himself as he gazed at the wide camp. He turned his face here and there in the starlight, and saw human life that but now was moving in the crash of great guns, the shrieking of men terribly wounded, the agony of mutilated horses, the bursting of shells, the hissing scream of the pom-pom, and the discordant cries of men fighting an impossible fight.

"There is no pretense here," he reflected. "It is life reduced down to the bare elements. There is no room for the superficial thing. It's all business. It's all stark human nature."

At that moment his eye caught one of those white messages of the sky flashing the old bitter promise, "We shall reach you soon." He forgot himself, and a great spirit welled up in him.

"Soon!" The light in the sky shot its message over the hills.

That was it--the present, not the past. Here was work, the one thing left to do.

"And it has to be done," he said aloud, as he walked on swiftly, a

spring to his footstep. Presently he mounted and rode away across the veld. Buried in his thoughts, he was only subconsciously aware of what he saw until, after near an hour's riding, he pulled rein at the door of the Stay Awhile Hospital, which was some miles in the rear of the main force.

As he entered, a woman in a nurse's garb passed him swiftly. He scarcely looked at her; he was only conscious that she was in great haste. Her eyes seemed looking at some inner, hidden thing, and, though they glanced at him, appeared not to see him or to realize more than that some one was passing. But suddenly, to both, after they had passed, there came an arrest of attention. There was a consciousness, which had nothing to do with the sight of the eyes, that a familiar presence had gone by. Each turned quickly, and their eyes came back from regarding the things of the imagination, and saw each other face to face. The nurse gave an exclamation of pleasure and ran forward.

Stafford held out a hand. It seemed to him, as he did it, that it stretched across a great black gulf and found another hand in the darkness beyond.

"Al'mah!" he said, in a voice of protest as of companionship.

Of all those he had left behind, this was the one being whom to meet was not disturbing. He wished to encounter no one of that inner circle of his tragic friendship; but he realized that Al'mah had had her tragedy too, and that her suffering could not be less than his own. The same dark factor had shadowed the lives of both. Adrian Fellowes had injured them both through the same woman, had shaken, if not shattered, the fabric of their lives. However much they two were blameworthy, they had been sincere, they had been honourable in their dishonour, they had been "falsely true." They were derelicts of life, with the comradeship of despair as a link between them.

"Al'mah," he said again, gently. Then, with a bitter humour, he added, "You here--I thought you were a prima donna!"

The flicker of a smile crossed her odd, fine, strong face. "This is grand opera," she said. "It is the Nibelungen Ring of England."

"To end in the Twilight of the Gods?" he rejoined with a hopeless kind of smile.

They turned to the outer door of the hospital and stepped into the night. For a moment they stood looking at the great camp far away to right and left, and to the lone mountains yonder, where the Boer commandoes held the passes and trained their merciless armament upon all approaches. Then he said at last: "Why have you come here? You had your work in England."

"What is my work?" she asked.

"To heal the wounded," he answered.

"I am trying to do that," she replied.

"You are trying to heal bodies, but it is a bigger, greater thing to heal the wounded mind."

"I am trying to do that too. It is harder than the other."

"Whose minds are you trying to heal?" he questioned, gently.

"'Physician heal thyself' was the old command, wasn't it? But that is harder still."

"Must one always be a saint to do a saintly thing?" he asked.

"I am not clever," she replied, "and I can't make phrases. But must one always be a sinner to do a wicked thing? Can't a saint do a wicked thing, and a sinner do a good thing without being called the one or the other?"

"I don't think you need apologize for not being able to make phrases. I suppose you'd say there is neither absolute saintliness nor absolute wickedness, but that life is helplessly composite of both, and that black really may be white. You know the old phrase, 'Killing no murder.'"

She seemed to stiffen, and her lips set tightly for a minute; then, as though by a great effort, she laughed bitterly.

"Murder isn't always killing," she replied. "Don't you remember the protest in Macbeth, 'Time was, when the brains were out the man would die?'" Then, with a little quick gesture towards the camp, she added, "When you think of to-day, doesn't it seem that the brains are out, and yet that the man still lives? I'm not a soldier, and this awful slaughter may be the most wonderful tactics, but it's all beyond my little mind."

"Your littleness is not original enough to attract notice," he replied with kindly irony. "There is almost an epidemic of it. Let us hope we shall have an antidote soon."

There was a sudden cry from inside the hospital. Al'mah shut her eyes for a moment, clinched her fingers, and became very pale; then she recovered herself, and turned her face towards the door, as though waiting for some one to come out.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Some bad case?"

"Yes--very bad," she replied.

"One you've been attending?"

"Yes."

"What arm--the artillery?" he asked with sudden interest.

"Yes, the artillery."

He turned towards the door of the hospital again. "One of my men? What battery? Do you know?"

"Not yours--Schiller's."

"Schiller's! A Boer?"

She nodded. "A Boer spy, caught by Boer bullets as he was going back."

"When was that?"

"This morning early."

"The little business at Wortmann's Drift?"

She nodded. "Yes, there."

"I don't quite understand. Was he in our lines--a Boer spy?"

"Yes. But he wore British uniform, he spoke English. He was an Englishman once."

Suddenly she came up close to him, and looked into his face steadily. "I will tell you all," she said scarce above a whisper. "He came to spy, but he came also to see his wife. She had written to ask him not to join the Boers, as he said he meant to do; or, if he had, to leave them and join his own people. He came, but not to join his fellow-countrymen. He came to get money from his wife; and he came to spy."

An illuminating thought shot into Stafford's mind. He remembered something that Byng once told him.

"His wife is a nurse?" he asked in a low tone.

"She is a nurse."

"She knew, then, that he was a spy?" he asked.

"Yes, she knew. I suppose she ought to be tried by court-martial. She did not expose him. She gave him a chance to escape. But he was shot as he tried to reach the Boer lines."

"And was brought back here to his wife--to you! Did he let them"--he nodded towards the hospital--"know he was your husband?"

When she spoke again her voice showed strain, but it did not tremble. "Of course. He would not spare me. He never did. It was always like that."

He caught her hand in his. "You have courage enough for a hundred," he said.

"I have suffered enough for a hundred," she responded.

Again that sharp cry rang out, and again she turned anxiously towards the door.

"I came to South Africa on the chance of helping him in some way," she replied. "It came to me that he might need me."

"You paid the price of his life once to Kruger--after the Raid, I've heard," he said.

"Yes, I owed him that, and as much more as was possible," she responded with a dark, pained look.

"His life is in danger--an operation?" he questioned.

"Yes. There is one chance; but they could not give him an anaesthetic, and they would not let me stay with him. They forced me away--out here." She appeared to listen again. "That was his voice--that crying," she added presently.

"Wouldn't it be better he should go? If he recovers there would only be--"

"Oh yes, to be tried as a spy--a renegade Englishman! But he would rather live in spite of that, if it was only for an hour."

"To love life so much as that--a spy!" Stafford reflected.

"Not so much love of life as fear of--" She stopped short.

"To fear--silence and peace!" he remarked darkly, with a shrug of his shoulders. Then he added: "Tell me, if he does not die, and if--if he is pardoned by any chance, do you mean to live with him again?"

A bitter laugh broke from her. "How do I know? What does any woman know what she will do until the situation is before her! She may mean to do one thing and do the complete opposite. She may mean to hate, and will end by loving. She may mean to kiss and will end by killing. She may kiss and kill too all in one moment, and still not be inconsistent. She would have the logic of a woman. How do I know what I would do--what I will do!"

The door of the hospital opened. A surgeon came out, and seeing Al'mah, moved towards the two. Stafford went forward hurriedly, but Al'mah stood like one transfixed. There was a whispered word, and then Stafford came back to her.

"You will not need to do anything," he said.

"He is gone--like that!" she whispered in an awed voice. "Death, death--so many die!" She shuddered.

Stafford passed her arm through his, and drew her towards the door of the hospital.

A half-hour later Stafford emerged again from the hospital, his head bent in thought. He rode slowly back to his battery, unconscious of the stir of life round him, of the shimmering white messages to the besieged town beyond the hills. He was thinking of the tragedy of the woman he had left tearless and composed beside the bedside of the man who had so vilely used her. He was reflecting how her life, and his own, and the lives of at least three others, were so tangled together that what twisted the existence of one disturbed all. In one sense the woman he had just left in the hospital was nothing to him, and yet now she seemed to be the only living person to whom he was drawn.

He remembered the story he had once heard in Vienna of a man and a woman who both had suffered betrayal, who both had no longer a single illusion left, who had no love for each other at all, in whom indeed love was dead--a mangled murdered thing; and yet who went away to Corfu together, and there at length found a pathway out of despair in

the depths of the sea. Between these two there had never been even the faint shadow of romance or passion; but in the terrible mystery of pain and humiliation, they had drawn together to help each other, through a breach of all social law, in pity of each other. He apprehended the real meaning of the story when Vienna was alive with it, but he understood far, far better now.

A pity as deep as any feeling he had ever known had come to him as he stood with Al'mah beside the bed of her dead renegade man; and it seemed to him that they two also might well bury themselves in the desert together, and minister to each other's despair. It was only the swift thought of a moment, which faded even as it saw the light; but it had its origin in that last flickering sense of human companionship which dies in the atmosphere of despair. "Every man must live his dark hours alone," a broken-down actor once said to Stafford as he tried to cheer him when the last thing he cared for had been taken from him--his old, faded, misshapen wife; when no faces sent warm glances to him across the garish lights. "It is no use," this Roscius had said, "every man must live his dark hours alone."

That very evening, after the battle of the Dreitval, Jigger, Stafford's trumpeter, had said a thing to him which had struck a chord that rang in empty chambers of his being. He had found Jigger sitting disconsolate beside a gun, which was yet grimy and piteous with the blood of men who had served it, and he asked the lad what his trouble was.

In reply Jigger had said, "When it 'it 'm 'e curled up like a bit o' shaving. An' when I done what I could 'e says, 'It's a speshul for one now, an' it's lonely goin', 'e says. When I give 'im a drink 'e says, 'It 'd do me more good later, little 'un'; an' 'e never said no more except, 'One at a time is the order--only one.'"

Not even his supper had lifted the cloud from Jigger's face, and Stafford had left the lad trying to compose a letter to the mother of the dead man, who had been an especial favourite with the trumpeter from the slums.

Stafford was roused from his reflections by the grinding, rumbling sound of a train. He turned his face towards the railway line.

"A troop-train--more food for the dragons," he said to himself. He could not see the train itself, but he could see the head-light of the locomotive, and he could hear its travail as it climbed slowly the last incline to the camp.

"Who comes there!" he said aloud, and in his mind there swept a premonition that the old life was finding him out, that its invisible forces were converging upon him. But did it matter? He knew in his soul that he was now doing the right thing, that he had come out in the open where all the archers of penalty had a fair target for their arrows. He wished to be "Free among the dead that are wounded and that lie in the grave and are out of remembrance;" but he would do no more to make it so than tens of thousands of other men were doing on these battle-fields.

"Who comes there!" he said again, his eyes upon the white, round light in the distance, and he stood still to try and make out the black, winding, groaning thing.

Presently he heard quick footsteps.

A small, alert figure stopped short, a small, abrupt hand saluted. "The General Commanding 'as sent for you, sir."

It was trumpeter Jigger of the Artillery.

"Are you the General's orderly, then?" asked Stafford quizzically.

"The orderly's gone w'ere 'e thought 'e'd find you, and I've come w'ere I know'd you'd be, sir."

"Where did he think he'd find me?"

"Wiv the 'osses, sir."

A look of gratification crossed Stafford's face. He was well known in the army as one who looked after his horses and his men. "And what made you think I was at the hospital, Jigger?"

"Becos you'd been to the 'osses, sir."

"Did you tell the General's orderly that?"

"No, your gryce--no, sir," he added quickly, and a flush of self-reproach came to his face, for he prided himself on being a real disciplinarian, a disciple of the correct thing. "I thought I'd like 'im to see our 'osses, an' 'ow you done 'em, an' I'd find you as quick as 'e could, wiv a bit to the good p'r'aps."

Stafford smiled. "Off you go, then. Find that orderly. Say, Colonel Stafford's compliments to the General Commanding and he will report himself at once. See that you get it straight, trumpeter."

Jigger would rather die than not get it straight, and his salute made that quite plain.

"It's made a man of him, anyhow," Stafford said to himself, as he watched the swiftly disappearing figure. "He's as straight as a nail, body and mind--poor little devil.... How far away it all seems!"

A quarter of an hour later he was standing beside the troop-train which he had seen labouring to its goal. It was carrying the old regiment of the General Officer Commanding, who had sent Stafford to its Colonel with an important message. As the two officers stood together watching the troops detrain and make order out of the chaos of baggage and equipment, Stafford's attention was drawn to a woman some little distance away, giving directions about her impedimenta.

"Who is the lady?" he asked, while in his mind was a sensible stir of recognition.

"Ah, there's something like the real thing!" his companion replied. "She is doing a capital bit of work. She and Lady Tynemouth have got a hospital-ship down at Durban. She's come to link it up better with the camp. It's Rudyard Byng's wife. They're both at it out here."

"Who comes there!" Stafford had exclaimed a moment before with a sense

of premonition.

Jasmine had come.

He drew back in the shadow as she turned round towards them.

"To the Stay Awhile--right!" he heard a private say in response to her directions.

He saw her face, but not clearly. He had glimpse of a Jasmine not so daintily pretty as of old, not so much of a dresden-china shepherdess; but with the face of a woman who, watching the world with understanding eyes, and living with an understanding heart, had taken on something of the mysterious depths of the Life behind life. It was only a glimpse he had, but it was enough. It was more than enough.

"Where is Byng?" he asked his fellow-officer.

"He's been up there with Tain's Brigade for a fortnight. He was in Kimberley, but got out before the investment, went to Cape Town, and came round here--to be near his wife, I suppose."

"He is soldiering, then?"

"He was a Colonel in the Rand Rifles once. He's with the South African Horse now in command of the regiment attached to Tain. Tain's out of your beat--away on the right flank there."

Presently Stafford saw Jasmine look in their direction; then, on seeing Stafford's companion, came forward hastily. The Colonel left Stafford and went to meet her.

A moment afterwards, she turned and looked at Stafford. Her face was now deadly pale, but it showed no agitation. She was in the light of an electric lamp, and he was in the shadow. For one second only she gazed at him, then she turned and moved away to the cape-cart awaiting her. The Colonel saw her in, then returned to Stafford.

"Why didn't you come and be introduced?" the Colonel asked. "I told her who you were."

"Hospital-ships are not in my line," Stafford answered casually. "Women and war don't go together."

"She's a nurse, she's not a woman," was the paradoxical reply.

"She knows Byng is here?"

"I suppose so. It looks like a clever bit of strategy--junction of forces. There's a lot of women at home would like the chance she has--at a little less cost."

"What is the cost?"

"Well, that ship didn't cost less than a hundred thousand pounds."

"Is that all?"

The Colonel looked at Stafford in surprise: but Stafford was not

thinking of the coin.

CHAPTER XXX

"AND NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET!"

As the cape-cart conveying Jasmine to the hospital moved away from the station, she settled down into the seat beside the driver with the helplessness of one who had received a numbing blow. Her body swayed as though she would faint, and her eyes closed, and stayed closed for so long a time, that Corporal Shorter, who drove the rough little pair of Argentines, said to her sympathetically:

"It's all right, ma'am. We'll be there in a jiffy. Don't give way."

This friendly solicitude had immediate effect. Jasmine sat up, and thereafter held herself as though she was in her yellow salon yonder in London.

"Thank you," she replied serenely to Corporal Shorter. "It was a long, tiring journey, and I let myself go for a moment."

"A good night's rest'll do you a lot of good, ma'am," he ventured. Then he added, "Beggin' pardon, ain't you Mrs. Colonel Rudyard Byng?"

She turned and looked at the man inquiringly. "Yes, I am Mrs. Byng."

"Thank you, ma'am. Now how did I know? Why," he chuckled, "I saw a big B on your hand-bag, and I knew you was from the hospital-ship--they told me that at the Stay Awhile; and the rest was easy, ma'am. I had a mate along o' your barge. He was one of them the Boers got at Talana Hill. They chipped his head-piece nicely--just like the 4.7's flay the kopjes up there. My mate's been writing to me about you. We're a long way from home, Joey and me, and a bit o' kindness is a bit of all right to us."

"Where is your home?" Jasmine asked, her fatigue and oppression lifting.

He chuckled as though it were a joke, while he answered: "Australia onct and first. My mate, Joey Clynes, him that's on your ship, we was both born up beyond Bendigo. When we cut loose from the paternal leash, so to speak, we had a bit of boundary-riding, rabbit-killing, shearing and sun-downing--all no good, year by year. Then we had a bit o' luck and found a mob of warrigals--horses run wild, you know. We stalked 'em for days in the droughttime to a water-course, and got 'em, and coaxed 'em along till the floods come; then we sold 'em, and with the hard tin shipped for to see the world. So it was as of old. And by and by we found ourselves down here, same as all the rest, puttin' in a bit o' time for the Flag."

Jasmine turned on him one of those smiles which had made her so many friends in the past--a smile none the less alluring because it had lost that erstime flavour of artifice and lure which, however hidden, had been part of its power. Now it was accompanied by no slight

drooping of the eyelids. It brightened a look which was direct and natural.

"It's a good thing to have lived in the wide distant spaces of the world," she responded. "A man couldn't easily be mean or small where life is so simple and so large."

His face flushed with pleasure. She was so easy to get on with, he said to himself; and she certainly had a wonderfully kind smile. But he felt too that she needed greater wisdom, and he was ready to give it--a friendly characteristic of the big open spaces "where life is so simple and so large."

"Well, that might be so 'long o' some continents," he remarked, "but it wasn't so where Joey Clynes and me was nourished, so to speak. I tripped up on a good many mean things from Bendigo to Thargomindah and back around. The back-blocks has its tricks as well as the towns, as you would see if you come across a stock-rider with a cheque to be broke in his hand. I've seen six months' wages go bung in a day with a stock-rider on the gentle jupe. But again, peradventure, I've seen a man that had lost ten thousand sheep tramp fifty miles in a blazing sun with a basket of lambs on his back, savin' them two switherin' little papillions worth nothin' at all, at the risk of his own life--just as mates have done here on this salamanderin' veld; same as Colonel Byng did to-day along o' Wortmann's Drift."

Jasmine had been trying to ask a question concerning her husband ever since the man had mentioned his name, and had not been able to do so. She had never spoken of him directly to any one since she had left England; had never heard from him; had written him no word; was, so far as the outer acts of life were concerned, as distant from him as Corporal Shorter was from his native Bendigo. She had been busy as she had never before been in her life, in a big, comprehensive, useful way. It had seemed to her in England, as she carried through the negotiations for the Valoria, fitted it out for the service it was to render, directed its administration over the heads of the committee appointed, for form's sake, to assist Lady Tynemouth and herself, that the spirit of her grandfather was over her, watching her, inspiring her. This had become almost an obsession with her. Her grandfather had had belief in her, delight in her; and now the innumerable talks she had had with him, as to the way he had done things, gave her confidence and a key to what she had to do. It was the first real work; for what she did for Ian Stafford in diplomacy was only playing upon the weakness of human nature with a skilled intelligence, with an instinctive knowledge of men and a capacity for managing them. The first real pride she had ever felt soothed her angry soul.

Her grandfather had been more in her mind than any one else--than either Rudyard or Ian Stafford. Towards both of these her mind had slowly and almost unconsciously changed, and she wished to think about neither. There had been a revolution in her nature, and all her tragic experience, her emotions, and her faculties, had been shaken into a crucible where the fire of pain and revolt burned on and on and on. From the crucible there had come as yet no precipitation of life's elements, and she scarcely knew what was in her heart. She tried to smother every thought concerning the past. She did not seek to find her bearings, or to realize in what country of the senses and the emotions she was travelling.

One thing was present, however, at times, and when it rushed over her in its fulness, it shook her as the wind shakes the leaf on a tree--a sense of indignation, of anger, or resentment. Against whom? Against all. Against Rudyard, against Ian Stafford; but most of all, a thousand times most against a dead man, who had been swept out of life, leaving behind a memory which could sting murderously.

Now, when she heard of Rudyard's bravery at Wortmann's Drift, a curious thrill of excitement ran through her veins, or it would be truer to say that a sensation new and strange vibrated in her blood. She had heard many tales of valour in this war, and more than one hero of the Victoria Cross had been in her charge at Durban; but as a child's heart might beat faster at the first words of a wonderful story, so she felt a faint suffocation in the throat and her brooding eyes took on a brighter, a more objective look, as she heard the tale of Wortmann's Drift.

"Tell me about it," she said, yet turned her head away from her eager historian.

Corporal Shorter's words were addressed to the smallest pink ear he had ever seen except on a baby, but he was only dimly conscious of that. He was full of a man's pride in a man's deed.

"Well, it was like this," he recited. "Gunter's horse bolted--Dick Gunter's in the South African Horse same as Colonel Byng--his lot. Old Gunter's horse gits away with him into the wide open. I s'pose there'd been a hunderd Boers firing at the runaway for three minutes, and at last off comes Gunter. He don't stir for a minute or more, then we see him pick himself up a bit quick, but settle back again. And while we was lookin' and tossin' pennies like as to his chances out there, a grey New Zealand mare nips out across the veld stretchin' every string. We knowed her all right, that grey mare--a regular Mrs. Mephisto, w'ich belongs to Colonel Byng. Do the Boojers fire at him? Don't they! We could see the spots of dust where the bullets struck, spittin', spittin', spittin', and Lord knows how many hunderd more there was that didn't hit the ground. An' the grey mare gets there. As cool as a granadillar, down drops Colonel Byng beside old Gunter; down goes the grey mare--Colonel Byng had taught her that trick, like the Roosian Cossack hosses. Then up on her rolls old Gunter, an' up goes Colonel Byng, and the grey mare switchin' her bobtail, as if she was havin' a bit of mealies in the middle o' the day. But when they was both on, then the band begun to play. Men was fightin' of course, but it looked as if the whole smash stopped to see what the end would be. It was a real pretty race, an' the grey mare takin' it as free as if she was carryin' a little bit of a pipkin like me instead of twenty-six stone. She's a flower, that grey mare! Once she stumbled, an' we knowed it wasn't an ant-bear's hole she'd found in the veld, and that she'd been hurt. But they know, them hosses, that they must do as their Baases do; and they fight right on. She come home with the two all right. She switched round a corner and over a nose of land where that crossfire couldn't hit the lot; an' there was the three of 'em at 'ome for a cup o' tea. Why, ma'am, that done the army as much good to-day, that little go-to-the-devil, you mud-suckers! as though we'd got Schuster's Hill. 'Twas what we needed--an' we got it. It took our eyes off the nasty little fact that half of a regiment was down, an' the other half with their job not done as it was ordered. It made the S.A.'s and the Lynchesters and the Gessex lot laugh. Old Gunter's all right. He's in the Stay Awhile

now. You'll be sure to see him. And Colonel Byng's all right, too, except a little bit o' splinter--"

"A bit of splinter--" Her voice was almost peremptory.

"A chip off his wrist like, but he wasn't thinkin' of that when he got back. He was thinkin' of the grey mare; and she was hit in three places, but not to mention. One bullet cut through her ear and through Colonel Byng's hat as he stooped over her neck; but the luck was with them. They was born to do a longer trek together. A little bit of the same thing in both of 'em, so to speak. The grey mare has a temper like a hunderd wildcats, and Colonel Byng can let himself go too, as you perhaps know, ma'am. We've seen him let loose sometimes when there was shirkers about, but he's all right inside his vest. And he's a good feeder. His men get their tucker all right. He knows when to shut his eyes. He's got a way to make his bunch--and they're the hardest-bit bunch in the army--do anything he wants 'em to. He's as hard himself as ever is, but he's all right underneath the epidermotis."

All at once there flashed before Jasmine's eyes the picture of Rudyard driving Krool out of the house in Park Lane with a sjambok. She heard again the thud of the rhinoceros-whip on the cringing back of the Boer; she heard the moan of the victim as he stumbled across the threshold into the street; and again she felt that sense of suffocation, that excitement which the child feels on the brink of a wonderful romance, the once-upon-a-time moment.

They were nearing the hospital. The driver silently pointed to it. He saw that he had made an impression, and he was content with it. He smiled to himself.

"Is Colonel Byng in the camp?" she asked.

"He's over--'way over, miles and miles, on the left wing with Kearey's brigade now. But old Gunter's here, and you're sure to see Colonel Byng soon--well, I should think."

She had no wish to see Colonel Byng soon. Three days would suffice to do what she wished here, and then she would return to Durban to her work there--to Alice Tynemouth, whose friendship and wonderful tactfulness had helped her in indefinable ways, as a more obvious sympathy never could have done. She would have resented one word which would have suggested that a tragedy was slowly crushing out her life.

Never a woman in the world was more alone. She worked and smiled with eyes growing sadder, yet with a force hardening in her which gave her face a character it never had before. Work had come at the right moment to save her from the wild consequences of a nature maddened by a series of misfortunes and penalties, for which there had been no warning and no preparation.

She was not ready for a renewal of the past. Only a few minutes before she had been brought face to face with Ian Stafford, had seen him look at her out of the shadow there at the station, as though she was an infinite distance away from him; and she had realized with overwhelming force how changed her world was. Ian Stafford, who but a few short months ago had held her in his arms and whispered unforgettable things, now looked at her as one looks at the image of a forgotten thing. She

recalled his last words to her that awful day when Rudyard had read the fatal letter, and the world had fallen:

"Nothing can set things right between you and me, Jasmine," he had said. "But there is Rudyard. You must help him through. He heard scandal about Mennaval last night at De Lancy Scovel's. He didn't believe it. It rests with you to give it all the lie. Good-bye."

That had been the end--the black, bitter end. Since then Ian had never spoken a word to her, nor she to him; but he had stood there in the shadow at the station like a ghost, reproachful, unresponsive, indifferent. She recalled now the day when, after three years' parting, she had left him cool, indifferent, and self-contained in the doorway of the sweet-shop in Regent Street; how she had entered her carriage, had clinched her hands, and cried with wilful passion: "He shall not treat me so. He shall show some feeling. He shall! He shall!"

Here was indifference again, but of another land. Hers was not a woman's vanity, in fury at being despised. Vanity, maybe, was still there, but so slight that it made no contrast to the proud turmoil of a nature which had been humiliated beyond endurance; which, for its mistakes, had received accruing penalties as precise as though they had been catalogued; which had waked to find that a whole lifetime had been an error; and that it had no anchor in any set of principles or impelling habits.

And over all there hung the shadow of a man's death, with its black suspicion. When Ian Stafford looked at her from the shadow of the railway-station, the question had flashed into his mind, Did she kill him? Around Adrian Fellowes' death there hung a cloud of mystery which threw a sinister shadow on the path of three people. In the middle of the night, Jasmine started from her sleep with the mystery of the man's death torturing her, and with the shuddering question, Which? on her fevered lips. Was it her husband--was it Ian Stafford? As he galloped over the veld, or sat with his pipe beside the camp-fire, Rudyard Byng was also drawn into the frigid gloom of the ugly thought, and his mind asked the question, Did she kill him? It was as though each who had suffered from the man in life was destined to be menaced by his shade, till it should be exorcised by that person who had taken the useless life, saying, "It was I; I did it!"

As Jasmine entered the hospital, it seemed to her excited imagination as though she was entering a House of Judgment: as though here in a court of everlasting equity she would meet those who had played their vital parts in her life.

What if Rudyard was here! What if in these few days while she was to be here he was to cross her path! What would she say? What would she do? What could be said or done? Bitterness and resentment and dark suspicion were in her mind--and in his. Her pride was less wilful and tempestuous than on the day when she drove him from her; when he said things which flayed her soul, and left her body as though it had been beaten with rods. Her bitterness, her resentment had its origin in the fact that he did not understand--and yet in his crude big way he had really understood better than Ian Stafford. She felt that Rudyard despised her now a thousand times more than ever he had hinted at in that last stifling scene in Park Lane; and her spirit rebelled against it. She would rather that he had believed everything against her, and

had made an open scandal, because then she could have paid any debt due to him by the penalty most cruel a woman can bear. But pity, concession, the condescension of a superior morality, were impossible to her proud mind.

As for Ian Stafford, he had left her stripped bare of one single garment of self-respect. His very kindness, his chivalry in defending her; his inflexible determination that all should be over between them forever, that she should be prevailed upon to be to Rudyard more than she had ever been--it all drove her into a deeper isolation. This isolation would have been her destruction but that something bigger than herself, a passion to do things, lifted to idealism a mind which in the past had grown materialistic, which, in gaining wit and mental skill, had missed the meaning of things, the elemental sense.

Corporal Shorter's tale of Rudyard's heroism had stirred her; but she could not have said quite what her feeling was with regard to it. She only knew vaguely that she was glad of it in a more personal than impersonal way. When she shook hands with the cheerful non-com. at the door of the hospital, she gave him a piece of gold which he was loth to accept till she said: "But take it as a souvenir of Colonel Byng's little ride with 'Old Gunter.'"

With a laugh, he took it then, and replied, "I'll not smoke it, I'll not eat it, and I'll not drink it. I'll wear it for luck and God-bless-you!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GREY HORSE AND ITS RIDER

It was almost midnight. The camp was sleeping. The forces of destruction lay torpid in the starry shadow of the night. There was no moon, but the stars gave a light that relieved the gloom. They were so near to the eye that it might seem a lancer could pick them from their nests of blue. The Southern Cross hung like a sign of hope to guide men to a new Messiah.

In vain Jasmine had tried to sleep. The day had been too much for her. All that happened in the past four years went rushing past, and she saw herself in scenes which were so tormenting in their reality that once she cried out as in a nightmare. As she did so, she was answered by a choking cry of pain like her own, and, waking, she started up from her couch with poignant apprehension; but presently she realized that it was the cry of some wounded patient in the ward not far from the room where she lay.

It roused her, however, from the half wakefulness which had been excoriated by burning memories, and, hurriedly rising, she opened wide the window and looked out into the night. The air was sharp, but it soothed her hot face and brow, and the wild pulses in her wrists presently beat less vehemently. She put a firm hand on herself, as she was wont to do in these days, when there was no time for brooding on her own troubles, and when, with the duties she had taken upon herself, it would be criminal to indulge in self-pity.

Looking out of the window now into the quiet night, the watch-fires dotting the plain had a fascination for her greater than the wonder of the southern sky and its plaque of indigo sprinkled with silver dust and diamonds. Those fires were the bulletins of the night, telling that around each of them men were sleeping, or thinking of other scenes, or wondering whether the fight to-morrow would be their last fight, and if so, what then? They were to the army like the candle in the home of the cottager. Those little groups of men sleeping around their fires were like a family, where men grow to serve each other as brother serves brother, knowing each other's foibles, but preserving each other's honour for the family's pride, risking life to save each other.

As Jasmine gazed into the gloom, spattered with a delicate radiance which did not pierce the shadows, but only made lively the darkness, she was suddenly conscious of the dull regular thud of horses' hoofs upon the veld. Troops of Mounted Infantry were evidently moving to take up a new position at the bidding of the Master Player. The sound was like the rub-a-dub of muffled hammers. The thought forced itself on her mind that here were men secretly hastening to take part in the grim lottery of life and death, from which some, and maybe many, would draw the black ticket of doom, and so pass from the game before the game was won.

The rumbling roll of hoofs grew distinct. Now they seemed to be almost upon her, and presently they emerged into view from the right, where their progress had been hidden by the hospital-building. When they reached the hospital there came a soft command and, as the troop passed, every face was turned towards the building. It was men full of life and the interest of the great game paying passing homage to their helpless comrades in this place of healing.

As they rode past, a few of the troopers had a glimpse of the figure dimly outlined at the window. Some made kindly jests, cheffing each other--"Your fancy, old sly-boots? Arranged it all, eh? Watch me, Lizzie, as I pass, and wave your lily-white hand!"

But others pressed their lips tightly, for visions of a woman somewhere waiting and watching flashed before their eyes; while others still had only the quiet consciousness of the natural man, that a woman looks at them; and where women are few and most of them are angels,--the battle-field has no shelter for any other--such looks have deep significance.

The troop went by steadily, softly and slowly. After they had all gone past, two horsemen detached from the troop came after. Presently one of them separated from his companion and rode on. The other came towards the hospital at a quick trot, drew bridle very near Jasmine's window, slid to the ground, said a soft word to his charger, patted its neck, and, turning, made for the door of the hospital. For a moment Jasmine stood looking out, greatly moved, she scarcely knew why, by this little incident of the night, and then suddenly the starlight seemed to draw round the patient animal standing at attention, as it were.

Then she saw it was a grey horse.

Its owner, as Corporal Shorter predicted, had come to see "Old Gunter," ere he went upon another expedition of duty. Its owner was

Rudyard Byng.

That was why so strange a coldness, as of apprehension or anxiety, had passed through Jasmine when the rider had come towards her out of the night. Her husband was here. If she called, he would come. If she stretched out her hand, she could touch him. If she opened a door, she would be in his presence. If he opened the door behind her, he could--

She stepped back hastily into the room, and drew her night-robe closely about her with sudden flushing of the face. If he should enter her room--she felt in the darkness for her dressing-gown. It was not on the chair beside her bed. She moved hastily, and blundered against a table. She felt for the foot of the bed. The dressing-gown was not there. Her brain was on fire. Where was her dressing-gown? She tried to button the night-dress over her palpitating breast, but abandoned it to throw back her head and gather her golden hair away from her shoulders and breast. All this in the dark, in the safe dusk of her own room.... Where was her dressing-gown? Where was her maid? Why should she be at such a disadvantage! She reached for the table again and found a match-box. She would strike a light, and find her dressing-gown. Then she abruptly remembered that she had no dressing-gown with her; that she had travelled with one single bag--little more than a hand-bag--and it contained only the emergency equipment of a nurse. She had brought no dressing-gown; only the light outer rain-proof coat which should serve a double purpose. She had forgotten for a moment that she was not in her own house, that she was an army-woman, living a soldier's life. She felt her way to the wall, found the rain-proof coat, and, with trembling fingers, put it on. As she did so a wave of weakness passed over her, and she swayed as though she would fall; but she put a hand on herself and fought her growing agitation.

She turned towards the bed, but stopped abruptly, because she heard footsteps in the hall outside--footsteps she knew, footsteps which for years had travelled towards her, day and night, with eagerness; the quick, urgent footsteps of a man of decision, of impulse, of determination. It was Rudyard's footsteps outside her door, Rudyard's voice speaking to some one; then Rudyard's footsteps pausing; and afterwards a dead silence. She felt his presence; she imagined his hand upon her door. With a little smothered gasp, she made a move forward as though to lock the door; then she remembered that it had no lock. With strained and startled eyes, she kept her gaze turned on the door, expecting to see it open before her. Her heart beat so hard she could hear it pounding against her breast, and her temples were throbbing.

The silence was horrible to her. Her agitation culminated. She could bear it no longer. Blindly she ran to another door which led into the sitting-room of the matron, used for many purposes--the hold-all of the odds and ends of the hospital life; where surgeons consulted, officers waited, and army authorities congregated for the business of the hospital. She found the door, opened it and entered hastily. One light was burning--a lamp with a green shade. She shut the door behind her quickly and leaned against it, closing her eyes with a sense of relief. Presently some movement in the room startled her. She opened her eyes. A figure stood between the green lamp and the farther door.

It was her husband.

Her senses had deceived her. His footsteps had not stopped before her bedroom-door. She had not heard the handle of the door of her bedroom turn, but the handle of the door of this room. The silence which had frightened her had followed his entrance here.

She hastily drew the coat about her. The white linen of her night-dress showed. She thrust it back, and instinctively drew behind the table, as though to hide her bare ankles.

He had started back at seeing her, but had instantly recovered himself. "Well, Jasmine," he said quietly, "we've met in a queer place."

All at once her hot agitation left her, and she became cold and still. She was in a maelstrom of feeling a minute before, though she could not have said what the feeling meant; now she was dominated by a haunting sense of injury, roused by resentment, not against him, but against everything and everybody, himself included. All the work of the last few months seemed suddenly undone--to go for nothing. Just as a drunkard in his pledge made reformation, which has done its work for a period, feels a sudden maddening desire to indulge his passion for drink, and plunges into a debauch,--the last maddening degradation before his final triumph,--so Jasmine felt now the restrictions and self-control of the past few months fall away from her. She emerged from it all the same woman who had flung her married life, her man, and her old world to the winds on the day that Krool had been driven into the street. Like Krool, she too had gone out into the unknown--into a strange land where "the Baas" had no habitation.

Rudyard's words seemed to madden her, and there was a look of scrutiny and inquiry in his eyes which she saw--and saw nothing else there. There was the inquisition in his look which had been there in their last interview when he had said as plainly as man could say, "What did it mean--that letter from Adrian Fellowes?"

It was all there in his eyes now--that hateful inquiry, the piercing scrutiny of a judge in the Judgment House, and there came also into her eyes, as though in consequence, a look of scrutiny too.

"Did you kill Adrian Fellowes? Was it you?" her disordered mind asked.

She had mistaken the look in his eyes. It was the same look as the look in hers, and in spite of all the months that had gone, both asked the same question as in the hour when they last parted. The dead man stood between them, as he had never stood in life--of infinitely more importance than he had ever been in life. He had never come between Rudyard and herself in the old life in any vital sense, not in any sense that finally mattered. He had only been an incident; not part of real life, but part of a general wastage of character; not a disintegrating factor in itself. Ah, no, not Adrian Fellowes, not him! It enraged her that Rudyard should think the dead man had had any sway over her. It was a needless degradation, against which she revolted now.

"Why have you come here--to this room?" she asked coldly.

As a boy flushes when he has been asked a disconcerting question which angers him or challenges his innocence, so Rudyard's face suffused; but the flush faded as quickly as it came. His eyes then looked at her

steadily, the whites of them so white because of his bronzed face and forehead, the glance firmer by far than in his old days in London. There was none of that unmanageable emotion in his features, the panic excitement, the savage disorder which were there on the day when Adrian Fellowes' letter brought the crisis to their lives; none of the barbaric storm which drove Krool down the staircase under the sjambok. Here was force and iron strength, though the man seemed older, his thick hair streaked with grey, while there was a deep fissure between the eyebrows. The months had hardened him physically, had freed him from all superfluous flesh; and the flabbiness had wholly gone from his cheeks and chin. There was no sign of a luxurious life about him. He was merely the business-like soldier with work to do. His khaki fitted him as only uniform can fit a man with a physique without defect. He carried in his hand a short whip of rhinoceros-hide, and as he placed his hands upon his hips and looked at Jasmine meditatively, before he answered her question, she recalled the scene with Krool. Her eyes were fascinated by the whip in his hand. It seemed to her, all at once, as though she was to be the victim of his wrath, and that the whip would presently fall upon her shoulders, as he drove her out into the veld. But his eyes drew hers to his own presently, and even while he spoke to her now, the illusion of the sjambok remained, and she imagined his voice to be intermingling with the dull thud of the whip on her shoulders.

"I came to see one of my troop who was wounded at Wortmann's Drift," he answered her.

"Old Gunter," she said mechanically.

"Old Gunter, if you like," he returned, surprised. "How did you know?"

"The world gossips still," she rejoined bitterly.

"Well, I came to see Gunter."

"On the grey mare," she said again like one in a dream.

"On the grey mare. I did not know that you were here, and--"

"If you had known I was here, you would not have come?" she asked with a querulous ring to her voice.

"No, I should not have come if I had known, unless people in the camp were aware that I knew. Then I should have felt it necessary to come."

"Why?" She knew; but she wanted him to say.

"That the army should not talk and wonder. If you were here, it is obvious that I should visit you."

"The army might as well wonder first as last," she rejoined. "That must come."

"I don't know anything that must come in this world," he replied. "We don't control ourselves, and must lies in the inner Mystery where we cannot enter. I had only to deal with the present. I could not come to the General and go again, knowing that you were here, without seeing you. We ought to do our work here without unnecessary cross-firing from our friends. There's enough of that from our foes."

"What right had you to enter my room?" she rejoined stubbornly.

"I am not in your room. Something--call it anything you like--made us meet on this neutral ground."

"You might have waited till morning," she replied perversely.

"In the morning I shall be far from here. Before daybreak I shall be fighting. War waits for no one--not even for you," he added, with more sarcasm than he intended.

Her feelings were becoming chaos again. He was going into battle. Bygone memories awakened, and the first days of their lives together came rushing upon her; but her old wild spirit was up in arms too against the irony of his last words, "Not even for you." Added to this was the rushing remembrance that South Africa had been the medium of all her trouble. If Rudyard had not gone to South Africa, that one five months a year and more ago, when she was left alone, restless, craving for amusement and excitement and--she was going to say romance, but there was no romance in those sordid hours of pleasure-making, when she plucked the fruit as it lay to her hand--ah, if only Rudyard had not gone to South Africa then! That five months held no romance. She had never known but one romance, and it was over and done. The floods had washed it away.

"You are right. War does not wait even for me," she exclaimed. "It came to meet me, to destroy me, when I was not armed. It came in the night as you have come, and found me helpless as I am now."

Suddenly she clasped her hands and wrung them, then threw them above her head in a gesture of despair. "Why didn't God or Destiny, or whatever it is, stop you from coming here! There is nothing between us worth keeping, and there can never be. There is a black sea between us. I never want to see you any more."

In her agitation the coat had fallen away from her white night-dress, and her breast showed behind the parted folds of the linen. Involuntarily his eyes saw. What memories passed through him were too vague to record; but a heavy sigh escaped him, followed, however, by a cloud which gathered on his brow. The shadow of a man's death thrust itself between them. This war might have never been, had it not been for the treachery of the man who had been false to everything and every being that had come his way. Indirectly this vast struggle in which thousands of lives were being lost had come through his wife's disloyalty, however unintentional, or in whatever degree. Whenever he thought of it, his pulses beat faster with indignation, and a deep resentment possessed him.

It was a resentment whose origin was not a mere personal wrong to him, but the betrayal of all that invaded his honour and the honour of his country. The map was dead--so much. He had paid a price--too small.

And Jasmine, as she looked at her husband now, was, oppressed by the same shadow--the inescapable thing. That was what she meant when she said, "There is a black sea between us."

What came to her mind when she saw his glance fall on her breast, she

could not have told. But a sudden flame of anger consumed her. The passion of the body was dead in her--atrophied. She was as one through whose veins had passed an icy fluid which stilled all the senses of desire, but never had her mind been so passionate, so alive. In the months lately gone, there had been times when her mind was in a paroxysm of rebellion and resentment and remorse; but in this red corner of the universe, from which the usual world was shut out, from which all domestic existence, all social organization, habit or the amenities of social intercourse were excluded, she had been able to restore her equilibrium. Yet now here, all at once, there was an invasion of this world of rigid, narrow organization, where there was no play; where all men's acts were part of a deadly mortal issue; where the human being was only part of a scheme which allowed nothing of the flexible adaptations of the life of peace, the life of cities, of houses: here was the sudden interposition of a purely personal life, of domestic being--of sex. She was conscious of no reasoning, of no mental protest which could be put into words: she was only conscious of emotions which now shook her with their power, now left her starkly cold, her brain muffled, or again aflame with a suffering as intense as that of Procrustes on his bed of iron.

This it was that seized her now. The glance of his eyes at her bared breast roused her. She knew not why, except that there was an indefinable craving for a self respect which had been violated by herself and others; except that she longed for the thing which she felt he would not give her. The look in his eye offered her nothing of that.

That she mistook what really was in his eyes was not material, though he was thinking of days when he believed he had discovered the secret of life--a woman whose life was beautiful; diffusing beauty, contentment, inspiration and peace. She did not know that his look was the wistful look backward, with no look forward; and that alone. She was living a life where new faculties of her nature were being exercised or brought into active being; she was absorbed by it all; it was part of her scheme for restoring herself, for getting surcease of anguish; but here, all at once, every entrenchment was overrun, the rigidity of the unit was made chaos, and she was tossed by the Spirit of Confusion upon a stormy sea of feeling.

"Will you not go?" she asked in a voice of suppressed passion. "Have you no consideration? It is past midnight."

His anger flamed, but he forced back the words upon his lips, and said with a bitter smile: "Day and night are the same to me always now. What else should be in war? I am going." He looked at the watch at his wrist. "It is half-past one o'clock. At five our work begins--not an eight-hour day. We have twenty-four-hour days here sometimes. This one may be shorter. You never can tell. It may be a one-hour day--or less."

Suddenly he came towards her with hands outstretched. "Dear wife--Jasmine--" he exclaimed.

Pity, memory, a great magnanimity carried him off his feet for a moment, and all that had happened seemed as nothing beside this fact that they might never see each other again; and peace appeared to him the one thing needful after all. The hatred and conflict of the world seemed of small significance beside the hovering presence of an enemy

stronger than Time.

She was still in a passion of rebellion against the inevitable--that old impatience and unrealized vanity which had helped to destroy her past. She shrank back in blind misunderstanding from him, for she scarcely heard his words. She mistook what he meant. She was bewildered, distraught.

"No, no--coward!" she cried.

He stopped short as though he had been shot. His face turned white. Then, with an oath, he went swiftly to the window which opened to the floor and passed through it into the night.

An instant later he was on his horse.

A moment of dumb confusion succeeded, then she realized her madness, and the thing as it really was. Running to the window, she leaned out.

She called, but only the grey mare's galloping came back to her awe-struck ears.

With a cry like that of an animal in pain, she sank on her knees on the floor, her face turned towards the stars.

"Oh, my God, help me!" she moaned.

At least here was no longer the cry of doom.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE WORLD'S FOUNDLING

At last day came. Jasmine was crossing the hallway of the hospital on her way to the dining-room when there came from the doorway of a ward a figure in a nurse's dress. It startled her by some familiar motion. Presently the face turned in her direction, but without seeing her. Jasmine recognized her then. She went forward quickly and touched the nurse's arm.

"Al'mah--it is Al'mah?" she said.

Al'mah's face turned paler, and she swayed slightly, then she recovered herself. "Oh, it is you, Mrs. Byng!" she said, almost dazedly.

After an instant's hesitation she held out a hand. "It's a queer place for it to happen," she added.

Jasmine noticed the hesitation and wondered at the words. She searched the other's face. What did Al'mah's look mean? It seemed composite of paralyzing surprise, of anxiety, of apprehension. Was there not also a look of aversion?

"Everything seems to come all at once," Al'mah continued, as though in explanation.

Jasmine had no inkling as to what the meaning of the words was; and, with something of her old desire to conquer those who were alien to her, she smiled winningly.

"Yes, things concentrate in life," she rejoined.

"I've noticed that," was the reply. "Fate seems to scatter, and then to gather in all at once, as though we were all feather-toys on strings."

After a moment, as Al'mah regarded her with vague wonder, though now she smiled too, and the anxiety, apprehension, and pain went from her face, Jasmine said: "Why did you come here? You had a world to work for in England."

"I had a world to forget in England," Al'mah replied. Then she added suddenly, "I could not sing any longer."

"Your voice--what happened to it?" Jasmine asked.

"One doesn't sing with one's voice only. The music is far behind the voice."

They had been standing in the middle of the hallway. Suddenly Al'mah caught at Jasmine's sleeve. "Will you come with me?" she said.

She led the way into a room which was almost gay with veld everlasting, pictures from illustrated papers, small flags of the navy and the colonies, the Boer Vierkleur and the Union Jack.

"I like to have things cheerful here," Al'mah said almost gaily. "Sometimes I have four or five convalescents in here, and they like a little gaiety. I sing them things from comic operas--Offenbach, Sullivan, and the rest; and if they are very sentimentally inclined I sing them good old-fashioned love-songs full of the musician's tricks. How people adore illusions! I've had here an old Natal sergeant, over sixty, and he was as cracked as could be about songs belonging to the time when we don't know that it's all illusion, and that there's no such thing as Love, nor ever was; but only a kind of mirage of the mind, a sort of phantasy that seizes us, in which we do crazy things, and sometimes, if the phantasy is strong enough, we do awful things. But still the illusions remain in spite of everything, as they did with the old sergeant. I've heard the most painful stories here from men before they died, of women that were false, and injuries done, many, many years ago; and they couldn't see that it wasn't real at all, but just phantasy."

"All the world's mad," responded Jasmine wearily, as Al'mah paused.

Al'mah nodded. "So I laugh a good deal, and try to be cheerful, and it does more good than being too sympathetic. Sympathy gets to be mere snivelling very often. I've smiled and laughed a great deal out here; and they say it's useful. The surgeons say it, and the men say it too sometimes."

"Are you known as Nurse Grattan?" Jasmine asked with sudden remembrance.

"Yes, Grattan was my mother's name. I am Nurse Grattan here."

"So many have whispered good things of you. A Scottish Rifleman said to me a week ago, 'Ech, she's aye see cheery!' What a wonderful thing it is to make a whole army laugh. Coming up here three officers spoke of you, and told of humorous things you had said. It's all quite honest, too. It's a reputation made out of new cloth. No one knows who you are?"

Al'mah flushed. "I don't know quite who I am myself. I think sometimes I'm the world's foundling."

Suddenly a cloud passed over her face again, and her strong whimsical features became drawn.

"I seem almost to lose my identity at times; and then it is I try most to laugh and be cheerful. If I didn't perhaps I should lose my identity altogether. Do you ever feel that?"

"No; I often wish I could."

Al'mah regarded her steadfastly. "Why did you come here?" she asked. "You had the world at your feet; and there was plenty to do in London. Was it for the same reason that brought me here? Was it something you wanted to forget there, some one you wanted to help here?"

Jasmine saw the hovering passion in the eyes fixed on her, and wondered what this woman had to say which could be of any import to herself; yet she felt there was something drawing nearer which would make her shrink.

"No," Jasmine answered, "I did not come to forget, but to try and remember that one belongs to the world, to the work of the world, to the whole people, and not to one of the people; not to one man, or to one family, or to one's self. That's all."

Al'mah's face was now very haggard, but her eyes were burning. "I do not believe you," she said straightly. "You are one of those that have had a phantasy. I had one first fifteen years ago, and it passed, yet it pursued me till yesterday--till yesterday evening. Now it's gone; that phantasy is gone forever. Come and see what it was."

She pointed to the door of another room.

There was something strangely compelling in her tone, in her movements. Jasmine followed her, fascinated by the situation, by the look in the woman's face. The door opened upon darkness, but Jasmine stepped inside, with Almah's fingers clutching her sleeve. For a moment nothing was visible; then, Jasmine saw, dimly, a coffin on two chairs.

"That was the first man I ever loved--my husband," Al'mah said quietly, pointing at the coffin. "There was another, but you took him from me--you and others."

Jasmine gave a little cry which she smothered with her hand; and she drew back involuntarily towards the light of the hallway. The smell of disinfectants almost suffocated her. A cloud of mystery and

indefinable horror seemed to envelop her; then a light flooded through her brain. It was like a stream of fire. But with a voice strangely calm, she said, "You mean Adrian Fellowes?"

Al'mah's face was in the shadow, but her voice was full of storm. "You took him from me, but you were only one," she said sharply and painfully. "I found it out at last. I suspected first at Glencader. Then at last I knew. It was an angry, contemptuous letter from you. I had opened it. I understood. When everything was clear, when there was no doubt, when I knew he had tried to hurt little Jigger's sister, when he had made up his mind to go abroad, then, I killed him. Then--I killed him."

Jasmine's cheek was white as Al'mah's apron; but she did not shrink. She came a step nearer, and peered into Al'mah's face, as though to read her inmost mind, as though to see if what she said was really true. She saw not a quiver of agitation, not the faintest horror of memory; only the reflective look of accomplished purpose.

"You--are you insane?" Jasmine exclaimed in a whisper. "Do you know what you have said?"

Al'mah smoothed her apron softly. "Perfectly. I do not think I am insane. I seem not to be. One cannot do insane things here. This is the place of the iron rule. Here we cure madness--the madness of war and other madnesses."

"You had loved him, yet you killed him!"

"You would have killed him though you did not love him. Yes, of course--I know that. Your love was better placed; but it was like a little bird caught by the hawk in the upper air--its flight was only a little one before the hawk found it. Yes, you would have killed Adrian, as I did if you had had the courage. You wanted to do it, but I did it. Do you remember when I sang for you on the evening of that day he died? I sang, 'More Was Lost at Mohacksfield.' As soon as I saw your face that evening I felt you knew all. You had been to his rooms and found him dead. I was sure of that. You remember how La Tosca killed Scarpia? You remember how she felt? I felt so--just like that. I never hesitated. I knew what I wanted to do, and I did it."

"How did you kill him?" Jasmine asked in that matter-of-fact way which comes at those times when the senses are numbed by tragedy.

"You remember the needle--Mr. Mappin's needle? I knew Adrian had it. He showed it to me. He could not keep the secret. He was too weak. The needle was in his pocket-book--to kill me with some day perhaps. He certainly had not the courage to kill himself.... I went to see him. He was dressing. The pocket-book lay on the table. As I said, he had showed it to me. While he was busy I abstracted the needle. He talked of his journey abroad. He lied--nothing but lies, about himself, about everything. When he had said enough,--lying was easier to him than anything else--I told him the truth. Then he went wild. He caught hold of me as if to strangle me.... He did not realize the needlepoint when it caught him. If he did, it must have seemed to him only the prick of a pin.... But in a few minutes it was all over. He died quite peacefully. But it was not very easy getting him on the sofa. He looked sleeping as he lay there. You saw. He would never lie any more to women, to you or to me or any other. It is a

good thing to stop a plague, and the simplest way is the best. He was handsome, and his music was very deceiving. It was almost good of its kind, and it was part of him. When I look back I find only misery. Two wicked men hurt me. They spoiled my life, first one and then another; and I went from bad to worse. At least he"--she pointed to the other room--"he had some courage at the very last. He fought, he braved death. The other--you remember the Glencader Mine. Your husband and Ian Stafford went down, and Lord Tynemouth was ready to go, but Adrian would not go. Then it was I began to hate him. That was the beginning. What happened had to be. I was to kill him; and I did. It avenged me, and it avenged your husband. I was glad of that, for Rudyard Byng had done so much for me: not alone that he saved me at the opera, you remember, but other good things. I did his work for him with Adrian."

"Have you no fear--of me?" Jasmine asked.

"Fear of--you? Why?"

"I might hate you--I might tell."

Al'mah made a swift gesture of protest. "Do not say foolish things. You would rather die than tell. You should be grateful to me. Some one had to kill him. There was Rudyard Byng, Ian Stafford, or yourself. It fell to me. I did your work. You will not tell; but it would not matter if you did. Nothing would happen--nothing at all. Think it out, and you will see why."

Jasmine shuddered violently. Her body was as cold as ice.

"Yes, I know. What are you going to do after the war?"

"Back to Covent Garden perhaps; or perhaps there will be no 'after the war.' It may all end here. Who knows--who cares!"

Jasmine came close to her. For an instant a flood of revulsion had overpowered her; but now it was all gone.

"We pay for all the wrong we do. We pay for all the good we get"--once Ian Stafford had said that, and it rang in her ears now. Al'mah would pay, and would pay here--here in this world. Meanwhile, Al'mah was a woman who, like herself, had suffered.

"Let me be your friend; let me help you," Jasmine said, and she took both of Almah's hands in her own.

Somehow Jasmine's own heart had grown larger, fuller, and kinder all at once. Until lately she had never ached to help the world or any human being in all her life; there had never been any of the divine pity which finds its employ in sacrifice. She had been kind, she had been generous, she had in the past few months given service unstinted; but it was more as her own cure for her own ills than yearning compassion for all those who were distressed "in mind, body, or estate."

But since last evening, in the glimmer of the stars, when Rudyard went from her with bitter anger on his lips, and a contempt which threw her far behind him,--since that hour, when, in her helplessness, she had sunk to the ground with an appeal to Something outside herself, her

heart had greatly softened. Once before she had appealed to the Invisible--that night before her catastrophe, when she wound her wonderful hair round her throat and drew it tighter and tighter, and had cried out to the beloved mother she had never known. But her inborn, her cultivated, her almost invincible egoism, had not even then been scattered by the bitter helplessness of her life.

That cry last night was a cry to the Something behind all. Only in the last few hours--why, she knew not--her heart had found a new sense. She felt her soul's eyes looking beyond herself. The Something that made her raise her eyes to the stars, which seemed a pervading power, a brooding tenderness and solicitude, had drawn her mind away into the mind of humanity. Her own misery now at last enabled her to see, however dimly, the woes of others; and it did not matter whether the woes were penalties or undeserved chastisement; the new-born pity of her soul made no choice and sought no difference.

As the singing-woman's hands lay in hers, a flush slowly spread over Al'mah's face, and behind the direct power of her eyes there came a light which made them aglow with understanding.

"I always thought you selfish--almost meanly selfish," Al'mah said presently. "I thought you didn't know any real life, any real suffering--only the surface, only disappointment at not having your own happiness; but now I see that was all a mask. You understand why I did what I did?"

"I understand."

"I suppose there would be thousands who would gladly see me in prison and on the scaffold--if they knew--"

Pain travelled across Jasmine's face. She looked Al'mah in the eyes with a look of reproof and command. "Never, never again speak of that to me or to any living soul," she said. "I will try to forget it; you must put it behind you." . . . Suddenly she pointed to the other room where Al'mah's husband lay dead. "When is he to be buried?" she asked.

"In an hour." A change came over Al'mah's face again, and she stood looking dazedly at the door of the room, behind which the dead man lay. "I cannot realize it. It does not seem real," she said. "It was all so many centuries ago, when I was young and glad."

Jasmine admonished her gently and drew her away.

A few moments later an officer approached them from one of the wards. At that moment the footsteps of the three were arrested by the booming of artillery. It seemed as though all the guns of both armies were at work.

The officer's eyes blazed, and he turned to the two women with an impassioned gesture.

"Byng and the S.A.'s have done their trick," he said. "If they hadn't, that wouldn't be going on. It was to follow--a general assault--if Byng pulled it off. Old Blunderbuss has done it this time. His combination's working all right--thanks to Byng's lot."

As he hurried on he was too excited to see Jasmine's agitation.

"Wait!" Jasmine exclaimed, as he went quickly down the hallway. But her voice was scarcely above a whisper, and he did not hear.

She wanted to ask him if Rudyard was safe. She did not realize that he could not know.

But the thunder of artillery told her that Rudyard had had his fighting at daybreak, as he had said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"ALAMACHTIG!"

When Rudyard flung himself on the grey mare outside Jasmine's window at the Stay Awhile Hospital, and touched her flank with his heel, his heart was heavy with passion, his face hard with humiliation and defeat. He had held out the hand of reconciliation, and she had met it with scorn. He had smothered his resentment, and let the light of peace in upon their troubles, and she had ruthlessly drawn a black curtain between them. He was going upon as dangerous a task as could be set a soldier, from which he might never return, and she had not even said a God-be-with-you--she who had lain in his bosom, been so near, so dear, so cherished:

"For Time and Change estrange, estrange--
And, now they have looked and seen us,
Oh, we that were dear, we are all too near,
With the thick of the world between us!"

How odd it seemed that two beings who had been all in all to each other, who in the prime of their love would have died of protesting shame, if they had been told that they would change towards each other, should come to a day when they would be less to each other than strangers, less and colder and farther off! It is because some cannot bear this desecration of ideals, this intolerable loss of life's assets, that they cling on and on, long after respect and love have gone, after hope is dead.

There had been times in the past few months when such thoughts as these vaguely possessed Rudyard's mind; but he could never, would never, feel that all was over, that the book of Jasmine's life was closed to him; not even when his whole nature was up in arms against the injury she had done him.

But now, as the grey mare reached out to achieve the ground his troopers had covered before him, his brain was in a storm of feeling. After all, what harm had he done her, that he should be treated so? Was he the sinner? Why should he make the eternal concession? Why should he be made to seem the one needing forgiveness? He did not know why. But at the bottom of everything lay a something--a yearning--which would not be overwhelmed. In spite of wrong and injury, it would live on and on; and neither Time nor crime, nor anything mortal could obliterate it from his heart's oracles.

The hoofs of the grey mare fell like the soft thud of a hammer in the

sand, regular and precise. Presently the sound and the motion lulled his senses. The rage and humiliation grew less, his face cooled. His head, which had been bent, lifted and his face turned upwards to the stars. The influence of an African night was on him. None that has not felt it can understand it so cold, so sweet, so full of sleep, so stirring with an underlife. Many have known the breath of the pampas beyond the Amazon; the soft pungency of the wattle blown across the salt-bush plains of Australia; the friendly exhilaration of the prairie or the chaparral; the living, loving loneliness of the desert; but yonder on the veld is a life of the night which possesses all the others have, and something of its own besides; something which gets into the bones and makes for forgetfulness of the world. It lifts a man away from the fret of life, and sets his feet on the heights where lies repose.

The peace of the stars crept softly into Rudyard's heart as he galloped gently on to overtake his men. His pulses beat slowly once again, his mind regained its poise. He regretted the oath he uttered, as he left Jasmine; he asked himself if, after all, everything was over and done.

How good the night suddenly seemed! No, it was not all over--unless, unless, indeed, in this fight coming on with the daybreak, Fate should settle it all by doing with him as it had done with so many thousands of others in this war. But even then, would it be all over? He was a primitive man, and he raised his face once more to the heavens. He was no longer the ample millionaire, sitting among the flesh-pots; he was a lean, simple soldier eating his biscuit as though it were the product of the chef of the Cafe Voisin; he was the fighter sleeping in a blanket in the open; he was a patriot after his kind; he was the friend of his race and the lover of one woman.

Now he drew rein. His regiment was just ahead. Daybreak was not far off, and they were near the enemy's position. In a little while, if they were not surprised, they would complete a movement, take a hill, turn the flank of the foe, and, if designed supports came up, have the Boers at a deadly disadvantage. Not far off to the left of him and his mounted infantry there were coming on for this purpose two batteries of artillery and three thousand infantry--Leary's brigade, which had not been in the action the day before at Wortmann's Drift.

But all depended on what he was able to do, what he and his hard-bitten South Africans could accomplish. Well, he had no doubt. War was part chance, part common sense, part the pluck and luck of the devil. He had ever been a gambler in the way of taking chances; he had always possessed ballast even when the London life had enervated, had depressed him; and to men of his stamp pluck is a commonplace: it belongs as eyes and hands and feet belong.

Dawn was not far away, and before daybreak he must have the hill which was the key to the whole position, which commanded the left flank of the foe. An hour or so after he got it, if the artillery and infantry did their portion, a great day's work would be done for England; and the way to the relief of the garrison beyond the mountains would be open. The chance to do this thing was the reward he received for his gallant and very useful fight at Wortmann's Drift twenty-four hours before. It would not do to fail in justifying the choice of the Master Player, who had had enough bad luck in the campaign so far.

The first of his force to salute him in the darkness was his next in command, Barry Whalen. They had been together in the old Rand Rifles, and had, in the words of the Kaffir, been as near as the flea to the blanket, since the day when Rudyard discovered that Barry Whalen was on the same ship bound for the seat of war. They were not youngsters, either of them; but they had the spring of youth in them, and a deep basis of strength and force; and they knew the veld and the veld people. There was no trick of the veldschoen copper for which they were not ready; and for any device of Kruger's lambs they were prepared to go one better. As Barry Whalen had said, "They'll have to get up early in the morning if they want to catch us."

This morning the Boers would not get up early enough; for Rudyard's command had already reached the position from which they could do their work with good chances in their favour; and there had been no sign of life from the Boer trenches in the dusk--naught of what chanced at Magersfontein. Not a shot had been fired, and there would certainly have been firing if the Boer had known; for he could not allow the Rooinek to get to the point where his own position would be threatened or commanded. When Kruger's men did discover the truth, there would be fighting as stiff as had been seen in this struggle for half a continent.

"Is it all right?" whispered Rudyard, as Barry Whalen drew up by him.

"Not a sound from them--not a sign."

"Their trenches should not be more than a few hundred yards on, eh?"

"Their nearest trenches are about that. We are just on the left of Hetmeyer's Kopje."

"Good. Let Glossop occupy the kopje with his squadrons, while we take the trenches. If we can force them back on their second line of trenches, and keep them there till our supports come up, we shall be all right."

"When shall we begin, sir?" asked Barry.

"Give orders to dismount now. Get the horses in the lee of the kopje, and we'll see what Brother Boer thinks of us after breakfast."

Rudyard took out a repeating-watch, and held it in his closed palm. As it struck, he noted the time.

His words were abrupt but composed. "Ten minutes more and we shall have the first streak of dawn. Then move. We shall be on them before they know it."

Barry Whalen made to leave, then turned back. Rudyard understood. They clasped hands. It was the grip of men who knew each other--knew each other's faults and weaknesses, yet trusted with a trust which neither disaster nor death could destroy.

"My girl--if anything happens to me," Barry said.

"You may be sure--as if she were my own," was Rudyard's reply. "If I go down, find my wife at the Stay Awhile Hospital. Tell her that the day I married her was the happiest day of my life, and that what I

said then I thought at the last. Everything else is straightened out--and I'll not forget your girl, Barry. She shall be as my own if things should happen that way."

"God bless you, old man," whispered Barry. "Goodbye." Then he recovered himself and saluted. "Is that all, sir?"

"Au revoir, Barry," came the answer; then a formal return of the salute. "That is all," he added brusquely.

They moved forward to the regiment, and the word to dismount was given softly. When the forces crept forward again, it was as infantrymen, moving five paces apart, and feeling their way up to the Boer trenches.

Dawn. The faintest light on the horizon, as it were a soft, grey glimmer showing through a dark curtain. It rises and spreads slowly, till the curtain of night becomes the veil of morning, white and kind. Then the living world begins to move. Presently the face of the sun shines through the veil, and men's bodies grow warm with active being, and the world stirs with busy life. On the veld, with the first delicate glow, the head of a meerkat, or a springbok, is raised above the gray-brown grass; herds of cattle move uneasily. Then a bird takes flight across the whitening air, another, and then another; the meerkat sits up and begs breakfast of the sun; lizards creep out upon the stones; a snake slides along obscenely foraging. Presently man and beast and all wild things are afoot or a-wing, as though the world was new-created; as though there had never been any mornings before, and this was not the monotonous repetition of a million mornings, when all things living begin the world afresh.

But nowhere seems the world so young and fresh and glad as on the sun-warmed veld. Nowhere do the wild roses seem so pure, or are the aloes so jaunty and so gay. The smell of the karoo bush is sweeter than attar, and the bog-myrtle and mimosa, where they shelter a house or fringe a river, have a look of Arcady. It is a world where any mysterious thing may happen--a world of five thousand years ago--the air so light, so sweetly searching and vibrating, that Ariel would seem of the picture, and gleaming hosts of mailed men, or vast colonies of green-clad archers moving to virgin woods might belong. Something frightens the timid spirit of a springbok, and his flight through the grass is like a phrase of music on a wilful adventure; a bird hears the sighing of the breeze in the mimosa leaves or the swaying shrubs, and in disdain of such slight performance flings out a song which makes the air drunken with sweetness.

A world of light, of commendable trees, of grey grass flecked with flowers, of life having the supreme sense of a freedom which has known no check. It is a life which cities have not spoiled, and where man is still in touch with the primeval friends of man; where the wildest beast and the newest babe of a woman have something in common.

Drink your fill of the sweet intoxicating air with eyes shut till the lungs are full and the heart beats with new fulness; then open them upon the wide sunrise and scan the veld so full of gracious odour. Is it not good and glad? And now face the hills rising nobly away there to the left, the memorable and friendly hills. Is it not--

Upon the morning has crept suddenly a black cloud, although the sun is

shining brilliantly. A moment before the dawn all was at peace on the veld and among the kopjes, and only the contented sighing of men and beasts broke the silence, or so it seemed; but with the glimmer of light along the horizon came a change so violent that all the circle of vision was in a quiver of trouble. Affrighted birds, in fluttering bewilderment, swept and circled aimlessly through the air with strange, half-human cries; the jackal and the meerkat, the springbok and the rheebock, trembled where they stood, with heads uplifted, vaguely trying to realize the Thing which was breaking the peace of their world; useless horses which had been turned out of the armies of Boers and British galloped and stumbled and plunged into space in alarm; for they knew what was darkening the morning. They had suffered the madness of battle, and they realized it at its native first value.

There was a battle forward on the left flank of the Boer Army. Behind Hetmeyer's Kopje were the horses of the men whom Rudyard Byng had brought to take a position and hold it till support came and this flank of the Farmer's Army was turned; but the men themselves were at work on the kopjes--the grim work of dislodging the voortrekker people from the places where they burrowed like conies among the rocks.

Just before dawn broke Byng's men were rushing the outer trenches. These they cleared with the wild cries of warriors whose blood was in a tempest. Bayonets dripped red, rifles were fired at hand-to-hand range, men clubbed their guns and fought as men fought in the days when the only fighting was man to man, or one man to many men. Here every "Boojer" and Rooinek was a champion. The Boer fell back because he was forced back by men who were men of the veld like himself; and the Briton pressed forward because he would not be denied; because he was sick of reverses; of going forward and falling back; of taking a position with staggering loss and then abandoning it; of gaining a victory and then not following it up; of having the foe in the hollow of the hand and hesitating to close it with a death-grip; of promising relief to besieged men, and marking time when you had gained a foothold, instead of gaining a foothold farther on.

Byng's men were mostly South-Africans born, who had lived and worked below the Zambesi all their lives; or else those whose blood was in a fever at the thought that a colony over which the British flag flew should be trod by the feet of an invader, who had had his own liberty and independence secured by that flag, but who refused to white men the status given to "niggers" in civilized states. These fighters under Byng had had their fill of tactics and strategy which led nowhere forward; and at Wortmann's Drift the day before they had done a big thing for the army with a handful of men. They could ride like Cossacks, they could shoot like William Tell, and they had a mind to be the swivel by which the army of Queen Victoria should swing from almost perpetual disaster, in large and small degree, to victory.

From the first trenches on and on to the second trenches higher up! But here the Boer in his burrow with his mauser rifle roaring, and his heart fierce with hatred and anger at the surprise, laid down to the bloody work with an ugly determination to punish remorselessly his fellow-citizens of the veld and the others. It was a fire which only bullet-proof men could stand, and these were but breasts of flesh and muscle, though the will was iron.

Up, up, and up, struggled these men of the indomitable will. Step by step, while man after man fell wounded or dead, they pushed forward,

taking what cover was possible; firing as steadily as at Aldershot; never wasting shots, keeping the eye vigilant for the black slouch hat above the rocks, which told that a Boer's head was beneath it, and might be caught by a lightning shot.

Step by step, man by man, troop by troop, they came nearer to the hedges of stone behind which an inveterate foe with grim joy saw a soldier fall to his soft-nosed bullet; while far down behind these men of a forlorn hope there was hurrying up artillery which would presently throw its lyddite and its shrapnel on the top of the hill up where hundreds of Boers held, as they thought, an impregnable position. At last with rushes which cost them almost as dearly in proportion as the rush at Balaclava cost the Light Brigade, Byng's men reached the top, mad with the passion of battle, vengeful in spirit because of the comrades they had lost; and the trenches emptied before them. As they were forsaken, men fought hand to hand and as savagely as ever men fought in the days of Rustom.

In one corner, the hottest that the day saw, Rudyard and Barry Whalen and a scattered handful of men threw themselves upon a greatly larger number of the enemy. For a moment a man here and there fought for his life against two or three of the foe. Of these were Rudyard and Barry Whalen. The khaki of the former was shot through in several places, he had been slashed in the cheek by a bullet, and a bullet had also passed through the muscle of his left forearm; but he was scarcely conscious of it. It seemed as though Fate would let no harm befall him; but, in the very moment, when on another part of the ridge his men were waving their hats in victory, three Boers sprang up before him, ragged and grim and old, but with the fire of fanaticism and race-hatred in their eyes. One of them he accounted for, another he wounded, but the wounded voortrekker--a giant of near seven feet clubbed his rifle, and drove at him. Rudyard shot at close quarters again, but his pistol missed fire.

Just as the rifle of his giant foe swung above him, Byng realized that the third Boer was levelling a rifle directly at his breast. His eyes involuntarily closed as though to draw the curtain of life itself, but, as he did so, he heard a cry--the wild, hoarse cry of a voice he knew so well.

"Baas! Baas!" it called.

Then two shots came simultaneously, and the clubbed rifle brought him to the ground.

"Baas! Baas!"

The voice followed him, as he passed into unconsciousness.

Barry Whalen had seen Rudyard's danger, but had been unable to do anything. His hands were more than full, his life in danger; but in the instant that he had secured his own safety, he heard the cry of "Baas! Baas!" Then he saw the levelled rifle fall from the hands of the Boer who had aimed at Byng, and its owner collapse in a heap. As Rudyard fell beneath the clubbed rifle he heard the cry, "Baas! Baas!" again, and saw an unkempt figure darting among the rocks. His own pistol brought down the old Boer who had felled Byng, and then he realized who it was had cried out, "Baas!"

The last time he had heard that voice was in Park Lane, when Byng, with sjambok, drove a half-caste valet into the street.

It was the voice of Krool. And Krool was now bending over Rudyard's body, raising his head and still murmuring, "Baas--Baas!"

Krool's rifle had saved Rudyard from death by killing one of his own fellow-fighters. Much as Barry Whalen loathed the man, this act showed that Krool's love for the master who had sjamboked him was stronger than death.

Barry, himself bleeding from slight wounds, stooped over his unconscious friend with a great anxiety.

"No, it is nothing," Krool said, with his hand on Rudyard's breast. "The left arm, it is hurt, the head not get all the blow. Alamachtig, it is good! The Baas--it is right with the Baas."

Barry Whalen sighed with relief. He set about to restore Rudyard, as Krool prepared a bandage for the broken head.

Down in the valley the artillery was at work. Lyddite and shrapnel and machine-guns were playing upon the top of the ridge above them, and the infantry--Humphrey's and Blagdon's men--were hurrying up the slope which Byng's pioneers had cleared, and now held. From this position the enemy could be driven from their main position on the summit, because they could be swept now by artillery fire from a point as high as their own.

"A good day's work, old man," said Barry Whalen to the still unconscious figure. "You've done the trick for the Lady at Windsor this time. It's a great sight better business than playing baccarat at DeLancy Scovel's."

Cheering came from everywhere, cries of victory filled the air. As he looked down the valley Barry could see the horses they had left behind being brought, under cover of the artillery and infantry fire, to the hill they had taken. The grey mare would be among them. But Rudyard would not want the grey mare yet awhile. An ambulance-cart was the thing for him.

Barry would have given much for a flask of brandy. A tablespoonful would bring Rudyard back. A surgeon was not needed, however. Krool's hands had knowledge. Barry remembered the day when Wallstein was taken ill in Rudyard's house, and how Krool acted with the skill of a Westminster sawbones.

Suddenly a bugle-call sounded, loud and clear and very near them. Byng had heard that bugle call again and again in this engagement, and once he had seen the trumpeter above the trenches, sounding the advance before more than a half-dozen men had reached the defences of the Boers. The same trumpeter was now running towards them. He had been known in London as Jigger. In South Africa he was familiarly called Little Jingo.

His face was white as he leaned over Barry Whalen to look at Rudyard, but suddenly the blood came back to his cheek.

"He wants brandy," Jigger said.

"Well, go and get it," said Barry sharply.

"I've got it here," was the reply; and he produced a flask.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Barry. "You'll have a gun next, and fire it too!"

"A 4.7," returned Jigger impudently.

As the flask was at Rudyard's lips, Barry Whalen said to Krool, "What do you stay here as--deserter or prisoner? It's got to be one or the other."

"Prisoner," answered Krool. Then he added, "See--the Baas."

Rudyard's eyes were open.

"Prisoner--who is a prisoner?" he asked feebly.

"Me, Baas," whispered Krool, leaning over him.

"He saved your life, Colonel," interposed Barry Whalen.

"I thought it was the brandy," said Jigger with a grin.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"THE ALPINE FELLOW"

To all who fought in the war a change of some sort had come. Those who emerged from it to return to England or her far Dominions, or to stay in the land of the veld, of the kranz and the kloof and the spruit, were never the same again. Something came which, to a degree, transformed them, as the salts of the water and the air permeate the skin and give the blood new life. None escaped the salt of the air of conflict.

The smooth-faced young subaltern who but now had all his life before him, realized the change when he was swept by the leaden spray of death on Spion Kop, and received in his face of summer warmth, or in his young exultant heart, the quietus to all his hopes, impulses and desires. The young find no solace or recompense in the philosophy of those who regard life as a thing greatly over-estimated.

Many a private grown hard of flesh and tense of muscle, with his scant rations and meagre covering in the cold nights, with his long marches and fruitless risks and futile fightings, when he is shot down, has little consolation, save in the fact that the thing he and his comrades and the regiment and the army set out to do is done. If he has to do so, he gives his life with a stony sense of loss which has none of the composure of those who have solace in thinking that what they leave behind has a constantly decreasing value. And here and there some simple soul, more gifted than his comrades, may touch off the meaning of it all, as it appears to those who hold their lives in their hands for a nation's sake, by a stroke of mordant comment.

So it was with that chess-playing private from New Zealand of whom Barry Whalen told Ian Stafford. He told it a few days after Rudyard Byng had won that fight at Hetmeyer's Kopje, which had enabled the Master Player to turn the flank of the Boers, though there was yet grim frontal work to do against machines of Death, carefully hidden and masked on the long hillsides, which would take staggering toll of Britain's manhood.

"From behind Otago there in New Zealand, he came," began Barry, "as fine a fella of thirty-three as ever you saw. Just come, because he heard old Britain callin'. Down he drops the stock-whip, away he shoves the plough, up he takes his little balance from the bank, sticks his chess-box in his pocket, says 'so-long' to his girl, and treks across the world, just to do his whack for the land that gave him and all his that went before him the key to civilization, and how to be happy though alive.... He was the real thing, the ne plus ultra, the I-stand-alone. The other fellas thought him the best of the best. He was what my father used to call 'a wide man.' He was in and out of a fight with a quirk at the corner of his mouth, as much as to say, 'I've got the hang of this, and it's different from what I thought; but that doesn't mean it hasn't got to be done, and done in style. It's the has-to-be.' And when they got him where he breathes, he fished out the little ivory pawn and put it on a stone at his head, to let it tell his fellow-countrymen how he looked at it--that he was just a pawn in the great game. The game had to be played, and won, and the winner had to sacrifice his pawns. He was one of the sacrifices. Well, I'd like a tombstone the same as that fella from New Zealand, if I could win it as fair, and see as far."

Stafford raised his head with a smile of admiration. "Like the ancients, like the Oriental Emperors to-day, he left his message. An Alexander, with not one world conquered."

"I'm none so sure of that," was Barry's response. "A man that could put such a hand on himself as he did has conquered a world. He didn't want to go, but he went as so many have gone hereabouts. He wanted to stay, but he went against his will, and--and I wish that the grub-hunters, and tuft-hunters, and the blind greedy majority in England could get hold of what he got hold of. Then life 'd be a different thing in Thamesfontein and the little green islands."

"You were meant for a Savonarola or a St. Francis, my bold grenadier," said Stafford with a friendly nod.

"I was meant for anything that comes my way, and to do everything that was hard enough."

Stafford waved a hand. "Isn't this hard enough--a handful of guns and fifteen hundred men lost in a day, and nothing done that you can put in an envelope and send 'to the old folks at 'ome?'"

"Well, that's all over, Colonel. Byng has turned the tide by turning the Boer flank. I'm glad he's got that much out of his big shindy. It'll do him more good than his millions. He was oozing away like a fat old pine-tree in London town. He's got all his balsam in his bones now. I bet he'll get more out of this thing than anybody, more that's worth having. He doesn't want honours or promotion; he wants what 'd make his wife sorry to be a widow; and he's getting it."

"Let us hope that his wife won't be put to the test," responded Stafford evenly.

Barry looked at him a little obliquely. "She came pretty near it when we took Hetmeyer's Kopje."

"Is he all right again?" Stafford asked; then added quickly, "I've had so much to do since the Hetmeyer business that I have not seen Byng."

Barry spoke very carefully and slowly. "He's over at Brinkwort's Farm for a while. He didn't want to go to the hospital, and the house at the Farm is good enough for anybody. Anyhow, you get away from the smell of disinfectants and the business of the hospital. It's a snigger little place is Brinkwort's Farm. There's an orchard of peaches and oranges, and there are pomegranate hedges, and plenty of nice flowers in the garden, and a stoep made for candidates for Stellenbosch--as comfortable as the room of a Rand director."

"Mrs. Byng is with him?" asked Stafford, his eyes turned towards Brinkwort's Farm miles away. He could see the trees, the kameel-thorn, the blue-gums, the orange and peach trees surrounding it, a clump or cloud of green in the veld.

"No, Mrs. Byng's not with him," was the reply.

Stafford stirred uneasily, a frown gathered, his eyes took on a look of sombre melancholy. "Ah," he said at length, "she has returned to Durban, then?"

"No. She got a chill the night of the Hetmeyer coup, and she's in bed at the hospital."

Stafford controlled himself. "Is it a bad chill?" he asked heavily. "Is she dangerously ill?" His voice seemed to thicken.

"She was; but she's not so bad that a little attention from a friend would make her worse. She never much liked me; but I went just the same, and took her some veld-roses."

"You saw her?" Stafford's voice was very low.

"Yes, for a minute. She's as thin as she once wasn't," Barry answered, "but twice as beautiful. Her eyes are as big as stars, and she can smile still, but it's a new one--a war-smile, I expect. Everything gets a turn of its own at the Front."

"She was upset and anxious about Byng, I suppose?" Stafford asked, with his head turned away from this faithfulest of friends, who would have died for the man now sitting on the stoep of Brinkwort's house, looking into the bloom of the garden.

"Naturally," was the reply. Barry Whalen thought carefully of what he should say, because the instinct of the friend who loved his friend had told him that, since the night at De Lancy Scovel's house when the name of Mennaval had been linked so hatefully with that of Byng's wife, there had been a cloud over Rudyard's life; and that Rudyard and Jasmine were not the same as of yore.

"Naturally she was upset," he repeated. "She made Al'mah go and nurse Byng."

"Al'mah," repeated Stafford mechanically. "Al'mah!" His mind rushed back to that night at the opera, when Rudyard had sprung from the box to the stage and had rescued Al'mah from the flames. The world had widened since then.

Al'mah and Jasmine had been under the same roof but now; and Al'mah was nursing Jasmine's husband--surely life was merely farce and tragedy.

At this moment an orderly delivered a message to Barry Whalen. He rose to go, but turned back to Stafford again.

"She'd be glad to see you, I'm certain," he said. "You never can tell what a turn sickness will take in camp, and she's looking pretty frail. We all ought to stand by Byng and whatever belongs to Byng. No need to say that to you; but you've got a lot of work and responsibility, and in the rush you mightn't realize that she's more ill than the chill makes her. I hope you won't mind my saying so in my stupid way."

Stafford rose and grasped his hand, and a light of wonderful friendliness and comradeship shone in his eyes.

"Beau chevalier! Beau chevalier!" was all he said, and impulsive Barry Whalen went away blinking; for hard as iron as he was physically, and a fighter of courage, his temperament got into his eyes or at his lips very easily.

Stafford looked after him admiringly. "Lucky the man who has such a friend," he said aloud--"Sans peur et sans reproche! He could not betray a "--the waving of wings above him caught his eye--"he could not betray an aasvogel." His look followed the bird of prey, the servitor of carrion death, as it flew down the wind.

He had absorbed the salt of tears and valour. He had been enveloped in the Will that makes all wills as one, the will of a common purpose; and it had changed his attitude towards his troubles, towards his past, towards his future.

What Barry had said to him, and especially the tale of the New Zealander, had revealed the change which had taken place. The War had purged his mind, cleared his vision. When he left England he was immersed in egoism, submerged by his own miseries. He had isolated himself in a lazaretto of self-reproach and resentment. The universe was tottering because a woman had played him false. Because of this obsession of self, he was eager to be done with it all, to pay a price which he might have paid, had it been possible to meet Rudyard pistol or sword in hand, and die as many such a man has done, without trying to save his own life or to take the life of another. That he could not do. Rudyard did not know the truth, had not the faintest knowledge that Jasmine had been more to himself than an old and dear friend. To pay the price in any other way than by eliminating himself from the equation was to smirch her name, be the ruin of a home, and destroy all hope for the future.

It had seemed to him that there was no other way than to disappear

honourably through one of the hundred gates which the war would open to him--to go where Death ambushed the reckless or the brave, and take the stroke meant for him, on a field of honour all too kind to himself and soothing to those good friends who would mourn his going, those who hoped for him the now unattainable things.

In a spirit of stoic despair he had come to the seat of war. He had invited Destiny to sweep him up in her reaping, by placing himself in the ambit of her scythe; but the sharp reaping-hook had passed him by.

The innumerable exits were there in the wall of life and none had opened to him; but since the evening when he saw Jasmine at the railway station, there had been an opening of doors in his soul hitherto hidden. Beyond these doors he saw glimpses of a new world--not like the one he had lived in, not so green, so various, or tumultuous, but it had the lure of that peace, not sterile or somnolent, which summons the burdened life, or the soul with a vocation, to the hood of a monk--a busy self-forgetfulness.

Looking after Barry Whalen's retreating figure he saw this new, grave world opening out before him; and as the vision floated before his eyes, Barry's appeal that he should visit Jasmine at the hospital came to him.

Jasmine suffered. He recalled Barry's words: "She's as thin as she once wasn't, but twice as beautiful. Her eyes are as big as stars, and she can smile still, but it's a new one--a war-smile, I expect. Everything gets a turn of its own at the Front."

Jasmine suffered in body. He knew that she suffered in mind also. To go to her? Was that his duty? Was it his desire? Did his heart cry out for it either in pity--or in love?

In love? Slowly a warm flood of feeling passed through him. It was dimly borne in on him, as he gazed at the hospital in the distance, that this thing called Love, which seizes upon our innermost selves, which takes up residence in the inner sanctuary, may not be dislodged. It stays on when the darkness comes, reigning in the gloom. Even betrayal, injury, tyranny, do not drive it forth. It continues. No longer is the curtain drawn aside for tribute, for appeal, or for adoration, but It remains until the last footfall dies in the temple, and the portals are closed forever.

For Stafford the curtain was drawn before the shrine; but love was behind the curtain still.

He would not go to her as Barry had asked. There in Brinkwort's house in the covert of peaches and pomegranates was the man and the only man who should, who must, bring new bloom to her cheek. Her suffering would carry her to Rudyard at the last, unless it might be that one or the other of them had taken Adrian Fellowes' life. If either had done that, there could be no reunion.

He did not know what Al'mah had told Jasmine, the thing which had cleared Jasmine's vision, and made possible a path which should lead from the hospital to the house among the orchard-trees at Brinkwort's Farm.

No, he would not, could not go to Jasmine--unless, it might be, she

was dying. A sudden, sharp anxiety possessed him. If, as Barry Whalen suggested, one of those ugly turns should come, which illnesses take in camp, and she should die without a friend near her, without Rudyard by her side! He mounted his horse, and rode towards the hospital.

His inquiries at the hospital relieved his mind. "If there is no turn for the worse, no complications, she will go on all right, and will be convalescent in a few days," the medicine-man had said.

He gave instructions for a message to be sent to him if there was any change for the worse. His first impulse, to tell them not to let her know he had inquired, he set aside. There must not be subterfuge or secrecy any longer. Let Destiny take her course.

As he left the hospital, he heard a wounded Boer prisoner say to a Tommy who had fought with him on opposite sides in the same engagement, "Alles zal recht kom!" All will come right, was the English of it.

Out of the agony of conflict would all come right--for Boer, for Briton, for Rudyard, for Jasmine, for himself, for Al'mah?

As he entered his tent again, he was handed his mail, which had just arrived. The first letter he touched had the postmark of Durban. The address on the envelope was in the handwriting of Lady Tynemouth.

He almost shrank from opening it, because of the tragedy which had come to the husband of the woman who had been his faithful friend over so many years. At an engagement a month before, Tynemouth had been blinded by shrapnel, and had been sent to Durban. To the two letters he had written there had come no answer until now; and he felt that this reply would be a plaint against Fate, a rebellion against the future restraint and trial and responsibility which would be put upon the wife, who was so much of the irresponsible world.

After a moment, however, he muttered a reproach against his own darkness of spirit and his lack of faith in her womanliness, and opened the envelope.

It was not the letter he had imagined and feared. It began by thanking him for his own letter, and then it plunged into the heart of her trouble:

".... Tynie is blind. He will never see again. But his face seems to me quite beautiful. It shines, Ian: beauty comes from within. Poor old Tynie, who would have thought that the world he loved couldn't make that light in his face! I never saw it there--did you? It is just giving up one's self to the Inevitable. I suppose we mostly are giving up ourselves to Ourselves, thinking always of our own pleasure and profit and pride, never being content, pushing on and on...., Ian, I'm not going to push on any more. I've done with the Climbers. There's too much of the Climbers in us all--not social climbing, I mean, but wanting to get somewhere that has something for us, out in the big material world. When I look at Tynie--he's lying there so peaceful--you might think it is a prison he is in. It isn't. He's set free into a world where he had never been. He's set free in a world of light that never blinds us. If he'd lived to be a hundred with the sight of his eyes, he'd never have known that there's a world that belongs to Allah,--I love that word, it sounds so great and yet so

friendly, so gentler than the name by which we call the First One in our language and our religion--and that world is inside ourselves.... Tynie is always thinking of other people now, wondering what they are doing and how they are doing it. He was talking about you a little while ago, and so admiringly. It brought the tears to my eyes. Oh, I am so glad, Ian, that our friendship has always been so much on the surface, so 'void of offence'--is that the phrase? I can look at it without wincing; and I am glad. It never was a thing of importance to you, for I am not important, and there was no weight of life in it or in me. But even the butterfly has its uses, and maybe I was meant to play a little part in your big life. I like to think it was so. Sometimes a bright day gets a little more interest from the drone of the locust or the glow of a butterfly's wings. I'm not sure that the locust's droning and the bright flutter of the butterfly's wings are not the way Nature has of fastening the soul to the meaning of it all. I wonder if you ever heard the lines--foolish they read, but they are not:

"All summer long there was one little butterfly,
Flying ahead of me,
Wings red and yellow, a pretty little fellow,
Flying ahead of me.
One little butterfly, one little butterfly,
What can his message be?--
All summer long, there was one little butterfly
Flying ahead of me.'

"It may be so that the poet meant the butterfly to mean the joy of things, the hope of things, the love of things flying ahead to draw us on and on into the sunlight and up the steeps, and over the higher hills.

"Ian, I would like to be such a butterfly in your eyes at this moment; perhaps the insignificant means of making you see the near thing to do, and by doing it get a step on towards the Far Thing. You used always to think of the Far Thing. Ah, what ambition you had when I first knew you on the Zambesi, when the old red umbrella, but for you, would have carried me over into the mist and the thunder! Well, you have lost that ambition. I know why you came out here. No one ever told me. The thing behind the words in your letter tells me plainer than words. The last time I saw you in London--do you remember when it was? It was the day that Rudyard Byng drove Krool into Park Lane with the sjambok. Well, that last time, when I met you in the hall as we were both leaving a house of trouble, I felt the truth. Do you remember the day I went to see you when Mr. Mappin came? I felt the truth then more. I often wondered how I could ever help you in the old days. That was an ambition of mine. But I had no brains--no brains like Jasmine's and many another woman; and I was never able to do anything. But now I feel as I never felt anything before in my life. I feel that my time and my chance have come. I feel like a prophetess, like Miriam,--or was it Deborah?--and that I must wind the horn of warning as you walk on the edge of the precipice.

"Ian, it's only little souls who do the work that should be left to Allah, and I don't believe that you can take the reins out of Allah's hands,--He lets you do it, of course, if you insist, for a wilful child must be taught his lesson--without getting smashed up at a sharp corner that you haven't learnt to turn. Ian, there's work for you to do. Even Tynie thinks that he can do some work still. He sees he can,

as he never did before; and he talks of you as a man who can do anything if you will. He says that if England wanted a strong man before the war she will want a stronger man afterwards to pick up the pieces, and put them all together again. He says that after we win, reconstruction in South Africa will be a work as big as was ever given to a man, because, if it should fail, 'down will go the whole Imperial show'--that's Tynie's phrase. And he says, why shouldn't you do it here, or why shouldn't you be the man who will guide it all in England? You found the key to England's isolation, to her foreign problem,--I'm quoting Tynie--which meant that the other nations keep hands off in this fight; well, why shouldn't you find another key, that to the future of this Empire? You got European peace for England, and now the problem is how to make this Empire a real thing. Tynie says this, not me. His command of English is better than mine, but neither of us would make a good private secretary, if we had to write letters with words of over two syllables. I've told you what Tynie says, but he doesn't know at all what I know; he doesn't see the danger I see, doesn't realize the mad thing in your brain, the sad thing weighing down your heart--and hers.

"Ilan, I feel it on my own heart, and I want it lifted away. Your letter has only one word in it really. That word is Finis. I say, it must not, shall not, be Finis. Look at the escapes you have had in this war. Is not that enough to prove that you have a long way to go yet, and that you have to 'make good' the veld as you trek. To outspan now would be a crime. It would spoil a great life, it would darken memory--even mine, Ilan. I must speak the truth. I want you, we all want you, to be the big man you are at heart. Do not be a Lassalle. It is too small. If one must be a slave, then let it be to something greater than one's self, higher--toweringly unattainably higher. Believe me, neither the girl you love nor any woman on earth is entitled to hold in slavery the energies and the mind and hopes of a man who can do big things--or any man at all.

"Ilan, Tynie and I have our trials, but we are going to live them down. At first Tynie wanted to die, but he soon said he would see it through--blind at forty. You have had your trials, you have them still; but every gift of man is yours, and every opportunity. Will you not live it all out to the end? Allah knows the exit He wants for us, and He must resent our breaking a way out of the prison of our own making.

"You've no idea how this life of work with Jasmine has brought things home to me--and to Jasmine too. When I see the multitude of broken and maimed victims of war, well, I feel like Jeremiah; but I feel sad too that these poor fellows and those they love must suffer in order to teach us our lesson--us and England. Dear old friend, great man, I am going to quote a verse Tynie read to me last night--oh, how strange that seems! Yet it was so in a sense, he did read to me. Tynie made me say the words from the book, but he read into them all that they were, he that never drew a literary breath. It was a poem Jasmine quoted to him a fortnight ago--Browning's 'Grammarians,' and he stopped me at these words:

"Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
He's for the morning.'

"Tynie stopped me there, and said, 'That's Stafford. He's the Alpine fellow!' . . ."

A few sentences more and then the letter ended on a note of courage, solicitude and friendship. And at the very last she said:

"It isn't always easy to find the key to things, but you will find it, not because you are so clever, but because at heart you are so good.... We both send our love, and don't forget that England hasn't had a tenth of her share of Ian Stafford...."

Then there followed a postscript which ran:

"I always used to say, 'When my ship comes home,' I'd have this or that. Well, here is the ship--mine and Jasmine's, and it has come Home for me, and for Jasmine, too, I hope."

Stafford looked out over the veld. He saw the light of the sun, the joy of summer, the flowers, the buoyant hills, where all the guns were silent now; he saw a blesbok in the distance leaping to join its fellows of a herd which had strayed across the fields of war; he felt that stir of vibrant life in the air which only the new lands know; and he raised his head with the light of resolve growing in his eyes.

"Don't forget that England hasn't had a tenth of her share of Ian Stafford," Alice Tynemouth had said.

Looking round, he saw men whose sufferings were no doubt as great as his own or greater; but they were living on for others' sakes. Despair retreated before a woman's insight.

"The Alpine fellow" wanted to live now.

CHAPTER XXXV

AT BRINKWORT'S FARM

"What are you doing here, Krool?" The face of the half-caste had grown more furtive than it was in the London days, and as he looked at Stafford now, it had a malignant expression which showed through the mask of his outward self-control.

"I am prisoner," Krool answered thickly.

"When--where?" Stafford inquired, his eye holding the other's.

"At Hetmeyer's Kopje."

"But what are you--a prisoner--doing here at Brinkwort's Farm?"

"I was hurt. They take me hospital, but the Baas, he send for me."

"They let you come without a guard ?"

"No--not. They are outside"--Krool jerked a finger towards the rear of the house--"with the biltong and the dop."

"You are a liar, Krool. There may be biltong, but there is no dop."

"What matters!" Krool's face had a leer. He looked impudently at Stafford, and Stafford read the meaning behind the unveiled insolence: Krool knew what no one else but Jasmine and himself knew with absolute certainty. Krool was in his own country, more than half a savage, with the lust of war in his blood, with memories of a day in Park Lane when the sjambok had done its ugly work, and Ian Stafford had, as Krool believed, placed it in the hands of the Baas.

It might be that this dark spirit, this Nibelung of the tragedy of the House of Byng, would even yet, when the way was open to a reconstructed life for Jasmine and Rudyard, bring catastrophe.

The thought sickened him, and then black anger took possession of him. The look he cast on the bent figure before him in the threadbare frock-coat which had been taken from the back of some dead Boer, with the corded breeches stuck in boots too large for him, and the khaki hat which some vanished Tommy would never wear again, was resolute and vengeful.

Krool must not stay at Brinkwort's Farm. He must be removed. If the Caliban told Rudyard what he knew, there could be but one end to it all; and Jasmine's life, if not ruined, must ever be, even at the best, lived under the cover of magnanimity and compassion. That would break her spirit, would take from her the radiance of temperament which alone could make life tolerable to her or to others who might live with her under the same roof. Anxiety possessed him, and he swiftly devised means to be rid of Krool before harm could be done. He was certain harm was meant--there was a look of semi-insanity in Krool's eyes. Krool must be put out of the way before he could speak with the Baas.... But how?

With a great effort Stafford controlled himself. Krool must be got rid of at once, must be sent back to the prisoners' quarters and kept there. He must not see Byng now. In a few more hours the army would move on, leaving the prisoners behind, and Rudyard would presently move on with the army. This was Byng's last day at Brinkwort's Farm, to which he himself had come to-day lest Rudyard should take note of his neglect, and their fellow-officers should remark that the old friendship had grown cold, and perhaps begin to guess at the reason why.

"You say the Baas sent for you?" he asked presently.

"Yes."

"To sjambok you again?"

Krool made a gesture of contempt. "I save the Baas at Hetmeyer's Kopje. I kill Piet Graaf to do it."

There was a look of assurance in the eyes of the mongrel, which sent a wave of coldness through Stafford's veins and gave him fresh anxiety.

He was in despair. He knew Byng's great, generous nature, and he dreaded the inconsistency which such men show--forgiving and forgetting when the iron penalty should continue and the chains of

punishment remain.

He determined to know the worst. "Traitor all round!" he said presently with contempt. "You saved the Baas by killing Piet Graaf--have you told the Baas that? Has any one told the Baas that? The sjambok is the Baas' cure for the traitor, and sometimes it kills to cure. Do you think that the Baas would want his life through the killing of Piet Graaf by his friend Krool, the slim one from the slime?"

As a sudden tempest twists and bends a tree, contorts it, bows its branches to the dust, transforms it from a thing of beauty to a hag of Walpurgis, so Stafford's words transformed Krool. A passion of rage possessed him. He looked like one of the creatures that waited on Wotan in the nether places. He essayed to speak, but at first could not. His body bent forward, and his fingers spread out in a spasm of hatred, then clinched with the stroke of a hammer on his knees, and again opened and shut in a gesture of loathsome cruelty.

At length he spoke, and Stafford listened intently, for now Caliban was off his guard, and he knew the worst that was meant.

"Ah, you speak of traitor--you! The sjambok for the traitor, eh? The sjambok--fifty strokes, a hunderd strokes--a t'ousand! Krool--Krool is a traitor, and the sjambok for him. What did he do? What did Krool do? He help Oom Paul against the Rooinek--against the Philistine. He help the chosen against the children of Hell.

"What did Krool do? He tell Oom Paul how the thieves would to come in the night to sold him like sheep to a butcher, how the t'ousand wolves would swarm upon the sheepfold, and there would be no homes for the voortrekker and his vrouw, how the Outlander would sit on our stoeps and pick the peaches from our gardens. And he tell him other things good for him to hear."

Stafford was conscious of the smell of orchard blossoms blown through the open window, of the odour of the pomegranate in the hedge; but his eyes were fascinated by the crouching passion of the figure before him and the dissonance of the low, unhuman voice. There was no pause in the broken, turgid torrent, which was like a muddy flood pouring over the boulders of a rapid.

"Who the traitor is? Is it the man that tries to save his homeland from the wolf and the worm? I kill Piet Graaf to save the Baas. The Baas an' I, we understand--on the Limpopo we make the unie. He is the Baas, and I am his slave. All else nothing is. I kill all the people of the Baas' country, but I die for the Baas. The Baas kill me if he will it. So it was set down in the bond on the Limpopo. If the Baas strike, he strike; if he kill, he kill. It is in the bond, it is set down. All else go. Piet Graaf, he go. Oom Paul, he go. Joubert, Cronje, Botha, they all go, if the Baas speak. It is written so. On the Limpopo it is written. All must go, if the Baas speak--one, two, three, a t'ousand. Else the bond is water, and the spirits come in the night, and take you to the million years of torment. It is nothing to die--pain! But only the Baas is kill me. It is written so. Only the Baas can hurt me. Not you, nor all the verdomde Rooineks out there"--he pointed to the vast camp out on the veld--"nor the Baas' vrouw. Do I not know all about the Baas' vrouw! She cannot hurt me.. ." He spat on the ground. "Who is the traitor? Is it Krool? Did

Krool steal from the Baas? Krool is the Baas' slave; it is only the friend of the Baas that steal from him--only him is traitor. I kill Piet Graaf to save the Baas. No one kills you to save the Baas! I saw you with your arms round the Baas' vrouw. So I go tell the Baas all. If he kill me--it is the Baas. It is written."

He spat on the ground again, and his eyes grown red with his passion glowered on Stafford like those of some animal of the jungle.

Stafford's face was white, and every nerve in his body seemed suddenly to be wrenched by the hand of torture. What right had he to resent this abominable tirade, this loathsome charge by such a beast? Yet he would have shot where he stood the fellow who had spoken so of "the Baas' vrouw," if it had not come to him with sudden conviction that the end was not to be this way. Ever since he had read Alice Tynemouth's letter a new spirit had been working in him. He must do nothing rash. There was enough stain on his hands now without the added stain of blood. But he must act; he must prevent Krool from telling the Baas. Yonder at the hospital was Jasmine, and she and her man must come together here in this peaceful covert before Rudyard went forward with the army. It must be so.

Two sentries were beyond the doorway. He stepped quickly to the stoep and summoned them. They came. Krool watched with eyes that, at first, did not understand.

Stafford gave an order. "Take the prisoner to the guard. They will at once march him back to the prisoners' camp."

Now Krool understood, and he made as if to spring on Stafford, but a pistol suddenly faced him, and he knew well that what Stafford would not do in cold blood, he would do in the exercise of his duty and as a soldier before these Rooinek privates. He stood still; he made no resistance.

But suddenly his voice rang out in a guttural cry--"Baas!"

In an instant a hand was clapped on his mouth, and his own dirty neckcloth provided a gag.

The storm was over. The native blood in him acknowledged the logic of superior force, and he walked out quietly between the sentries. Stafford's move was regular from a military point of view. He was justified in disposing of a dangerous and recalcitrant prisoner. He could find a sufficient explanation if he was challenged.

As he turned round from the doorway through which Krool had disappeared, he saw Al'mah, who had entered from another room during the incident.

A light came to Stafford's face. They two derelicts of life had much in common--the communion of sinners who had been so much sinned against.

"I heard his last words about you and--her," she said in a low voice.

"Where is Byng?" he asked anxiously.

"In the kloof near by. He will be back presently."

"Thank God!"

Al'mah's face was anxious. "I don't know what you are going to say to him, or why you have come," she said, "but--"

"I have come to congratulate him on his recovery."

"I understand. I want to say some things to you. You should know them before you see him. There is the matter of Adrian Fellowes."

"What about Adrian Fellowes?" Stafford asked evenly, yet he felt his heart give a bound and his brain throb.

"Does it matter to you now? At the inquest you were--concerned."

"I am more concerned now," he rejoined huskily.

He suddenly held out a hand to her with a smile of rare friendliness. There came over him again the feeling he had at the hospital when they talked together last, that whatever might come of all the tragedy and sorrow around them they two must face irretrievable loss.

She hesitated a moment, and then as she took his outstretched hand she said, "Yes, I will take it while I can."

Her eyes went slowly round the room as though looking for something--some point where they might rest and gather courage maybe, then they steadied to his firmly.

"You knew Adrian Fellowes did not die a natural death--I saw that at the inquest."

"Yes, I knew."

"It was a poisoned needle."

"I know. I found the needle."

"Ah! I threw it down afterwards. I forgot about it."

Slowly the colour left Stafford's face, as the light of revelation broke in upon his brain. Why had he never suspected her? His brain was buzzing with sounds which came from inner voices--voices of old thoughts and imaginings, like little beings in a dark forest hovering on the march of the discoverer. She was speaking, but her voice seemed to come through a clouded medium from a great distance to him.

"He had hurt me more than any other--than my husband or her. I did it. I would do it again.... I had been good to him.... I had suffered, I wanted something for all I had lost, and he was . . ."

Her voice trailed away into nothing, then rose again presently. "I am not sorry. Perhaps you wonder at that. But no, I do not hate myself for it--only for all that went before it. I will pay, if I have to pay, in my own way.... Thousands of women die who are killed by hands that carry no weapon. They die of misery and shame and regret.... This one man died because ..."

He did not hear, or if he heard he did not realize what she was saying now. One thought was ringing through his mind like bells pealing. The gulf of horrible suspicion between Rudyard and Jasmine was closed. So long as it yawned, so long as there was between them the accounting for Adrian Fellowes' death, they might have come together, but there would always have been a black shadow between--the shadow that hangs over the scaffold.

"They should know the truth," he said almost peremptorily.

"They both know," she rejoined calmly. "I told him this evening. On the day I saw you at the hospital, I told her."

There was silence for a moment, and then he said: "She must come here before he joins his regiment."

"I saw her last night at the hospital," Al'mah answered. "She was better. She was preparing to go to Durban. I did not ask her if she was coming, but I was sure she was not. So, just now, before you came, I sent a message to her. It will bring her.... It does not matter what a woman like me does."

"What did you say to her?"

"I wrote, 'If you wish to see him before the end, come quickly.' She will think he is dying."

"If she resents the subterfuge?"

"Risks must be taken. If he goes without their meeting--who can tell! Now is the time--now. I want to see it. It must be."

He reached out both hands and took hers, while she grew pale. Her eyes had a strange childishly frightened look.

"You are a good woman, Al'mah," he said.

A quivering, ironical laugh burst from her lips. Then, suddenly, her eyes were suffused.

"The world would call it the New Goodness then," she replied in a voice which told how deep was the well of misery in her being.

"It is as old as Allah," he replied.

"Or as old as Cain?" she responded, then added quickly, "Hush! He is coming."

An instant afterwards she was outside among the peach trees, and Rudyard and Stafford faced each other in the room she had just left.

As Al'mah stood looking into the quivering light upon the veld, her fingers thrust among the blossoms of a tree which bent over her, she heard horses' hoofs, and presently there came round the corner of the house two mounted soldiers who had brought Krool to Brinkwort's Farm. Their prisoner was secured to a stirrup-leather, and the neckcloth was still binding his mouth.

As they passed, Krool turned towards the house, eyes showing like flames under the khaki trooper's hat, which added fresh incongruity to the frock-coat and the huge top-boots.

The guard were now returning to their post at the door-way.

"What has happened?" she asked, with a gesture towards the departing Krool.

"A bit o' lip to Colonel Stafford, ma'am," answered one of the guard. "He's got a tongue like a tanner's vat, that gooser. Wants a lump o' lead in 'is baskit 'e does."

"'E done a good turn at Hetmeyer's Kopje," added the Second. "If it hadn't been for 'im the S.A.'s would have had a new Colonel"--he jerked his head towards the house, from which came the murmur of men's voices talking earnestly.

"Whatever 'e done it for, it was slim, you can stake a tidy lot on that, ma'am," interjected the First. "He's the bottom o' the sink, this half-caste Boojer is."

The Second continued: "If I 'ad my way 'e'd be put in front at the next push-up, just where the mausers of his pals would get 'im. 'E's done a lot o' bitin' in 'is time--let 'im bite the dust now, I sez. I'm fair sick of treatin' that lot as if they was square fighters. Why, 'e'd fire on a nurse or an ambulance, that tyke would."

"There's lots like him in yonder," urged the First, as a hand was jerked forward towards the hills, "and we're goin' to get 'em this time--goin' to get 'em on the shovel. Their schances and their kranzes and their ant-bear dugouts ain't goin' to help them this mop-up. We're goin' to get the tongue in the hole o' the buckle this time. It's over the hills and far away, and the Come-in-Elizas won't stop us. When the howitzers with their nice little balls of lyddite physic get opening their bouquets to-morrow--"

"Who says to-morrow?" demanded the Second.

"I says to-morrow. I know. I got ears, and 'im that 'as ears to 'ear let 'im 'ear--that's what the Scripture saith. I was brought up on the off side of a vicarage."

He laughed eagerly at his own joke, chuckling till his comrade followed up with a sharp challenge.

"I bet you never heard nothin' but your own bleatin's--not about wot the next move is, and w'en it is."

The First made quick retort. "Then you lose your bet, for I 'eard Colonel Byng get 'is orders larst night--w'en you was sleepin' at your post, Willy. By to-morrow this time you'll see the whole outfit at it. You'll see the little billows of white rolling over the hills--that's shrapnel. You'll hear the rippin', zippin', zimmin' thing in the air wot makes you sick; for you don't know who it's goin' to 'it. That's shells. You'll hear a thousand blankets being shook--that's mausers and others. You'll see regiments marching out o' step, an' every man on his own, which is not how we started this war,

not much. And where there's a bit o' rock, you say, 'Ere's a friend, and you get behind it like a man. And w'en there's nothing to get behind, you get in front, and take your chances, and you get there--right there, over the trenches, over the bloomin' Amalakites, over the hills and far away, where they want the relief they're goin' to get, or I'm a pansy blossom."

"Well, to-morrow can't come quick enough for me," answered the Second. He straightened out his shoulders and eyed the hills in front of him with a calculating air, as though he were planning the tactics of the fight to come.

"We'll all be in it--even you, ma'am," insinuated the First to Al'mah with a friendly nod. "But I'd ruther 'ave my job nor yours. I've done a bit o' nursin'--there was Bob Critchett that got a splinter o' shell in 'is 'ead, and there was Sergeant Hoyle and others. But it gits me where I squeak that kind o' thing do."

Suddenly they brought their rifles to the salute, as a footstep sounded smartly on the stoep. It was Stafford coming from the house.

He acknowledged the salute mechanically. His eyes were fastened on the distance. They had a rapt, shining look, and he walked like one in a pleasant dream. A moment afterwards he mounted his horse with the lightness of a boy, and galloped away.

He had not seen Al'mah as he passed.

In her fingers was crushed a bunch of orange blossoms. A heavy sigh broke from her lips. She turned to go within, and, as she did so, saw Rudyard Byng looking from the doorway towards the hospital where Jasmine was.

"Will she come?" Al'mah asked herself, and mechanically she wiped the stain of the blossoms from her fingers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SPRINGS OF HEALING

Dusk had almost come, yet Jasmine had not arrived at Brinkwort's Farm, the urgency of Al'mah's message notwithstanding. As things stood, it was a matter of life and death; and to Al'mah's mind humanity alone should have sent Jasmine at once to her husband's side. Something of her old prejudice against Jasmine rose up again. Perhaps behind it all was involuntary envy of an invitation to happiness so freely laid at Jasmine's feet, but withheld from herself by Fate. Never had the chance to be happy or the obvious inducement to be good ever been hers. She herself had nothing, and Jasmine still had a chance for all to which she had no right. Her heart beat harder at the thought of it. She was of those who get their happiness first in making others happy--as she would have done with Blantyre, if she had had a chance; as even she tried to do with the man whom she had sent to his account with the firmness and fury of an ancient Greek. The maternal, the protective sense was big in her, and indirectly it had governed her life. It had sent her to South Africa--to protect the wretch who had

done his best to destroy her; it had made her content at times as she did her nurse's work in what dreadful circumstances! It was the source of her revolt at Jasmine's conduct and character.

But was it also that, far beneath her criticism of Jasmine, which was, after all, so little in comparison with the new-found affection she really had for her, there lay a kinship, a sympathy, a soul's rapprochement with Rudyard, which might, in happier circumstances, have become a mating such as the world knew in its youth? Was that also in part the cause of her anxiety for Rudyard, and of her sharp disapproval of Jasmine? Did she want to see Rudyard happy, no matter at what cost to Jasmine? Was it the everlasting feminine in her which would make a woman sacrifice herself for a man, if need be, in order that he might be happy? Was it the ancient tyrannical soul in her which would make a thousand women sacrifice themselves for the man she herself set above all others?

But she was of those who do not know what they are, or what they think and feel, till some explosion forces open the doors of their souls and they look upon a new life over a heap of ruins.

She sat in the gathering dusk, waiting, while hope slowly waned. Rudyard also, on the veranda, paced weakly, almost stumblingly, up and down, his face also turning towards the Stay Awhile Hospital. At length, with a heavy sigh, he entered the house and sat down in a great arm-chair, from which old Brinkwort the Boer had laid down the law for his people.

Where was Jasmine? Why did she not hasten to Brinkwort's Farm?

A Staff Officer from the General Commanding had called to congratulate Jasmine on her recovery, and to give fresh instructions which would link her work at Durban effectively with the army as it now moved on to the relief of the town beyond the hills. Al'mah's note had arrived while the officer was with Jasmine, and it was held back until he left. It was then forgotten by the attendant on duty, and it lay for three hours undelivered. Then when it was given to her, no mention was made of the delay.

When the Staff Officer left her, he had said to himself that hers was one of the most alluring and fascinating faces he had ever seen; and he, like Stafford, though in another sphere--that of the Secret Intelligence Department--had travelled far and wide in the world. Perfectly beautiful he did not call her, though her face was as near that rarity as any he had known. He would only have called a woman beautiful who was tall, and she was almost petite; but that was because he himself was over-tall, and her smallness seemed to be properly classed with those who were pretty, not the handsome or the beautiful. But there was something in her face that haunted him--a wistful, appealing delicacy, which yet was associated with an instant readiness of intellect, with a perspicuous judgment and a gift of organization. And she had eyes of blue which were "meant to drown those who hadn't life-belts," as he said.

In one way or another he put all this to his fellow officers, and said that the existence of two such patriots as Byng and Jasmine in one family was unusual.

"Pretty fairly self-possessed, I should say," said Rigby, the youngest

officer present at mess. "Her husband under repair at Brinkwort's Farm, in the care of the blue-ribbon nurse of the army, who makes a fellow well if he looks at her, and she studying organization at the Stay Awhile with a staff-officer."

The reply of the Staff Officer was quick and cutting enough for any officers' mess.

"I see by the latest papers from England, that Balfour says we'll muddle through this war somehow," he said. "He must have known you, Rigby. With the courage of the damned you carry a fearsome lot of impedimenta, and you muddle quite adequately. The lady you have traduced has herself been seriously ill, and that is why she is not at Brinkwort's Farm. What a malicious mind you've got! Byng would think so."

"If Rigby had been in your place to-day," interposed a gruff major, "the lady would surely have had a relapse. Convalescence is no time for teaching the rudiments of human intercourse."

Pale and angry, Rigby, who was half Scotch and correspondingly self-satisfied, rejoined stubbornly: "I know what I know. They haven't met since she came up from Durban. Sandlip told me that--"

The Staff Officer broke the sentence. "What Sandlip told you is what Nancy would tell Polly and Polly would tell the cook--and then Rigby would know. But statement number one is an Ananiasism, for Byng saw his wife at the hospital the night before Hetmeyer's Kopje. I can't tell what they said, though, nor what was the colour of the lady's pegoir, for I am neither Nancy nor Polly nor the cook--nor Rigby."

With a maddened gesture Rigby got to his feet, but a man at his side pulled him down. "Sit still, Baby Bunting, or you'll not get over the hills to-morrow," he said, and he offered Rigby a cigar from Rigby's own cigar-case, cutting off the end, handing it to him and lighting a match.

"Gun out of action: record the error of the day," piped the thin precise voice of the Colonel from the head of the table.

A chorus of quiet laughter met the Colonel's joke, founded on the technical fact that the variation in the firing of a gun, due to any number of causes, though apparently firing under the same conditions, is carted officially "the error of the day" in Admiralty reports.

"Here the incident closed," as the newspapers say, but Rigby the tactless and the petty had shown that there was rumour concerning the relations of Byng and his wife, which Jasmine, at least, imagined did not exist.

When Jasmine read the note Al'mah had sent her, a flush stole slowly over her face, and then faded, leaving a whiteness, behind which was the emanation, not of fear, but of agitation and of shock.

It meant that Rudyard was dying, and that she must go to him. That she must go to him? Was that the thought in her mind--that she must go to him?

If she wished to see him again before he went! That midnight, when he

was on his way to Hetmeyer's Kopje, he had flung from her room into the night, and ridden away angrily on his grey horse, not hearing her voice faintly calling after him. Now, did she want to see him--the last time before he rode away again forever, on that white horse called Death? A shudder passed through her.

"Ruddy! Poor Ruddy!" she said, and she did not remember that those were the pitying, fateful words she used on the day when Ian Stafford dined with her alone after Rudyard made his bitter protest against the life they lived. "We have everything--everything," he had said, "and yet--"

Now, however, there was an anguished sob in her voice. With the thought of seeing him, her fingers tremblingly sought the fine-spun strands of hair which ever lay a little loose from the wonder of its great coiled abundance, and then felt her throat, as though to adjust the simple linen collar she wore, making exquisite contrast to the soft simplicity of her dark-blue gown.

She found the attendant who had given her the letter, and asked if the messenger was waiting, and was only then informed that he had been gone three hours or more.

Three hours or more! It might be that Rudyard was gone forever without hearing what she had to say, or knowing whether she desired reconciliation and peace.

She at once gave orders for a cape-cart to take her over to Brinkwort's Farm. The attendant respectfully said that he must have orders. She hastened to the officer in charge of the hospital, and explained. His sympathy translated itself into instant action. Fortunately there was a cart at the door. In a moment she was ready, and the cart sped away into the night across the veld.

She had noticed nothing as she mounted the cart--neither the driver nor the horses; but, as they hurried on, she was roused by a familiar voice saying, "'E done it all right at Hetmeyer's Kopje--done it brown. First Wortmann's Drift, and then Hetmeyer's Kopje, and he'll be over the hills and through the Boers and into Lordkop with the rest of the hold-me-backs."

She recognized him--the first person who had spoken to her of her husband on her arrival, the cheerful Corporal Shorter, who had told her of Wortmann's Drift and the saving of "Old Gunter."

She touched his arm gently. "I am glad it is you," she said in a low tone.

"Not so glad as I am," he answered. "It's a purple shame that you should ha' been took sick when he was mowed down, and that some one else should be healin' 'is gapin' wounds besides 'is lawful wife, and 'er a rifle-shot away! It's a fair shame, that's wot it is. But all's well as ends well, and you're together at the finish."

She shrank from his last words. Her heart seemed to contract; it hurt her as though it was being crushed in a vise. She was used to that pain now. She had felt it--ah, how many times since the night she found Adrian Fellowes' white rose on her pillow, laid there by the man she had sworn at the altar to love, honor, and obey! Her head

drooped. "At the finish"--how strange and new and terrible it was!
The world stood still for her.

"You'll go together to Lordkop, I expect," she heard her companion's voice say, and at first she did not realize its meaning; then slowly it came to her. "At the finish" in his words meant the raising of the siege of Lordkop, it meant rescue, victory, restoration. He had not said that Rudyard was dead, that the Book of Rudyard and Jasmine was closed forever. Her mind was in chaos, her senses in confusion. She seemed like one in a vague shifting, agonizing dream.

She was unconscious of what her friendly Corporal was saying. She only answered him mechanically now and then; and he, seeing that she was distraught, talked on in a comforting kind of way, telling her anecdotes of Rudyard, as they were told in that part of the army to which he belonged.

What was she going to do when she arrived? What could she do if Rudyard was dead? If Rudyard was still alive, she would make him understand that she was not the Jasmine of the days "before the flood"--before that storm came which uprooted all that ever was in her life except the old, often anguished, longing to be good, and the power which swept her into bye and forbidden paths. If he was gone, deaf to her voice and to any mortal sound, then--there rushed into her vision the figure of Ian Stafford, but she put that from her with a trembling determination. That was done forever. She was as sure of it as she was sure of anything in the world. Ian had not forgiven her, would never forgive her. He despised her, rejected her, abhorred her. Ian had saved her from the result of Rudyard's rash retaliation and fury, and had then repulsed her, bidden her stand off from him with a magnanimity and a chivalry which had humiliated her. He had protected her from the shame of an open tragedy, and then had shut the door in her face. Rudyard, with the same evidence as Ian held--the same letter as proof--he, whatever he believed or thought, he had forgiven her. Only a few nights ago, that night before the fight at Hetmeyer's Kopje, he had opened his arms to her and called her his wife. In Rudyard was some great good thing, something which could not die, which must live on. She sat up straight in the seat of the cart, her hands clinched.

No, no, no, Rudyard was not dead, and he should not die. It mattered not what Al'mah had written, she must have her chance to prove herself; his big soul must have its chance to run a long course, must not be cut off at the moment when so much had been done; when there was so much to do. Ian should see that she was not "just a little burst of eloquence," as he had called her, not just a strumpet, as he thought her; but a woman now, beyond eloquence, far distant from the poppy-fields of pleasure. She was young enough for it to be a virtue in her to avoid the poppy-fields. She was not twenty-six years of age, and to have learned the truth at twenty-six, and still not to have been wholly destroyed by the lies of life, was something which might be turned to good account.

She was sharply roused, almost shocked out of her distraction. Bright lights appeared suddenly in front of her, and she heard the voice of her Corporal saying: "We're here, ma'am, where old Brinkwort built a hospital for one, and that one's yours, Mrs. Byng."

He clucked to his horses and they slackened. All at once the lights

seemed to grow larger, and from the garden of Brinkwort's house came the sharp voice of a soldier saying:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"A friend," was the Corporal's reply.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign," was brusquely returned.

A moment afterwards Jasmine was in the sweet-smelling garden, and the lights of the house were flaring out upon her.

She heard at the same time the voices of the sentry and of Corporal Shorter in low tones of badinage, and she frowned. It was cruel that at the door of the dead or the dying there should be such levity.

All at once a figure came between her and the light. Instinctively she knew it was Al'mah.

"Al'mah! Al'mah!" she said painfully, and in a voice scarce above a whisper.

The figure of the singing-woman bent over her protectingly, as it might almost seem, and her hands were caught in a warm clasp.

"Am I in time?" Jasmine asked, and the words came from her in gasps.

Al'mah had no repentance for her deception. She saw an agitation which seemed to her deeper and more real than any emotion ever shown by Jasmine, not excepting the tragical night at the Glencader Mine and the morning of the first meeting at the Stay Awhile Hospital. The butterfly had become a thrush that sang with a heart in its throat.

She gathered Jasmine's eyes to her own. It seemed as though she never would answer. To herself she even said, why should she hurry, since all was well, since she had brought the two together living, who had been dead to each other these months past, and, more than all, had been of the angry dead? A little more pain and regret could do no harm, but only good. Besides, now that she was face to face with the result of her own deception, she had a sudden fear that it might go wrong. She had no remorse for the act, but only a faint apprehension of the possible consequences. Suppose that in the shock of discovery Jasmine should throw everything to the winds, and lose herself in arrant egotism once more! Suppose--no, she would suppose nothing. She must believe that all she had done was for the best.

She felt how cold were the small delicate hands in her own strong warm fingers, she saw the frightened appeal of the exquisite haunting eyes, and all at once realized the cause of that agitation--the fear that death had come without understanding, that the door had been forever shut against the answering voices.

"You are in time," she said gently, encouragingly, and she tightened the grasp of her hands.

As the volts of an electric shock quivering through a body are suddenly withdrawn, and the rigidity becomes a ghastly inertness, so Jasmine's hands, and all her body, seemed released. She felt as though she must fall, but she reasserted her strength, and slowly regained

her balance, withdrawing her hands from those of Al'mah.

"He is alive--he is alive--he is alive," she kept repeating to herself like one in a dream. Then she added hastily, with an effort to bear herself with courage: "Where is he? Take me."

Al'mah motioned, and in a moment they were inside the house. A sense of something good and comforting came over Jasmine. Here was an old, old room furnished in heavy and simple Dutch style, just as old Elias Brinkwort had left it. It had the grave and heavy hospitableness of a picture of Teniers or Jan Steen. It had the sense of home, the welcome of the cradle and the patriarch's chair. These were both here as they were when Elias Brinkwort and his people went out to join the Boer army in the hills, knowing that the verdomde Rooinek would not loot his house or ravage his belongings.

To Jasmine's eyes, it brought a new strange sense, as though all at once doors had been opened up to new sensations of life. Almost mechanically, yet with a curious vividness and permanency of vision, her eyes drifted from the patriarch's chair to the cradle in the corner; and that picture would remain with her till she could see no more at all. Unbidden and unconscious there came upon her lips a faint smile, and then a door in front of her was opened, and she was inside another room--not a bedroom as she had expected, but a room where the Dutch simplicity and homely sincerity had been invaded by something English and military. This she felt before her eyes fell on a man standing beside a table, fully dressed. Though shaken and worn, it was a figure which had no affinity with death.

As she started back Al'mah closed the door behind her, and she found herself facing Rudyard, looking into his eyes.

Al'mah had miscalculated. She did not realize Jasmine as she really was--like one in a darkened room who leans out to the light and sun. The old life, the old impetuous egoism, the long years of self were not yet gone from a character composite of impulse, vanity and intensity. This had been too daring an experiment with one of her nature, which had within the last few months become as strangely, insistently, even fanatically honest, as it had been elusive in the past. In spite of a tremulous effort to govern herself and see the situation as it really was--an effort of one who desired her good to bring her and Rudyard together, the ruse itself became magnified to monstrous proportions, and her spirit suddenly revolted. She felt that she had been inveigled; that what should have been her own voluntary act of expiation and submission, had been forced upon her, and pride, ever her most secret enemy, took possession of her.

"I have been tricked," she said, with eyes aflame and her body trembling. "You have trapped me here!" There was scorn and indignation in her voice.

He did not move, but his eyes were intent upon hers and persistently held them. He had been near to death, and his vision had been more fully cleared than hers. He knew that this was the end of all or the beginning of all things for them both; and though anger suddenly leaped at the bottom of his heart, he kept it in restraint, the primitive thing of which he had had enough.

"I did not trick you, Jasmine," he answered, in a low voice. "The

letter was sent without my knowledge or permission. Al'mah thought she was doing us both a good turn. I never deceived you--never. I should not have sent for you in any case. I heard you were ill and I tried to get up and go to you; but it was not possible. Besides, they would not let me. I wanted to go to you again, because, somehow, I felt that midnight meeting in the hospital was a mistake; that it ended as you would not really wish it to end."

Again, with wonderful intuition for a man who knew so little of women, as he thought, he had said the one thing which could have cooled the anger that drowned the overwhelming gratitude she felt at his being alive--overwhelming, in spite of the fact that her old mad temperament had flooded it for the moment.

He would have gone to her--that was what he had said. In spite of her conduct that midnight, when he was on his way to Hetmeyer's Kopje, he would have come again to her! How, indeed, he must have loved her; or how magnanimous, how impossibly magnanimous, he was!

How thin and worn he was, and how large the eyes were in the face grown hollow with suffering! There were liberal streaks of grey also at his temples, and she noted there was one strand all white just in the centre of his thick hair. A swift revulsion of feeling in her making for peace was, however, sharply arrested by the look in his eyes. It had all the sombreness of reproach--of immitigable reproach. Could she face that look now and through the years to come? It were easier to live alone to the end with her own remorse, drinking the cup that would not empty, on and on, than to live with that look in his eyes.

She turned her head away from him. Her glance suddenly caught a sjambok lying along two nails on the wall. His eyes followed hers, and in the minds of both was the scene when Rudyard drove Krool into the street under just such a whip of rhinoceros-hide.

Something of the old spirit worked in her in spite of all. Idiosyncrasy may not be cauterized, temperament must assert itself, or the personality dies. Was he to be her master--was that the end of it all? She had placed herself so completely in his power by her wilful waywardness and errors. Free from blame, she would have been ruler over him; now she must be his slave!

"Why did you not use it on me?" she asked, in a voice almost like a cry, though it had a ring of bitter irony. "Why don't you use it now? Don't you want to?"

"You were always so small and beautiful," he answered, slowly. "A twenty-stamp mill to crush a bee!"

Again resentment rose in her, despite the far-off sense of joy she had in hearing him play with words. She could forgive almost anything for that--and yet she was real and had not merely the dilettante soul. But why should he talk as though she was a fly and he an eagle? Yet there was admiration in his eyes and in his words. She was angry with herself--and with him. She was in chaos again.

"You treat me like a child, you condescend--"

"Oh, for God's sake--for God's sake!" he interrupted, with a sudden

storm in his face; but suddenly, as though by a great mastery of the will, he conquered himself, and his face cleared.

"You must sit down, Jasmine," he said, hurriedly. "You look tired. You haven't got over your illness yet."

He hastily stepped aside to get her a chair, but, as he took hold of it, he stumbled and swayed in weakness, born of an excitement far greater than her own; for he was thinking of the happiness of two people, not of the happiness of one; and he realized how critical was this hour. He had a grasp of the bigger things, and his talk with Stafford of a few hours ago was in his mind--a talk which, in its brevity, still had had the limitlessness of revelation. He had made a promise to one of the best friends that man--or woman--ever had, as he thought; and he would keep it. So he said to himself. Stafford understood Jasmine, and Stafford had insisted that he be not deceived by some revolt on the part of Jasmine, which would be the outcome of her own humiliation, of her own anger with herself for all the trouble she had caused. So he said to himself.

As he staggered with the chair she impulsively ran to aid him.

"Rudyard," she exclaimed, with concern, "you must not do that. You have not the strength. It is silly of you to be up at all. I wonder at Al'mah and the doctor!"

She pushed him to a big arm-chair beside the table and gently pressed him down into the seat. He was very weak, and his hand trembled on the chair-arm. She reached out, as if to take it; but, as though the act was too forward, her fingers slipped to his wrist instead, and she felt his pulse with the gravity of a doctor.

Despite his weakness a look of laughter crept into his eyes and stayed there. He had read the little incident truly. Presently, seeing the whiteness of his face but not the look in his eyes, she turned to the table, and pouring out a glass of water from a pitcher there, held it to his lips.

"Here, Rudyard," she said, soothingly, "drink this. You are faint. You shouldn't have got up simply because I was coming."

As he leaned back to drink from the glass she caught the gentle humour of his look, begotten of the incident of a moment before.

There was no reproach in the strong, clear eyes of blue which even wounds and illness had not faced--only humour, only a hovering joy, only a good-fellowship, and the look of home. She suddenly thought of the room from which she had just come, and it seemed, not fantastically to her, that the look in his eyes belonged to the other room where were the patriarch's chair and the baby's cradle. There was no offending magnanimity, no lofty compassion in his blameless eyes, but a human something which took no account of the years that the locust had eaten, the old mad, bad years, the wrong and the shame of them. There was only the look she had seen the day he first visited her in her own home, when he had played with words she had used in the way she adored, and would adore till she died; when he had said, in reply to her remark that he would turn her head, that it wouldn't make any difference to his point of view if she did turn her head! Suddenly it was all as if that day had come back, although his then giant

physical strength had gone; although he had been mangled in the power-house of which they had spoken that day. Come to think of it, she too had been working in the "power-house" and had been mangled also; for she was but a thread of what she was then, but a wisp of golden straw to the sheaf of the then young golden wheat.

All at once, in answer to the humour in his eyes, to the playful bright look, the tragedy and the passion which had flown out from her old self like the flame that flares out of an opened furnace-door, sank back again, the door closed, and all her senses were cooled as by a gentle wind.

Her eyes met his, and the invitation in them was like the call of the thirsty harvester in the sunburnt field. With an abandon, as startling as it was real and true to her nature, she sank down to the floor and buried her face in her hands at his feet. She sobbed deeply, softly.

With an exclamation of gladness and welcome he bent over her and drew her close to him, and his hands soothed her trembling shoulders.

"Peace is the best thing of all, Jasmine," he whispered. "Peace."

They were the last words that Ian had addressed to her. It did not make her shrink now that both had said to her the same thing, for both knew her, each in his own way, better than she had ever known herself; and each had taught her in his own way, but by what different means!

All at once, with a start, she caught Rudyard's arm with a little spasmodic grasp.

"I did not kill Adrian Fellowes," she said, like a child eager to be absolved from a false imputation. She looked up at him simply, bravely.

"Neither did I," he answered gravely, and the look in his eyes did not change. She noted that.

"I know. It was--"

She paused. What right had she to tell!

"Yes, we both know who did it," he added. "Al'mah told me."

She hid her head in her hands again, while he hung over her wisely waiting and watching.

Presently she raised her head, but her swimming eyes did not seek his. They did not get so high. After one swift glance towards his own, they dropped to where his heart might be, and her voice trembled as she said:

"Long ago Alice Tynemouth said I ought to marry a man who would master me. She said I needed a heavy hand over me--and the shackles on my wrists."

She had forgotten that these phrases were her own; that she had used them concerning herself the night before the tragedy.

"I think she was right," she added. "I had never been mastered, and I

was all childish wilfulness and vanity. I was never worth while. You took me too seriously, and vanity did the rest."

"You always had genius," he urged, gently, "and you were so beautiful."

She shook her head mournfully. "I was only an imitation always--only a dresden-china imitation of the real thing I might have been, if I had been taken right in time. I got wrong so early. Everything I said or did was mostly imitation. It was made up of other people's acts and words. I could never forget anything I'd ever heard; it drowned any real thing in me. I never emerged--never was myself."

"You were a genius," he repeated again. "That's what genius does. It takes all that ever was and makes it new."

She made a quick spasmodic protest of her hand. She could not bear to have him praise her. She wanted to tell him all that had ever been, all that she ought to be sorry for, was sorry for now almost beyond endurance. She wanted to strip her soul bare before him; but she caught the look of home in his eyes, she was at his knees at peace, and what he thought of her meant so much just now--in this one hour, for this one hour. She had had such hard travelling, and here was a rest-place on the road.

He saw that her soul was up in battle again, but he took her arms, and held them gently, controlling her agitation. Presently, with a great sigh, her forehead drooped upon his hands. They were in a vast theatre of war, and they were part of it; but for the moment sheer waste of spirit and weariness of soul made peace in a turbulent heart.

"It's her real self--at last," he kept saying to himself, "She had to have her chance, and she has got it."

Outside in a dark corner of the veranda, Al'mah was in reverie. She knew from the silence within that all was well. The deep peace of the night, the thing that was happening in the house, gave her a moment's surcease from her own problem, her own arid loneliness. Her mind went back to the night when she had first sung "Manassa" at Covent Garden. The music shimmered in her brain. She essayed to hum some phrases of the opera which she had always loved, but her voice had no resonance or vibration. It trailed away into a whisper.

"I can't sing any more. What shall I do when the war ends? Or is it that I am to end here with the war?" she whispered to herself.... Again reverie deepened. Her mind delivered itself up to an obsession. "No, I am not sorry I killed him," she said firmly after a long time, "If a price must be paid, I will pay it."

Buried in her thoughts, she was scarcely conscious of voices near by. At last they became insistent to her ears, They were the voices of sentries off duty--the two who had talked to her earlier in the evening, after Ian Stafford had left.

"This ain't half bad, this night ain't," said one. "There's a lot o' space in a night out here."

"I'd like to be 'longside o' some one I know out by 'Ampstead 'Eath," rejoined the other.

"I got a girl in Camden Town," said the First victoriously.

"I got kids--somerheres, I expect," rejoined the Second with a flourish of pride and self-assertion.

"Oh, a donah's enough for me!" returned the First.

"You'll come to the other when you don't look for it neither," declared his friend in a voice of fatality.

"You ain't the only fool in the world, mate, of course. But 'struth, I like this business better. You've got a good taste in your mouth in the morning 'ere."

"Well, I'll meet you on 'Ampstead 'Eath when the war is over, son," challenged the Second.

"I ain't 'opin' and I ain't prophesyin' none this heat," was the quiet reply. "We've got a bit o' hell in front of us yet. I'll talk to you when we're in Lordkop."

"I'll talk to your girl in Camden Town, if you 'appen to don't," was the railing reply.

"She couldn't stand it not but the once," was the retort; and then they struck each other with their fists in rough play, and laughed, and said good-night in the vernacular.

CHAPTER XXXVII

UNDER THE GUN

They had left him for dead in a dreadful circle of mangled gunners who had fallen back to cover in a donga, from a fire so stark that it seemed the hillside itself was discharging myriad bolts of death, as a waterwheel throws off its spray. No enemy had been visible, but far away in front--that front which must be taken--there hung over the ridge of the hills veils of smoke like lace. Hideous sounds tortured the air--crackling, snapping, spitting sounds like the laughter of animals with steel throats. Never was ill work better done than when, on that radiant veld, the sky one vast turquoise vault, beneath which quivered a shimmer of quicksilver light, the pom-poms, the maulers, and the shrapnel of Kruger's men mowed down Stafford and his battery, showered them, drowned them in a storm of lead.

"Alamachtig," said a Rustenburg dopper who, at the end of the day, fell into the hands of the English, "it was like cutting alfalfa with a sickle! Down they tumbled, horses and men, mashed like mealies in the millstones. A damn lot of good horses was killed this time. The lead-grinders can't pick the men and leave the horses. It was a verdomde waste of good horses. The Rooinek eats from a bloody basin this day."

Alamachtig!

At the moment Ian Stafford felt the battle was well launched. The air was shrieking with the misery of mutilated men and horses and the ghoulish laughter of pom-poms. When he went down it seemed to him that human anger had reached its fullest expression. Officers and men alike were in a fury of determination and vengeance. He had seen no fear, no apprehension anywhere, only a defiant anger which acted swiftly, coolly. An officer stepped over the lacerated, shattered body of a comrade of his mess with the abstracted impassiveness of one who finds his way over a puddle in the road; and here were puddles too--puddles of blood. A gunner lifted away the corpse of his nearest friend from the trail and strained and wrenched at his gun with the intense concentration of one who kneads dough in a trough. The sobbing agony of those whom Stafford had led rose up from the ground around him, and voices cried to be put out of pain and torture. These begrimed men around him, with jackets torn by bullets, with bandaged head stained with blood or dragging leg which left a track of blood behind, were not the men who last night were chatting round the camp-fires and making bets as to where the attack would begin to-day.

Stafford was cool enough, however. It was as though an icy liquid had been poured into his veins. He thought more clearly than he had ever done, even in those critical moments of his past when cool thinking was indispensable. He saw the mistake that had been made in giving his battery work which might have been avoided, and with the same result to the battle; but he also saw the way out of it, and he gave orders accordingly. When the horses were lashed to a gallop to take up the new position, which, if they reached, would give them shelter against this fiendish rain of lead, and also enable them to enfilade the foe at advantage, something suddenly brought confusion to his senses, and the clear thinking stopped. His being seemed to expand suddenly to an enormity of chaos and then as suddenly to shrink, dwindle, and fall back into a smother--as though, in falling, blankets were drawn roughly over his head and a thousand others were shaken in the air around him. And both were real in their own way. The thousand blankets flapping in the air were the machine guns of the foe following his battery into a zone of less dreadful fire, and the blankets that smothered him were wrappings of unconsciousness which save us from the direst agonies of body and mind.

The last thing he saw, as his eyes, with a final effort of power, sought to escape from this sudden confusion, was a herd of springboks flinging themselves about in the circle of fire, caught in the struggle of the two armies, and, like wild birds in a hurricane, plunging here and there in flight and futile motion. As unconsciousness enwrapped him the vision of these distraught denizens of the veld was before his eyes. Somehow, in a lightning transformation, he became one with them and was mingled with them.

Time passed.

When his eyes opened again, slowly, heavily, the same vision was before him--the negative left on the film of his sight by his last conscious glance at the world.

He raised himself on his elbow and looked out over the veld. The springboks were still distractedly tossing here and there, but the army to which he belonged had moved on. It was now on its way up the hill lying between them and the Besieged City. He was dimly conscious of this, for the fight round him had ceased, the storm had gone

forward. There was noise, great noise, but he was outside of it, in a kind of valley of awful inactivity. All round him was the debris of a world in which he had once lived and moved and worked. How many years--or centuries--was it since he had been in that harvest of death? There was no anomaly. It was not that time had passed; it was that his soul had made so far a journey.

In his sleep among the guns and the piteous, mutilated dead, he had gone a pilgrimage to a Distant Place and had been told the secret of the world. Yet when he first waked, it was not in his mind--only that confusion out of which he had passed to nothingness with the vision of the distracted springboks. Suddenly a torturing thirst came, and it waked him fully to the reality of it all. He was lying in his own blood, in the swath which the battle had cut.

His work was done. This came to him slowly, as the sun clears away the mists of morning. Something--Some One--had reached out and touched him on the shoulder, had summoned him.

When he left Brinkwort's Farm yesterday, it was with the desire to live, to do large things. He and Rudyard had clasped hands, and Rudyard had made a promise to him, which gave him hope that the broken roof-tree would be mended, the shattered walls of home restored. It had seemed to him then that his own mistake was not irreparable, and that the way was open to peace, if not to happiness.

When he first came to this war he had said, "I will do this," and, "I will do that," and he had thought it possible to do it in his own time and because he willed it. He had put himself deliberately in the way of the Scythe, and had thrown himself into its arc of death.

To have his own way by tricking Destiny into giving him release and absolution without penalty--that had been his course. In the hour when he had ceased to desire exit by breaking through the wall and not by the predestined door, the reply of Destiny to him had been: "It is not for you to choose." He had wished to drink the cup of release, had reached out to take it, but presently had ceased to wish to drink it. Then Destiny had said: "Here is the dish--drink it."

He closed his eyes to shut out the staring light, and he wished in a vague way that he might shut out the sounds of the battle--the everlasting boom and clatter, the tearing reverberations. But he smiled too, for he realized that his being where he was alone meant that the army had moved on over that last hill; and that there would soon be the Relief for which England prayed.

There was that to the good; and he had taken part in it all. His battery, a fragment of what it had been when it galloped out to do its work in the early morning, had had its glorious share in the great day's work.

He had had the most critical and dangerous task of this memorable day. He had been on the left flank of the main body, and his battery had suddenly faced a terrific fire from concealed riflemen who had not hitherto shown life at this point. His promptness alone had saved the battery from annihilation. His swift orders secured the gallant withdrawal of the battery into a zone of comparative safety and renewed activity, while he was left with this one abandoned gun and his slain men and fellow-officers.

But somehow it all suddenly became small and distant and insignificant to his senses. He did not despise the work, for it had to be done. It was big to those who lived, but in the long movement of time it was small, distant, and subordinate.

If only the thirst did not torture him, if only the sounds of the battle were less loud in his ears! It was so long since he waked from that long sleep, and the world was so full of noises, the air so arid, and the light of the sun so fierce. Darkness would be peace. He longed for darkness.

He thought of the spring that came from the rocks in the glen behind the house, where he was born in Derbyshire. He saw himself stooping down, kneeling to drink, his face, his eyes buried in the water, as he gulped down the good stream. Then all at once it was no longer the spring from the rock in which he laved his face and freshened his parched throat; a cool cheek touched his own, lips of tender freshness swept his brow, silken hair with a faint perfume of flowers brushed his temples, his head rested on a breast softer than any pillow he had ever known.

"Jasmine!" he whispered, with parched lips and closed eyes. "Jasmine--water," he pleaded, and sank away again into that dream from which he had but just wakened.

It had not been all a vision. Water was here at his tongue, his head was pillowed on a woman's breast, lips touched his forehead.

But it was not Jasmine's breast; it was not Jasmine's hand which held the nozzle of the water-bag to his parched lips.

Through the zone of fire a woman and a young surgeon had made their way from the attending ambulance that hovered on the edge of battle to this corner of death in the great battle-field. It mattered not to the enemy, who still remained in the segment of the circle where they first fought, whether it was man or woman who crossed this zone of fire. No heed could be given now to Red Cross work, to ambulance, nurse, or surgeon. There would come a time for that, but not yet. Here were two races in a life-and-death grip; and there could be no give and take for the wounded or the dead until the issue of the day was closed.

The woman who had come through the zone of fire was Al'mah. She had no right to be where she was. As a nurse her place was not the battle-field; but she had had a premonition of Stafford's tragedy, and in the night had concealed herself in the blankets of an ambulance and had been carried across the veld to that outer circle of battle where wait those who gather up the wreckage, who provide the salvage of war. When she was discovered there was no other course but to allow her to remain; and so it was that as the battle moved on she made her way to where the wounded and dead lay.

A sorely wounded officer, able with the help of a slightly injured gunner to get out of the furnace of fire, had brought word of Stafford's death but with the instinct of those to whom there come whisperings, visions of things, Al'mah felt she must go and find the man with whose fate, in a way, her own had been linked; who, like herself, had been a derelict upon the sea of life; the grip of whose

hand, the look of whose eyes the last time she saw him, told her that as a brother loves so he loved her.

Hundreds saw the two make their way across the veld, across the lead-swept plain; but such things in the hour of battle are commonplaces; they are taken as part of the awful game. Neither mauser nor shrapnel nor maxim brought them down as they made their way to the abandoned gun beside which Stafford lay. Yet only one reached Stafford's side, where he was stretched among his dead comrades. The surgeon stayed his course at three-quarters of the distance to care for a gunner whose mutilations were robbed of half their horror by a courage and a humour which brought quick tears to Al'mah's eyes. With both legs gone the stricken fellow asked first for a match to light his cutty pipe and then remarked: "The saint's own luck that there it was with the stem unbroke to give me aise whin I wanted it!

"Shure, I thought I was dead," he added as the surgeon stooped over him, "till I waked up and give meself the lie, and got a grip o' me pipe, glory be!"

With great difficulty Al'mah dragged Stafford under the horseless gun, left behind when the battery moved on. Both forces had thought that nothing could live in that gray-brown veld, and no effort at first was made to rescue or take it. By every law of probability Al'mah and the young surgeon ought to be lying dead with the others who had died, some with as many as twenty bullet wounds in their bodies, while the gunner, who had served this gun to the last and then, alone, had stood at attention till the lead swept him down, had thirty wounds to his credit for England's sake. Under the gun there was some shade, for she threw over it a piece of tarpaulin and some ragged, blood-stained jackets lying near--jackets of men whose wounds their comrades had tried hastily to help when the scythe of war cut them down.

There was shade now, but there was not safety, for the ground was spurting dust where bullets struck, and even bodies of dead men were dishonoured by the insult of new wounds and mutilations.

Al'mah thought nothing of safety, but only of this life which was ebbing away beside her. She saw that a surgeon could do nothing, that the hurt was internal and mortal; but she wished him not to die until she had spoken with him once again and told him all there was to tell--all that had happened after he left Brinkwort's Farm yesterday.

She looked at the drawn and blanched face and asked herself if that look of pain and mortal trouble was the precursor of happiness and peace. As she bathed the forehead of the wounded man, it suddenly came to her that here was the only tragedy connected with Stafford's going: his work was cut short, his usefulness ended, his hand was fallen from the lever that lifted things.

She looked away from the blanched face to the field of battle, towards the sky above it. Circling above were the vile aasvogels, the loathsome birds which followed the track of war, watching, waiting till they could swoop upon the flesh blistering in the sun. Instinctively she drew nearer to the body of the dying man, as though to protect it from the evil flying things. She forced between his lips a little more water.

"God make it easy!" she said.

A bullet struck a wheel beside her, and with a ricochet passed through the flesh of her forearm. A strange look came into her eyes, suffusing them. Was her work done also? Was she here to find the solution of all her own problems--like Stafford--like Stafford? Stooping, she reverently kissed the bloodless cheek. A kind of exaltation possessed her. There was no fear at all. She had a feeling that he would need her on the journey he was about to take, and there was no one else who could help him now. Who else was there beside herself--and Jigger?

Where was Jigger? What had become of Jigger? He would surely have been with Stafford if he had not been hurt or killed. It was not like Jigger to be absent when Stafford needed him.

She looked out from under the gun, as though expecting to find him coming--to see him somewhere on this stricken plain. As she did so she saw the young surgeon, who had stayed to help the wounded gunner, stumbling and lurching towards the gun, hands clasping his side, and head thrust forward in an attitude of tense expectation, as though there was a goal which must be reached.

An instant later she was outside hastening towards him. A bullet spat at her feet, another cut the skirt of her dress, but all she saw was the shambling figure of the man who, but a few minutes before, was so flexible and alert with life, eager to relieve the wounds of those who had fallen. Now he also was in dire need.

She had almost reached him when, with a stiff jerk sideways and an angular artion of the figure, he came to the ground like a log, ungainly and rigid.

"They got me! I'm hit--twice," he said, with grey lips; with eyes that stared at her and through her to something beyond; but he spoke in an abrupt, professional, commonplace tone. "Shrapnel and mauler," he added, his hands protecting the place where the shrapnel had found him. His staring blue eyes took on a dull cloud, and his whole figure seemed to sink and shrink away. As though realizing and resisting, if not resenting this dissolution of his forces, his voice rang out querulously, and his head made dogmatic emphasis.

"They oughtn't to have done it," the petulant voice insisted. "I wasn't fighting." Suddenly the voice trailed away, and all emphasis, accent, and articulation passed from the sentient figure. Yet his lips moved once again. "Ninety-nine Adelphi Terrace--first floor," he said mechanically, and said no more.

As mechanically as he had spoken, Al'mah repeated the last words. "Ninety-nine Adelphi Terrace, first floor," she said slowly.

They were chambers next to those where Adrian Fellowes had lived and died. She shuddered.

"So he was not married," she said reflectively, as she left the lifeless body and went back to the gun where Stafford lay.

Her arm through which the bullet had passed was painful, but she took no heed of it. Why should she? Hundreds, maybe thousands, were being killed off there in the hills. She saw nothing except the debris of Ian Stafford's life drifting out to the shoreless sea.

He lived still, but remained unconscious, and she did not relax her vigil. As she watched and waited the words of the young surgeon kept ringing in her ears, a monotonous discord, "Ninety-nine Adelphi Terrace--first floor!" Behind it all was the music of the song she had sung at Rudyard Byng's house the evening of the day Adrian Fellowes had died--"More was lost at Mohacksfield."

The stupefaction that comes with tragedy crept over her. As the victim of an earthquake sits down amid vast ruins, where the dead lie unnumbered, speechless, and heedless, so she sat and watched the face of the man beside her, and was not conscious that the fire of the armies was slackening, that bullets no longer spattered the veld or struck the gun where she sat; that the battle had been carried over the hills.

In time help would come, so she must wait. At least she had kept Stafford alive. So far her journey through Hades had been justified. He would have died had it not been for the water and brandy she had forced between his lips, for the shade in which he lay beneath the gun. In the end they would come and gather the dead and wounded. When the battle was over they would come, or, maybe, before it was over.

But through how many hours had there been the sickening monotony of artillery and rifle-fire, the bruit of angry metal, in which the roar of angrier men was no more than a discord in the guttural harmony. Her senses became almost deadened under the strain. Her cheeks grew thinner, her eyes took on a fixed look. She seemed like one in a dream. She was only conscious in an isolated kind of way. Louder than all the noises of the clanging day was the beating of her heart. Her very body seemed to throb, the pulses in her temples were like hammers hurting her brain.

At last she was roused by the sound of horses' hoofs.

So the service-corps were coming at last to take up the wounded and bury the dead. There were so many dead, so few wounded!

The galloping came nearer and nearer. It was now as loud as thunder almost. It stopped short. She gave a sigh of relief. Her vigil was ended. Stafford was still alive. There was yet a chance for him to know that friends were with him at the last, and also what had happened at Brinkwort's Farm after he had left yesterday.

She leaned out to see her rescuers. A cry broke from her. Here was one man frantically hitching a pair of artillery-horses to the gun and swearing fiercely in the Taal as he did so.

The last time she had seen that khaki hat, long, threadbare frock-coat, huge Hessian boots and red neckcloth was at Brinkwort's Farm. The last time she had seen that malevolent face was when its owner was marched away from Brinkwort's Farm yesterday.

It was Krool.

An instant later she had dragged Stafford out from beneath the gun, for it was clear that the madman intended to ride off with it.

When Krool saw her first he was fastening the last hook of the traces with swift, trained fingers. He stood dumfounded for a moment. The superstitious, half-mystical thing in him came trembling to his eyes; then he saw Stafford's body, and he realized the situation. A look of savage hatred came into his face, and he made a step forward with sudden impulse, as though he would spring upon Stafford. His hand was upon a knife at his belt. But the horses plunged and strained, and he saw in the near distance a troop of cavalry.

With an obscene malediction at the body, he sprang upon a horse. A sjambok swung, and with a snort, which was half a groan, the trained horses sprang forward.

"The Rooinek's gun for Oom Paul!" he shouted back over his shoulder.

Most prisoners would have been content to escape and save their skins, but a more primitive spirit lived in Krool. Escape was not enough for him. Since he had been foiled at Brinkwort's Farm and could not reach Rudyard Byng; since he would be shot the instant he was caught after his escape--if he was caught--he would do something to gall the pride of the verdomde English. The gun which the Boers had not dared to issue forth and take, which the British could not rescue without heavy loss while the battle was at its height--he would ride it over the hills into the Boers' camp.

There was something so grotesque in the figure of the half-caste, with his copper-coat flying behind him as the horses galloped away, that a wan smile came to Al'mah's lips. With Stafford at her feet in the staring sun she yet could not take her eyes from the man, the horses, and the gun. And not Al'mah alone shaded and strained eyes to follow the tumbling, bouncing gun. Rifles, maxims, and pom-poms opened fire upon it. It sank into a hollow and was partially lost to sight; it rose again and jerked forward, the dust rising behind it like surf. It swayed and swung, as the horses wildly took the incline of the hills, Krool's sjambok swinging above them; it struggled with the forces that dragged it higher and higher up, as though it were human and understood that it was a British gun being carried into the Boer lines.

At first a battery of the Boers, fighting a rear-guard action, had also fired on it, but the gunners saw quickly that a single British gun was not likely to take up an advance position and attack alone, and their fire died away. Thinking only that some daring Boer was doing the thing with a thousand odds against him, they roared approval as the gun came nearer and nearer.

Though the British poured a terrific fire after the flying battery of one gun, there was something so splendid in the episode; the horses were behaving so gallantly,--horses of one of their own batteries daringly taken by Krool under the noses of the force--that there was scarcely a man who was not glad when, at last, the gun made a sudden turn at a kopje, and was lost to sight within the Boer lines, leaving behind it a little cloud of dust.

Tommy Atkins had his uproarious joke about it, but there was one man who breathed a sigh of relief when he heard of it. That was Barry Whalen. He had every reason to be glad that Krool was out of the way, and that Rudyard Byng would see him no more. Sitting beside the still unconscious Ian Stafford on the veld, Al'mah's reflections were much

the same as those of Barry Whalen.

With the flight of Krool and the gun came the end of Al'mah's vigil. The troop of cavalry which galloped out to her was followed by the Red Cross wagons.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"PHEIDIPPIDES"

At dawn, when the veld breathes odours of a kind pungency and fragrance, which only those know who have made it their bed and friend, the end came to the man who had lain under the gun.

"Pheidippides!" the dying Stafford said, with a grim touch of the humour which had ever been his. He was thinking of the Greek runner who brought the news of victory to Athens and fell dead as he told it.

It almost seemed from the look on Stafford's face that, in very truth, he was laying aside the impedimenta of the long march and the battle, to carry the news to that army of the brave in Walhalla who had died for England before they knew that victory was hers.

"Pheidippides," he repeated, and Rudyard Byng, whose eyes were so much upon the door, watching and waiting for some one to come, pressed his hand and said: "You know the best, Stafford. So many didn't. They had to go before they knew."

"I have my luck," Stafford replied, but yet there was a wistful look in his face.

His eyes slowly closed, and he lay so motionless that Al'mah and Rudyard thought he had gone. He scarcely seemed to notice when Al'mah took the hand that Rudyard had held, and the latter, with quick, noiseless steps, left the room.

What Rudyard had been watching and waiting for was come.

Jasmine was at the door. His message had brought her in time.

"Is it dangerous?" she asked, with a face where tragedy had written self-control.

"As bad as can be," he answered. "Go in and speak to him, Jasmine. It will help him."

He opened the door softly. As Jasmine entered, Al'mah with a glance of pity and friendship at the face upon the bed, passed into another room.

There was a cry in Jasmine's heart, but it did not reach her lips.

She stole to the bed and laid her fingers upon the hand lying white and still upon the coverlet.

At once the eyes of the dying man opened. This was a touch that would

reach to the farthest borders of his being--would bring him back from the Immortal Gates. Through the mist of his senses he saw her. He half raised himself. She pillowed his head on her breast. He smiled. A light transfigured his face.

"All's well," he said, with a long sigh, and his body sank slowly down.

"Ian! Ian!" she cried, but she knew that he could not hear.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"THE ROAD IS CLEAR"

The Army had moved on over the hills, into the valley of death and glory, across the parched veld to the town of Lordkop, where an emaciated, ragged garrison had kept faith with all the heroes from Caractacus to Nelson. Courageous legions had found their way to the petty dorp, with its corrugated iron roofs, its dug-outs, its improvised forts, its fever hospitals, its Treasure House of Britain, where she guarded the jewels of her honour.

The menace of the hills had passed, heroes had welcomed heroes and drunk the cup of triumph; but far back in the valleys beyond the hills from which the army had come, there were those who must drink the cup of trembling, the wine of loss.

As the trumpets of victory attended the steps of those remnants of brigades which met the remnants of a glorious garrison in the streets of Lordkop, drums of mourning conducted the steps of those who came to bury the dust of one who had called himself Pheidippides as he left the Day Path and took the Night Road.

Gun-carriage and reversed arms and bay charger, faithful comrades with bent heads, the voice of victory over the grave--"I am the resurrection and the life"--the volleys of honour, the proud salut of the brave to the vanished brave, the quivering farewells of the few who turn away from the fresh-piled earth with their hearts dragging behind--all had been; and all had gone. Evening descended upon the veld with a golden radiance which soothed like prayer.

By the open window at the foot of a bed in the Stay Awhile Hospital a woman gazed into the saffron splendour with an intentness which seemed to make all her body listen. Both melancholy and purpose marked the attitude of the figure.

A voice from the bed at the foot of which she stood drew her gaze away from the sunset sky to meet the bright, troubled eyes.

"What is it, Jigger?" the woman asked gently, and she looked to see that the framework which kept the bedclothes from a shattered leg was properly in its place.

"'E done a lot for me," was the reply. "A lot 'e done, and I dunno how I'll git along now."

There was great hopelessness in the tone.

"He told me you would always have enough to help you get on, Jigger. He thought of all that."

"Ere, oh, 'ere it ain't that," the lad said in a sudden passion of protest, the tears standing in his eyes. "It ain't that! Wot's money, when your friend wot give it ain't 'ere! I never done nothing for 'im--that's wot I feel. Nothing at all for 'im."

"You are wrong," was the soft reply. "He told me only a few days ago that you were like a loaf of bread in the cupboard--good for all the time."

The tears left the wide blue eyes. "Did 'e say that--did 'e?" he asked, and when she nodded and smiled, he added, "'E's 'appy now, ain't 'e?" His look questioned her eagerly.

For an instant she turned and gazed at the sunset, and her eyes took on a strange mystical glow. A colour came to her face, as though from strong flush of feeling, then she turned to him again, and answered steadily:

"Yes, he is happy now."

"How do you know?" the lad asked with awe in his face, for he believed in her utterly. Then, without waiting for her to answer, he added: "Is it, you hear him say so, as I hear you singin' in my sleep sometimes--singin', singin', as you did at Glencader, that first time I ever 'eerd you? Is it the same as me in my sleep?"

"Yes, it is like that--just like that," she answered, taking his hand, and holding it with a motherly tenderness.

"Ain't you never goin' to sing again?" he added.

She was silent, looking at him almost abstractedly.

"This war'll be over pretty soon now," he continued, "and we'll all have to go back to work."

"Isn't this work?" Al'mah asked with a smile, which had in it something of her old whimsical self.

"It ain't play, and it ain't work," he answered with a sage frown of intellectual effort. "It's a cut above 'em both--that's my fancy."

"It would seem like that," was the response. "What are you going to do when you get back to England?" she inquired.

"I thought I'd ask you that," he replied anxiously. "Couldn't I be a scene-shifter or somefink at the opery w'ere you sing?"

"I'm going to sing again, am I?" she asked.

"You'd have to be busy," he protested admiringly.

"Yes, I'll have to be busy," she replied, her voice ringing a little, "and we'll have to find a way of being busy together."

"His gryce'd like that," he responded.

She turned her face slowly to the evening sky, where grey clouds became silver and piled up to a summit of light. She was silent for a long time.

"If work won't cure, nothing will," she said in a voice scarce above a whisper. Her body trembled a little, and her eyes closed, as though to shut out something that pained her sight.

"I wish you'd sing somethin'--same as you did that night at Glencader, about the green hill far away," whispered the little trumpeter from the bed.

She looked at him for a moment meditatively, then shook her head, and turned again to the light in the evening sky.

"P'raps she's makin' up a new song," Jigger said to himself.

On a kopje overlooking the place where Ian Stafford had been laid to sleep to the call of the trumpets, two people sat watching the sun go down. Never in the years that had gone had there been such silence between them as they sat together. Words had been the clouds in which the lightning of their thoughts had been lost; they had been the disguises in which the truth of things masqueraded. They had not dared to be silent, lest the truth should stalk naked before them. Silence would have revealed their unhappiness; they would not have dared to look closely and deeply into each other's face, lest revelation should force them to say, "It has been a mistake; let us end it." So they had talked and talked and acted, and yet had done nothing and been nothing.

Now they were silent, because they had tossed into the abyss of Time the cup of trembling, and had drunk of the chalice of peace. Over the grave into which, this day, they had thrown the rock-roses and sprigs of the karoo bush, they had, in silence, made pledges to each other, that life's disguises should be no more for them; that the door should be wide open between the chambers where their souls dwelt, each in its own pension of being, with its own individual sense, but with the same light, warmth, and nutriment, and with the free confidence which exempts life from its confessions. There should be no hidden things any more.

There was a smile on the man's face as he looked out over the valley. With this day had come triumph for the flag he loved, for the land where he was born, and also the beginning of peace for the land where he had worked, where he had won his great fortune. He had helped to make this land what it was, and in battle he had helped to save it from disaster.

But there had come another victory--the victory of Home. The coincidence of all the vital values had come in one day, almost in one hour.

Smiling, he laid his hand upon the delicate fingers of the woman beside him, as they rested on her knee. She turned and looked at him with an understanding which is the beginning of all happiness; and a colour came to her cheeks such as he had not seen there for more days

than he could count. Her smile answered his own, but her eyes had a sadness which would never wholly leave them. When he had first seen those eyes he had thought them the most honest he had ever known. Looking at them now, with confidence restored, he thought again as he did that night at the opera the year of the Raid.

"It's all before us still, Jasmine," he said with a ring of purpose and a great gentleness in his tone.

Her hand trembled, the shadows deepened in her eyes, but determination gathered at her lips.

Some deep-cherished, deferred resolve reasserted itself.

"But I cannot--I cannot go on until you know all, Rudyard, and then you may not wish to go on," she said. Her voice shook, and the colour went from her lips. "I must be honest now--at last, about everything. I want to tell you--"

He got to his feet. Stooping, he raised her, and looked her squarely in the eyes.

"Tell me nothing, Jasmine," he said. Then he added in a voice of finality, "There is nothing to tell." Holding both her hands tight in one of his own, he put his fingers on her lips.

"A fresh start for a long race--the road is clear," he said firmly.

Looking into his eyes, she knew that he read her life and soul, that in his deep primitive way he understood her as she had been and as she was, and yet was content to go on. Her head drooped upon his breast.

A trumpet-call rang out piercingly sweet across the valley. It echoed and echoed away among the hills.

He raised his head to listen. Pride, vision and power were in his eyes.

"It's all before us still, Jasmine," he said again.

Her fingers tightened on his.

THE END

GLOSSARY:

AASVOGEL Vulture.

ALFALFA Lucerne.

BILTONG Strips of dried meat.

DISSELBOOM The single shaft of an ox-wagon.

DONGA A gulley or deep fissure in the soil.

DOPPER A dissenter from the Dutch Reformed Church, but generally

applied to Dutchmen in South Africa.

DORP Settlement or town.

KAROO The highlands of the interior of South Africa.

KOPJE A rounded hillock.

KLOOF A gap or pass in mountains.

KRAAL Native hut; also a walled inclosure for cattle.

KRANZES Rocky precipices.

MEERKAT A species of ichneumon.

ROOINEK Literally, "red-neck"; term applied to British soldiers by the Boers.

SCHANSES Intrenchments (or fissures on hills).

SJAMBOK A stick or whip made from hippopotamus or rhinoceros hide.

SPRUIT A small stream.

STOEP Veranda of a Dutch house.

TAAL South African Dutch.

TREK To move from place to place with belongings.

VELD An open grassy plain.

VELDSCHOEN Rough untanned leather shoes.

VERDOMDE Damned.

VIERKLEUR The national flag (four colours) of the late South African Republics.

VOORTREKKER Pioneer.

VROUW Wife.

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

CONTENTS

Volume 1.

THE PATROL OF THE CYPRESS HILLS
GOD'S GARRISON
A HAZARD OF THE NORTH

Volume 2.

A PRAIRIE VAGABOND
SHE OF THE TRIPLE CHEVRON
THREE OUTLAWS

Volume 3.

SHON MCGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE
PERE CHAMPAGNE
THE SCARLET HUNTER
THE STONE

Volume 4.

THE TALL MASTER
THE CRIMSON FLAG
THE FLOOD
IN PIPI VALLEY

Volume 5.

ANTOINE AND ANGELIQUE
THE CIPHER
A TRAGEDY OF NOBODIES
A SANCTUARY OF THE PLAINS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

With each volume of this subscription edition (1912) there is a special introduction, setting forth, in so far as seemed possible, the relation of each work to myself, to its companion works, and to the scheme of my literary life. Only one or two things, therefore, need be said here, as I wish God-speed to this edition, which, I trust, may help to make old friends warmer friends and new friends more understanding. Most of the novels and most of the short stories were suggested by incidents or characters which I had known, had heard of intimately, or, as in the case of the historical novels, had discovered in the works of historians. In no case are the main characters drawn absolutely from life; they are not portraits; and the proof of that is that no one has ever been able to identify, absolutely, any single character in these books. Indeed, it would be impossible for me to restrict myself to actual portraiture. It is trite to say that photography is not art, and photography has no charm for the artist, or the humanitarian indeed, in the portrayal of life. At its best it is only an exhibition of outer formal characteristics, idiosyncrasies, and contours. Freedom is the first essential of the artistic mind. As will be noticed in the introductions and original notes to several of these volumes, it is stated that they possess anachronisms; that they are not portraits of people living or dead, and that they only assume to be in harmony with the spirit of men and times and things. Perhaps in the first few pages of 'The Right of Way' portraiture is more nearly reached than in any other of these books, but it was only the nucleus, if I may say so, of a larger development which

the original Charley Steele never attained. In the novel he grew to represent infinitely more than the original ever represented in his short life.

That would not be strange when it is remembered that the germ of 'The Right of Way' was growing in my mind over a long period of years, and it must necessarily have developed into a larger conception than the original character could have suggested. The same may be said of the chief characters in 'The Weavers'. The story of the two brothers--David Claridge and Lord Eglinton--in that book was brewing in my mind for quite fifteen years, and the main incidents and characters of other novels in this edition had the same slow growth. My forthcoming novel, called 'The Judgment House', had been in my mind for nearly twenty years and only emerged when it was full grown, as it were; when I was so familiar with the characters that they seemed as real in all ways as though they were absolute people and incidents of one's own experience.

Little more need be said. In outward form the publishers have made this edition beautiful. I should be ill-content if there was not also an element of beauty in the work of the author. To my mind truth alone is not sufficient. Every work of art, no matter how primitive in conception, how tragic or how painful, or even how grotesque in design--like the gargoyles on Notre Dame must have, too, the elements of beauty--that which lures and holds, the durable and delightful thing. I have a hope that these books of mine, as faithful to life as I could make them, have also been touched here and there by the staff of beauty. Otherwise their day will be short indeed; and I should wish for them a day a little longer at least than my day and span.

I launch the ship. May it visit many a port! May its freight never lie neglected on the quays!

INTRODUCTION

So far as my literary work is concerned 'Pierre and His People' may be likened to a new city built upon the ashes of an old one. Let me explain. While I was in Australia I began a series of short stories and sketches of life in Canada which I called 'Pike Pole Sketches on the Madawaska'. A very few of them were published in Australia, and I brought with me to England in 1889 about twenty of them to make into a volume. I told Archibald Forbes, the great war correspondent, of my wish for publication, and asked him if he would mind reading the sketches and stories before I approached a publisher. He immediately consented, and one day I brought him the little brown bag containing the tales.

A few days afterwards there came an invitation to lunch, and I went to Clarence Gate, Regent's Park, to learn what Archibald Forbes thought of my tales. We were quite merry at luncheon, and after luncheon, which for him was a glass of milk and a biscuit, Forbes said to me, "Those stories, Parker--you have the best collection of titles I have ever known." He paused. I understood. To his mind the tales did not live up to their titles. He hastily added, "But I am going to give you a letter of introduction to Macmillan. I may be wrong." My reply was: "You need not give me a letter to Macmillan unless I write and ask you for it."

I took my little brown bag and went back to my comfortable rooms in an

old-fashioned square. I sat down before the fire on this bleak winter's night with a couple of years' work on my knee. One by one I glanced through the stories and in some cases read them carefully, and one by one I put them in the fire, and watched them burn. I was heavy at heart, but I felt that Forbes was right, and my own instinct told me that my ideas were better than my performance--and Forbes was right. Nothing was left of the tales; not a shred of paper, not a scrap of writing. They had all gone up the chimney in smoke. There was no self-pity. I had a grim kind of feeling regarding the thing, but I had no regrets, and I have never had any regrets since. I have forgotten most of the titles, and indeed all the stories except one. But Forbes and I were right; of that I am sure.

The next day after the arson I walked for hours where London was busiest. The shop windows fascinated me; they always did; but that day I seemed, subconsciously, to be looking for something. At last I found it. It was a second-hand shop in Covent Garden. In the window there was the uniform of an officer of the time of Wellington, and beside it--the leather coat and fur cap of a trapper of the Hudson's Bay Company! At that window I commenced to build again upon the ashes of last night's fire. Pretty Pierre, the French half-breed, or rather the original of him as I knew him when a child, looked out of the window at me. So I went home, and sitting in front of the fire which had received my manuscript the night before, with a pad upon my knee, I began to write 'The Patrol of the Cypress Hills' which opens 'Pierre and His People'.

The next day was Sunday. I went to service at the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, and while listening superficially to the sermon I was also reading the psalms. I came upon these words, "Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, that are out of remembrance," and this text, which I used in the story 'The Patrol of the Cypress Hills', became, in a sense, the text for all the stories which came after. It seemed to suggest the lives and the end of the lives of the workers of the pioneer world.

So it was that Pierre and His People chiefly concerned those who had been wounded by Fate, and had suffered the robberies of life and time while they did their work in the wide places. It may be that my readers have found what I tried, instinctively, to convey in the pioneer life I portrayed--"The soul of goodness in things evil." Such, on the whole, my observation had found in life, and the original of Pierre, with all his mistakes, misdemeanours, and even crimes, was such an one as I would have gone to in trouble or in hour of need, knowing that his face would never be turned from me.

These stories made their place at once. The 'Patrol of the Cypress Hills' was published first in 'The Independent' of New York and in 'Macmillan's Magazine' in England. Mr. Bliss Carman, then editor of 'The Independent', eagerly published several of them--'She of the Triple Chevron' and others. Mr. Carman's sympathy and insight were a great help to me in those early days. The then editor of 'Macmillan's Magazine', Mr. Mowbray Morris, was not, I think, quite so sure of the merits of the Pierre stories. He published them, but he was a little credulous regarding them, and he did not pat me on the back by any means. There was one, however, who made the best that is in 'Pierre and His People' possible; this was the unforgettable W. E. Henley, editor of 'The National Observer'. One day at a sitting I wrote a short story called 'Antoine and Angelique', and sent it to him almost before the ink was dry. The reply came by return of post: "It is almost, or quite, as good

as can be. Send me another." So forthwith I sent him 'God's Garrison', and it was quickly followed by 'The Three Outlaws', 'The Tall Master', 'The Flood', 'The Cipher', 'A Prairie Vagabond', and several others. At length came 'The Stone', which brought a telegram of congratulation, and finally 'The Crimson Flag'. The acknowledgment of that was a postcard containing these all too-flattering words: "Bravo, Balzac!" Henley would print what no other editor would print; he gave a man his chance to do the boldest thing that was in him, and I can truthfully say that the doors which he threw open gave freedom to an imagination and an individuality of conception, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful.

These stories and others which appeared in 'The National Observer', in 'Macmillan's', in 'The English Illustrated Magazine' and others made many friends; so that when the book at length came out it was received with generous praise, though not without some criticism. It made its place, however, at once, and later appeared another series, called 'An Adventurer of the North', or, as it is called in this edition, 'A Romany of the Snows'. Through all the twenty stories of this second volume the character of Pierre moved; and by the time the last was written there was scarcely an important magazine in the English-speaking world which had not printed one or more of them. Whatever may be thought of the stories themselves, or of the manner in which the life of the Far North was portrayed, of one thing I am sure: Pierre was true to the life--to his race, to his environment, to the conditions of pioneer life through which he moved. When the book first came out there was some criticism from Canada itself, but that criticism has long since died away, and it never was determined.

Plays have been founded on the 'Pierre' series, and one in particular, 'Pierre of the Plains', had a considerable success, with Mr. Edgar Selwyn, the adapter, in the main part. I do not know whether, if I were to begin again, I should have written all the Pierre stories in quite the same way. Perhaps it is just as well that I am not able to begin again. The stories made their own place in their own way, and that there is still a steady demand for 'Pierre and His People' and 'A Romany of the Snows' seems evidence that the editor of an important magazine in New York who declined to recommend them for publication to his firm (and later published several of the same series) was wrong, when he said that the tales "seemed not to be salient." Things that are not "salient" do not endure. It is twenty years since 'Pierre and His People' was produced--and it still endures. For this I cannot but be deeply grateful. In any case, what 'Pierre' did was to open up a field which had not been opened before, but which other authors have exploited since with success and distinction. 'Pierre' was the pioneer of the Far North in fiction; that much may be said; and for the rest, Time is the test, and Time will have its way with me as with the rest.

NOTE

It is possible that a Note on the country portrayed in these stories may be in keeping. Until 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company--first granted its charter by King Charles II--practically ruled that vast region stretching from the fiftieth parallel of latitude to the Arctic Ocean--a handful of adventurous men entrenched in forts and posts, yet trading with, and mostly peacefully conquering, many savage tribes. Once the sole master

of the North, the H. B. C. (as it is familiarly called) is revered by the Indians and half-breeds as much as, if not more than, the Government established at Ottawa. It has had its forts within the Arctic Circle; it has successfully exploited a country larger than the United States. The Red River Valley, the Saskatchewan Valley, and British Columbia, are now belted by a great railway, and given to the plough; but in the far north life is much the same as it was a hundred years ago. There the trapper, clerk, trader, and factor are cast in the mould of another century, though possessing the acuter energies of this. The 'voyageur' and 'courier de bois' still exist, though, generally, under less picturesque names.

The bare story of the hardy and wonderful career of the adventurers trading in Hudson's Bay,--of whom Prince Rupert was once chiefest,--and the life of the prairies, may be found in histories and books of travel; but their romances, the near narratives of individual lives, have waited the telling. In this book I have tried to feel my way towards the heart of that life--worthy of being loved by all British men, for it has given honest graves to gallant fellows of our breeding. Imperfectly, of course, I have done it; but there is much more to be told.

When I started *Pretty Pierre* on his travels, I did not know--nor did he--how far or wide his adventures and experiences would run. They have, however, extended from Quebec in the east to British Columbia in the west, and from the Cypress Hills in the south to the Coppermine River in the north. With a less adventurous man we had had fewer happenings. His faults were not of his race, that is, French and Indian,--nor were his virtues; they belong to all peoples. But the expression of these is affected by the country itself. *Pierre* passes through this series of stories, connecting them, as he himself connects two races, and here and there links the past of the Hudson's Bay Company with more modern life and Canadian energy pushing northward. Here is something of romance "pure and simple," but also traditions and character, which are the single property of this austere but not cheerless heritage of our race.

All of the tales have appeared in magazines and journals--namely, 'The National Observer', 'Macmillan's', 'The National Review', and 'The English Illustrated'; and 'The Independent of New York'. By the courtesy of the proprietors of these I am permitted to republish.

G. P.

HARPENDEN,
HERTFORDSHIRE,
July, 1892.

BOOK 1.

THE PATROL OF THE CYPRESS HILLS
GOD'S GARRISON
A HAZARD OF THE NORTH

THE PATROL OF THE CYPRESS HILLS

"He's too ha'sh," said old Alexander Windsor, as he shut the creaking door of the store after a vanishing figure, and turned to the big iron stove with outstretched hands; hands that were cold both summer and winter. He was of lean and frigid make.

"Sergeant Fones is too ha'sh," he repeated, as he pulled out the damper and cleared away the ashes with the iron poker.

Pretty Pierre blew a quick, straight column of cigarette smoke into the air, tilted his chair back, and said: "I do not know what you mean by 'ha'sh,' but he is the devil. Eh, well, there was more than one devil made sometime in the North West." He laughed softly.

"That gives you a chance in history, Pretty Pierre," said a voice from behind a pile of woollen goods and buffalo skins in the centre of the floor. The owner of the voice then walked to the window. He scratched some frost from the pane and looked out to where the trooper in dog-skin coat, gauntlets and cap, was mounting his broncho. The old man came and stood near the young man,--the owner of the voice,--and said again: "He's too ha'sh."

"Harsh you mean, father," added the other.

"Yes, harsh you mean, Old Brown Windsor,--quite harsh," said Pierre.

Alexander Windsor, storekeeper and general dealer, was sometimes called "Old Brown Windsor" and sometimes "Old Aleck," to distinguish him from his son, who was known as "Young Aleck."

As the old man walked back again to the stove to warm his hands, Young Aleck continued: "He does his duty, that's all. If he doesn't wear kid gloves while at it, it's his choice. He doesn't go beyond his duty. You can bank on that. It would be hard to exceed that way out here."

"True, Young Aleck, so true; but then he wears gloves of iron, of ice. That is not good. Sometime the glove will be too hard and cold on a man's shoulder, and then!--Well, I should like to be there," said Pierre, showing his white teeth.

Old Aleck shivered, and held his fingers where the stove was red hot.

The young man did not hear this speech; from the window he was watching Sergeant Fones as he rode towards the Big Divide. Presently he said: "He's going towards Humphrey's place. I--" He stopped, bent his brows, caught one corner of his slight moustache between his teeth, and did not stir a muscle until the Sergeant had passed over the Divide.

Old Aleck was meanwhile dilating upon his theme before a passive listener. But Pierre was only passive outwardly. Besides hearkening to the father's complaints he was closely watching the son. Pierre was clever, and a good actor. He had learned the power of reserve and outward immobility. The Indian in him helped him there. He had heard what Young Aleck had just muttered; but to the man of the cold fingers he said: "You keep good whisky in spite of the law and the iron glove, Old Aleck." To the young man: "And you can drink it so free, eh, Young Aleck?"

The half-breed looked out of the corners of his eyes at the young man,

but he did not raise the peak of his fur cap in doing so, and his glances askance were not seen.

Young Aleck had been writing something with his finger-nail on the frost of the pane, over and over again. When Pierre spoke to him thus he scratched out the word he had written, with what seemed unnecessary force. But in one corner it remained:

"Mab--"

Pierre added: "That is what they say at Humphrey's ranch."

"Who says that at Humphrey's?--Pierre, you lie!" was the sharp and threatening reply. The significance of this last statement had been often attested on the prairies by the piercing emphasis of a six-chambered revolver. It was evident that Young Aleck was in earnest. Pierre's eyes glowed in the shadow, but he idly replied:

"I do not remember quite who said it. Well, 'mon ami,' perhaps I lie; perhaps. Sometimes we dream things, and these dreams are true. You call it a lie--'bien!' Sergeant Fones, he dreams perhaps Old Aleck sells whisky against the law to men you call whisky runners, sometimes to Indians and half-breeds--halfbreeds like Pretty Pierre. That was a dream of Sergeant Fones; but you see he believes it true. It is good sport, eh? Will you not take--what is it?--a silent partner? Yes; a silent partner, Old Aleck. Pretty Pierre has spare time, a little, to make money for his friends and for himself, eh?"

When did not Pierre have time to spare? He was a gambler. Unlike the majority of half-breeds, he had a pronounced French manner, nonchalant and debonair.

The Indian in him gave him coolness and nerve. His cheeks had a tinge of delicate red under their whiteness, like those of a woman. That was why he was called Pretty Pierre. The country had, however, felt a kind of weird menace in the name. It was used to snakes whose rattle gave notice of approach or signal of danger. But Pretty Pierre was like the death-adder, small and beautiful, silent and deadly. At one time he had made a secret of his trade, or thought he was doing so. In those days he was often to be seen at David Humphrey's home, and often in talk with Mab Humphrey; but it was there one night that the man who was ha'sh gave him his true character, with much candour and no comment.

Afterwards Pierre was not seen at Humphrey's ranch. Men prophesied that he would have revenge some day on Sergeant Fones; but he did not show anything on which this opinion could be based. He took no umbrage at being called Pretty Pierre the gambler. But for all that he was possessed of a devil.

Young Aleck had inherited some money through his dead mother from his grandfather, a Hudson's Bay factor. He had been in the East for some years, and when he came back he brought his "little pile" and an impressionable heart with him. The former Pretty Pierre and his friends set about to win; the latter, Mab Humphrey won without the trying. Yet Mab gave Young Aleck as much as he gave her. More. Because her love sprang from a simple, earnest, and uncontaminated life. Her purity and affection were being played against Pierre's designs and Young Aleck's weakness. With Aleck cards and liquor went together. Pierre seldom drank.

But what of Sergeant Fones? If the man that knew him best--the Commandant--had been asked for his history, the reply would have been: "Five years in the Service, rigid disciplinarian, best non-commissioned officer on the Patrol of the Cypress Hills." That was all the Commandant knew.

A soldier-policeman's life on the frontier is rough, solitary, and severe. Active duty and responsibility are all that make it endurable. To few is it fascinating. A free and thoughtful nature would, however, find much in it, in spite of great hardships, to give interest and even pleasure. The sense of breadth and vastness, and the inspiration of pure air could be a very gospel of strength, beauty, and courage, to such an one--for a time. But was Sergeant Fones such an one? The Commandant's scornful reply to a question of the kind would have been: "He is the best soldier on the Patrol."

And so with hard gallops here and there after the refugees of crime or misfortune, or both, who fled before them like deer among the passes of the hills, and, like deer at bay, often fought like demons to the death; with border watchings, and protection and care and vigilance of the Indians; with hurried marches at sunrise, the thermometer at fifty degrees below zero often in winter, and open camps beneath the stars, and no camp at all, as often as not, winter and summer; with rough barrack fun and parade and drill and guard of prisoners; and with chances now and then to pay homage to a woman's face, the Mounted Force grew full of the Spirit of the West and became brown, valiant, and hardy, with wind and weather. Perhaps some of them longed to touch, oftener than they did, the hands of children, and to consider more the faces of women,--for hearts are hearts even under a belted coat of red on the Fiftieth Parallel,--but men of nerve do not blazon their feelings.

No one would have accused Sergeant Fones of having a heart. Men of keen

discernment would have seen in him the little Bismarck of the Mounted Police. His name carried farther on the Cypress Hills Patrol than any other; and yet his officers could never say that he exceeded his duty or enlarged upon the orders he received. He had no sympathy with crime. Others of the force might wink at it; but his mind appeared to sit severely upright upon the cold platform of Penalty, in beholding breaches of the statutes. He would not have rained upon the unjust as the just if he had had the directing of the heavens. As Private Gellatly put it: "Sergeant Fones has the fear o' God in his heart, and the law of the land across his saddle, and the newest breech-loading at that!" He was part of the great machine of Order, the servant of Justice, the sentinel in the vestibule of Martial Law. His interpretation of duty worked upward as downward. Officers and privates were acted on by the force known as Sergeant Fones. Some people, like Old Brown Windsor, spoke hardly and openly of this force. There were three people who never did--Pretty Pierre, Young Aleck, and Mab Humphrey. Pierre hated him; Young Aleck admired in him a quality lying dormant in himself--decision; Mab Humphrey spoke unkindly of no one. Besides--but no!

What was Sergeant Fones's country? No one knew. Where had he come from? No one asked him more than once. He could talk French with Pierre, --a kind of French that sometimes made the undertone of red in the Frenchman's cheeks darker. He had been heard to speak German to a German prisoner, and once, when a gang of Italians were making trouble on a line of railway under construction, he arrested the leader, and, in a few

swift, sharp words in the language of the rioters, settled the business. He had no accent that betrayed his nationality.

He had been recommended for a commission. The officer in command had hinted that the Sergeant might get a Christmas present. The officer had further said: "And if it was something that both you and the Patrol would be the better for, you couldn't object, Sergeant." But the Sergeant only saluted, looking steadily into the eyes of the officer. That was his reply. Private Gellatly, standing without, heard Sergeant Fones say, as he passed into the open air, and slowly bared his forehead to the winter sun:

"Exactly."

And Private Gellatly cried, with revolt in his voice, "Divils me own, the word that a't to have been full o' joy was like the clip of a rifle-breech."

Justice in a new country is administered with promptitude and vigour, or else not administered at all. Where an officer of the Mounted Police-Soldiery has all the powers of a magistrate, the law's delay and the insolence of office have little space in which to work. One of the commonest slips of virtue in the Canadian West was selling whisky contrary to the law of prohibition which prevailed. Whisky runners were land smugglers. Old Brown Windsor had, somehow, got the reputation of being connected with the whisky runners; not a very respectable business, and thought to be dangerous. Whisky runners were inclined to resent intrusion on their privacy with a touch of that biting inhospitableness which a moonlighter of Kentucky uses toward an inquisitive, unsympathetic marshal. On the Cypress Hills Patrol, however, the erring servants of Bacchus were having a hard time of it. Vigilance never slept there in the days of which these lines bear record. Old Brown Windsor had, in words, freely espoused the cause of the sinful. To the careless spectator it seemed a charitable siding with the suffering; a proof that the old man's heart was not so cold as his hands. Sergeant Fones thought differently, and his mission had just been to warn the store-keeper that there was menacing evidence gathering against him, and that his friendship with Golden Feather, the Indian Chief, had better cease at once. Sergeant Fones had a way of putting things. Old Brown Windsor endeavoured for a moment to be sarcastic. This was the brief dialogue in the domain of sarcasm:

"I s'pose you just lit round in a friendly sort of way, hopin' that I'd kenoodle with you later."

"Exactly."

There was an unpleasant click to the word. The old man's hands got colder. He had nothing more to say.

Before leaving, the Sergeant said something quietly and quickly to Young Aleck. Pierre observed, but could not hear. Young Aleck was uneasy; Pierre was perplexed. The Sergeant turned at the door, and said in French: "What are your chances for a Merry Christmas at Pardon's Drive, Pretty Pierre?" Pierre answered nothing. He shrugged his shoulders, and as the door closed, muttered, "Il est le diable." And he meant it. What should Sergeant Fones know of that intended meeting at Pardon's Drive on Christmas Day? And if he knew, what then? It was not against the law to play euchre. Still it perplexed Pierre. Before the Windsors, father and

son, however, he was, as we have seen, playfully cool.

After quitting Old Brown Windsor's store, Sergeant Fones urged his stout broncho to a quicker pace than usual. The broncho was, like himself, wasteful of neither action nor affection. The Sergeant had caught him wild and independent, had brought him in, broken him, and taught him obedience. They understood each other; perhaps they loved each other. But about that even Private Gellatly had views in common with the general sentiment as to the character of Sergeant Fones. The private remarked once on this point "Sarpints alive! the heels of the one and the law of the other is the love of them. They'll weather together like the Devil and Death."

The Sergeant was brooding; that was not like him. He was hesitating; that was less like him. He turned his broncho round as if to cross the Big Divide and to go back to Windsor's store; but he changed his mind again, and rode on toward David Humphrey's ranch. He sat as if he had been born in the saddle. His was a face for the artist, strong and clear, and having a dominant expression of force. The eyes were deepset and watchful. A kind of disdain might be traced in the curve of the short upper lip, to which the moustache was clipped close--a good fit, like his coat. The disdain was more marked this morning.

The first part of his ride had been seen by Young Aleck, the second part by Mab Humphrey. Her first thought on seeing him was one of apprehension for Young Aleck and those of Young Aleck's name. She knew that people spoke of her lover as a ne'er-do-weel; and that they associated his name freely with that of Pretty Pierre and his gang. She had a dread of Pierre, and, only the night before, she had determined to make one last great effort to save Aleck, and if he would not be saved--strange that, thinking it all over again, as she watched the figure on horseback coming nearer, her mind should swerve to what she had heard of Sergeant Fones's expected promotion. Then she fell to wondering if anyone had ever given him a real Christmas present; if he had any friends at all; if life meant anything more to him than carrying the law of the land across his saddle. Again he suddenly came to her in a new thought, free from apprehension, and as the champion of her cause to defeat the half-breed and his gang, and save Aleck from present danger or future perils.

She was such a woman as prairies nurture; in spirit broad and thoughtful and full of energy; not so deep as the mountain woman, not so imaginative, but with more persistency, more daring. Youth to her was a warmth, a glory. She hated excess and lawlessness, but she could understand it. She felt sometimes as if she must go far away into the unpeopled spaces, and shriek out her soul to the stars from the fulness of too much life. She supposed men had feelings of that kind too, but that they fell to playing cards and drinking instead of crying to the stars. Still, she preferred her way.

Once, Sergeant Fones, on leaving the house, said grimly after his fashion: "Not Mab but Ariadne--excuse a soldier's bluntness..... Good-bye!" and with a brusque salute he had ridden away. What he meant she did not know and could not ask. The thought instantly came to her mind: Not Sergeant Fones; but who? She wondered if Ariadne was born on the prairie. What knew she of the girl who helped Theseus, her lover, to slay the Minotaur? What guessed she of the Slopes of Naxos? How old was Ariadne? Twenty? For that was Mab's age. Was Ariadne beautiful? She ran her fingers loosely through her short brown hair, waving softly about her Greek-shaped head, and reasoned that Ariadne must have been

presentable, or Sergeant Fones would not have made the comparison. She hoped Ariadne could ride well, for she could.

But how white the world looked this morning, and how proud and brilliant the sky! Nothing in the plane of vision but waves of snow stretching to the Cypress Hills; far to the left a solitary house, with its tin roof flashing back the sun, and to the right the Big Divide. It was an old-fashioned winter, not one in which bare ground and sharp winds make life outdoors inhospitable. Snow is hospitable-clean, impacted snow; restful and silent. But there was one spot in the area of white, on which Mab's eyes were fixed now, with something different in them from what had been there. Again it was a memory with which Sergeant Fones was associated. One day in the summer just past she had watched him and his company put away to rest under the cool sod, where many another lay in silent company, a prairie wanderer, some outcast from a better life gone by. Afterwards, in her home, she saw the Sergeant stand at the window, looking out towards the spot where the waves in the sea of grass were more regular and greener than elsewhere, and were surmounted by a high cross. She said to him--for she of all was never shy of his stern ways:

"Why is the grass always greenest there, Sergeant Fones?"

He knew what she meant, and slowly said: "It is the Barracks of the Free."

She had no views of life save those of duty and work and natural joy and loving a ne'er-do-weel, and she said: "I do not understand that."

And the Sergeant replied: "'Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, who are out of remembrance.'"

But Mab said again: "I do not understand that either."

The Sergeant did not at once reply. He stepped to the door and gave a short command to some one without, and in a moment his company was mounted in line; handsome, dashing fellows; one the son of an English nobleman, one the brother of an eminent Canadian politician, one related to a celebrated English dramatist. He ran his eye along the line, then turned to Mab, raised his cap with machine-like precision, and said: "No, I suppose you do not understand that. Keep Aleck Windsor from Pretty Pierre and his gang. Good-bye."

Then he mounted and rode away. Every other man in the company looked back to where the girl stood in the doorway; he did not. Private Gellatly said, with a shake of the head, as she was lost to view: "Devils bestir me, what a widdy she'll make!" It was understood that Aleck Windsor and Mab Humphrey were to be married on the coming New Year's Day. What connection was there between the words of Sergeant Fones and those of Private Gellatly? None, perhaps.

Mab thought upon that day as she looked out, this December morning, and saw Sergeant Fones dismounting at the door. David Humphrey, who was outside, offered to put up the Sergeant's horse; but he said: "No, if you'll hold him just a moment, Mr. Humphrey, I'll ask for a drink of something warm, and move on. Miss Humphrey is inside, I suppose?"

"She'll give you a drink of the best to be had on your patrol, Sergeant," was the laughing reply. "Thanks for that, but tea or coffee is good enough for me," said the Sergeant. Entering, the coffee was soon in the

hand of the hardy soldier. Once he paused in his drinking and scanned Mab's face closely. Most people would have said the Sergeant had an affair of the law in hand, and was searching the face of a criminal; but most people are not good at interpretation. Mab was speaking to the chore-girl at the same time and did not see the look. If she could have defined her thoughts when she, in turn, glanced into the Sergeant's face, a moment afterwards, she would have said, "Austerity fills this man. Isolation marks him for its own." In the eyes were only purpose, decision, and command. Was that the look that had been fixed upon her face a moment ago? It must have been. His features had not changed a breath. Mab began their talk.

"They say you are to get a Christmas present of promotion, Sergeant Fones."

"I have not seen it gazetted," he answered enigmatically.

"You and your friends will be glad of it."

"I like the service."

"You will have more freedom with a commission." He made no reply, but rose and walked to the window, and looked out across the snow, drawing on his gauntlets as he did so.

She saw that he was looking where the grass in summer was the greenest!

He turned and said:

"I am going to barracks now. I suppose Young Aleck will be in quarters here on Christmas Day, Miss Mab?"

"I think so," and she blushed.

"Did he say he would be here?"

"Yes."

"Exactly."

He looked toward the coffee. Then: "Thank you.....Good-bye."

"Sergeant?"

"Miss Humphrey!"

"Will you not come to us on Christmas Day?"

His eyelids closed swiftly and opened again. "I shall be on duty."

"And promoted?"

"Perhaps."

"And merry and happy?"--she smiled to herself to think of Sergeant Fones being merry and happy.

"Exactly."

The word suited him.

He paused a moment with his fingers on the latch, and turned round as if to speak; pulled off his gauntlet, and then as quickly put it on again. Had he meant to offer his hand in good-bye? He had never been seen to take the hand of anyone except with the might of the law visible in steel.

He opened the door with the right hand, but turned round as he stepped out, so that the left held it while he faced the warmth of the room and the face of the girl. The door closed.

Mounted, and having said good-bye to Mr. Humphrey, he turned towards the house, raised his cap with soldierly brusqueness, and rode away in the direction of the barracks.

The girl did not watch him. She was thinking of Young Aleck, and of Christmas Day, now near. The Sergeant did not look back.

Meantime the party at Windsor's store was broken up. Pretty Pierre and Young Aleck had talked together, and the old man had heard his son say: "Remember, Pierre, it is for the last time." Then they talked after this fashion:

"Ah, I know, 'mon ami;' for the last time! 'Eh, bien,' you will spend Christmas Day with us too--no? You surely will not leave us on the day of good fortune? Where better can you take your pleasure for the last time? One day is not enough for farewell. Two, three; that is the magic number. You will, eh? no? Well, well, you will come to-morrow--and--eh, 'mon ami,' where do you go the next day? Oh, 'pardon,' I forgot, you spend the Christmas Day--I know. And the day of the New Year? Ah, Young Aleck, that is what they say--the devil for the devil's luck. So."

"Stop that, Pierre." There was fierceness in the tone. "I spend the Christmas Day where you don't, and as I like, and the rest doesn't concern you. I drink with you, I play with you--'bien!' As you say yourself, 'bien,' isn't that enough?"

"'Pardon!' We will not quarrel. No; we spend not the Christmas Day after the same fashion, quite. Then, to-morrow at Pardon's Drive! Adieu!"

Pretty Pierre went out of one door, a malediction between his white teeth, and Aleck went out of another door with a malediction upon his gloomy lips. But both maledictions were levelled at the same person. Poor Aleck.

"Poor Aleck!" That is the way we sometimes think of a good nature gone awry; one that has learned to say cruel maledictions to itself, and against which demons hurl their deadly maledictions too. Alas, for the ne'er-do-weel!

That night a stalwart figure passed from David Humphrey's door, carrying with him the warm atmosphere of a good woman's love. The chilly outer air of the world seemed not to touch him, Love's curtains were drawn so close. Had one stood within "the Hunter's Room," as it was called, a little while before, one would have seen a man's head bowed before a woman, and her hand smoothing back the hair from the handsome brow where dissipation had drawn some deep lines. Presently the hand raised the

head until the eyes of the woman looked full into the eyes of the man.

"You will not go to Pardon's Drive again, will you, Aleck?"

"Never again after Christmas Day, Mab. But I must go to-morrow. I have given my word."

"I know. To meet Pretty Pierre and all the rest, and for what? Oh, Aleck, isn't the suspicion about your father enough, but you must put this on me as well?"

"My father must suffer for his wrong-doing if he does wrong, and I for mine."

There was a moment's silence. He bowed his head again.

"And I have done wrong to us both. Forgive me, Mab."

She leaned over and caressed his hair. "I forgive you, Aleck."

A thousand new thoughts were thrilling through him. Yet this man had given his word to do that for which he must ask forgiveness of the woman he loved. But to Pretty Pierre, forgiven or unforgiven, he would keep his word. She understood it better than most of those who read this brief record can. Every sphere has its code of honour and duty peculiar to itself.

"You will come to me on Christmas morning, Aleck?"

"I will come on Christmas morning."

"And no more after that of Pretty Pierre?"

"And no more of Pretty Pierre."

She trusted him; but neither could reckon with unknown forces.

Sergeant Fones, sitting in the barracks in talk with Private Gellatly, said at that moment in a swift silence, "Exactly."

Pretty Pierre, at Pardon's Drive, drinking a glass of brandy at that moment, said to the ceiling:

"No more of Pretty Pierre after to-morrow night, monsieur! Bien! If it is for the last time, then it is for the last time. So....so."

He smiled. His teeth were amazingly white.

The stalwart figure strode on under the stars, the white night a lens for visions of days of rejoicing to come. All evil was far from him. The dolorous tide rolled back in this hour from his life, and he revelled in the light of a new day.

"When I've played my last card to-morrow night with Pretty Pierre, I'll begin the world again," he whispered.

And Sergeant Fones in the barracks said just then, in response to a further remark of Private Gellatly,--"Exactly."

Young Aleck fell to singing:

"Out from your vineland come
Into the prairies wild;
Here will we make our home,
Father, mother, and child;
Come, my love, to our home,
Father, mother, and child,
Father, mother, and--"

He fell to thinking again--"and child--and child,"--it was in his ears
and in his heart.

But Pretty Pierre was singing softly to himself in the room at Pardon's
Drive:

"Three good friends with the wine at night
Vive la compagnie!
Two good friends when the sun grows bright
Vive la compagnie!
Vive la, vive la, vive l'amour!
Vive la, vive la, vive l'amour!
Three good friends, two good friends
Vive la compagnie!"

What did it mean?

Private Gellatly was cousin to Idaho Jack, and Idaho Jack disliked Pretty
Pierre, though he had been one of the gang. The cousins had seen each
other lately, and Private Gellatly had had a talk with the man who was
ha'sh. It may be that others besides Pierre had an idea of what it
meant.

In the house at Pardon's Drive the next night sat eight men, of whom
three were Pretty Pierre, Young Aleck, and Idaho Jack. Young Aleck's
face was flushed with bad liquor and the worse excitement of play. This
was one of the unreckoned forces. Was this the man that sang the tender
song under the stars last night? Pretty Pierre's face was less pretty
than usual; the cheeks were pallid, the eyes were hard and cold. Once he
looked at his partner as if to say, "Not yet." Idaho Jack saw the look;
he glanced at his watch; it was eleven o'clock. At that moment the door
opened, and Sergeant Fones entered. All started to their feet, most with
curses on their lips; but Sergeant Fones never seemed to hear anything
that could make a feature of his face alter. Pierre's hand was on his
hip, as if feeling for something. Sergeant Fones saw that; but he walked
to where Aleck stood, with his unplayed cards still in his hand, and,
laying a hand on his shoulder, said, "Come with me."

"Why should I go with you?"--this with a drunken man's bravado.

"You are my prisoner."

Pierre stepped forward. "What is his crime?" he exclaimed.

"How does that concern you, Pretty Pierre?"

"He is my friend."

"Is he your friend, Aleck?"

What was there in the eyes of Sergeant Fones that forced the reply,--
"To-night, yes; to-morrow, no."

"Exactly. It is near to-morrow; come."

Aleck was led towards the door. Once more Pierre's hand went to his hip; but he was looking at the prisoner, not at the Sergeant. The Sergeant saw, and his fingers were at his belt. He opened the door. Aleck passed out. He followed. Two horses were tied to a post. With difficulty Aleck was mounted. Once on the way his brain began slowly to clear, but he grew painfully cold. It was a bitter night. How bitter it might have been for the ne'er-do-weel let the words of Idaho Jack, spoken in a long hour's talk next day with Old Brown Windsor, show. "Pretty Pierre, after the two were gone, said, with a shiver of curses,--'Another hour and it would have been done, and no one to blame. He was ready for trouble. His money was nearly finished. A little quarrel easily made, the door would open, and he would pass out. His horse would be gone, he could not come back; he would walk. The air is cold, quite, quite cold; and the snow is a soft bed. He would sleep well and sound, having seen Pretty Pierre for the last time. And now--' The rest was French and furtive."

From that hour Idaho Jack and Pretty Pierre parted company.

Riding from Pardon's Drive, Young Aleck noticed at last that they were not going towards the barracks. He said: "Why do you arrest me?"

The Sergeant replied: "You will know that soon enough. You are now going to your own home. Tomorrow you will keep your word and go to David Humphrey's place; the next day I will come for you. Which do you choose: to ride with me to-night to the barracks and know why you are arrested, or go, unknowing, as I bid you, and keep your word with the girl?"

Through Aleck's fevered brain, there ran the words of the song he sang before--

"Out from your vineland come
Into the prairies wild;
Here will we make our home,
Father, mother, and child."

He could have but one answer.

At the door of his home the Sergeant left him with the words, "Remember you are on parole."

Aleck noticed as the Sergeant rode away that the face of the sky had changed, and slight gusts of wind had come up. At any other time his mind would have dwelt upon the fact. It did not do so now.

Christmas Day came. People said that the fiercest night, since the blizzard day of 1863, had been passed. But the morning was clear and beautiful. The sun came up like a great flower expanding. First the yellow, then the purple, then the red, and then a mighty shield of roses. The world was a blanket of drift, and down, and glistening silver.

Mab Humphrey greeted her lover with such a smile as only springs to a thankful woman's lips. He had given his word and had kept it; and the path of the future seemed surer.

He was a prisoner on parole; still that did not depress him. Plans for coming days were talked of, and the laughter of many voices filled the house. The ne'er-do-weel was clothed and in his right mind. In the Hunter's Room the noblest trophy was the heart of a repentant prodigal.

In the barracks that morning a gazetted notice was posted, announcing, with such technical language as is the custom, that Sergeant Fones was promoted to be a lieutenant in the Mounted Police Force of the North West Territory. When the officer in command sent for him he could not be found. But he was found that morning; and when Private Gellatly, with a warm hand, touching the glove of "iron and ice" that, indeed, now said: "Sergeant Fones, you are promoted, God help you!" he gave no sign. Motionless, stern, erect, he sat there upon his horse, beside a stunted larch tree. The broncho seemed to understand, for he did not stir, and had not done so for hours;--they could tell that. The bridle rein was still in the frigid fingers, and a smile was upon the face.

A smile upon the face of Sergeant Fones!

Perhaps he smiled that he was going to the Barracks of the Free--

"Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, that are out of remembrance."

In the wild night he had lost his way, though but a few miles from the barracks.

He had done his duty rigidly in that sphere of life where he had lived so much alone among his many comrades. Had he exceeded his duty once in arresting Young Aleck?

When, the next day, Sergeant Fones lay in the barracks, over him the flag for which he had sworn to do honest service, and his promotion papers in his quiet hand, the two who loved each other stood beside him for many a throbbing minute. And one said to herself, silently: "I felt sometimes" --but no more words did she say even to herself.

Old Aleck came in, and walked to where the Sergeant slept, wrapped close in that white frosted coverlet which man wears but once. He stood for a moment silent, his fingers numbly clasped.

Private Gellatly spoke softly: "Angels betide me, it's little we knew the great of him till he wint away; the pride, and the law--and the love of him."

In the tragedy that faced them this Christmas morning one at least had seen "the love of him." Perhaps the broncho had known it before.

Old Aleck laid a palm upon the hand he had never touched when it had life. "He's--too--ha'sh," he said slowly.

Private Gellatly looked up wonderingly. But the old man's eyes were wet.

GOD'S GARRISON

Twenty years ago there was trouble at Fort o' God. "Out of this place we get betwixt the suns," said Gyng the Factor. "No help that falls abaft tomorrow could save us. Food dwindles, and ammunition's nearly gone, and they'll have the cold steel in our scalp-locks if we stay. We'll creep along the Devil's Causeway, then through the Red Horn Woods, and so across the plains to Rupert House. Whip in the dogs, Baptiste, and be ready all of you at midnight."

"And Grah the Idiot--what of him"?" asked Pretty Pierre.

"He'll have to take his chance. If he can travel with us, so much the better for him"; and the Factor shrugged his shoulders.

"If not, so much the worse, eh"?" returned Pretty Pierre.

"Work the sum out to suit yourself. We've got our necks to save. God'll have to help the Idiot if we can't."

"You hear, Grah Hamon, Idiot," said Pierre an hour afterwards, "we're going to leave Fort o' God and make for Rupert House. You've a dragging leg, you're gone in the savvy, you have to balance yourself with your hands as you waddle along, and you slobber when you talk; but you've got to cut away with us quick across the Beaver Plains, and Christ'll have to help you if we can't. That's what the Factor says, and that's how the case stands, Idiot--'bien?'"

"Grah want pipe--bubble--bubble--wind blow," muttered the daft one.

Pretty Pierre bent over and said slowly: "If you stay here, Grah, the Indian get your scalp; if you go, the snow is deep and the frost is like a badger's tooth, and you can't be carried."

"Oh, Oh!--my mother dead--poor Annie--by God, Grah want pipe--poor Grah sleep in snow-bubble, bubble--Oh, Oh!--the long wind, fly away."

Pretty Pierre watched the great head of the Idiot as it swung heavily on his shoulders, and then said: "'Mais,' like that, so!" and turned away.

When the party were about to sally forth on their perilous path to safety, Gyng stood and cried angrily: "Well, why hasn't some one bundled up that moth-eaten Caliban? Curse it all, must I do everything myself?"

"But you see," said Pierre, "the Caliban stays at Fort o' God."

"You've got a Christian heart in you, so help me, Heaven!" replied the other. "No, sir, we give him a chance,--and his Maker too for that matter, to show what He's willing to do for His misfits."

Pretty Pierre rejoined, "Well, I have thought. The game is all against Grah if he go; but there are two who stay at Fort o' God."

And that is how, when the Factor and his half-breeds and trappers stole away in silence towards the Devil's Causeway, Pierre and the Idiot remained behind. And that is why the flag of the H. B. C. still flew above Fort o' God in the New Year's sun just twenty years ago to-day.

The Hudson's Bay Company had never done a worse day's work than when they promoted Gyng to be chief factor. He loathed the heathen and he showed his loathing. He had a heart harder than iron, a speech that bruised worse than the hoof of an angry moose. And when at last he drove away a band of wandering Sioux, foodless, from the stores, siege and ambush took the place of prayer, and a nasty portion fell to Fort o' God. For the Indians found a great cache of buffalo meat, and, having sent the women and children south with the old men, gave constant and biting assurances to Gyng that the heathen hath his hour, even though he be a dog which is refused those scraps from the white man's table which give life in the hour of need. Besides all else, there was in the Fort the thing which the gods made last to humble the pride of men--there was rum.

And the morning after Gyng and his men had departed, because it was a day when frost was master of the sun, and men grew wild for action, since to stand still was to face indignant Death, they, who camped without, prepared to make a sally upon the wooden gates. Pierre saw their intent, and hid in the ground some pemmican and all the scanty rum. Then he looked at his powder and shot, and saw that there was little left. If he spent it on the besiegers, how should they fare for beast and fowl in hungry days? And for his rifle he had but a brace of bullets. He rolled these in his hand, looking upon them with a grim smile. And the Idiot, seeing, rose and sidled towards him, and said: "Poor Grah want pipe--bubble--bubble." Then a light of childish cunning came into his eyes, and he touched the bullets blunderingly, and continued: "Plenty, plenty b'longs Grah--give poor Grah pipe--plenty, plenty, give you these."

And Pretty Pierre after a moment replied: "So that's it, Grah?--you've got bullets stowed away? Well, I must have them. It's a one-sided game in which you get the tricks; but here's the pipe, Idiot--my only pipe for your dribbling mouth--my last good comrade. Now show me the bullets. Take me to them, daft one, quick."

A little later the Idiot sat inside the store, wrapped in loose furs, and blowing bubbles; while Pretty Pierre, with many handfuls of bullets by him, waited for the attack.

"Eh," he said, as he watched from a loophole, "Gyng and the others have got safely past the Causeway, and the rest is possible. Well, it hurts an idiot as much to die, perhaps, as a half-breed or a factor. It is good to stay here. If we fight, and go out swift like Grah's bubbles, it is the game. If we starve and sleep as did Grah's mother, then it also is the game. It is great to have all the chances against and then to win. We shall see."

With a sharp relish in his eye he watched the enemy coming slowly forward. Yet he talked almost idly to himself: "I have a thought of so long ago. A woman--she was a mother, and it was on the Madawaska River, and she said: 'Sometimes I think a devil was your father, an angel sometimes. You were begot in an hour between a fighting and a mass: between blood and heaven. And when you were born you made no cry. They said that was a sign of evil. You refused the breast, and drank only of the milk of wild cattle. In baptism you flung your hand before your face that the water might not touch, nor the priest's finger make a cross upon the water. And they said it were better if you had been born an idiot than with an evil spirit; and that your hand would be against the loins that bore you. But Pierre, ah Pierre, you love your mother, do you not?'" . . . And he standing now, his eye closed with the gate-chink in front of Fort o' God, said quietly: "She was of the race that hated

these--my mother; and she died of a wound they gave her at the Tete Blanche Hill. Well, for that you die now, Yellow Arm, if this gun has a bullet cold enough."

A bullet pinged through the sharp air, as the Indians swarmed towards the gate, and Yellow Arm, the chief, fell. The besiegers paused; and then, as if at the command of the fallen man, they drew back, bearing him to the camp, where they sat down and mourned.

Pierre watched them for a time; and, seeing that they made no further move, retired into the store, where the Idiot muttered and was happy after his kind. "Grah got pipe--blow away--blow away to Annie--pretty soon."

"Yes, Grah, there's chance enough that you'll blow away to Annie pretty soon," remarked the other.

"Grah have white eagles--fly, fly on the wind--oh, oh, bubble, bubble!" and he sent the filmy globes floating from the pipe that a camp of river-drivers had given the half-breed winters before.

Pierre stood and looked at the wandering eyes, behind which were the torturings of an immense and confused intelligence; a life that fell deformed before the weight of too much brain, so that all tottered from the womb into the gutters of foolishness, and the tongue mumbled of chaos when it should have told marvellous things. And the half-breed, the thought of this coming upon him, said: "Well, I think the matters of hell have fallen across the things of heaven, and there is storm. If for one moment he could think clear, it would be great."

He bethought him of a certain chant, taught him by a medicine man in childhood, which, sung to the waving of a torch in a place of darkness, caused evil spirits to pass from those possessed, and good spirits to reign in their stead. And he raised the Idiot to his feet, and brought him, maundering, to a room where no light was. He kneeled before him with a lighted torch of bear's fat and the tendons of the deer, and waving it gently to and fro, sang the ancient rune, until the eye of the Idiot, following the torch at a tangent as it waved, suddenly became fixed upon the flame, when it ceased to move. And the words of the chant ran through Grah's ears, and pierced to the remote parts of his being; and a sickening trouble came upon his face, and the lips ceased to drip, and were caught up in twinges of pain. . . . The chant rolled on: "Go forth, go forth upon them, thou, the Scarlet Hunter! Drive them forth into the wilds, drive them crying forth! Enter in, O enter in, and lie upon the couch of peace, the couch of peace within my wigwam, thou the wise one! Behold, I call to thee!"

And Pierre, looking upon the Idiot, saw his face glow, and his eye stream steadily to the light, and he said, "What is it that you see, Grah?--speak!"

All pitifulness and struggle had gone from the Idiot's face, and a strong calm fell upon it, and the voice of a man that God had created spoke slowly: "There is an end of blood. The great chief Yellow Arm is fallen. He goeth to the plains where his wife will mourn upon his knees, and his children cry, because he that gathered food is gone, and the pots are empty on the fire. And they who follow him shall fight no more. Two shall live through bitter days, and when the leaves shall shine in the sun again, there shall good things befall. But one shall go upon a long

journey with the singing birds in the path of the white eagle. He shall travel, and not cease until he reach the place where fools, and children, and they into whom a devil entered through the gates of birth, find the mothers who bore them. But the other goeth at a different time--" At this point the light in Pretty Pierre's hand flickered and went out, and through the darkness there came a voice, the voice of an idiot, that whimpered: "Grah want pipe--Annie, Annie dead."

The angel of wisdom was gone, and chaos spluttered on the lolling lips again; the Idiot sat feeling for the pipe that he had dropped.

And never again through the days that came and went could Pierre, by any conjuring, or any swaying torch, make the fool into a man again. The devils of confusion were returned forever. But there had been one glimpse of the god. And it was as the Idiot had said when he saw with the eyes of that god: no more blood was shed. The garrison of this fort held it unmolested. The besiegers knew not that two men only stayed within the walls; and because the chief begged to be taken south to die, they left the place surrounded by its moats of ice and its trenches of famine; and they came not back.

But other foes more deadly than the angry heathen came, and they were called Hunger and Loneliness. The one destroyeth the body and the other the brain. But Grah was not lonely, nor did he hunger. He blew his bubbles, and muttered of a wind whereon a useless thing--a film of water, a butterfly, or a fool--might ride beyond the reach of spirit, or man, or heathen. His flesh remained the same, and grew not less; but that of Pierre wasted, and his eye grew darker with suffering. For man is only man, and hunger is a cruel thing. To give one's food to feed a fool, and to search the silent plains in vain for any living thing to kill, is a matter for angels to do and bear, and not mere mortals. But this man had a strength of his own like to his code of living, which was his own and not another's. And at last, when spring leaped gaily forth from the grey cloak of winter, and men of the H. B. C. came to relieve Fort o' God, and entered at its gates, a gaunt man, leaning on his rifle, greeted them standing like a warrior, though his body was like that of one who had lain in the grave. He answered to the name of Pierre without pride, but like a man and not as a sick woman. And huddled on the floor beside him was an idiot fondling a pipe, with a shred of pemmican at his lips.

As if in irony of man's sacrifice, the All Hail and the Master of Things permitted the fool to fulfil his own prophecy, and die of a sudden sickness in the coming-on of summer. But he of God's Garrison that remained repented not of his deed. Such men have no repentance, neither of good nor evil.

A HAZARD OF THE NORTH

Nobody except Gregory Thorne and myself knows the history of the Man and Woman, who lived on the Height of Land, just where Dog Ear River falls into Marigold Lake. This portion of the Height of Land is a lonely country. The sun marches over it distantly, and the man of the East--the braggart--calls it outcast; but animals love it; and the shades of the long-gone trapper and 'voyageur' saunter without mourning through its

fastnesses. When you are in doubt, trust God's dumb creatures--and the happy dead who whisper pleasant promptings to us, and whose knowledge is mighty. Besides, the Man and Woman lived there, and Gregory Thorne says that they could recover a lost paradise. But Gregory Thorne is an insolent youth. The names of these people were John and Audrey Malbrouck; the Man was known to the makers of backwoods history as Captain John. Gregory says about that--but no, not yet!--let his first meeting with the Man and the Woman be described in his own words, unusual and flippant as they sometimes are; for though he is a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, and a brother of a Right Honourable, he has conceived it his duty to emancipate himself in the matter of style in language; and he has succeeded.

"It was autumn," he said, "all colours; beautiful and nippy on the Height of Land; wild ducks, the which no man could number, and bear's meat abroad in the world. I was alone. I had hunted all day, leaving my mark now and then as I journeyed, with a cache of slaughter here, and a blazed hickory there. I was hungry as a circus tiger--did you ever eat slippery elm bark?--yes, I was as bad as that. I guessed from what I had been told, that the Malbrouck show must be hereaway somewhere. I smelled the lake miles off--oh, you could too if you were half the animal I am; I followed my nose and the slippery-elm between my teeth, and came at a double-quick suddenly on the fair domain. There the two sat in front of the house like turtle-doves, and as silent as a middy after his first kiss. Much as I ached to get my tooth into something filling, I wished that I had 'em under my pencil, with that royal sun making a rainbow of the lake, the woods all scarlet and gold, and that mist of purple--eh, you've seen it?--and they sitting there monarchs of it all, like that duffer of a king who had operas played for his solitary benefit. But I hadn't a pencil and I had a hunger, and I said 'How!' like any other Injin--insolent, wasn't it? Then the Man rose, and he said I was welcome, and she smiled an approving but not very immediate smile, and she kept her seat,--she kept her seat, my boy,--and that was the first thing that set me thinking. She didn't seem to be conscious that there was before her one of the latest representatives from Belgravia, not she! But when I took an honest look at her face, I understood. I'm glad that I had my hat in my hand, polite as any Frenchman on the threshold of a blanchisserie: for I learned very soon that the Woman had been in Belgravia too, and knew far more than I did about what was what. When she did rise to array the supper table, it struck me that if Josephine Beauharnais had been like her, she might have kept her hold on Napoleon, and saved his fortunes; made Europe France; and France the world. I could not understand it. Jimmy Haldane had said to me when I was asking for Malbrouck's place on the compass,--'Don't put on any side with them, my Greg, or you'll take a day off for penitence.' They were both tall and good to look at, even if he was a bit rugged, with neck all wire and muscle, and had big knuckles. But she had hands like those in a picture of Velasquez, with a warm whiteness and educated--that's it, educated hands.

"She wasn't young, but she seemed so. Her eyes looked up and out at you earnestly, yet not inquisitively, and more occupied with something in her mind, than with what was before her. In short, she was a lady; not one by virtue of a visit to the gods that rule o'er Buckingham Palace, but by the claims of good breeding and long descent. She puzzled me, eluded me--she reminded me of someone; but who? Someone I liked, because I felt a thrill of admiration whenever I looked at her--but it was no use, I couldn't remember. I soon found myself talking to her according to St. James--the palace, you know--and at once I entered a bet with my beloved

aunt, the dowager--who never refuses to take my offer, though she seldom wins, and she's ten thousand miles away, and has to take my word for it--that I should find out the history of this Man and Woman before another Christmas morning, which wasn't more than two months off. You know whether or not I won it, my son."

I had frequently hinted to Gregory that I was old enough to be his father, and that in calling me his son, his language was misplaced; and I repeated it at that moment. He nodded good-humouredly, and continued:

"I was born insolent, my s--my ancestor. Well, after I had cleared a space at the supper table, and had, with permission, lighted my pipe, I began to talk. . . Oh yes, I did give them a chance occasionally; don't interrupt. . . . I gossiped about England, France, the universe. From the brief comments they made I saw they knew all about it, and understood my social argot, all but a few words--is there anything peculiar about any of my words? After having exhausted Europe and Asia I discussed America; talked about Quebec, the folklore of the French Canadians, the 'voyageurs' from old Maisonneuve down. All the history I knew I rallied, and was suddenly bowled out. For Malbrouck followed my trail from the time I began to talk, and in ten minutes he had proved me to be a baby in knowledge, an emaciated baby; he eliminated me from the equation. He first tripped me on the training of naval cadets; then on the Crimea; then on the taking of Quebec; then on the Franco-Prussian War; then, with a sudden round-up, on India. I had been trusting to vague outlines of history; I felt when he began to talk that I was dealing with a man who not only knew history, but had lived it. He talked in the fewest but directest words, and waxed eloquent in a blunt and colossal way. But seeing his wife's eyes fixed on him intently, he suddenly pulled up, and no more did I get from him on the subject. He stopped so suddenly that in order to help over the awkwardness, though I'm not really sure there was any, I began to hum a song to myself. Now, upon my soul, I didn't think what I was humming; it was some subterranean association of things, I suppose--but that doesn't matter here. I only state it to clear myself of any unnecessary insolence. These were the words I was maundering with this noble voice of mine:

"The news I bring, fair Lady,
Will make your tears run down

Put off your rose-red dress so fine
And doff your satin gown!

Monsieur Malbrouck is dead, alas!
And buried, too, for aye;

I saw four officers who bore
His mighty corse away.

.....
We saw above the laurels,
His soul fly forth amain.

And each one fell upon his face
And then rose up again.

And so we sang the glories,
For which great Malbrouck bled;
Mironton, Mironton, Mirontaine,

Great Malbrouck, he is dead.'

"I felt the silence grow peculiar, uncomfortable. I looked up. Mrs. Malbrouck was rising to her feet with a look in her face that would make angels sorry--a startled, sorrowful thing that comes from a sleeping pain. What an ass I was! Why, the Man's name was Malbrouck; her name was Malbrouck--awful insolence! But surely there was something in the story of the song itself that had moved her. As I afterward knew, that was it. Malbrouck sat still and unmoved, though I thought I saw something stern and masterful in his face as he turned to me; but again instantly his eyes were bent on his wife with a comforting and affectionate expression. She disappeared into the house. Hoping to make it appear that I hadn't noticed anything, I dropped my voice a little and went on, intending, however, to stop at the end of the verse:

"Malbrouck has gone a-fighting,
Mironton, Mironton, Mirontaine!"

"I ended there; because Malbrouck's heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and he said: 'If you please, not that song.'

"I suspect I acted like an idiot. I stammered out apologies, went down on my litanies, figuratively speaking, and was all the same confident that my excuses were making bad infernally worse. But somehow the old chap had taken a liking to me.--No, of course you couldn't understand that. Not that he was so old, you know; but he had the way of retired royalty about him, as if he had lived life up to the hilt, and was all pulse and granite. Then he began to talk in his quiet way about hunting and fishing; about stalking in the Highlands and tiger-hunting in India; and wound up with some wonderful stuff about moose-hunting, the sport of Canada. This made me itch like sin, just to get my fingers on a trigger, with a full moose-yard in view. I can feel it now--the bound in the blood as I caught at Malbrouck's arm and said: 'By George, I must kill moose; that's sport for Vikings, and I was meant to be a Viking--or a gladiator.' Malbrouck at once replied that he would give me some moose-hunting in December if I would come up to Marigold Lake. I couldn't exactly reply on the instant, because, you see, there wasn't much chance for board and lodging thereabouts, unless--but he went on to say that I should make his house my 'public,' perhaps he didn't say it quite in those terms, that he and his wife would be glad to have me. With a couple of Indians we could go north-west, where the moose-yards were, and have some sport both exciting and prodigious. Well, I'm a muff, I know, but I didn't refuse that. Besides, I began to see the safe side of the bet I had made with my aunt, the dowager, and I was more than pleased with what had come to pass so far. Lucky for you, too, you yarn-spinner, that the thing did develop so, or you wouldn't be getting fame and shekels out of the results of my story.

"Well, I got one thing out of the night's experience; and it was that the Malbroucks were no plebs., that they had had their day where plates are blue and gold and the spoons are solid coin. But what had sent them up here among the moose, the Indians, and the conies--whatever THEY are? How should I get at it? Insolence, you say? Yes, that. I should come up here in December, and I should mulct my aunt in the price of a new breech-loader. But I found out nothing the next morning, and I left with a paternal benediction from Malbrouck, and a smile from his wife that sent my blood tingling as it hadn't tingled since a certain season in London, which began with my tuneful lyre sounding hopeful numbers and ended with it hanging on the willows.

"When I thought it all over, as I trudged back on yesterday's track, I concluded that I had told them all my history from my youth up until now, and had got nothing from them in return. I had exhausted my family records, bit by bit, like a curate in his first parish; and had gone so far as to testify that one of my ancestors had been banished to Australia for political crimes. Distinctly they had me at an advantage, though, to be sure, I had betrayed Mrs. Malbrouck into something more than a suspicion of emotion.

"When I got back to my old camp, I could find out nothing from the other fellows; but Jacques Pontiac told me that his old mate, Pretty Pierre, who in recent days had fallen from grace, knew something of these people that no one else guessed, because he had let them a part of his house in the parish of St. Genevieve in Quebec, years before. Pierre had testified to one fact, that a child--a girl--had been born to Mrs. Malbrouck in his house, but all further knowledge he had withheld. Pretty Pierre was off in the Rocky Mountains practising his profession--chiefly poker--and was not available for information. What did I, Gregory Thorne, want of the information anyway? That's the point, my son. Judging from after-developments I suppose it was what the foolish call occult sympathy. Well, where was that girl-child? Jacques Pontiac didn't know. Nobody knew. And I couldn't get rid of Mrs. Malbrouck's face; it haunted me; the broad brow, deep eyes, and high-bred sweetness--all beautifully animal. Don't laugh: I find astonishing likenesses between the perfectly human and the perfectly animal. Did you never see how beautiful and modest the faces of deer are; how chic and sensitive is the manner of a hound; nor the keen, warm look in the eye of a well-bred mare? Why, I'd rather be a good horse of blood and temper than half the fellows I know. You are not an animal lover as I am; yes, even when I shoot them or fight them I admire them, just as I'd admire a swordsman who, in 'quart,' would give me death by the wonderful upper thrust. It's all a battle; all a game of love and slaughter, my son, and both go together.

"Well, as I say, her face followed me. Watch how the thing developed. By the prairie-track I went over to Fort Desire, near the Rockies, almost immediately after this, to see about buying a ranch with my old chum at Trinity, Polly Cliffshawe--Polydore, you know. Whom should I meet in a hut on the ranch but Jacques's friend, Pretty Pierre. This was luck; but he was not like Jacques Pontiac, he was secretive as a Buddhist deity. He had a good many of the characteristics that go to a fashionable diplomatist: clever, wicked, cool, and in speech doing the vanishing trick just when you wanted him. But my star of fortune was with me. One day Silverbottle, an Indian, being in a murderous humour, put a bullet in Pretty Pierre's leg, and would have added another, only I stopped it suddenly. While in his bed he told me what he knew of the Malbroucks.

"This is the fashion of it. John and Audrey Malbrouck had come to Quebec in the year 1865, and sojourned in the parish of St. Genevieve, in the house of the mother of Pretty Pierre. Of an inquiring turn of mind, the French half-breed desired to know concerning the history of these English people, who, being poor, were yet gentle, and spoke French with a grace and accent which was to the French-Canadian patois as Shakespeare's English is to that of Seven Dials. Pierre's methods of inquisitiveness were not strictly dishonest. He did not open letters, he did not besiege dispatch-boxes, he did not ask impudent questions; he watched and listened. In his own way he found out that the man had been a soldier in the ranks, and that he had served in India. They were most attached to

the child, whose name was Marguerite. One day a visitor, a lady, came to them. She seemed to be the cause of much unhappiness to Mrs. Malbrouck. And Pierre was alert enough to discover that this distinguished-looking person desired to take the child away with her. To this the young mother would not consent, and the visitor departed with some chillingly-polite phrases, part English, part French, beyond the exact comprehension of Pierre, and leaving the father and mother and little Marguerite happy. Then, however, these people seemed to become suddenly poorer, and Malbrouck began farming in a humble, but not entirely successful way. The energy of the man was prodigious; but his luck was sardonic. Floods destroyed his first crops, prices ran low, debt accumulated, foreclosure of mortgage occurred, and Malbrouck and the wife and child went west.

"Five years later, Pretty Pierre saw them again at Marigold Lake: Malbrouck as agent for the Hudson's Bay Company--still poor, but contented. It was at this period that the former visitor again appeared, clothed in purple and fine linen, and, strange as it may seem, succeeded in carrying off the little child, leaving the father and mother broken, but still devoted to each other.

"Pretty Pierre closed his narration with these words: "Bien,' that Malbrouck, he is great. I have not much love of men, but he--well, if he say,--"See, Pierre, I go to the home of the white bear and the winter that never ends; perhaps we come back, perhaps we die; but there will be sport for men--" 'voilà!' I would go. To know one strong man in this world is good. Perhaps, some time I will go to him--yes, Pierre, the gambler, will go to him, and say: It is good for the wild dog that he live near the lion. And the child, she was beautiful; she had a light heart and a sweet way."

It was with this slight knowledge that Gregory Thorne set out on his journey over the great Canadian prairie to Marigold Lake, for his December moose-hunt.

Gregory has since told me that, as he travelled with Jacques Pontiac across the Height of Land to his destination, he had uncomfortable feelings; presentiments, peculiar reflections of the past, and melancholy --a thing far from habitual with him. Insolence is all very well, but you cannot apply it to indefinite thoughts; it isn't effective with vague presentiments. And when Gregory's insolence was taken away from him, he was very like other mortals; virtue had gone out of him; his brown cheek and frank eye had lost something of their charm. It was these unusual broodings that worried him; he waked up suddenly one night calling, "Margaret! Margaret!" like any childlike lover. And that did not please him. He believed in things that, as he said himself, "he could get between his fingers;" he had little sympathy with morbid sentimentalities. But there was an English Margaret in his life; and he, like many another childlike man, had fallen in love, and with her--very much in love indeed; and a star had crossed his love to a degree that greatly shocked him and pleased the girl's relatives. She was the granddaughter of a certain haughty dame of high degree, who regarded icily this poorest of younger sons, and held her darling aloof. Gregory, very like a blunt unreasoning lover, sought to carry the redoubt by wild assault; and was overwhelmingly routed. The young lady, though finding some avowed pleasure in his company, accompanied by brilliant misunderstanding of his advances and full-front speeches, had never given him enough encouragement to warrant his playing young Lochinvar in Park Lane; and his cup became full when, at the close of the season, she was whisked off to the seclusion of a country-seat, whose walls to him were

impregnable. His defeat was then, and afterwards, complete. He pluckily replied to the derision of his relatives with multiplied derision, demanded his inheritance, got his traps together, bought a fur coat, and straightway sailed the wintry seas to Canada.

His experiences had not soured his temper. He believed that every dog has his day, and that Fate was very malicious; that it brought down the proud, and rewarded the patient; that it took up its abode in marble halls, and was the mocker at the feast. All this had reference, of course, to the time when he should--rich as any nabob--return to London, and be victorious over his enemy in Park Lane. It was singular that he believed this thing would occur; but he did. He had not yet made his fortune, but he had been successful in the game of buying and selling lands, and luck seemed to dog his path. He was fearless, and he had a keen eye for all the points of every game--every game but love.

Yet he was born to succeed in that game too. For though his theory was, that everything should be treated with impertinence before you could get a proper view of it, he was markedly respectful to people. Few could resist him; his impudence of ideas was so pleasantly mixed with delicately suggested admiration of those to whom he talked. It was impossible that John Malbrouck and his wife could have received him other than they did; his was the eloquent, conquering spirit.

II.

By the time he reached Lake Marigold he had shaken off all those hovering fancies of the woods, which, after all, might only have been the whisperings of those friendly and far-seeing spirits who liked the lad as he journeyed through their lonely pleasure-grounds. John Malbrouck greeted him with quiet cordiality, and Mrs. Malbrouck smiled upon him with a different smile from that with which she had speeded him a month before; there was in it a new light of knowledge, and Gregory could not understand it. It struck him as singular that the lady should be dressed in finer garments than she wore when he last saw her; though certainly her purple became her. She wore it as if born to it; and with an air more sedately courteous than he had ever seen, save at one house in Park Lane. Had this rustle of fine trappings been made for him? No; the woman had a mind above such snobbishness, he thought. He suffered for a moment the pang of a cynical idea; but the eyes of Mrs. Malbrouck were on him and he knew that he was as nothing before her. Her eyes--how they were fixed upon him! Only two women had looked so truthfully at him before: his dead mother and--Margaret. And Margaret--why, how strangely now at this instant came the thought that she was like his Margaret! Wonder sprang to his eyes. At that moment a door opened and a girl entered the room--a girl lissome, sweet-faced, well-bred of manner, who came slowly towards them.

"My daughter, Mr. Thorne," the mother briefly remarked. There was no surprise in the girl's face, only an even reserve of pleasure, as she held out her hand and said: "Mr. Gregory Thorne and I are old enemies." Gregory Thorne's nerve forsook him for an instant. He knew now the reason of his vague presentiments in the woods; he understood why, one night, when he had been more childlike than usual in his memory of the one woman who could make life joyous for him, the voice of a voyageur, not Jacques's nor that of any one in camp, sang:

"My dear love, she waits for me,
None other my world is adorning;
My true love I come to thee,
My dear, the white star of the morning.
Eagles spread out your wings,
Behold where the red dawn is breaking!
Hark, 'tis my darling sings,
The flowers, the song-birds awaking;
See, where she comes to me,
My love, ah, my dear love!"

And here she was. He raised her hand to his lips, and said: "Miss Carley, you have your enemy at an advantage."

"Miss Carley in Park Lane, Margaret Malbrouck here in my old home," she replied.

There ran swiftly through the young man's brain the brief story that Pretty Pierre had told him. This, then, was the child who had been carried away, and who, years after, had made captive his heart in London town! Well, one thing was clear, the girl's mother here seemed inclined to be kinder to him than was the guardian grandmother--if she was the grandmother--because they had their first talk undisturbed, it may be encouraged; amiable mothers do such deeds at times.

"And now pray, Mr. Thorne," she continued, "may I ask how came you here in my father's house after having treated me so cavalierly in London?--not even sending a P.P.C. when you vanished from your worshippers in Vanity Fair."

"As for my being here, it is simply a case of blind fate; as for my friends, the only one I wanted to be sorry for my going was behind earthworks which I could not scale in order to leave my card, or--or anything else of more importance; and being left as it were to the inclemency of a winter world, I fled from--"

She interrupted him. "What! the conqueror, you, flying from your Moscow?"

He felt rather helpless under her gay raillery; but he said:

"Well, I didn't burn my kremlin behind me."

"Your kremlin?"

"My ships, then: they--they are just the same," he earnestly pleaded. Foolish youth, to attempt to take such a heart by surprise and storm!

"That is very interesting," she said, "but hardly wise. To make fortunes and be happy in new countries, one should forget the old ones. Meditation is the enemy of action."

"There's one meditation could make me conquer the North Pole, if I could but grasp it definitely."

"Grasp the North Pole? That would be awkward for your friends and gratifying to your enemies, if one may believe science and history. But, perhaps, you are in earnest after all, poor fellow! for my father tells me you are going over the hills and far away to the moose-yards. How

valiant you are, and how quickly you grasp the essentials of fortune-making!"

"Miss Malbrouck, I am in earnest, and I've always been in earnest in one thing at least. I came out here to make money, and I've made some, and shall make more; but just now the moose are as brands for the burning, and I have a gun sulky for want of exercise."

"What an eloquent warrior-temper! And to whom are your deeds of valour to be dedicated? Before whom do you intend to lay your trophies of the chase?"

"Before the most provoking but worshipful lady that I know."

"Who is the sylvan maid? What princess of the glade has now the homage of your impressionable heart, Mr. Thorne?"

And Gregory Thorne, his native insolence standing him in no stead, said very humbly:

"You are that sylvan maid, that princess--ah, is this fair to me, is it fair, I ask you?"

"You really mean that about the trophies"? she replied. "And shall you return like the mighty khans, with captive tigers and lions, led by stalwart slaves, in your train, or shall they be captive moose or grizzlies?"

"Grizzlies are not possible here," he said, with cheerful seriousness, "but the moose is possible, and more, if you would be kinder--Margaret."

"Your supper, see, is ready," she said. "I venture to hope your appetite has not suffered because of long absence from your friends."

He could only dumbly answer by a protesting motion of the hand, and his smile was not remarkably buoyant.

The next morning they started on their moose-hunt. Gregory Thorne was cast down when he crossed the threshold into the winter morning without hand-clasp or god-speed from Margaret Malbrouck; but Mrs. Malbrouck was there, and Gregory, looking into her eyes, thought how good a thing it would be for him, if some such face looked benignly out on him every morning, before he ventured forth into the deceitful day. But what was the use of wishing! Margaret evidently did not care. And though the air was clear and the sun shone brightly, he felt there was a cheerless wind blowing on him; a wind that chilled him; and he hummed to himself bitterly a song of the voyageurs:

"O, O, the winter wind, the North wind,
My snow-bird, where art thou gone?
O, O, the wailing wind the night wind,
The cold nest; I am alone.
O, O, my snow-bird!

"O, O, the waving sky, the white sky,
My snow-bird thou fliest far;
O, O, the eagle's cry, the wild cry,
My lost love, my lonely star.
O, O, my snow-bird!"

He was about to start briskly forward to join Malbrouck and his Indians, who were already on their way, when he heard his name called, and, turning, he saw Margaret in the doorway, her fingers held to the tips of her ears, as yet unused to the frost. He ran back to where she stood, and held out his hand. "I was afraid," he bluntly said, "that you wouldn't forsake your morning sleep to say good-bye to me."

"It isn't always the custom, is it," she replied, "for ladies to send the very early hunter away with a tally-ho? But since you have the grace to be afraid of anything, I can excuse myself to myself for fleeing the pleasantest dreams to speed you on your warlike path."

At this he brightened very much, but she, as if repenting she had given him so much pleasure, added: "I wanted to say good-bye to my father, you know; and--" she paused.

"And"? he added.

"And to tell him that you have fond relatives in the old land who would mourn your early taking off; and, therefore, to beg him, for their sakes, to keep you safe from any outrageous moose that mightn't know how the world needed you."

"But there you are mistaken," he said; "I haven't anyone who would really care, worse luck! except the dowager; and she, perhaps, would be consoled to know that I had died in battle,--even with a moose,--and was clear of the possibility of hanging another lost reputation on the family tree, to say nothing of suspension from any other kind of tree. But, if it should be the other way; if I should see your father in the path of an outrageous moose--what then?"

"My father is a hunter born," she responded; "he is a great man," she proudly added.

"Of course, of course," he replied. "Good-bye. I'll take him your love.--Good-bye!" and he turned away.

"Good-bye," she gaily replied; and yet, one looking closely would have seen that this stalwart fellow was pleasant to her eyes, and as she closed the door to his hand waving farewell to her from the pines, she said, reflecting on his words:

"You'll take him my love, will you? But, Master Gregory, you carry a freight of which you do not know the measure; and, perhaps, you never shall, though you are very brave and honest, and not so impudent as you used to be,--and I'm not so sure that I like you so much better for that either, Monsieur Gregory."

Then she went and laid her cheek against her mother's, and said: "They've gone away for big game, mother dear; what shall be our quarry?"

"My child," the mother replied, "the story of our lives since last you were with me is my only quarry. I want to know from your own lips all that you have been in that life which once was mine also, but far away from me now, even though you come from it, bringing its memories without its messages."

"Dear, do you think that life there was so sweet to me? It meant as

little to your daughter as to you. She was always a child of the wild woods. What rustle of pretty gowns is pleasant as the silken shiver of the maple leaves in summer at this door? The happiest time in that life was when we got away to Holwood or Marchurst, with the balls and calls all over."

Mrs. Malbrouck smoothed her daughter's hand gently and smiled approvingly.

"But that old life of yours, mother; what was it? You said that you would tell me some day. Tell me now. Grandmother was fond of me--poor grandmother! But she would never tell me anything. How I longed to be back with you!.... Sometimes you came to me in my sleep, and called to me to come with you; and then again, when I was gay in the sunshine, you came, and only smiled but never beckoned; though your eyes seemed to me very sad, and I wondered if mine would not also become sad through looking in them so--are they sad, mother?" And she laughed up brightly into her mother's face.

"No, dear; they are like the stars. You ask me for my part in that life. I will tell you soon, but not now. Be patient. Do you not tire of this lonely life? Are you truly not anxious to return to--"

"To the husks that the swine did eat?' No, no, no; for, see: I was born for a free, strong life; the prairie or the wild wood, or else to live in some far castle in Welsh mountains, where I should never hear the voice of the social Thou must!--oh, what a must! never to be quite free or natural. To be the slave of the code. I was born--I know not how! but so longing for the sky, and space, and endless woods. I think I never saw an animal but I loved it, nor ever lounged the mornings out at Holwood but I wished it were a hut on the mountain side, and you and father with me." Here she whispered, in a kind of awe: "And yet to think that Holwood is now mine, and that I am mistress there, and that I must go back to it--if only you would go back with me.... ah, dear, isn't it your duty to go back with me"? she added, hesitatingly.

Audrey Malbrouck drew her daughter hungrily to her bosom, and said: "Yes, dear, I will go back, if it chances that you need me; but your father and I have lived the best days of our lives here, and we are content. But, my Margaret, there is another to be thought of too, is there not? And in that case is my duty then so clear?"

The girl's hand closed on her mother's, and she knew her heart had been truly read.

III.

The hunters pursued their way, swinging grandly along on their snow-shoes, as they made for the Wild Hawk Woods. It would seem as if Malbrouck was testing Gregory's strength and stride, for the march that day was a long and hard one. He was equal to the test, and even Big Moccasin, the chief, grunted sound approval. But every day brought out new capacities for endurance and larger resources; so that Malbrouck, who had known the clash of civilisation with barbarian battle, and deeds both dour and doughty, and who loved a man of might, regarded this youth with increasing favour. By simple processes he drew from Gregory his aims and ambitions, and found the real courage and power behind the front

of irony--the language of manhood and culture which was crusted by free and easy idioms. Now and then they saw moose-tracks, but they were some days out before they came to a moose-yard--a spot hoof-beaten by the moose; his home, from which he strays, and to which he returns at times like a repentant prodigal. Now the sport began. The dog-trains were put out of view, and Big Moccasin and another Indian went off immediately to explore the country round about. A few hours, and word was brought that there was a small herd feeding not far away. Together they crept stealthily within range of the cattle. Gregory Thorne's blood leaped as he saw the noble quarry, with their wide-spread horns, sniffing the air, in which they had detected something unusual. Their leader, a colossal beast, stamped with his forefoot, and threw back his head with a snort.

"The first shot belongs to you, Mr. Thorne," said Malbrouck. "In the shoulder, you know. You have him in good line. I'll take the heifer."

Gregory showed all the coolness of an old hunter, though his lips twitched slightly with excitement. He took a short but steady aim, and fired. The beast plunged forward and then fell on his knees. The others broke away. Malbrouck fired and killed a heifer, and then all ran in pursuit as the moose made for the woods.

Gregory, in the pride of his first slaughter, sprang away towards the wounded leader, which, sunk to the earth, was shaking its great horns to and fro. When at close range, he raised his gun to fire again, but the moose rose suddenly, and with a wild bellowing sound rushed at Gregory, who knew full well that a straight stroke from those hoofs would end his moose-hunting days. He fired, but to no effect. He could not, like a toreador, jump aside, for those mighty horns would sweep too wide a space. He dropped on his knees swiftly, and as the great antlers almost touched him, and he could feel the roaring breath of the mad creature in his face, he slipped a cartridge in, and fired as he swung round; but at that instant a dark body bore him down. He was aware of grasping those sweeping horns, conscious of a blow which tore the flesh from his chest; and then his knife--how came it in his hand?--with the instinct of the true hunter. He plunged it once, twice, past a foaming mouth, into that firm body, and then both fell together; each having fought valiantly after his kind.

Gregory dragged himself from beneath the still heaving body, and stretched to his feet; but a blindness came, and the next knowledge he had was of brandy being poured slowly between his teeth, and of a voice coming through endless distances: "A fighter, a born fighter," it said. "The pluck of Lucifer--good boy!"

Then the voice left those humming spaces of infinity, and said: "Tilt him this way a little, Big Moccasin. There, press firmly, so. Now the band steady--together--tighter--now the withes--a little higher up--cut them here." There was a slight pause, and then: "There, that's as good as an army surgeon could do it. He'll be as sound as a bell in two weeks. Eh, well, how do you feel now? Better? That's right! Like to be on your feet, would you? Wait. Here, a sup of this. There you are. . . . Well?"

"Well," said the young man, faintly, "he was a beauty."

Malbrouck looked at him a moment, thoughtfully, and then said: "Yes, he was a beauty."

"I want a dozen more like him, and then I shall be able to drop 'em as neat as, you do."

"H'm! the order is large. I'm afraid we shall have to fill it at some other time;" and Malbrouck smiled a little grimly.

"What! only one moose to take back to the Height of Land, to--" something in the eye of the other stopped him.

"To? Yes, to?" and now the eye had a suggestion of humour.

"To show I'm not a tenderfoot."

"Yes, to show you're not a tenderfoot. I fancy that will be hardly necessary. Oh, you will be up, eh? Well!"

"Well, I'm a tottering imbecile. What's the matter with my legs?--my prophetic soul, it hurts! Oh, I see; that's where the old warrior's hoof caught me sideways. Now, I'll tell you what, I'm going to have another moose to take back to Marigold Lake."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm going to take back a young, live moose."

"A significant ambition. For what?--a sacrifice to the gods you have offended in your classic existence?"

"Both. A peace-offering, and a sacrifice to--a goddess."

"Young man," said the other, the light of a smile playing on his lips, "Prosperity be thy page! Big Moccasin, what of this young live moose?"

The Indian shook his head doubtfully.

"But I tell you I shall have that live moose, if I have to stay here to see it grow."

And Malbrouck liked his pluck, and wished him good luck. And the good luck came. They travelled back slowly to the Height of Land, making a circuit. For a week they saw no more moose; but meanwhile Gregory's hurt quickly healed. They had now left only eight days in which to get back to Dog Ear River and Marigold Lake. If the young moose was to come it must come soon. It came soon.

They chanced upon a moose-yard, and while the Indians were beating the woods, Malbrouck and Gregory watched.

Soon a cow and a young moose came swinging down to the embankment. Malbrouck whispered: "Now if you must have your live moose, here's a lasso. I'll bring down the cow. The young one's horns are not large. Remember, no pulling. I'll do that. Keep your broken chest and bad arm safe. Now!"

Down came the cow with a plunge into the yard-dead. The lasso, too, was over the horns of the calf, and in an instant Malbrouck was swinging away with it over the snow. It was making for the trees--exactly what Malbrouck desired. He deftly threw the rope round a sapling, but not too taut, lest the moose's horns should be injured. The plucky animal now

turned on him. He sprang behind a tree, and at that instant he heard the thud of hoofs behind him. He turned to see a huge bull-moose bounding towards him. He was between two fires, and quite unarmed. Those hoofs had murder in them. But at the instant a rifle shot rang out, and he only caught the forward rush of the antlers as the beast fell.

The young moose now had ceased its struggles, and came forward to the dead bull with that hollow sound of mourning peculiar to its kind. Though it afterwards struggled once or twice to be free, it became docile and was easily taught, when its anger and fear were over.

And Gregory Thorne had his live moose. He had also, by that splendid shot, achieved with one arm, saved Malbrouck from peril, perhaps from death.

They drew up before the house at Marigold Lake on the afternoon of the day before Christmas, a triumphal procession. The moose was driven, a peaceful captive with a wreath of cedar leaves around its neck--the humorous conception of Gregory Thorne. Malbrouck had announced their coming by a blast from his horn, and Margaret was standing in the doorway wrapped in furs, which may have come originally from Hudson's Bay, but which had been deftly re-manufactured in Regent Street.

Astonishment, pleasure, beamed in her eyes. She clapped her hands gaily, and cried: "Welcome, welcome, merry-men all!" She kissed her father; she called to her mother to come and see; then she said to Gregory, with arch raillery, as she held out her hand: "Oh, companion of hunters, comest thou like Jacques in Arden from dropping the trustful tear upon the prey of others, or bringest thou quarry of thine own? Art thou a warrior sated with spoil, master of the sports, spectator of the fight, Prince, or Pistol? Answer, what art thou?"

And he, with a touch of his old insolence, though with something of irony too, for he had hoped for a different fashion of greeting, said:

"All, lady, all! The Olympian all! The player of many parts. I am Touchstone, Jacques, and yet Orlando too."

"And yet Orlando too, my daughter," said Malbrouck, gravely. "He saved your father from the hoofs of a moose bent on sacrifice. Had your father his eye, his nerve, his power to shoot with one arm a bull moose at long range, so!--he would not refuse to be called a great hunter, but wear the title gladly."

Margaret Malbrouck's face became anxious instantly. "He saved you from danger--from injury, father"? she slowly said, and looked earnestly at Gregory; "but why to shoot with one arm only?"

"Because in a fight of his own with a moose--a hand-to-hand fight--he had a bad moment with the hoofs of the beast."

And this young man, who had a reputation for insolence, blushed, so that the paleness which the girl now noticed in his face was banished; and to turn the subject he interposed:

"Here is the live moose that I said I should bring. Now say that he's a beauty, please. Your father and I--"

But Malbrouck interrupted:

"He lassoed it with his one arm, Margaret. He was determined to do it himself, because, being a superstitious gentleman, as well as a hunter, he had some foolish notion that this capture would propitiate a goddess whom he imagined required offerings of the kind."

"It is the privilege of the gods to be merciful," she said. "This peace-offering should propitiate the angriest, cruellest goddess in the universe; and for one who was neither angry nor really cruel--well, she should be satisfied.... altogether satisfied," she added, as she put her cheek against the warm fur of the captive's neck, and let it feel her hand with its lips.

There was silence for a minute, and then with his old gay spirit all returned, and as if to give an air not too serious to the situation, Gregory, remembering his Euripides, said:

".let the steer bleed,
And the rich altars, as they pay their vows,
Breathe incense to the gods: for me, I rise
To better life, and grateful own the blessing."

"A pagan thought for a Christmas Eve," she said to him, with her fingers feeling for the folds of silken flesh in the throat of the moose; "but wounded men must be humoured. And, mother dear, here are our Argonauts returned; and--and now I think I will go."

With a quick kiss on her father's cheek--not so quick but he caught the tear that ran through her happy smile--she vanished into the house.

That night there was gladness in this home. Mirth sprang to the lips of the men like foam on a beaker of wine, so that the evening ran towards midnight swiftly. All the tale of the hunt was given by Malbrouck to joyful ears; for the mother lived again her youth in the sunrise of this romance which was being sped before her eyes; and the father, knowing that in this world there is nothing so good as courage, nothing so base as the shifting eye, looked on the young man, and was satisfied, and told his story well;--told it as a brave man would tell it, bluntly as to deeds done, warmly as to the pleasures of good sport, directly as to all. In the eye of the young man there had come the glance of larger life, of a new-developed manhood. When he felt that dun body crashing on him, and his life closing with its strength, and ran the good knife home, there flashed through his mind how much life meant to the dying, how much it ought to mean to the living; and then this girl, this Margaret, swam before his eyes--and he had been graver since.

He knew, as truly as if she had told him, that she could never mate with any man who was a loiterer on God's highway, who could live life without some sincerity in his aims. It all came to him again in this room, so austere in its appointments, yet so gracious, so full of the spirit of humanity without a note of ennui, or the rust of careless deeds. As this thought grew he looked at the face of the girl, then at the faces of the father and mother, and the memory of his boast came back--that he would win the stake he laid, to know the story of John and Audrey Malbrouck before this coming Christmas morning. With a faint smile at his own past insolent self, he glanced at the clock. It was eleven. "I have lost my bet," he unconsciously said aloud.

He was roused by John Malbrouck remarking: "Yes, you have lost your bet?"

Well, what was it"? The youth, the childlike quality in him," flushed his face deeply, and then, with a sudden burst of frankness, he said:

"I did not know that I had spoken. As for the bet, I deserve to be thrashed for ever having made it; but, duffer as I am, I want you to know that I'm something worse than duffer. The first time I met you I made a bet that I should know your history before Christmas Day. I haven't a word to say for myself. I'm contemptible. I beg your pardon; for your history is none of my business. I was really interested; that's all; but your lives, I believe it, as if it was in the Bible, have been great--yes, that's the word! and I'm a better chap for having known you, though, perhaps, I've known you all along, because, you see, I've--I've been friends with your daughter--and-well, really I haven't anything else to say, except that I hope you'll forgive me, and let me know you always."

Malbrouck regarded him for a moment with a grave smile, and then looked toward his wife. Both turned their glances quickly upon Margaret, whose eyes were on the fire. The look upon her face was very gentle; something new and beautiful had come to reign there.

A moment, and Malbrouck spoke: "You did what was youthful and curious, but not wrong; and you shall not lose your hazard. I--"

"No, do not tell me," Gregory interrupted; "only let me be pardoned."

"As I said, lad, you shall not lose your hazard. I will tell you the brief tale of two lives."

"But, I beg of you! For the instant I forgot. I have more to confess." And Gregory told them in substance what Pretty Pierre had disclosed to him in the Rocky Mountains.

When he had finished, Malbrouck said: "My tale then is briefer still: I was a common soldier, English and humble by my mother, French and noble through my father--noble, but poor. In Burmah, at an outbreak among the natives, I rescued my colonel from immediate and horrible death, though he died in my arms from the injuries he received. His daughter too, it was my fortune, through God's Providence, to save from great danger. She became my wife. You remember that song you sang the day we first met you?

"It brought her father back to mind painfully. When we came to England her people--her mother--would not receive me. For myself I did not care; for my wife, that was another matter. She loved me and preferred to go with me anywhere; to a new country, preferably. We came to Canada.

"We were forgotten in England. Time moves so fast, even if the records in red-books stand. Our daughter went to her grandmother to be brought up and educated in England--though it was a sore trial to us both--that she might fill nobly that place in life for which she is destined. With all she learned she did not forget us. We were happy save in her absence. We are happy now; not because she is mistress of Holwood and Marchurst--for her grandmother and another is dead--but because such as she is our daughter, and--"

He said no more. Margaret was beside him, and her fingers were on his lips.

Gregory came to his feet suddenly, and with a troubled face.

"Mistress of Holwood and Marchurst!" he said; and his mind ran over his own great deficiencies, and the list of eligible and anxious suitors that Park Lane could muster. He had never thought of her in the light of a great heiress.

But he looked down at her as she knelt at her father's knee, her eyes upturned to his, and the tide of his fear retreated; for he saw in them the same look she had given him when she leaned her cheek against the moose's neck that afternoon.

When the clock struck twelve upon a moment's pleasant silence, John Malbrouck said to Gregory Thorne:

"Yes, you have won your Christmas hazard, my boy."

But a softer voice than his whispered: "Are you--content--Gregory?"

The Spirits of Christmas-tide, whose paths lie north as well as south, smiled as they wrote his answer on their tablets; for they knew, as the man said, that he would always be content, and--which is more in the sight of angels--that the woman would be content also.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Awkward for your friends and gratifying to your enemies
Carrying with him the warm atmosphere of a good woman's love
Freedom is the first essential of the artistic mind
I was born insolent
Knowing that his face would never be turned from me
Likenesses between the perfectly human and the perfectly animal
Longed to touch, oftener than they did, the hands of children
Meditation is the enemy of action
My excuses were making bad infernally worse
Nothing so good as courage, nothing so base as the shifting eye
She wasn't young, but she seemed so
The Barracks of the Free
The gods made last to humble the pride of men--there was rum
The soul of goodness in things evil
Time is the test, and Time will have its way with me
Where I should never hear the voice of the social Thou must

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

A PRAIRIE VAGABOND
SHE OF THE TRIPLE CHEVRON
THREE OUTLAWS

A PRAIRIE VAGABOND

Little Hammer was not a success. He was a disappointment to the missionaries; the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company said he was "no good;" the Mounted Police kept an eye on him; the Crees and Blackfeet would have nothing to do with him; and the half-breeds were profane regarding him. But Little Hammer was oblivious to any depreciation of his merits, and would not be suppressed. He loved the Hudson's Bay Company's Post at Yellow Quill with an unwavering love; he ranged the half-breed hospitality of Red Deer River, regardless of it being thrown at him as he in turn threw it at his dog; he saluted Sergeant Gellatly with a familiar How! whenever he saw him; he borrowed tabac of the half-breed women, and, strange to say, paid it back--with other tabac got by daily petition, until his prayer was granted, at the H. B. C. Post. He knew neither shame nor defeat, but where women were concerned he kept his word, and was singularly humble. It was a woman that induced him to be baptised. The day after the ceremony he begged "the loan of a dollar for the love of God" from the missionary; and being refused, straightway, and for the only time it was known of him, delivered a rumbling torrent of half-breed profanity, mixed with the unusual oaths of the barracks. Then he walked away with great humility. There was no swagger about Little Hammer. He was simply unquenchable and continuous. He sometimes got drunk; but on such occasions he sat down, or lay down, in the most convenient place, and, like Caesar beside Pompey's statue, wrapped his mantle about his face and forgot the world. He was a vagabond Indian, abandoned yet self-contained, outcast yet gregarious. No social ostracism unnerved him, no threats of the H. B. C. officials moved him; and when in the winter of 187_ he was driven from one place to another, starving and homeless, and came at last emaciated and nearly dead to the Post at Yellow Quill, he asked for food and shelter as if it were his right, and not as a mendicant.

One night, shortly after his reception and restoration, he was sitting in the store silently smoking the Company's tabac. Sergeant Gellatly entered. Little Hammer rose, offered his hand, and muttered, "How!"

The Sergeant thrust his hand aside, and said sharply: "Whin I take y'r hand, Little Hammer, it'll be to put a grip an y'r wrists that'll stay there till y'are in quarters out of which y'll come nayther winter nor summer. Put that in y'r pipe and smoke it, y' scamp!"

Little Hammer had a bad time at the Post that night. Lounging half-breeds reviled him; the H. B. C. officials rebuked him; and travellers who were coming and going shared in the derision, as foolish people do where one is brow-beaten by many. At last a trapper entered, whom seeing, Little Hammer drew his blanket up about his head. The trapper sat down very near Little Hammer, and began to smoke. He laid his plug-tabac and his knife on the counter beside him. Little Hammer reached over and took the knife, putting it swiftly within his blanket. The trapper saw the act, and, turning sharply on the Indian, called him a thief. Little Hammer chuckled strangely and said nothing; but his eyes

peered sharply above the blanket. A laugh went round the store. In an instant the trapper, with a loud oath, caught at the Indian's throat; but as the blanket dropped back he gave a startled cry. There was the flash of a knife, and he fell back dead. Little Hammer stood above him, smiling, for a moment, and then, turning to Sergeant Gellatly, held out his arms silently for the handcuffs.

The next day two men were lost on the prairies. One was Sergeant Gellatly; the other was Little Hammer. The horses they rode travelled so close that the leg of the Indian crowded the leg of the white man; and the wilder the storm grew, the closer still they rode. A 'poudre' day, with its steely air and fatal frost, was an ill thing in the world; but these entangling blasts, these wild curtains of snow, were desolating even unto death. The sun above was smothered; the earth beneath was trackless; the compass stood for loss all round.

What could Sergeant Gellatly expect, riding with a murderer on his left hand: a heathen that had sent a knife through the heart of one of the lords of the North? What should the gods do but frown, or the elements be at, but howling on their path? What should one hope for but that vengeance should be taken out of the hands of mortals, and be delivered to the angry spirits?

But if the gods were angry at the Indian, why should Sergeant Gellatly only sway to and fro, and now laugh recklessly, and now fall sleepily forward on the neck of his horse; while the Indian rode straight, and neither wavered nor wandered in mind, but at last slipped from his horse and walked beside the other? It was at this moment that the soldier heard, "Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly," called through the blast; and he thought it came from the skies, or from some other world. "Me darlin'," he said, "have y' come to me?" But the voice called again: "Sergeant Gellatly, keep awake! keep awake! You sleep, you die; that's it. Holy. Yes. How!" Then he knew that it was Little Hammer calling in his ear, and shaking him; that the Indian was dragging him from his horse . . . his revolver, where was it? he had forgotten . . . he nodded . . . nodded. But Little Hammer said: "Walk, hell! you walk, yes;" and Little Hammer struck him again and again; but one arm of the Indian was under his shoulder and around him, and the voice was anxious and kind. Slowly it came to him that Little Hammer was keeping him alive against the will of the spirits--but why should they strike him instead of the Indian? Was there any sun in the world? Had there ever been? or fire or heat anywhere, or anything but wind and snow in all God's universe? . . . Yes, there were bells ringing--soft bells of a village church; and there was incense burning--most sweet it was! and the coals in the censer--how beautiful, how comforting! He laughed with joy again, and he forgot how cold, how maliciously cold, he had been; he forgot how dreadful that hour was before he became warm; when he was pierced by myriad needles through the body, and there was an incredible aching at his heart.

And yet something kept thundering on his body, and a harsh voice shrieked at him, and there were many lights dancing over his shut eyes; and then curtains of darkness were dropped, and centuries of oblivion came; and then--then his eyes opened to a comforting silence, and some one was putting brandy between his teeth, and after a time he heard a voice say: "'Bien,' you see he was a murderer, but he save his captor. 'Voila,' such a heathen! But you will, all the same, bring him to justice--you call it that? But we shall see."

Then some one replied, and the words passed through an outer web of darkness and an inner haze of dreams. "The feet of Little Hammer were like wood on the floor when you brought the two in, Pretty Pierre--and lucky for them you found them. . . . The thing would read right in a book, but it's not according to the run of things up here, not by a damned sight!"

"Private Bradshaw," said the first voice again, "you do not know Little Hammer, nor that story of him. You wait for the trial. I have something to say. You think Little Hammer care for the prison, the rope?--Ah, when a man wait five years to kill--so! and it is done, he is glad sometimes when it is all over. Sergeant Gellatly there will wish he went to sleep forever in the snow, if Little Hammer come to the rope. Yes, I think."

And Sergeant Gellatly's brain was so numbed that he did not grasp the meaning of the words, though he said them over and over again. . . . Was he dead? No, for his body was beating, beating . . . well, it didn't matter . . . nothing mattered . . . he was sinking to forgetfulness . . . sinking.

So, for hours, for weeks--it might have been for years--and then he woke, clear and knowing, to "the unnatural, intolerable day"--it was that to him, with Little Hammer in prison. It was March when his memory and vigour vanished; it was May when he grasped the full remembrance of himself, and of that fight for life on the prairie: of the hands that smote him that he should not sleep; of Little Hammer the slayer, who had driven death back discomfited, and brought his captor safe to where his own captivity and punishment awaited him.

When Sergeant Gellatly appeared in court at the trial he refused to bear witness against Little Hammer. "D' ye think--does wan av y' think--that I'll speak a word agin the man--haythen or no haythen--that pulled me out of me tomb and put me betune the barrack quilts? Here's the stripes aff me arm, and to gaol I'll go; but for what wint before I clapt the iron on his wrists, good or avil, divil a word will I say. An' here's me left hand, and there's me right fut, and an eye of me too, that I'd part with, for the cause of him that's done a trick that your honour wouldn't do--an' no shame to y' aither--an' y'd been where Little Hammer was with me."

His honour did not reply immediately, but he looked meditatively at Little Hammer before he said quietly,--"Perhaps not, perhaps not."

And Little Hammer, thinking he was expected to speak, drew his blanket up closely about him and grunted, "How!"

Pretty Pierre, the notorious half-breed, was then called. He kissed the Book, making the sign of the Cross swiftly as he did so, and unheeding the ironical, if hesitating, laughter in the court. Then he said: "Bien, I will tell you the story--the whole truth. I was in the Stony Plains. Little Hammer was 'good Injin' then. . . . Yes, sacre! it is a fool who smiles at that. I have kissed the Book. Dam! . . . He would be chief soon when old Two Tails die. He was proud, then, Little Hammer. He go not to the Post for drink; he sell not next year's furs for this year's rations; he shoot straight."

Here Little Hammer stood up and said: "There is too much talk. Let me be. It is all done. The sun is set--I care not--I have killed him;" and then he drew his blanket about his face and sat down.

But Pierre continued: "Yes, you killed him-quick, after five years--that is so; but you will not speak to say why. Then, I will speak. The Injins say Little Hammer will be great man; he will bring the tribes together; and all the time Little Hammer was strong and silent and wise. Then Brigley the trapper--well, he was a thief and coward. He come to Little Hammer and say, 'I am hungry and tired.' Little Hammer give him food and sleep. He go away. 'Bien,' he come back and say,--'It is far to go; I have no horse.' So Little Hammer give him a horse too. Then he come back once again in the night when Little Hammer was away, and before morning he go; but when Little Hammer return, there lay his bride--only an Injin girl, but his bride--dead! You see? Eh? No? Well, the Captain at the Post he says it was the same as Lucrece.--I say it was like hell. It is not much to kill or to die--that is in the game; but that other, 'mon Dieu!' Little Hammer, you see how he hide his head: not because he kill the Tarquin, that Brigley, but because he is a poor 'vaurien' now, and he once was happy and had a wife. . . . What would you do, judge honourable? . . . Little Hammer, I shake your hand--so--How!"

But Little Hammer made no reply.

The judge sentenced Little Hammer to one month in gaol. He might have made it one thousand months--it would have been the same; for when, on the last morning of that month, they opened the door to set him free, he was gone. That is, the Little Hammer whom the high gods knew was gone; though an ill-nourished, self-strangled body was upright by the wall. The vagabond had paid his penalty, but desired no more of earth.

Upon the door was scratched the one word: How!

SHE OF THE TRIPLE CHEVRON

Between Archangel's Rise and Pardon's Drive there was but one house. It was a tavern, and it was known as Galbraith's Place. There was no man in the Western Territories to whom it was not familiar. There was no traveller who crossed the lonely waste but was glad of it, and would go twenty miles out of his way to rest a night on a corn-husk bed which Jen Galbraith's hands had filled, to eat a meal that she had prepared, and to hear Peter Galbraith's tales of early days on the plains, when buffalo were like clouds on the horizon, when Indians were many and hostile, and when men called the great western prairie a wedge of the American desert.

It was night on the prairie. Jen Galbraith stood in the doorway of the tavern sitting-room and watched a mighty beacon of flame rising before her, a hundred yards away. Every night this beacon made a circle of light on the prairie, and Galbraith's Place was in the centre of the circle. Summer and winter it burned from dusk to daylight. No hand fed it but that of Nature. It never failed; it was a cruse that was never empty. Upon Jen Galbraith it had a weird influence. It grew to be to her a kind of spiritual companion, though, perhaps, she would not so have named it. This flaming gas, bubbling up from the depths of the earth on the lonely plains, was to her a mysterious presence grateful to her; the receiver of her thoughts, the daily necessity in her life. It filled her too with a kind of awe; for, when it burned, she seemed not herself alone, but another self of her whom she could not quite understand. Yet

she was no mere dreamer. Upon her practical strength of body and mind had come that rugged poetical sense, which touches all who live the life of mountain and prairie. She showed it in her speech; it had a measured cadence. She expressed it in her body; it had a free and rhythmic movement. And not Jen alone, but many another dweller on the prairie, looked upon it with a superstitious reverence akin to worship. A blizzard could not quench it. A gale of wind only fed its strength. A rain-storm made a mist about it, in which it was enshrined like a god. Peter Galbraith could not fully understand his daughter's fascination for this Prairie Star, as the North-West people called it. It was not without its natural influence upon him; but he regarded it most as a comfortable advertisement, and he lamented every day that this never-failing gas well was not near a large population, and he still its owner. He was one of that large family in the earth who would turn the best things in their lives into merchandise. As it was, it brought much grist to his mill; for he was not averse to the exercise of the insinuating pleasures of euchre and poker in his tavern; and the hospitality which ranchmen, cowboys, and travellers sought at his hand was often prolonged, and also remunerative to him.

Pretty Pierre, who had his patrol as gamester defined, made semi-annual visits to Galbraith's Place. It occurred generally after the rounding-up and branding seasons, when the cowboys and ranchmen were "flush" with money. It was generally conceded that Monsieur Pierre would have made an early excursion to a place where none is ever "ordered up," if he had not been free with the money which he so plentifully won.

Card-playing was to him a science and a passion. He loved to win for winning's sake. After that, money, as he himself put it, was only fit to be spent for the good of the country, and that men should earn more. Since he put his philosophy into instant and generous practice, active and deadly prejudice against him did not have lengthened life.

The Mounted Police, or as they are more poetically called, the Riders of the Plains, watched Galbraith's Place, not from any apprehension of violent events, but because Galbraith was suspected of infringing the prevailing law of Prohibition, and because for some years it had been a tradition and a custom to keep an eye on Pierre.

As Jen Galbraith stood in the doorway looking abstractedly at the beacon, her fingers smoothing her snowy apron the while, she was thinking thus to herself: "Perhaps father is right. If that Prairie Star were only at Vancouver or Winnipeg instead of here, our Val could be something, more than a prairie-rider. He'd have been different, if father hadn't started this tavern business. Not that our Val is bad. He isn't; but if he had money he could buy a ranch,--or something."

Our Val, as Jen and her father called him, was a lad of twenty-two, one year younger than Jen. He was prairie-rider, cattle-dealer, scout, cowboy, happy-go-lucky vagrant,--a splendid Bohemian of the plains. As Jen said, he was not bad; but he had a fiery, wandering spirit, touched withal by the sunniest humour. He had never known any curb but Jen's love and care. That had kept him within bounds so far. All men of the prairie spoke well of him. The great new lands have codes and standards of morals quite their own. One enthusiastic admirer of this youth said, in Jen's hearing, "He's a Christian--Val Galbraith!" That was the western way of announcing a man as having great civic and social virtues. Perhaps the respect for Val Galbraith was deepened by the fact that there was no broncho or cayuse that he could not tame to the saddle.

Jen turned her face from the flame and looked away from the oasis of warmth it made, to where the light shaded away into darkness, a darkness that was unbroken for many a score of miles to the north and west. She sighed deeply and drew herself up with an aggressive motion as though she was freeing herself of something. So she was. She was trying to shake off a feeling of oppression. Ten minutes ago the gaslighted house behind her had seemed like a prison. She felt that she must have air, space, and freedom.

She would have liked a long ride on the buffalo-track. That, she felt, would clear her mind. She was no romantic creature out of her sphere, no exotic. She was country-born and bred, and her blood had been charged by a prairie instinct passing through three generations. She was part of this life. Her mind was free and strong, and her body was free and healthy. While that freedom and health was genial, it revolted against what was gross or irregular. She loved horses and dogs, she liked to take a gun and ride away to the Poplar Hills in search of game, she found pleasure in visiting the Indian Reservation, and talking to Sun-in-the-North, the only good Indian chief she knew, or that anyone else on the prairies knew. She loved all that was strong and untamed, all that was panting with wild and glowing life. Splendidly developed, softly sinewy, warmly bountiful, yet without the least physical over-luxuriance or suggestiveness, Jen, with her tawny hair and dark-brown eyes, was a growth of unrestrained, unconventional, and eloquent life. Like Nature around her, glowing and fresh, yet glowing and hardy. There was, however, just a strain of pensiveness in her, partly owing to the fact that there were no women near her, that she had, virtually, lived her life as a woman alone.

As she thus looked into the undefined horizon two things were happening: a traveller was approaching Galbraith's Place from a point in that horizon; and in the house behind her someone was singing. The traveller sat erect upon his horse. He had not the free and lazy seat of the ordinary prairie-rider. It was a cavalry seat, and a military manner. He belonged to that handful of men who patrol a frontier of near a thousand miles, and are the security of peace in three hundred thousand miles of territory--the Riders of the Plains, the North-West Mounted Police.

This Rider of the Plains was Sergeant Thomas Gellatly, familiarly known as Sergeant Tom. Far away as he was he could see that a woman was standing in the tavern door. He guessed who it was, and his blood quickened at the guessing. But reining his horse on the furthest edge of the lighted circle, he said, debatingly: "I've little time enough to get to the Rise, and the order was to go through, hand the information to Inspector Jules, and be back within forty-eight hours. Is it flesh and blood they think I am? Me that's just come back from a journey of a hundred miles, and sent off again like this with but a taste of sleep and little food, and Corporal Byng sittin' there at Fort Desire with a pipe in his mouth and the fat on his back like a porpoise. It's famished I am with hunger, and thirty miles yet to do; and she, standin' there with a six months' welcome in her eye. . . . It's in the interest of Justice if I halt at Galbraith's Place for half-an-hour, bedad! The blackguard hid away there at Soldier's Knee will be arrested all the sooner; for horse and man will be able the better to travel. I'm glad it's not me that has to take him whoever he is. It's little I like leadin' a fellow-creature towards the gallows, or puttin' a bullet into him if he won't come. . . . Now what will we do, Larry, me boy? "this to the

broncho--"Go on without bite or sup, me achin' behind and empty before, and you laggin' in the legs, or stay here for the slice of an hour and get some heart into us? Stay here is it, me boy? then lave go me fut with your teeth and push on to the Prairie Star there." So saying, Sergeant Tom, whose language in soliloquy, or when excited, was more marked by a brogue than at other times, rode away towards Galbraith's Place.

In the tavern at that moment, Pretty Pierre was sitting on the bar-counter, where temperance drinks were professedly sold, singing to himself. His dress was singularly neat, if coarse, and his slouch hat was worn with an air of jauntiness according well with his slight make and almost girlish delicacy of complexion. He was puffing a cigarette, in the breaks of the song. Peter Galbraith, tall, gaunt, and sombre-looking, sat with his chair tilted back against the wall, rather nervously pulling at the strips of bark of which the yielding chair-seat was made. He may or may not have been listening to the song which had run through several verses. Where it had come from, no one knew; no one cared to know. The number of its verses were legion. Pierre had a sweet voice, of a peculiarly penetrating quality; still it was low and well-modulated, like the colour in his cheeks, which gave him his name.

These were the words he was singing as Sergeant Tom rode towards the tavern:

"The hot blood leaps in his quivering breast
Voila! 'Tis his enemies near!
There's a chasm deep on the mountain crest
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!
They follow him close and they follow him fast,
And he flies like a mountain deer;
Then a mad, wild leap and he's safe at last!
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!
A cry and a leap and the danger's past
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

At the close of the verse, Galbraith said: "I don't like that song. I--I don't like it. You're not a father, Pierre."

"No, I am not a father. I have some virtue of that. I have spared the world something, Pete Galbraith."

"You have the Devil's luck; your sins never get YOU into trouble."

A curious fire flashed in the half-breed's eyes, and he said, quietly: "Yes, I have great luck; but I have my little troubles at times--at times."

"They're different, though, from this trouble of Val's." There was something like a fog in the old man's throat.

"Yes, Val was quite foolish, you see. If he had killed a white man--Pretty Pierre, for instance--well, there would have been a show of arrest, but he could escape. It was an Injin. The Government cherish the Injin much in these days. The redskin must be protected. It must be shown that at Ottawa there is justice. That is droll--quite. Eh, bien! Val will not try to escape. He waits too long--near twenty-four hours. Then, it is as you see. . . . You have not told her?" He nodded towards the door of the sittingroom.

"Nothing. It'll come on Jen soon enough if he doesn't get away, and bad enough if he does, and can't come back to us. She's fond of him--as fond of him as a mother. Always was wiser than our Val or me, Jen was. More sense than a judge, and proud but not too proud, Pierre--not too proud. She knows the right thing to do, like the Scriptures; and she does it too. . . . Where did you say he was hid?"

"In the Hollow at Soldier's Knee. He stayed too long at Moose Horn. Injins carried the news on to Fort Desire. When Val started south for the Border other Injins followed, and when a halt was made at Soldier's Knee they pushed across country over to Fort Desire. You see, Val's horse give out. I rode with him so far. My horse too was broke up. What was to be done? Well, I knew a ranchman not far from Soldier's Knee. I told Val to sleep, and I would go on and get the ranchman to send him a horse, while I come on to you. Then he could push on to the Border. I saw the ranchman, and he swore to send a horse to Val to-night. He will keep his word. He knows Val. That was at noon to-day, and I am here, you see, and you know all. The danger? Ah, my friend,--the Police Barracks at Archangel's Rise! If word is sent down there from Fort Desire before Val passes, they will have out a big patrol, and his chances,--well, you know them, the Riders of the Plains. But Val, I think will have luck, and get into Montana before they can stop him. I hope; yes."

"If I could do anything, Pierre! Can't we--"

The half-breed interrupted: "No, we can't do anything, Galbraith. I have done all. The ranchman knows me. He will keep his word, by the Great Heaven!" It would seem as if Pierre had reasons for relying on the ranchman other than ordinary prairie courtesy to law-breakers.

"Pierre, tell me the whole story over, slow and plain. It don't seem nateral to think of it; but if you go over it again, perhaps I can get the thing more reas'nable in my mind. No, it ain't nateral to me, Pierre--our Val running away." The old man leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands.

"Eh, well, it was an Injin. So much. It was in self-defence--a little, but of course to prove that. There is the difficulty. You see, they were all drinking, and the Injin--he was a chief---proposed--he proposed that Val should sell him his sister, Jen Galbraith, to be the chief's squaw. He would give him a cayuse. Val's blood came up quick--quite quick. You know Val. He said between his teeth: 'Look out, Snow Devil, you Injin dog, or I'll have your heart. Do you think a white girl is like a redskin woman, to be sold as you sell your wives and daughters to the squaw-men and white loafers, you reptile?' Then the Injin said an ugly word about Val's sister, and Val shot him dead like lightning.... Yes, that is good to swear, Galbraith. You are not the only one that curses the law in this world. It is not Justice that fills the gaols, but Law."

The old man rose and walked up and down the room in a shuffling kind of way. His best days were done, the spring of his life was gone, and the step was that of a man who had little more of activity and force with which to turn the halting wheels of life. His face was not altogether good, yet it was not evil. There was a sinister droop to the eyelids, a suggestion of cruelty about the mouth; but there was more of good-nature and passive strength than either in the general expression. One could

see that some genial influence had dominated what was inherently cruel and sinister in him. Still the sinister predisposition was there.

"He can't never come here, Pierre, can he"? he asked, despairingly.

"No, he can't come here, Galbraith. And look: if the Riders of the Plains should stop here to-night, or to-morrow, you will be cool--cool, eh?"

"Yes, I will be quite cool, Pierre." Then he seemed to think of something else and looked up half-curiously, half-inquiringly at the half-breed.

Pierre saw this. He whistled quietly to himself for a little, and then called the old man over to where he sat. Leaning slightly forward he made his reply to the look that had been bent upon him. He touched Galbraith's breast lightly with his delicate fingers, and said: "I have not much love for the world, Pete Galbraith, and not much love for men and women altogether; they are fools--nearly all. Some men--you know--treat me well. They drink with me--much. They would make life a hell for me if I was poor--shoot me, perhaps, quick!--if--if I didn't shoot first. They would wipe me with their feet. They would spoil Pretty Pierre." This he said with a grim kind of humour and scorn, refined in its suppressed force. Fastidious as he was in appearance, Pierre was not vain. He had been created with a sense of refinement that reduced the grossness of his life; but he did not trade on it; he simply accepted it and lived it naturally after his kind. He was not good at heart, and he never pretended to be so. He continued: "No, I have not much love; but Val, well, I think of him some. His tongue is straight; he makes no lies. His heart is fire; his arms are strong; he has no fear. He does not love Pierre; but he does not pretend to love him. He does not think of me like the rest. So much the more when his trouble comes I help him. I help him to the death if he needs me. To make him my friend--that is good. Eh? Perhaps. You see, Galbraith?"

The old man nodded thoughtfully, and after a little pause said: "I have killed Injins myself;" and he made a motion of his head backward, suggestive of the past.

With a shrug of his shoulders the other replied "Yes, so have I--sometimes. But the government was different then, and there were no Riders of the Plains." His white teeth showed menacingly under his slight moustache. Then there was another pause. Pierre was watching the other.

"What's that you're doing, Galbraith?"

"Rubbin' laudanum on my gums for this toothache. Have to use it for nuralgy, too."

Galbraith put the little vial back in his waistcoat pocket, and presently said: "What will you have to drink, Pretty Pierre?" That was his way of showing gratitude.

"I am reform. I will take coffee, if Jen Galbraith will make some. Too much broke glass inside is not good. Yes."

Galbraith went into the sitting-room to ask Jen to make the coffee. Pierre, still sitting on the bar-counter, sang to himself a verse of a

rough-and-ready, satirical prairie ballad:

"The Riders of the Plains, my boys, are twenty thousand strong
Oh, Lordy, don't they make the prairies howl!
'Tis their lot to smile on virtue and to collar what is wrong,
And to intercept the happy flowin' bowl.

They've a notion, that in glory, when we wicked ones have chains
They will all be major-generals--and that!
They're a lovely band of pilgrims are the Riders of the Plains
Will some sinner please to pass around the hat?"

As he reached the last two lines of the verse the door opened and Sergeant Tom entered. Pretty Pierre did not stop singing. His eyes simply grew a little brighter, his cheek flushed ever so slightly, and there was an increase of vigour in the closing notes.

Sergeant Tom smiled a little grimly, then he nodded and said: "Been at it ever since, Pretty Pierre? You were singing the same song on the same spot when I passed here six months ago."

"Eh, Sergeant Tom, it is you? What brings you so far from your straw-bed at Fort Desire?" From underneath his hat-brim Pierre scanned the face of the trooper closely.

"Business. Not to smile on virtue, but to collar what is wrong. I guess you ought to be ready by this time to go into quarters, Pierre. You've had a long innings."

"Not yet, Sergeant Tom, though I love the Irish, and your company would make me happy. But I am so innocent, and the world--it cannot spare me yet. But I think you come to smile on virtue, all the same, Sergeant Tom. She is beautiful is Jen Galbraith. Ah, that makes your eye bright --so! You Riders of the Plains, you do two things at one time. You make this hour someone happy, and that hour someone unhappy. In one hand the soft glove of kindness, in the other, voila! the cold glove of steel. We cannot all be great like that, Sergeant Tom."

"Not great, but clever. Voila, the Pretty Pierre! In one hand he holds the soft paper, the pictures that deceive--kings, queens, and knaves; in the other, pictures in gold and silver--money won from the pockets of fools. And so, as you say, 'bien,' and we each have our way, bedad!"

Sergeant Tom noticed that the half-breed's eyes nearly closed, as if to hide the malevolence that was in them. He would not have been surprised to see a pistol drawn. But he was quite fearless, and if it was not his duty to provoke a difficulty, his fighting nature would not shrink from giving as good as he got. Besides, so far as that nature permitted, he hated Pretty Pierre. He knew the ruin that this gambler had caused here and there in the West, and he was glad that Fort Desire, at any rate, knew him less than it did formerly.

Just then Peter Galbraith entered with the coffee, followed by Jen. When the old man saw his visitor he stood still with sudden fear; but catching a warning look from the eye of the half-breed, he made an effort to be steady, and said: "Well, Jen, if it isn't Sergeant Tom! And what brings you down here, Sergeant Tom? After some scalawag that's broke the law?"

Sergeant Tom had not noticed the blanched anxiety in the father's face;

for his eyes were seeking those of the daughter. He answered the question as he advanced towards Jen: "Yes and no, Galbraith; I'm only takin' orders to those who will be after some scalawag by daylight in the mornin', or before. The hand of a traveller to you, Miss Jen."

Her eyes replied to his in one language; her lips spoke another. "And who is the law-breaker, Sergeant Tom"? she said, as she took his hand.

Galbraith's eyes strained towards the soldier till the reply came: "And I don't know that; not wan o' me. I'd ridden in to Fort Desire from another duty, a matter of a hundred miles, whin the major says to me, 'There's murder been done at Moose Horn. Take these orders down to Archangel's Rise, and deliver them and be back here within forty-eight hours.' And here I am on the way, and, if I wasn't ready to drop for want of a bite and sup, I'd be movin' away from here to the south at this moment."

Galbraith was trembling with excitement. Pierre warned him by a look, and almost immediately afterward gave him a reassuring nod, as if an important and favourable idea had occurred to him.

Jen, looking at the Sergeant's handsome face, said: "It's six months to a day since you were here, Sergeant Tom."

"What an almanac you are, Miss!"

Pretty Pierre sipping his coffee here interrupted musingly: "But her almanac is not always so reliable. So I think. When was I here last, Ma'm'selle?"

With something like menace in her eyes Jen replied: "You were here six months ago to-day, when you won thirty dollars from our Val; and then again, just thirty days after that."

"Ah, so! You remember with a difference."

A moment after, Sergeant Tom being occupied in talking to Jen, Pierre whispered to Peter Galbraith: "His horse--then the laudanum!"

Galbraith was puzzled for a moment, but soon nodded significantly, and the sinister droop to his eyes became more marked. He turned to the Sergeant and said, "Your horse must be fed as well as yourself, Sergeant Tom. I'll look after the beast, and Jen will take care of you. There's some fresh coffee, isn't there, Jen?"

Jen nodded an affirmative. Galbraith knew that the Sergeant would trust no one to feed his horse but himself, and the offer therefore was made with design.

Sergeant Tom replied instantly: "No, I'll do it if someone will show me the grass pile."

Pierre slipped quietly from the counter, and said, "I know the way, Galbraith. I will show."

Jen turned to the sitting-room, and Sergeant Tom moved to the tavern door, followed by Pierre, who, as he passed Galbraith, touched the old man's waistcoat pocket, and said: "Thirty drops in the coffee."

Then he passed out, singing softly:

"And he sleepeth so well, and he sleepeth so long
The fight it was hard, my dear;
And his foes were many and swift and strong
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

There was danger ahead for Sergeant Thomas Gellatly. Galbraith followed his daughter to the sitting-room. She went to the kitchen and brought bread, and cold venison, and prairie fowl, and stewed dried apples--the stay and luxury of all rural Canadian homes. The coffee-pot was then placed on the table. Then the old man said: "Better give him some of that old cheese, Jen, hadn't you? It's in the cellar." He wanted to be rid of her for a few moments. "S'pose I had," and Jen vanished.

Now was Galbraith's chance. He took the vial of laudanum from his pocket, and opened the coffee-pot. It was half full. This would not suit. Someone else--Jen--might drink the coffee also! Yet it had to be done. Sergeant Tom should not go on. Inspector Jules and his Riders of the Plains must not be put upon the track of Val. Twelve hours would make all the difference. Pour out a cup of coffee?--Yes, of course, that would do. It was poured out quickly, and then thirty drops of laudanum were carefully counted into it. Hark, they are coming back!--Just in time. Sergeant Tom and Pierre enter from outside, and then Jen from the kitchen. Galbraith is pouring another cup of coffee as they enter, and he says: "Just to be sociable I'm goin' to have a cup of coffee with you, Sergeant Tom. How you Riders of the Plains get waited on hand and foot!" Did some warning flash through Sergeant Tom's mind or body, some mental shock or some physical chill? For he distinctly shivered, though he was not cold. He seemed suddenly oppressed with a sense of danger. But his eyes fell on Jen, and the hesitation, for which he did not then try to account, passed. Jen, clear-faced and true, invited him to sit and eat, and he, starting half-abstractedly, responded to her "Draw nigh, Sergeant Tom," and sat down. Commonplace as the words were, they thrilled him, for he thought of a table of his own in a home of his own, and the same words spoken everyday, but without the "Sergeant,"--simply "Tom."

He ate heartily and sipped his coffee slowly, talking meanwhile to Jen and Galbraith. Pretty Pierre watched them all. Presently the gambler said: "Let us go and have our game of euchre, Galbraith. Ma'm'selle can well take care of Sergeant Tom."

Galbraith drank the rest of his coffee, rose, and passed with Pierre into the bar-room. Then the halfbreed said to him, "You were careful--thirty drops?"

"Yes, thirty drops." The latent cruelty of the old man's nature was awake.

"That is right. It is sleep; not death. He will sleep so sound for half a day, perhaps eighteen hours, and then!--Val will have a long start."

In the sitting-room Sergeant Tom was saying: "Where is your brother, Miss Galbraith?" He had no idea that the order in his pocket was for the arrest of that brother. He merely asked the question to start the talk.

He and Jen had met but five or six times; but the impression left on the minds of both was pleasant--ineradicable. Yet, as Sergeant Tom often asked himself during the past six months, why should he think of her?

The life he led was one of severe endurance, and harshness, and austerity. Into it there could not possibly enter anything of home. He was but a noncommissioned officer of the Mounted Police, and beyond that he had nothing. Ireland had not been kind to him. He had left her inhospitable shores, and after years of absence he had but a couple of hundred dollars laid up--enough to purchase his discharge and something over, but nothing with which to start a home. Ranching required capital. No, it couldn't be thought of; and yet he had thought of it, try as he would not to do so. And she? There was that about this man who had lived life on two continents, in whose blood ran the warm and chivalrous Celtic fire, which appealed to her. His physical manhood was noble, if rugged; his disposition genial and free, if schooled, but not entirely, to that reserve which his occupation made necessary--a reserve he would have been more careful to maintain, in speaking of his mission a short time back in the bar-room, if Jen had not been there. She called out the frankest part of him; she opened the doors of his nature; she attracted confidence as the sun does the sunflower.

To his question she replied: "I do not know where our Val is. He went on a hunting expedition up north. We never can tell about him, when he will turn up or where he will be to-morrow. He may walk in any minute. We never feel uneasy. He always has such luck, and comes out safe and sound wherever he is. Father says Val's a hustler, and that nothing can keep in the road with him. But he's a little wild--a little. Still, we don't hector him, Sergeant Tom; hectoring never does any good, does it?"

"No, hectoring never does any good. And as for the wildness, if the heart of him's right, why that's easy out of him whin he's older. It's a fine lad I thought him, the time I saw him here. It's his freedom I wish I had--me that has to travel all day and part of the night, and thin part of the day and all night back again, and thin a day of sleep and the same thing over again. And that's the life of me, sayin' nothin' of the frost and the blizzards, and no home to go to, and no one to have a meal for me like this whin I turn up." And the sergeant wound up with, "Whooroo! there's a speech for you, Miss!" and laughed good-humouredly. For all that, there was in his eyes an appeal that went straight to Jen's heart.

But, woman-like, she would not open the way for him to say anything more definite just yet. She turned the subject. And yet again, woman-like, she knew it would lead to the same conclusion:

"You must go to-night?"

"Yes, I must."

"Nothing--nothing would keep you?"

"Nothing. Duty is duty, much as I'd like to stay, and you givin' me the bid. But my orders were strict. You don't know what discipline means, perhaps. It means obeyin' commands if you die for it; and my commands were to take a letter to Inspector Jules at Archangel's Rise to-night. It's a matter of murder or the like, and duty must be done, and me that sleepy, not forgettin' your presence, as ever a man was and looked the world in the face."

He drank the rest of the coffee and mechanically set the cup down, his eyes closing heavily as he did so. He made an effort, however, and pulled himself together. His eyes opened, and he looked at Jen steadily for a moment. Then he leaned over and touched her hand gently with his

fingers,--Pierre's glove of kindness,--and said: "It's in my heart to want to stay; but a sight of you I'll have on my way back. But I must go on now, though I'm that drowsy I could lie down here and never stir again."

Jen said to herself: "Poor fellow, poor fellow, how tired he is! I wish"--but she withdrew her hand. He put his hand to his head, and said, absently: "It's my duty and it's orders, and . . . what was I sayin'? The disgrace of me if, if . . . bedad! the sleep's on me; I'm awake, but I can't open my eyes. . . . If the orders of me--and a good meal . . . and the disgrace . . . to do me duty--looked the world in the face--"

During this speech he staggered to his feet, Jen watching him anxiously the while. No suspicion of the cause of his trouble crossed her mind. She set it down to extreme natural exhaustion. Presently feeling the sofa behind him, he dropped upon it, and, falling back, began to breathe heavily. But even in this physical stupefaction he made an effort to reassert himself, to draw himself back from the coming unconsciousness. His eyes opened, but they were blind with sleep; and as if in a dream, he said: "My duty . . . disgrace . . . a long sleep . . . Jen, dearest"--how she started then!--"it must be done . . . my Jen!" and he said no more.

But these few words had opened up a world for her--a new-created world on the instant. Her life was illuminated. She felt the fulness of a great thought suffusing her face. A beautiful dream was upon her. It had come to her out of his sleep. But with its splendid advent there came the other thing that always is born with woman's love--an almost pathetic care of the being loved. In the deep love of women the maternal and protective sense works in the parallels of mutual regard. In her life now it sprang full-statured in action; love of him, care of him; his honour her honour; his life her life. He must not sleep like this if it was his duty to go on. Yet how utterly worn he must be! She had seen men brought in from fighting prairie fires for three days without sleep; had watched them drop on their beds, and lie like logs for thirty-six hours. This sleep of her lover was, therefore, not so strange to her. but it was perilous to the performance of his duty.

"Poor Sergeant Tom," she said. "Poor Tom," she added; and then, with a great flutter at the heart at last, "My Tom!" Yes, she said that; but she said it to the beacon, to the Prairie Star, burning outside brighter, it seemed to her, than it had ever done before. Then she sat down and watched him for many minutes, thinking at the end of each that she would wake him. But the minutes passed, his breathing grew heavier, and he did not stir. The Prairie Star made quivering and luminous curtains of red for the windows, and Jen's mind was quivering in vivid waves of feeling just the same. It seemed to her as if she was looking at life now through an atmosphere charged with some rare, refining essence, and that in it she stood exultingly. Perhaps she did not define it so; but that which we define she felt. And happy are they who feel it, and, feeling it, do not lose it in this world, and have the hope of carrying it into the next.

After a time she rose, went over to him and touched his shoulder. It seemed strange to her to do this thing. She drew back timidly from the pleasant shock of a new experience. Then she remembered that he ought to be on his way, and she shook him gently, then, with all her strength, and called to him quietly all the time, as if her low tones ought to wake

him, if nothing else could. But he lay in a deep and stolid slumber. It was no use. She went to her seat and sat down to think. As she did so, her father entered the room.

"Did you call, Jen"? he said; and turned to the sofa. "I was calling to Sergeant Tom. He's asleep there; dead-gone, father. I can't wake him."

"Why should you wake him? He is tired."

The sinister lines in Galbraith's face had deepened greatly in the last hour. He went over and looked closely at the Sergeant, followed languidly by Pierre, who casually touched the pulse of the sleeping man, and said as casually:

"Eh, he sleep well; his pulse is like a baby; he was tired, much. He has had no sleep for one, two, three nights, perhaps; and a good meal, it makes him comfortable, and so you see!"

Then he touched lightly the triple chevron on Sergeant Tom's arm, and said:

"Eh, a man does much work for that. And then, to be moral and the friend of the law all the time!" Pierre here shrugged his shoulders. "It is easier to be wicked and free, and spend when one is rich, and starve when one is poor, than to be a sergeant and wear the triple chevron. But the sleep will do him good just the same, Jen Galbraith."

"He said that he must go to Archangel's Rise tonight, and be back at Fort Desire to-morrow night."

"Well, that's nothing to us, Jen," replied Galbraith, roughly. "He's got his own business to look after. He and his tribe are none too good to us and our tribe. He'd have your old father up to-morrow for selling a tired traveller a glass of brandy; and worse than that, ay, a great sight worse than that, mind you, Jen."

Jen did not notice, or, at least, did not heed, the excited emphasis on the last words. She thought that perhaps her father had been set against the Sergeant by Pierre.

"There, that'll do, father," she said. "It's easy to bark at a dead lion. Sergeant Tom's asleep, and you say things that you wouldn't say if he was awake. He never did us any harm, and you know that's true, father."

Galbraith was about to reply with anger; but he changed his mind and walked into the bar-room, followed by Pierre.

In Jen's mind a scheme had been hurriedly and clearly formed; and with her, to form it was to put it into execution. She went to Sergeant Tom, opened his coat, felt in the inside pocket, and drew forth an official envelope. It was addressed to Inspector Jules at Archangel's Rise. She put it back and buttoned up the coat again. Then she said, with her hands firmly clenching at her side,—"I'll do it."

She went into the adjoining room and got a quilt, which she threw over him, and a pillow, which she put under his head. Then she took his cap and the cloak which he had thrown over a chair, as if to carry them away. But another thought occurred to her, for she looked towards the bar-room

and put them down again. She glanced out of the window and saw that her father and Pierre had gone to lessen the volume of gas which was feeding the flame. This, she knew, meant that her father would go to bed when he came back to the house; and this suited her purpose. She waited till they had entered the bar-room again, and then she went to them, and said: "I guess he's asleep for all night. Best leave him where he is. I'm going. Good-night."

When she got back to the sitting-room she said to herself: "How old father's looking! He seems broken up to-day. He isn't what he used to be." She turned once more to look at Sergeant Tom, then she went to her room.

A little later Peter Galbraith and Pretty Pierre went to the sitting-room, and the old man drew from the Sergeant's pocket the envelope which Jen had seen. Pierre took it from him. "No, Pete Galbraith. Do not be a fool. Suppose you steal that paper. Sergeant Tom will miss it. He will understand. He will guess about the drug, then you will be in trouble. Val will be safe now. This Rider of the Plains will sleep long enough for that. There, I put the paper back. He sleeps like a log. No one can suspect the drug, and it is all as we like. No, we will not steal; that is wrong--quite wrong"--here Pretty Pierre showed his teeth. "We will go to bed. Come!"

Jen heard them ascend the stairs. She waited a half-hour, then she stole into Val's bedroom, and when she emerged again she had a bundle of clothes across her arm. A few minutes more and she walked into the sitting-room dressed in Val's clothes, and with her hair closely wound on the top of her head.

The house was still. The Prairie Star made the room light enough for her purpose. She took Sergeant Tom's cap and cloak and put them on. She drew the envelope from his pocket and put it in her bosom--she showed the woman there, though for the rest of this night she was to be a Rider of the Plains, She of the Triple Chevron.

She went towards the door, hesitated, drew back, then paused, stooped down quickly, tenderly touched the soldier's brow with her lips, and said: "I'll do it for you. You shall not be disgraced--Tom."

III

This was at half-past ten o'clock. At two o'clock a jaded and blown horse stood before the door of the barracks at Archangel's Rise. Its rider, muffled to the chin, was knocking, and at the same time pulling his cap down closely over his head. "Thank God the night is dusky," he said. We have heard that voice before. The hat and cloak are those of Sergeant Tom, but the voice is that of Jen Galbraith. There is some danger in this act; danger for her lover, contempt for herself if she is discovered. Presently the door opens and a corporal appears. "Who's there? Oh," he added, as he caught sight of the familiar uniform; "where from?"

"From Fort Desire. Important orders to Inspector Jules. Require fresh horse to return with; must leave mine here. Have to go back at once."

"I say," said the corporal, taking the papers--"what's your name?"

"Gellatly--Sergeant Gellatly."

"Say, Sergeant Gellatly, this isn't accordin' to Hoyle--come in the night and go in the night and not stay long enough to have a swear at the Gover'ment. Why, you're comin' in, aren't you? You're comin' across the door-mat for a cup of coffee and a warm while the horse is gettin' ready, aren't you, Sergeant--Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly? I've heard of you, but--yes; I will hurry. Here, Waugh, this to Inspector Jules! If you won't step in and won't drink and will be unsociable, sergeant, why, come on and you shall have a horse as good as the one you've brought. I'm Corporal Galna."

Jen led the exhausted horse to the stables. Fortunately there was no lantern used, and therefore little chance for the garrulous corporal to study the face of his companion, even if he wished to do so. The risk was considerable; but Jen Galbraith was fired by that spirit of self-sacrifice which has held a world rocking to destruction on a balancing point of safety.

The horse was quickly saddled, Jen meanwhile remaining silent. While she was mounting, Corporal Galna drew and struck a match to light his pipe. He held it up for a moment as though to see the face of Sergeant Gellatly. Jen had just given a good-night, and the horse the word and a touch of the spur at the instant. Her face, that is, such of it as could be seen above the cloak and under the cap, was full in the light. Enough was seen, however, to call forth, in addition to Corporal Galna's good-night, the exclamation, "Well, I'm blowed!"

As Jen vanished into the night a moment after, she heard a voice calling --not Corporal Galna's--"Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly!" She supposed it was Inspector Jules, but she would not turn back now. Her work was done.

A half-hour later Corporal Galna confided to Private Waugh that Sergeant Gellatly was too damned pretty for the force--wondered if they called him Beauty at Fort Desire--couldn't call him Pretty Gellatly, for there was Pretty Pierre who had right of possession to that title--would like to ask him what soap he used for his complexion--'twasn't this yellow bar-soap of the barracks, which wouldn't lather, he'd bet his ultimate dollar.

Waugh, who had sometime seen Sergeant Gellatly, entered into a disputation on the point. He said that "Sergeant Tom was good-looking, a regular Irish thoroughbred; but he wasn't pretty, not much!--guessed Corporal Galna had nightmare, and finally, as the interest in the theme increased in fervour, announced that Sergeant Tom could loosen the teeth of, and knock the spots off, any man among the Riders, from Archangel's Rise to the Cypress Hills. Pretty--not much--thoroughbred all over!"

And Corporal Galna replied, sarcastically,--"That he might be able for spot dispersion of such a kind, but he had two as pretty spots on his cheek, and as white and touch-no-tobacco teeth as any female ever had." Private Waugh declared then that Corporal Galna would be saying Sergeant Gellatly wasn't a man at all, and wore earrings, and put his hair into papers; and when he could find no further enlargement of sarcasm, consigned the Corporal to a fiery place of future torment reserved for lunatics.

At this critical juncture Waugh was ordered to proceed to Inspector Jules. A few minutes after, he was riding away toward Soldier's Knee, with the Inspector and another private, to capture Val Galbraith, the slayer of Snow Devil, while four other troopers also started off in different directions.

IV

It was six o'clock when Jen drew rein in the yard at Galbraith's Place. Through the dank humours of the darkest time of the night she had watched the first grey streaks of dawn appear. She had caught her breath with fear at the thought that, by some accident, she might not get back before seven o'clock, the hour when her father rose. She trembled also at the supposition of Sergeant Tom awaking and finding his papers gone. But her fearfulness and excitement was not that of weakness, rather that of a finely nervous nature, having strong elements of imagination, and, therefore, great capacities for suffering as for joy; but yet elastic, vigorous, and possessing unusual powers of endurance. Such natures rebuild as fast as they are exhausted. In the devitalising time preceding the dawn she had felt a sudden faintness come over her for a moment; but her will surmounted it, and, when she saw the ruddy streaks of pink and red glorify the horizon, she felt a sudden exaltation of physical strength. She was a child of the light, she loved the warm flame of the sun, the white gleam of the moon. Holding in her horse to give him a five minutes' rest, she rose in her saddle and looked round. She was alone in her circle of vision, she and her horse. The long hillocks of prairie rolled away like the sea to the flushed morning, and the far-off Cypress Hills broke the monotonous skyline of the south. Already the air was dissipated of its choking weight, and the vast solitude was filling with that sense of freedom which night seems to shut in as with four walls, and day to widen gloriously. Tears sprang to her eyes from a sudden rush of feeling; but her lips were smiling. The world was so different from what it was yesterday. Something had quickened her into a glowing life.

Then she urged the horse on, and never halted till she reached home. She unsaddled the animal that had shared with her the hardship of the long, hard ride, hobbled it, and entered the house quickly. No one was stirring. Sergeant Tom was still asleep. This she saw, as she hurriedly passed in and laid the cap and cloak where she had found them. Then, once again, she touched the brow of the sleeper with her lips, and went to her room to divest herself of Val's clothes. The thing had been done without anyone knowing of her absence. But she was frightened as she looked into the mirror. She was haggard, and her eyes were bloodshot. Eight hours or nearly in the saddle, at ten miles an hour, had told on her severely; as well it might. Even a prairie-born woman, however, understands the art and use of grooming better than a man. Warm water quickly heated at the gas, with a little acetic acid in it, used generally for her scouring,--and then cold water with oatmeal flour, took away in part the dulness and the lines in the flesh. But the eyes! Jen remembered the vial of tincture of myrrh left by a young Englishman a year ago, and used by him for refreshing his eyes after a drinking bout. She got it, tried the tincture, and saw and felt an immediate benefit. Then she made a cup of strong green tea, and in ten minutes was like herself again. Now for the horse. She went quickly out where she could

not be seen from the windows of the house, and gave him a rubbing down till he was quite dry. Then she gave him a little water and some feed. The horse was really the touchstone of discovery. But Jen trusted in her star. If the worst came she would tell the tale. It must be told anyway to Sergeant Tom--but that was different now. Even if the thing became known it would only be a thing to be teased about by her father and others, and she could stop that. Poor girl, as though that was the worst that was to come from her act!

Sergeant Tom slept deeply and soundly. He had not stirred. His breathing was unnaturally heavy, Jen thought, but, no suspicion of foul play came to her mind yet. Why should it? She gave herself up to a sweet and simple sense of pride in the deed she had done for him, disturbed but slightly by the chances of discovery, and the remembrance of the match that showed her face at Archangel's Rise. Her hands touched the flaxen hair of the soldier, and her eyes grew luminous. One night had stirred all her soul to its depths. A new woman had been born in her. Val was dear to her--her brother Val; but she realised now that another had come who would occupy a place that neither father, nor brother, nor any other could fill. Yet it was a most weird set of tragic circumstances. This man before her had been set to do a task which might deprive her brother of his life, certainly of his freedom; that would disgrace him; her father had done a great wrong too, had put in danger the life of the man she loved, to save his son; she herself in doing this deed for her lover had placed her brother in jeopardy, had crossed swords with her father's purposes, had done the one thing that stood between that father's son and safety; Pretty Pierre, whom she hated and despised, and thought to be the enemy of her brother and of her home, had proved himself a friend; and behind it all was the brother's crime committed to avenge an insult to her name.

But such is life. Men and women are unwittingly their own executioners, and the executioners of those they love.

V

An hour passed, and then Galbraith and Pierre appeared. Jen noticed that her father went over to Sergeant Tom and rather anxiously felt his pulse. Once in the night the old man had come down and done the same thing. Pierre said something in an undertone. Did they think he was ill? That was Jon's thought. She watched them closely; but the half-breed knew that she was watching, and the two said nothing more to each other. But Pierre said, in a careless way: "It is good he have that sleep. He was played out, quite."

Jon replied, a secret triumph at her heart: "But what about his orders, the papers he was to carry to Archangel's Rise? What about his being back at Fort Desire in the time given him?"

"It is not much matter about the papers. The poor devil that Inspector Jules would arrest--well, he will get off, perhaps, but that does no one harm. Eh, Galbraith? The law is sometimes unkind. And as for obeying orders, why, the prairie is wide, it is a hard ride, horses go wrong; --a little tale of trouble to Inspector Jules, another at Fort Desire, and who is to know except Pete Galbraith, Jen Galbraith, and Pierre? Poor Sergeant Tom. It was good he sleep so."

Jen felt there was irony behind the smooth words of the gambler. He had a habit of saying things, as they express it in that country, between his teeth. That signifies what is animal-like and cruel. Galbraith stood silent during Pierre's remarks, but, when he had finished, said:

"Yes, it's all right if he doesn't sleep too long; but there's the trouble--too long!"

Pierre frowned a warning, and then added, with unconcern: "I remember when you sleep thirty hours, Galbraith--after the prairie fire, three years ago, eh!"

"Well, that's so; that's so as you say it. We'll let him sleep till noon, or longer--or longer, won't we, Pierre?"

"Yes, till noon is good, or longer."

"But he shall not sleep longer if I can wake him," said Jen. "You do not think of the trouble all this sleeping may make for him."

"But then--but then, there is the trouble he will make for others, if he wakes. Think. A poor devil trying to escape the law!"

"But we have nothing to do with that, and justice is justice, Pierre."

"Eh, well, perhaps, perhaps!" Galbraith was silent.

Jen felt that so far as Sergeant Tom's papers were concerned he was safe; but she felt also that by noon he ought to be on his way back to Fort Desire--after she had told him what she had done. She was anxious for his honour. That her lover shall appear well before the world, is a thing deep in the heart of every woman. It is a pride for which she will deny herself, even of the presence of that lover.

"Till noon," Jen said, "and then he must go."

VI

Jen watched to see if her father or Pierre would notice that the horse was changed, had been travelled during the night, or that it was a different one altogether. As the morning wore away she saw that they did not notice the fact. This ignorance was perhaps owing largely to the appearance of several ranchmen from near the American border. They spent their time in the bar-room, and when they left it was nearly noon. Still Sergeant Tom slept. Jen now went to him and tried to wake him. She lifted him to a sitting position, but his head fell on her shoulder. Disheartened, she laid him down again. But now at last an undefined suspicion began to take possession of her. It made her uneasy; it filled her with a vague sense of alarm. Was this sleep natural? She remembered that, when her father and others had slept so long after the prairie fire, she had waked them once to give them drink and a little food, and they did not breathe so heavily as he was doing. Yet what could be done? What was the matter? There was not a doctor nearer than a hundred miles. She thought of bleeding,--the old-fashioned remedy still used on the prairies--but she decided to wait a little. Somehow she felt that she

would receive no help from her father or Pierre. Had they anything to do with this sleep? Was it connected with the papers? No, not that, for they had not sought to take them, and had not made any remark about their being gone. This showed their unconcern on that point. She could not fathom the mystery, but the suspicion of something irregular deepened. Her father could have no reason for injuring Sergeant Tom; but Pretty Pierre--that was another matter. Yet she remembered too that her father had appeared the more anxious of the two about the Sergeant's sleep. She recalled that he said: "Yes, it's all right, if he doesn't sleep too long."

But Pierre could play a part, she knew, and could involve others in trouble, and escape himself. He was a man with a reputation for occasional wickednesses of a naked, decided type. She knew that he was possessed of a devil, of a very reserved devil, but liable to bold action on occasions. She knew that he valued the chances of life or death no more than he valued the thousand and one other chances of small importance, which occur in daily experience. It was his creed that one doesn't go till the game is done and all the cards are played. He had a stoic indifference to events.

He might be capable of poisoning--poisoning! ah, that thought! of poisoning Sergeant Tom for some cause. But her father? The two seemed to act alike in the matter. Could her father approve of any harm happening to Tom? She thought of the meal he had eaten, of the coffee he had drunk. The coffee--was that the key? But she said to herself that she was foolish, that her love had made her so. No, it could not be.

But a fear grew upon her, strive as she would against it. She waited silently and watched, and twice or thrice made ineffectual efforts to rouse him. Her father came in once. He showed anxiety; that was unmistakable, but was it the anxiety of guilt of any kind? She said nothing. At five o'clock matters abruptly came to a climax. Jen was in the kitchen, but, hearing footsteps in the sitting-room, she opened the door quietly. Her father was bending over Sergeant Tom, and Pierre was speaking: "No, no, Galbraith, it is all right. You are a fool. It could not kill him."

"Kill him--kill him," she repeated gaspingly to herself.

"You see he was exhausted; he may sleep for hours yet. Yes, he is safe, I think."

"But Jen, she suspects something, she--"

"Hush!" said Pretty Pierre. He saw her standing near. She had glided forward and stood with flashing eyes turned, now upon the one, and now upon the other. Finally they rested on Galbraith.

"Tell me what you have done to him; what you and Pretty Pierre have done to him. You have some secret. I will know." She leaned forward, something of the tigress in the poise of her body. "I tell you, I will know." Her voice was low, and vibrated with fierceness and determination. Her eyes glowed, and her nostrils trembled with disdain and indignation. As they drew back,--the old man sullenly, the gambler with a slight gesture of impatience,--she came a step nearer to them and waited, the cords of her shapely throat swelling with excitement. A moment so, and then she said in a tone that suggested menace, determination:

"You have poisoned him. Tell me the truth. Do you hear, father--the truth, or I will hate you. I will make you repent it till you die."

"But--" Pierre began.

She interrupted him. "Do not speak, Pretty Pierre. You are a devil. You will lie. Father--!" She waited. "What difference does it make to you, Jen?" "What difference--what difference to me? That you should be a murderer?"

"But that is not so, that is a dream of yours, Ma'm'selle," said Pierre.

She turned to her father again. "Father, will you tell the truth to me? I warn you it will be better for you both."

The old man's brow was sullen, and his lips were twitching nervously. "You care more for him than you do for your own flesh and blood, Jen. There's nothing to get mad about like that. I'll tell you when he's gone. . . . Let's--let's wake him," he added, nervously.

He stooped down and lifted the sleeping man to a sitting posture. Pierre assisted him.

Jen saw that the half-breed believed Sergeant Tom could be wakened, and her fear diminished slightly, if her indignation did not. They lifted the soldier to his feet. Pierre pressed the point of a pin deep into his arm. Jen started forward, woman-like, to check the action, but drew back, for she saw heroic measures might be necessary to bring him to consciousness. But, nevertheless, her anger broke bounds, and she said: "Cowards--cowards! What spite made you do this?"

"Damnation, Jen," said the father, "you'll hector me till I make you sorry. What's this Irish policeman to you? What's he beside your own flesh and blood, I say again."

"Why does my own flesh and blood do such wicked tricks to an Irish soldier? Why does it give poison to an Irish soldier?"

"Poison, Jen? You needn't speak so ghost-like. It was only a dose of laudanum; not enough to kill him. Ask Pierre."

Inwardly she believed him, and said a Thank-God to herself, but to the half-breed she remarked: "Yes, ask Pierre--you are behind all this! It is some evil scheme of yours. Why did you do it? Tell the truth for once." Her eyes swam angrily with Pierre's.

Pierre was complacent; he admired her wild attacks. He smiled, and replied: "My dear, it was a whim of mine; but you need not tell him, all the same, when he wakes. You see this is your father's house, though the whim is mine. But look: he is waking--the pin is good. Some cold water, quick!"

The cold water was brought and dashed into the face of the soldier. He showed signs of returning consciousness. The effect of the laudanum had been intensified by the thoroughly exhausted condition of the body.

But the man was perfectly healthy, and this helped to resist the danger of a fatal result.

Pierre kept up an intermittent speech. "Yes, it was a mere whim of mine. Eh, he will think he has been an ass to sleep so long, and on duty, and orders to carry to Archangel's Rise!" Here he showed his teeth again, white and regular like a dog's. That was the impression they gave, his lips were so red, and the contrast was so great. One almost expected to find that the roof of his mouth was black, like that of a well-bred hound; but there is no evidence available on the point.

"There, that is good," he said. "Now set him down, Pete Galbraith. Yes--so, so! Sergeant Tom, ah, you will wake well, soon. Now the eyes a little wider. Good. Eh, Sergeant Tom, what is the matter? It is breakfast time--quite."

Sergeant Tom's eyes opened slowly and looked dazedly before him for a minute. Then they fell on Pierre. At first there was no recognition, then they became consciously clearer. "Pretty Pierre, you here in the barracks!" he said. He put his hand to his head, then rubbed his eyes roughly and looked up again. This time he saw Jen and her father. His bewilderment increased. Then he added: "What is the matter? Have I been asleep? What--!" He remembered. He staggered to his feet and felt his pockets quickly and anxiously for his letter. It was gone.

"The letter!" he said. "My orders! Who has robbed me? Faith, I remember. I could not keep awake after I drank the coffee. My papers are gone, I tell you, Galbraith," he said, fiercely.

Then he turned to Jen: "You are not in this, Jen. Tell me."

She was silent for a moment, then was about to answer, when he turned to the gambler and said: "You are at the bottom of this. Give me my papers." But Pierre and Galbraith were as dumbfounded as the Sergeant himself to know that the letter was gone. They were stunned beyond speech when Jen said, flushing: "No, Sergeant Tom, I am the thief. When I could not wake you, I took the letter from your pocket and carried it to Inspector Jules last night,--or, rather, Sergeant Gellatly carried them. I wore his cap and cloak and passed for him."

"You carried that letter to Inspector Jules last night, Jen"? said the soldier, all his heart in his voice.

Jen saw her father blanch, his mouth open blankly, and his lips refuse to utter the words on them. For the first time she comprehended some danger to him, to herself--to Val!

"Father, father," she said,--" what is it?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulders and rejoined: "Eh, the devil! Such mistakes of women. They are fools--all." The old man put out a shaking hand and caught his daughter's arm. His look was of mingled wonder and despair, as he said, in a gasping whisper, "You carried that letter to Archangel's Rise?"

"Yes," she answered, faltering now; "Sergeant Tom had said how important it was, you remember. That it was his duty to take it to Inspector Jules, and be back within forty-eight hours. He fell asleep. I could not wake him. I thought, what if he were my brother--our Val. So, when you and Pretty Pierre went to bed, I put on Val's clothes, took Sergeant Tom's cloak and hat, carried the orders to Jules, and was back here by

six o'clock this morning."

Sergeant Tom's eyes told his tale of gratitude. He made a step towards her; but the old man, with a strange ferocity, motioned him back, saying,

"Go away from this house. Go quick. Go now, I tell you, or by God,-- I'll--"

Here Pretty Pierre touched his arm.

Sergeant Tom drew back, not because he feared but as if to get a mental perspective of the situation. Galbraith again said to his daughter,-- "Jen, you carried them papers? You! for him--for the Law!" Then he turned from her, and with hand clenched and teeth set spoke to the soldier: "Haven't you heard enough? Curse you, why don't you go?"

Sergeant Tom replied coolly: "Not so fast, Galbraith. There's some mystery in all this. There's my sleep to be accounted for yet. You had some reason, some"--he caught the eyes of Pierre. He paused. A light began to dawn on his mind, and he looked at Jen, who stood rigidly pale, her eyes fixed fearfully, anxiously, upon him. She too was beginning to frame in her mind a possible horror; the thing that had so changed her father, the cause for drugging the soldier. There was a silence in which Pierre first, and then all, detected the sound of horses' hoofs. Pierre went to the door and looked out. He turned round again, and shrugged his shoulders with an expression of helplessness. But as he saw Jen was about to speak, and Sergeant Tom to move towards the door, he put up his hand to stay them both, and said: "A little--wait!"

Then all were silent. Jen's fingers nervously clasped and unclasped, and her eyes were strained towards the door. Sergeant Tom stood watching her pityingly; the old man's head was bowed. The sound of galloping grew plainer. It stopped. An instant and then three horsemen appeared before the door. One was Inspector Jules, one was Private Waugh, and the other between them was--let Jen tell who he was. With an agonised cry she rushed from the house and threw herself against the saddle, and with her arms about the prisoner, cried: "Oh, Val, Val, it was you! It was you they were after. It was you that--oh no, no, no! My poor Val, and I can't tell you--I can't tell you!"

Great as was her grief and self-reproach, she felt it would be cruel to tell him the part she had taken in placing him in this position. She hated herself, but why deepen his misery? His face was pale, but it had its old, open, fearless look, which dissipation had not greatly marred. His eyelids quivered, but he smiled, and touching her with his steel-bound hands, gently said:

"Never mind, Jen. It isn't so bad. You see it was this way: Snow Devil said something about someone that belonged to me, that cares more about me than I deserve. Well, he died sudden, and I was there at the time. That's all. I was trying with the help of Pretty Pierre to get out of the country"--and he waved his hand towards the half-breed.

"With Pretty Pierre--Pierre"? she said.

"Yes, he isn't all gambler. But they were too quick for me, and here I am. Jules is a hustler on the march. But he said he'd stop here and let me see you and dad as we go up to Fort Desire, and--there, don't mind, Sis--don't mind it so!"

Her sobs had ceased, but she clung to him as if she could never let him go. Her father stood near her, all the lines in his face deepened into bitterness. To him Val said: "Why, dad, what's the matter? Your hand is shaky. Don't you get this thing eatin' at your heart."

"It isn't worth it. That Injin would have died if you'd been in my place, I guess. Between you and me, I expect to give Jules the slip before we get there." And he laughed at the Inspector, who laughed a little austerely too, and in his heart wished that it was anyone else he had as a prisoner than Val Galbraith, who was a favourite with the Riders of the Plains.

Sergeant Tom had been standing in the doorway regarding this scene, and working out in his mind the complications that had led to it. At this point he came forward, and Inspector Jules said to him, after a curt salutation:

"You were in a hurry last night, Sergeant Gellatly. You don't seem so pushed for time now. Usual thing. When a man seems over-zealous--drink, cards, or women behind it. But your taste is good, even if, under present circumstances"--He stopped, for he saw a threatening look in the eyes of the other, and that other said: "We won't discuss that matter, Inspector, if you please. I'm going on to Fort Desire now. I couldn't have seen you if I'd wanted to last night."

"That's nonsense. If you had waited one minute longer at the barracks you could have done so. I called to you as you were leaving, but you didn't turn back."

"No. I didn't hear you."

All were listening to this conversation, and none more curiously than Private Waugh. Many a time in days to come he pictured the scene for the benefit of his comrades. Pretty Pierre, leaning against the hitching-post near the bar-room, said languidly:

"But, Inspector, he speaks the truth--quite: that is a virtue of the Riders of the Plains." Val had his eyes on the half-breed, and a look of understanding passed between them. While Val and his father and sister were saying their farewells in few words, but with homely demonstrations, Sergeant Tom brought his horse round and mounted it. Inspector Jules gave the word to move on. As they started, Gellatly, who fell behind the others slightly, leaned down and whispered: "Forgive me, Jen. You did a noble act for me, and the life of me would prove to you that I'm grateful. It's sorry, sorry I am. But I'll do what I can for Val, as sure as the heart's in me. Good-bye, Jen."

She looked up with a faint hope in her eyes. "Goodbye!" she said. "I believe you . . . Good-bye!"

In a few minutes there was only a cloud of dust on the prairie to tell where the Law and its quarry were. And of those left behind, one was a broken-spirited old man with sorrow melting away the sinister look in his face; one, a girl hovering between the tempest of bitterness and a storm of self-reproach; and one a half-breed gambler, who again sat on the bar-counter smoking a cigarette and singing to himself, as indolently as if he were not in the presence of a painful drama of life, perhaps a tragedy. But was the song so pointless to the occasion, after all, and

was the man so abstracted and indifferent as he seemed? For thus the song ran:

"Oh, the bird in a cage and the bird on a tree
Voila! 'tis a different fear!
The maiden weeps and she bends the knee
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!
But the bird in a cage has a friend in the tree,
And the maiden she dries her tear:
And the night is dark and no moon you see
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!
When the doors are open the bird is free
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

VII

These words kept ringing in Jen's ears as she stood again in the doorway that night with her face turned to the beacon. How different it seemed now! When she saw it last night it was a cheerful spirit of light--a something suggesting comfort, companionship, aspiration, a friend to the traveller, and a mysterious, but delightful, association. In the morning when she returned from that fortunate, yet most unfortunate, ride, it was still burning, but its warm flame was exhausted in the glow of the life-giving sun; the dream and delight of the night robbed of its glamour by the garish morning; like her own body, its task done, sinking before the unrelieved scrutiny of the day. To-night it burned with a different radiance. It came in fiery palpitations from the earth. It made a sound that was now like the moan of pine trees, now like the rumble of far-off artillery. The slight wind that blew spread the topmost crest of flame into strands of ruddy hair, and, looking at it, Jen saw herself rocked to and fro by tumultuous emotions, yet fuller of strength and larger of life than ever she had been. Her hot veins beat with determination, with a love which she drove back by another, cherished now more than it had ever been, because danger threatened the boy to whom she had been as a mother. In twenty-four hours she had grown to the full stature of love and suffering.

There were shadows that betrayed less roundness to her face; there were lines that told of weariness; but in her eyes there was a glowing light of hope. She raised her face to the stars and unconsciously paraphrasing Pierre's song said: "Oh, the God that dost save us, hear!"

A hand touched her arm, and a voice said, huskily, "Jen, I wanted to save him and--and not let you know of it; that's all. You're not keepin' a grudge agin me, my girl?"

She did not move nor turn her head. "I've no grudge, father; but--if--if you had told me, 'twouldn't be on my mind that I had made it worse for Val."

The kindness in the voice reassured him, and he ventured to say: "I didn't think you'd be carin' for one of the Riders of the Plains, Jen."

Then the old man trembled lest she should resent his words. She seemed about to do so, but the flush faded from her brow, and she said, simply: "I care for Val most, father. But he didn't know he was getting Val into

trouble."

She suddenly quivered as a wave of emotion passed through her; and she said, with a sob in her voice: "Oh, it's all scrub country, father, and no paths, and--and I wish I had a mother!"

The old man sat down in the doorway and bowed his grey head in his arms. Then, after a moment, he whispered:

"She's been dead twenty-two years, Jen. The day Val was born she went away. I'd a-been a better man if she'd a-lived, Jen; and a better father."

This was an unusual demonstration between these two. She watched him sadly for a moment, and then, leaning over and touching him gently on the shoulder, said: "It's worse for you than it is for me, father. Don't feel so bad. Perhaps we shall save him yet."

He caught a gleam of hope in her words: "Mebbe, Jen, mebbe!" and he raised his face to the light.

This ritual of affection was crude and unadorned; but it was real. They sat there for half-an-hour, silent.

Then a figure came out of the shadows behind the house and stood before them. It was Pierre.

"I go to-morrow morning, Galbraith," he said. The old man nodded, but did not reply.

"I go to Fort Desire," the gambler added.

Jen faced him. "What do you go there for, Pretty Pierre?"

"It is my whim. Besides, there is Val. He might want a horse some dark night."

"Pierre, do you mean that?"

"As much as Sergeant Tom means what he says. Every man has his friends. Pretty Pierre has a fancy for Val Galbraith--a little. It suits him to go to Fort Desire. Jen Galbraith, you make a grand ride last night. You do a bold thing--all for a man. We shall see what he will do for you. And if he does nothing--ah! you can trust the tongue of Pretty Pierre. He will wish he could die, instead of--Eh, bien, good-night!" He moved away. Jen followed him. She held out her hand. It was the first time she had ever done so to this man.

"I believe you," she said. "I believe that you mean well to our Val. I am sorry that I called you a devil." He smiled. "Ma'm'selle, that is nothing. You spoke true. But devils have their friends--and their whims. So you see, good-night."

"Mebbe it will come out all right, Jen--mebbe!" said the old man.

But Jen did not reply. She was thinking hard, her eyes upon the Prairie Star. Living life to the hilt greatly illumines the outlook of the mind. She was beginning to understand that evil is not absolute, and that good is often an occasion more than a condition.

There was a long silence again. At last the old man rose to go and reduce the volume of flame for the night; but Jen stopped him. "No, father, let it burn all it can to-night. It's comforting."

"Mebbe so--mebbe!" he said.

A faint refrain came to them from within the house:

"When doors are open the bird is free
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

VIII

It was a lovely morning. The prairie billowed away endlessly to the south, and heaved away in vastness to the north; and the fresh, sharp air sent the blood beating through the veins. In the bar-room some early traveller was talking to Peter Galbraith. A wandering band of Indians was camped about a mile away, the only sign of humanity in the waste. Jen sat in the doorway culling dried apples. Though tragedies occur in lives of the humble, they must still do the dull and ordinary task. They cannot stop to cherish morbidity, to feed upon their sorrow; they must care for themselves and labour for others. And well is it for them that it is so.

The Indian camp brings unpleasant memories to Jen's mind. She knows it belongs to old Sun-in-the-North, and that he will not come to see her now, nor could she, or would she, go to him. Between her and that race there can never again be kindly communion. And now she sees, for the first time, two horsemen riding slowly in the track from Fort Desire towards Galbraith's Place. She notices that one sits upright, and one seems leaning forward on his horse's neck. She shades her eyes with her hand, but she cannot distinguish who they are. But she has seen men tied to their horses ride as that man is riding, when stricken with fever, bruised by falling timber, lacerated by a grizzly, wounded by a bullet, or crushed by a herd of buffaloes. She remembered at that moment the time that a horse had struck Val with its forefeet, and torn the flesh from his chest, and how he had been brought home tied to a broncho's back.

The thought of this drove her into the house, to have Val's bed prepared for the sufferer, whoever he was. Almost unconsciously she put on the little table beside the bed a bunch of everlasting prairie flowers, and shaded the light to the point of quiet and comfort.

Then she went outside again. The travellers now were not far away. She recognised the upright rider. It was Pretty Pierre. The other--she could not tell. She called to her father. She had a fear which she did not care to face alone. "See, see, father," she said, "Pretty Pierre and--and can it be Val?" For the moment she seemed unable to stir. But the old man shook his head, and said: "No, Jen, it can't be. It ain't Val."

Then another thought possessed her. Her lips trembled, and, throwing her head back as does a deer when it starts to shake off its pursuers by flight, she ran swiftly towards the riders. The traveller standing

beside Galbraith said: "That man is hurt, wounded probably. I didn't expect to have a patient in the middle of the plains. I'm a doctor. Perhaps I can be of use here?" When a hundred yards away Jen recognised the recumbent rider. A thousand thoughts flashed through her brain. What had happened? Why was he dressed in civilian's clothes? A moment, and she was at his horse's head. Another, and her warm hand clasped the pale, moist, and wrinkled one which hung by the horse's neck. His coat at the shoulder was stained with blood, and there was a handkerchief about his head. This--this was Sergeant Tom Gellatly!

She looked up at Pierre, an agony of inquiry in her eyes, and pointing mutely to the wounded man. Pierre spoke with a tone of seriousness not common to his voice: "You see, Jen Galbraith, it was brave. Sergeant Tom one day resigns the Mounted Police. He leaves the Riders of the Plains. That is not easy to understand, for he is in much favour with the officers. But he buys himself out, and there is the end of the Sergeant and his triple chevron. That is one day. That night, two men on a ferry are crossing the Saskatchewan at Fort Desire. They are fired at from the shore behind. One man is hit twice. But they get across, cut the ferry loose, mount horses, and ride away together. The man that was hit--yes, Sergeant Tom. The other that was not hit was Val Galbraith."

Jen gave a cry of mingled joy and pain, and said, with Tom Gellatly's cold hand clasped to her bosom: "Val, our Val, is free, is safe."

"Yes, Val is free and safe--quite. The Riders of the Plains could not cross the river. It was too high. And so Tom Gellatly and Val got away. Val rides straight for the American border, and the other rides here." They were now near the house, but Jen said, eagerly: "Go on. Tell me all."

"I knew what had happened soon, and I rode away, too, and last night I found Tom Gellatly lying beside his horse on the prairie. I have brought him here to you. You two are even now, Jen Galbraith."

They were at the tavern door. The traveller and Pierre lifted, down the wounded and unconscious man, and brought him and laid him on Val Galbraith's bed.

The traveller examined the wounds in the shoulder and the head, and said: "The head is all right. If I can get the bullet out of the shoulder he'll be safe enough--in time."

The surgery was skilful but rude, for proper instruments were not at hand; and in a few hours he, whom we shall still call Sergeant Tom, lay quietly sleeping, the pallor gone from his face and the feeling of death from his hand.

It was near midnight when he waked. Jen was sitting beside him. He looked round and saw her. Her face was touched with the light that shone from the Prairie Star. "Jen," he said, and held out his hand.

She turned from the window and stood beside his bed. She took his outstretched hand. "You are better, Sergeant Tom"? she said, gently.

"Yes, I'm better; but it's not Sergeant Tom I am any longer, Jen."

"I forgot that."

"I owed you a great debt, Jen. I couldn't remain one of the Riders of the Plains and try to pay it. I left them. Then I tried to save Val, and I did. I knew how to do it without getting anyone else into trouble. It is well to know the trick of a lock and the hour that guard is changed. I had left, but I relieved guard that night just the same. It was a new man on watch. It's only a minute I had; for the regular relief watch was almost at my heels. I got Val out just in time. They discovered us, and we had a run for it. Pretty Pierre has told you. That's right. Val is safe now--"

In a low strained voice, interrupting him, she said, "Did Val leave you wounded so on the prairie?"

"Don't let that ate at your heart. No, he didn't. I hurried him off, and he didn't know how bad I was hit. But I--I've paid my debt, haven't I, Jen?" With eyes that could not see for tears, she touched pityingly, lovingly, the wounds on his head and shoulder, and said: "These pay a greater debt than you ever owed me. You risked your life for me--yes, for me. You have given up everything to do it. I can't pay you the great difference. No, never!"

"Yes--yes, you can, if you will, Jen. It's as aisy! If you'll say what I say, I'll give you quit of that difference, as you call it, forever and ever."

"First, tell me. Is Val quite, quite safe?"

"Yes, he's safe over the border by this time; and to tell you the truth, the Riders of the Plains wouldn't be dyin' to arrest him again if he was in Canada, which he isn't. It's little they wanted to fire at us, I know, when we were crossin' the river, but it had to be done, you see, and us within sight. Will you say what I ask you, Jen?"

She did not speak, but pressed his hand ever so slightly.

"Tom Gellatly, I promise," he said.

"Tom Gellatly, I promise--"

"To give you as much--"

"To give you as much--"

"Love--"

There was a pause, and then she falteringly said, "Love--"

"As you give to me--"

"As you give to me--"

"And I'll take you poor as you are--"

"And I'll take you poor as you are--"

"To be my husband as long as you live--"

"To be my husband as long as you live--"

"So help me, God."

"So help me, God."

She stooped with dropping tears, and he kissed her once. Then what was girl in her timidly drew back, while what was woman in her, and therefore maternal, yearned over the sufferer.

They had not seen the figure of an old man at the door. They did not hear him enter. They only knew of Peter Galbraith's presence when he said: "Mebbe--mebbe I might say Amen!"

THREE OUTLAWS

The missionary at Fort Anne of the H. B. C. was violently in earnest. Before he piously followed the latest and most amply endowed batch of settlers, who had in turn preceded the new railway to the Fort, the word scandal had no place in the vocabulary of the citizens. The H. B. C. had never imported it into the Chinook language, the common meeting-ground of all the tribes of the North; and the British men and native-born, who made the Fort their home, or place of sojourn, had never found need for its use. Justice was so quickly distributed, men were so open in their conduct, good and bad, that none looked askance, nor put their actions in ambush, nor studied innuendo. But this was not according to the new dispensation--that is, the dispensation which shrewdly followed the settlers, who as shrewdly preceded the railway. And, the dispensation and the missionary were known also as the Reverend Ezra Badgley, who, on his own declaration, in times past had "a call" to preach, and in the far East had served as local preacher, then probationer, then went on circuit, and now was missionary in a district of which the choice did credit to his astuteness, and gave room for his piety and for his holy rage against the Philistines. He loved a word for righteous mouthing, and in a moment of inspiration pagan and scandal came to him. Upon these two words he stamped, through them he perspired mightily, and with them he clenched his stubby fingers--such fingers as dug trenches, or snatched lewdly at soft flesh, in days of barbarian battle. To him all men were Pagans who loved not the sound of his voice, nor wrestled with him in prayer before the Lord, nor fed him with rich food, nor gave him much strong green tea to drink. But these men were of opaque stuff, and were not dismayed, and they called him St. Anthony, and with a prophetic and deadly patience waited. The time came when the missionary shook his denouncing finger mostly at Pretty Pierre, who carefully nursed his silent wrath until the occasion should arrive for a delicate revenge which hath its hour with every man, if, hating, he knows how to bide the will of Fate.

The hour came. A girl had been found dying on the roadside beyond the Fort by the drunken doctor of the place and Pierre. Pierre was with her when she died.

"An' who's to bury her, the poor colleen"?' said Shon McGann afterwards.

Pierre musingly replied: "She is a Protestant. There is but one man."

After many pertinent and vigorous remarks, Shon added, "A Pagan is it, he calls you, Pierre, you that's had the holy water on y'r forehead, and the cross on the water, and that knows the book o' the Mass like the cards in a pack? Sinner y' are, and so are we all, God save us! say I; and weavin' the stripes for our backs He may be, and little I'd think of Him failin' in that: but Pagan--faith, it's black should be the white of the eyes of that preachin' sneak, and a rattle of teeth in his throat--divils go round me!"

The half-breed, still musing, replied: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth--is that it, Shon?" "Nivir a word truer by song or by book, and stand by the text, say I. For Papist I am, and Papist are you; and the imps from below in y'r fingers whip poker is the game; and outlaws as they call us both--you for what it doesn't concern me, and I for a wild night in ould Donegal--but Pagan, wurra! whin shall it be, Pierre?"

"When shall it to be?"

"True for you. The teeth in his throat and a lump to his eye, and what more be the will o' God. Fightin' there'll be, av coorse; but by you I'll stand, and sorra inch will I give, if they'll do it with sticks or with guns, and not with the blisterin' tongue that's lied of me and me frinds--for frind I call you, Pierre, that loved me little in days gone by. And proud I am not of you, nor you of me; but we've tasted the bitter of avil days together, and divils surround me, if I don't go down with you or come up with you, whichever it be! For there's dirt, as I say on their tongues, and over their shoulder they look at you, and not with an eye full front."

Pierre was cool, even pensive. His lips parted slightly once or twice, and showed a row of white, malicious teeth. For the rest, he looked as if he were politely interested but not moved by the excitement of the other. He slowly rolled a cigarette and replied: "He says it is a scandal that I live at Fort Anne. Well, I was here before he came, and I shall be here after he goes--yes. A scandal--tsh! what is that? You know the word 'Raca' of the Book? Well, there shall be more 'Raca; soon --perhaps. No, there shall not be fighting as you think, Shon; but--" here Pierre rose, came over, and spread his fingers lightly on Shon's breast "but this thing is between this man and me, Shon McGann, and you shall see a great matter. Perhaps there will be blood, perhaps not--perhaps only an end." And the half-breed looked up at the Irishman from under his dark brows so covertly and meaningly that Shon saw visions of a trouble as silent as a plague, as resistless as a great flood. This noiseless vengeance was not after his own heart. He almost shivered as the delicate fingers drummed on his breast.

"Angels begird me, Pretty Pierre, but it's little I'd like you for enemy o' mine; for I know that you'd wait for y'r foe with death in y'r hand, and pity far from y'r heart; and y'd smile as you pulled the black-cap on y'r head, and laugh as you drew the life out of him, God knows how! Arrah, give me, sez I, the crack of a stick, the bite of a gun, or the clip of a sabre's edge, with a shout in y'r mouth the while!"

Though Pierre still listened lazily, there was a wicked fire in his eyes. His words now came from his teeth with cutting precision. "I have a great thought tonight, Shon McGann. I will tell you when we meet again. But, my friend, one must not be too rash--no, not too brutal. Even the sabre should fall at the right time, and then swift and still. Noise is not battle. Well, 'au revoir!' To-morrow I shall tell you many things."

He caught Shon's hand quickly, as quickly dropped it, and went out indolently singing a favourite song,--"Voici le sabre de mon Pere!"

It was dark. Pretty Pierre stood still, and thought for a while. At last he spoke aloud: "Well, I shall do it, now I have him--so!" And he opened and shut his hand swiftly and firmly. He moved on, avoiding the more habited parts of the place, and by a roundabout came to a house standing very close to the bank of the river. He went softly to the door and listened. Light shone through the curtain of a window. He went to the window and looked beneath the curtain. Then he came back to the door, opened it very gently, stepped inside, and closed it behind him.

A man seated at a table, eating, rose; a man on whom greed had set its mark--greed of the flesh, greed of men's praise, greed of money. His frame was thick-set, his body was heavily nourished, his eye was shifty but intelligent; and a close observer would have seen something elusive, something furtive and sinister, in his face. His lips were greasy with meat as he stood up, and a fear sprang to his face, so that its fat looked sickly. But he said hoarsely, and with an attempt at being brave--"How dare you enter my house with out knocking? What do you want?"

The half-breed waved a hand protestingly towards him. "Pardon!" he said. "Be seated, and finish your meal. Do you know me?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Well, as I said, do not stop your meal. I have come to speak with you very quietly about a scandal--a scandal, you understand. This is Sunday night, a good time to talk of such things." Pierre seated himself at the table, opposite the man.

But the man replied: "I have nothing to say to you. You are--"

The half-breed interrupted: "Yes, I know, a Pagan fattening--" here he smiled, and looked at his thin hands--"fattening for the shambles of the damned, as you have said from the pulpit, Reverend Ezra Badgley. But you will permit me--a sinner as you say--to speak to you like this while you sit down and eat. I regret to disturb you, but you will sit, eh?"

Pierre's tone was smooth and low, almost deferential, and his eyes, wide open now, and hot with some hidden purpose, were fixed compellingly on the man. The missionary sat, and, having recovered slightly, fumbled with a knife and fork. A napkin was still beneath his greasy chin. He did not take it away.

Pierre then spoke slowly: "Yes, it is a scandal concerning a sinner--and a Pagan. . . . Will you permit me to light a cigarette? Thank you You have said many harsh things about me: well, as you see, I am amiable. I lived at Fort Anne before you came. They call me Pretty Pierre. Why is my cheek so? Because I drink no wine; I eat not much. Pardon, pork like that on your plate--no! no! I do not take green tea as there in your cup; I do not love women, one or many. Again, pardon, I say."

The other drew his brows together with an attempt at pious frowning and indignation; but there was a cold, sneering smile now turned upon him, and it changed the frown to anxiety, and made his lips twitch, and the food he had eaten grow heavy within him.

"I come to the scandal slowly. The woman? She was a young girl travelling from the far East, to search for a man who had--spoiled her. She was found by me and another. Ah, you start so! . . . Will you not listen? . . . Well, she died to-night."

Here the missionary gasped, and caught with both hands at the table.

"But before she died she gave two things into my hands: a packet of letters--a man is a fool to write such letters--and a small bottle of poison--laudanum, old-fashioned but sure. The letters were from the man at Fort Anne--the man, you hear! The other was for her death, if he would not take her to his arms again. Women are mad when they love. And so she came to Fort Anne, but not in time. The scandal is great, because the man is holy--sit down!"

The half-breed said the last two words sharply, but not loudly. They both sat down slowly again, looking each other in the eyes. Then Pierre drew from his pocket a small bottle and a packet of letters, and held them before him. "I have this to say: there are citizens of Fort Anne who stand for justice more than law; who have no love for the ways of St. Anthony. There is a Pagan, too, an outlaw, who knows when it is time to give blow for blow with the holy man. Well, we understand each other, 'hein?'"

The elusive, sinister look in the missionary's face was etched in strong lines now. A dogged sullenness hung about his lips. He noticed that one hand only of Pretty Pierre was occupied with the relics of the dead girl; the other was free to act suddenly on a hip pocket. "What do you want me to do?" he said, not whiningly, for beneath the selfish flesh and shallow outworks there were the elements of a warrior--all pulpy now, but they were there.

"This," was the reply: "for you to make one more outlaw at Fort Anne by drinking what is in this bottle--sit down, quick, by God!" He placed the bottle within reach of the other. "Then you shall have these letters; and there is the fire. After? Well, you will have a great sleep, the good people will find you, they will bury you, weeping much, and no one knows here but me. Refuse that, and there is the other, the Law--ah, the poor girl was so very young!--and the wild Justice which is sometimes quicker than Law. Well? well?"

The missionary sat as if paralysed, his face all grey, his eyes fixed on the half-breed. "Are you man or devil"? he groaned at length.

With a slight, fantastic gesture Pierre replied: "It was said that a devil entered into me at birth, but that was mere scandal--'peut-etre.' You shall think as you will."

There was silence. The sullenness about the missionary's lips became charged with a contempt more animal than human. The Reverend Ezra Badgley knew that the man before him was absolute in his determination, and that the Pagans of Fort Anne would show him little mercy, while his flock would leave him to his fate. He looked at the bottle. The silence grew, so that the ticking of the watch in the missionary's pocket could be heard plainly, having for its background of sound the continuous swish of the river. Pretty Pierre's eyes were never taken off the other, whose gaze, again, was fixed upon the bottle with a terrible fascination. An hour, two hours, passed. The fire burned lower. It was midnight; and now the watch no longer ticked; it had fulfilled its day's work. The

missionary shuddered slightly at this. He looked up to see the resolute gloom of the half-breed's eyes, and that sneering smile, fixed upon him still. Then he turned once more to the bottle. . . . His heavy hand moved slowly towards it. His stubby fingers perspired and showed sickly in the light. . . . They closed about the bottle. Then suddenly he raised it, and drained it at a draught. He sighed once heavily and as if a great inward pain was over. Rising he took the letters silently pushed towards him, and dropped them into the fire. He went to the window, raised it, and threw the bottle into the river. The cork was left: Pierre pointed to it. He took it up with a strange smile and thrust it into the coals. Then he sat down by the table, leaning his arms upon it, his eyes staring painfully before him, and the forgotten napkin still about his neck. Soon the eyes closed, and, with a moan on his lips, his head dropped forward on his arms. . . . Pierre rose, and, looking at the figure soon to be breathless as the baked meats about it, said: "'Bien,' he was not all coward. No."

Then he turned and went out into the night.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Delicate revenge which hath its hour with every man
Good is often an occasion more than a condition
He does not love Pierre; but he does not pretend to love him
It is not Justice that fills the gaols, but Law
It is not much to kill or to die--that is in the game
Men and women are unwittingly their own executioners
Noise is not battle
She was beginning to understand that evil is not absolute
The Government cherish the Injin much in these days

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

SHON MCGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE
PERE CHAMPAGNE
THE SCARLET HUNTER
THE STONE

SHON MCGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE

"Oh, it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise,

With the knees pressing hard to the saddle, my men;
With the sparks from the hoofs giving light to the eyes,
And our hearts beating hard as we rode to the glen!

"And it's back with the ring of the chain and the spur,
And it's back with the sun on the hill and the moor,
And it's back is the thought sets my pulses astir!
But I'll never go back to Farcalladen more."

Shon McGann was lying on a pile of buffalo robes in a mountain hut,--an Australian would call it a humpey,--singing thus to himself with his pipe between his teeth. In the room, besides Shon, were Pretty Pierre, Jo Gordineer, the Hon. Just Trafford, called by his companions simply "The Honourable," and Prince Levis, the owner of the establishment. Not that Monsieur Levis, the French Canadian, was really a Prince. The name was given to him with a humorous cynicism peculiar to the Rockies. We have little to do with Prince Levis here; but since he may appear elsewhere, this explanation is made.

Jo Gordineer had been telling The Honourable about the ghost of Guidon Mountain, and Pretty Pierre was collaborating with their host in the preparation of what, in the presence of the Law--that is of the North-West Mounted Police--was called ginger-tea, in consideration of the prohibition statute.

Shon McGann had been left to himself--an unusual thing; for everyone had a shot at Shon when opportunity occurred; and never a bull's-eye could they make on him. His wit was like the shield of a certain personage of mythology.

He had wandered on from verse to verse of the song with one eye on the collaborators and an ear open to The Honourable's polite exclamations of wonder. Jo had, however, come to the end of his weird tale--for weird it certainly was, told at the foot of Guidon Mountain itself, and in a region of vast solitudes--the pair of chemists were approaching "the supreme union of unctuous elements," as The Honourable put it, and in the silence that fell for a moment there crept the words of the singer:

"And it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise,
And it's swift as an arrow and straight as a spear--"

Jo Gordineer interrupted. "Say, Shon, when'll you be through that tobogan ride of yours? Aint there any end to it?"

But Shon was looking with both eyes now at the collaborators, and he sang softly on:

"And it's keen as the frost when the summer-time dies,
That we rode to the glen and with never a fear."

Then he added: "The end's cut off, Joey, me boy; but what's a tobogan ride, annyway?"

"Listen to that, Pierre. I'll be eternally shivered if he knows what a tobogan ride is!"

"Hot shivers it'll be for you, Joey, me boy, and no quinine over the bar aither," said Shon.

"Tell him what a tobogan ride is, Pierre."

And Pretty Pierre said: "Eh, well, I will tell you. It is like-no, you have the word precise, Joseph. Eh? What?"

Pierre then added something in French. Shon did not understand it, but he saw The Honourable smile, so with a gentle kind of contempt he went on singing:

"And it's hey for the hedge, and it's hey for the wall!
And it's over the stream with an echoing cry;
And there's three fled for ever from old Donegal,
And there's two that have shown how bold Irishmen die."

The Honourable then said, "What is that all about, Shon? I never heard the song before."

"No more you did. And I wish I could see the lad that wrote that song, livin' or dead. If one of ye's will tell me about your tobogan rides, I'll unfold about Farcalladen Rise."

Prince Levis passed the liquor. Pretty Pierre, seated on a candle-box, with a glass in his delicate fingers, said: "Eh, well, the Honourable has much language. He can speak, precise--this would be better with a little lemon, just a little,--the Honourable, he, perhaps, will tell. Eh?"

Pretty Pierre was showing his white teeth. At this stage in his career, he did not love the Honourable. The Honourable understood that, but he made clear to Shon's mind what toboganing is.

And Shon, on his part, with fresh and hearty voice, touched here and there by a plaintive modulation, told about that ride on Farcalladen Rise; a tale of broken laws, and fight and fighting, and death and exile; and never a word of hatred in it all.

"And the writer of the song, who was he"? asked the Honourable.

"A gentleman after God's own heart. Heaven rest his soul, if he's dead, which I'm thinkin' is so, and give him the luck of the world if he's livin', say I. But it's little I know what's come to him. In the heart of Australia I saw him last; and mates we were together after gold. And little gold did we get but what was in the heart of him. And we parted one day, I carryin' the song that he wrote for me of Farcalladen Rise, and the memory of him; and him givin' me the word, 'I'll not forget you, Shon, me boy, whatever comes; remember that. And a short pull of the Three-Star together for the partin' salute,' says he. And the Three-Star in one sup each we took, as solemn as the Mass, and he went away towards Cloncurry and I to the coast; and that's the last that I saw of him, now three years gone. And here I am, and I wish I was with him wherever he is."

"What was his name"? said the Honourable.

"Lawless."

The fingers of the Honourable trembled on his cigar. "Very interesting, Shon," he said, as he rose, puffing hard till his face was in a cloud of smoke. "You had many adventures together, I suppose," he continued.

"Adventures we had and sufferin' bewhiles, and fun, too, to the neck and flowin' over."

"You'll spin us a long yarn about them another night, Shon"? said the Honourable.

"I'll do it now--a yarn as long as the lies of the Government; and proud of the chance."

"Not to-night, Shon" (there was a kind of huskiness in the voice of the Honourable); "it's time to turn in. We've a long tramp over the glacier to-morrow, and we must start at sunrise."

The Honourable was in command of the party, though Jo Gordineer was the guide, and all were, for the moment, miners, making for the little Goshen Field over in Pipi Valley.--At least Pretty Pierre said he was a miner.

No one thought of disputing the authority of the Honourable, and they all rose.

In a few minutes there was silence in the hut, save for the oracular breathing of Prince Levis and the sparks from the fire. But the Honourable did not sleep well; he lay and watched the fire through most of the night.

The day was clear, glowing, decisive. Not a cloud in the curve of azure, not a shiver of wind down the canon, not a frown in Nature, if we except the lowering shadows from the shoulders of the giants of the range. Crowning the shadows was a splendid helmet of light, rich with the dyes of the morning; the pines were touched with a brilliant if austere warmth. The pride of lofty lineage and severe isolation was regnant over all. And up through the splendour, and the shadows, and the loneliness, and the austere warmth, must our travellers go. Must go? Scarcely that, but the Honourable had made up his mind to cross the glacier and none sought to dissuade him from his choice; the more so, because there was something of danger in the business. Pretty Pierre had merely shrugged his shoulders at the suggestion, and had said:

"'Nom de Dieu,' the higher we go the faster we live, that is something."

"Sometimes we live ourselves to death too quickly. In my schooldays I watched a mouse in a jar of oxygen do that," said the Honourable.

"That is the best way to die," remarked the halfbreed--"much."

Jo Gordineer had been over the path before. He was confident of the way, and proud of his office of guide.

"Climb Mont Blanc, if you will," said the Honourable, "but leave me these white bastions of the Selkirks."

Even so. They have not seen the snowy hills of God who have yet to look upon the Rocky Mountains, absolute, stupendous, sublimely grave.

Jo Gordineer and Pretty Pierre strode on together. They being well away from the other two, the Honourable turned and said to Shon: "What was the name of the man who wrote that song of yours, again, Shon?"

"Lawless."

"Yes, but his first name?"

"Duke--Duke Lawless."

There was a pause, in which the other seemed to be intently studying the glacier above them. Then he said: "What was he like?--in appearance, I mean."

"A trifle more than your six feet, about your colour of hair and eyes, and with a trick of smilin' that would melt the heart of an exciseman, and O'Connell's own at a joke, barrin' a time or two that he got hold of a pile of papers from the ould country. By the grave of St. Shon! thin he was as dry of fun as a piece of blotting paper. And he said at last, before he was aisy and free again, 'Shon,' says he, 'it's better to burn your ships behind ye, isn't it?'

"And I, havin' thought of a glen in ould Ireland that I'll never see again, nor any that's in it, said: 'Not, only burn them to the water's edge, Duke Lawless, but swear to your own soul that they never lived but in the dreams of the night.'

"'You're right there, Shon,' says he, and after that no luck was bad enough to cloud the gay heart of him, and bad enough it was sometimes."

"And why do you fear that he is not alive?"

"Because I met an old mate of mine one day on the Frazer, and he said that Lawless had never come to Cloncurry; and a hard, hard road it was to travel."

Jo Gordineer was calling to them, and there the conversation ended. In a few minutes the four stood on the edge of the glacier. Each man had a long hickory stick which served as alpenstock, a bag hung at his side, and tied to his back was his gold-pan, the hollow side in, of course. Shon's was tied a little lower down than the others.

They passed up this solid river of ice, this giant power at endless strife with the high hills, up towards its head. The Honourable was the first to reach the point of vantage, and to look down upon the vast and wandering fissures, the frigid bulwarks, the great fortresses of ice, the ceaseless snows, the aisles of this mountain sanctuary through which Nature's splendid anthems rolled. Shon was a short distance below, with his hand over his eyes, sweeping the semi-circle of glory.

Suddenly there was a sharp cry from Pierre: "Mon Dieu! Look!"

Shon McGann had fallen on a smooth pavement of ice. The gold-pan was beneath him, and down the glacier he was whirled-whirled, for Shon had thrust his heels in the snow and ice, and the gold-pan performed a series of circles as it sped down the incline. His fingers clutched the ice and snow, but they only left a red mark of blood behind. Must he go the whole course of that frozen slide, plump into the wild depths below?

"'Mon Dieu!--mon Dieu!'" said Pretty Pierre, piteously. The face of the Honourable was set and tense.

Jo Gordineer's hand clutched his throat as if he choked. Still Shon

sped. It was a matter of seconds only. The tragedy crowded to the awful end.

But, no.

There was a tilt in the glacier, and the gold-pan, suddenly swirling, again swung to the outer edge, and shot over.

As if hurled from a catapult, the Irishman was ejected from the white monster's back. He fell on a wide shelf of ice, covered with light snow, through which he was tunnelled, and dropped on another ledge below, near the path by which he and his companions had ascended. "Shied from the finish, by God!" said Jo Gordineer. "'Le pauvre Shon!'" added Pretty Pierre.

The Honourable was making his way down, his brain haunted by the words, "He'll never go back to Farcalladen more."

But Jo was right.

For Shon McGann was alive. He lay breathless, helpless, for a moment; then he sat up and scanned his lacerated fingers: he looked up the path by which he had come; he looked down the path he seemed destined to go; he started to scratch his head, but paused in the act, by reason of his fingers.

Then he said: "It's my mother wouldn't know me from a can of cold meat if I hadn't stopped at this station; but wurrawurra, what a car it was to come in!" He examined his tattered clothes and bare elbows; then he unbuckled the gold-pan, and no easy task was it with his ragged fingers. "'Twas not for deep minin' I brought ye," he said to the pan, "nor for scrapin' the clothes from me back."

Just then the Honourable came up. "Shon, my man . . . alive, thank God! How is it with you?"

"I'm hardly worth the lookin' at. I wouldn't turn my back to ye for a ransom."

"It's enough that you're here at all."

"Ah, 'voila!' this Irishman!" said Pretty Pierre, as his light fingers touched Shon's bruised arm gently. This from Pretty Pierre!

There was that in the voice which went to Shon's heart. Who could have guessed that this outlaw of the North would ever show a sign of sympathy or friendship for anybody? But it goes to prove that you can never be exact in your estimate of character. Jo Gordineer only said jestingly: "Say, now, what are you doing, Shon, bringing us down here, when we might be well into the Valley by this time?"

"That in your face and the hair aff your head," said Shon; "it's little you know a tobogan ride when you see one. I'll take my share of the grog, by the same token."

The Honourable uncorked his flask. Shon threw back his head with a laugh.

"For it's rest when the gallop is over, me men!

And it's here's to the lads that have ridden their last;
And it's here's--"

But Shon had fainted with the flask in his hand and this snatch of a song on his lips.

They reached shelter that night. Had it not been for the accident, they would have got to their destination in the Valley; but here they were twelve miles from it. Whether this was fortunate or unfortunate may be seen later. Comfortably bestowed in this mountain tavern, after they had toasted and eaten their venison and lit their pipes, they drew about the fire.

Besides the four, there was a figure that lay sleeping in a corner on a pile of pine branches, wrapped in a bearskin robe. Whoever it was slept soundly.

"And what was it like--the gold-pan flyer--the tobogan ride, Shon?" remarked Jo Gordineer.

"What was it like?--what was it like?" replied Shon. "Sure, I couldn't see what it was like for the stars that were hittin' me in the eyes. There wasn't any world at all. I was ridin' on a streak of lightnin', and nivar a rubber for the wheels; and my fingers makin' stripes of blood on the snow; and now the stars that were hittin' me were white, and thin they were red, and sometimes blue--"

"The Stars and Stripes," inconsiderately remarked Jo Gordineer.

"And there wasn't any beginning to things, nor any end of them; and when I struck the snow and cut down the core of it like a cat through a glass, I was willin' to say with the Prophet of Ireland--"

"Are you going to pass the liniment, Pretty Pierre?" It was Jo Gordineer said that.

What the Prophet of Israel did say--Israel and Ireland were identical to Shon--was never told.

Shon's bubbling sarcasm was full-stopped by the beneficent savour that, rising now from the hands of the four, silenced all irrelevant speech. It was a function of importance. It was not simply necessary to say How! or Here's reformation! or I look towards you! As if by a common instinct, the Honourable, Jo Gordineer, and Pretty Pierre, turned towards Shon and lifted their glasses. Jo Gordineer was going to say: "Here's a safe foot in the stirrups to you," but he changed his mind and drank in silence.

Shon's eye had been blazing with fun, but it took on, all at once, a misty twinkle. None of them had quite bargained for this. The feeling had come like a wave of soft lightning, and had passed through them. Did it come from the Irishman himself? Was it his own nature acting through those who called him "partner"?

Pretty Pierre got up and kicked savagely at the wood in the big fireplace. He ostentatiously and needlessly put another log of Norfolk-pine upon the fire.

The Honourable gaily suggested a song.

"Sing us 'Avec les Braves Sauvages,' Pierre," said Jo Gordineer.

But Pierre waved his fingers towards Shon: "Shon, his song--he did not finish--on the glacier. It is good we hear all. 'Hein?'"

And so Shon sang:

"Oh it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise."

The sleeper on the pine branches stirred nervously, as if the song were coming through a dream to him. At the third verse he started up, and an eager, sun-burned face peered from the half-darkness at the singer. The Honourable was sitting in the shadow, with his back to the new actor in the scene.

"For it's rest when the gallop is over, my men I
And it's here's to the lads that have ridden their last!
And it's here's--"

Shon paused. One of those strange lapses of memory came to him which come at times to most of us concerning familiar things. He could get no further than he did on the mountain side. He passed his hand over his forehead, stupidly:--"Saints forgive me; but it's gone from me, and sorra the one can I get it; me that had it by heart, and the lad that wrote it far away. Death in the world, but I'll try it again!

"For it's rest when the gallop is over, my men!
And it's here's to the lads that have ridden their last!
And it's here's--"

Again he paused.

But from the half-darkness there came a voice, a clear baritone:

"And here's to the lasses we leave in the glen,
With a smile for the future, a sigh for the past."

At the last words the figure strode down into the firelight.

"Shon, old friend, don't you know me?"

Shon had started to his feet at the first note of the voice, and stood as if spellbound.

There was no shaking of hands. Both men held each other hard by the shoulders, and stood so for a moment looking steadily eye to eye.

Then Shon said: "Duke Lawless, there's parallels of latitude and parallels of longitude, but who knows the tomb of ould Brian Borhoime?"

Which was his way of saying, "How come you here"? Duke Lawless turned to the others before he replied. His eyes fell on the Honourable. With a start and a step backward, and with a peculiar angry dryness in his voice, he said:

"Just Trafford!"

"Yes," replied the Honourable, smiling, "I have found you."

"Found me! And why have you sought me? Me, Duke Lawless? I should have thought--"

The Honourable interrupted: "To tell you that you are Sir Duke Lawless."

"That? You sought me to tell me that?"

"I did."

"You are sure? And for naught else?"

"As I live, Duke."

The eyes fixed on the Honourable were searching. Sir Duke hesitated, then held out his hand. In a swift but cordial silence it was taken. Nothing more could be said then. It is only in plays where gentlemen freely discuss family affairs before a curious public. Pretty Pierre was busy with a decoction. Jo Gordineer was his associate. Shon had drawn back, and was apparently examining the indentations on his gold-pan.

"Shon, old fellow, come here," said Sir Duke Lawless.

But Shon had received a shock. "It's little I knew Sir Duke Lawless--" he said.

"It's little you needed to know then, or need to know now, Shon, my friend. I'm Duke Lawless to you here and henceforth, as ever I was then, on the wallaby track."

And Shon believed him. The glasses were ready.

"I'll give the toast," said the Honourable with a gentle gravity. "To Shon McGann and his Tobogan Ride!"

"I'll drink to the first half of it with all my heart," said Sir Duke. "It's all I know about."

"Amen to that divorce," rejoined Shon.

"But were it not for the Tobogan Ride we shouldn't have stopped here," said the Honourable; "and where would this meeting have been?"

"That alters the case," Sir Duke remarked. "I take back the 'Amen,'" said Shon.

II

Whatever claims Shon had upon the companionship of Sir Duke Lawless, he knew there were other claims that were more pressing. After the toast was finished, with an emphasised assumption of weariness, and a hint of a long yarn on the morrow, he picked up his blanket and started for the room where all were to sleep. The real reason of this early departure was clear to Pretty Pierre at once, and in due time it dawned upon Jo Gordineer.

The two Englishmen, left alone, sat for a few moments silent and smoking

hard. Then the Honourable rose, got his knapsack, and took out a small number of papers, which he handed to Sir Duke, saying, "By slow postal service to Sir Duke Lawless. Residence, somewhere on one of five continents."

An envelope bearing a woman's writing was the first thing that met Sir Duke's eye. He stared, took it out, turned it over, looked curiously at the Honourable for a moment, and then began to break the seal.

"Wait, Duke. Do not read that. We have something to say to each other first."

Sir Duke laid the letter down. "You have some explanation to make," he said.

"It was so long ago; mightn't it be better to go over the story again?"

"Perhaps."

"Then it is best you should tell it. I am on my defence, you know."

Sir Duke leaned back, and a frown gathered on his forehead. Strikingly out of place on his fresh face it seemed. Looking quickly from the fire to the face of the Honourable and back again earnestly, as if the full force of what was required came to him, he said: "We shall get the perspective better if we put the tale in the third person. Duke Lawless was the heir to the title and estates of Trafford Court. Next in succession to him was Just Trafford, his cousin. Lawless had an income sufficient for a man of moderate tastes. Trafford had not quite that, but he had his profession of the law. At college they had been fast friends, but afterwards had drifted apart, through no cause save difference of pursuits and circumstances. Friends they still were and likely to be so always. One summer, when on a visit to his uncle, Admiral Sir Clavel Lawless, at Trafford Court, where a party of people had been invited for a month, Duke Lawless fell in love with Miss Emily Dorset. She did him the honour to prefer him to any other man--at least, he thought so. Her income, however, was limited like his own. The engagement was not announced, for Lawless wished to make a home before he took a wife. He inclined to ranching in Canada, or a planter's life in Queensland. The eight or ten thousand pounds necessary was not, however, easy to get for the start, and he hadn't the least notion of discounting the future, by asking the admiral's help. Besides, he knew his uncle did not wish him to marry unless he married a woman plus a fortune. While things were in this uncertain state, Just Trafford arrived on a visit to Trafford Court. The meeting of the old friends was cordial. Immediately on Trafford's arrival, however, the current of events changed. Things occurred which brought disaster. It was noticeable that Miss Emily Dorset began to see a deal more of Admiral Lawless and Just Trafford, and a deal less of the younger Lawless. One day Duke Lawless came back to the house unexpectedly, his horse having knocked up on the road. On entering the library he saw what turned the course of his life." Sir Duke here paused, sighed, shook the ashes out of his pipe with a grave and expressive anxiety which did not properly belong to the action, and remained for a moment, both arms on his knees, silent, and looking at the fire. Then he continued:

"Just Trafford sat beside Emily Dorset in an attitude of--say, affectionate consideration. She had been weeping, and her whole manner suggested very touching confidences. They both rose on the entrance of

Lawless; but neither tried to say a word. What could they say? Lawless apologised, took a book from the table which he had not come for, and left."

Again Sir Duke paused.

"The book was an illustrated Much Ado About Nothing," said the Honourable.

"A few hours after, Lawless had an interview with Emily Dorset. He demanded, with a good deal of feeling, perhaps,--for he was romantic enough to love the girl,--an explanation. He would have asked it of Trafford first if he had seen him. She said Lawless should trust her; that she had no explanation at that moment to give. If he waited--but Lawless asked her if she cared for him at all, if she wished or intended to marry him? She replied lightly, 'Perhaps, when you become Sir Duke Lawless.' Then Lawless accused her of heartlessness, and of encouraging both his uncle and Just Trafford. She amusingly said, 'Perhaps she had, but it really didn't matter, did it?' For reply, Lawless said her interest in the whole family seemed active and impartial. He bade her not vex herself at all about him, and not to wait until he became Sir Duke Lawless, but to give preference to seniority and begin with the title at once; which he has reason since to believe that she did. What he said to her he has been sorry for, not because he thinks it was undeserved, but because he has never been able since to rouse himself to anger on the subject, nor to hate the girl and Just Trafford as he ought. Of the dead he is silent altogether. He never sought an explanation from Just Trafford, for he left that night for London, and in two days was on his way to Australia. The day he left, however, he received a note from his banker saying that £8000 had been placed to his credit by Admiral Lawless. Feeling the indignity of what he believed was the cause of the gift, Lawless neither acknowledged it nor used it, not any penny of it. Five years have gone since then, and Lawless has wandered over two continents, a self-created exile. He has learned much that he didn't learn at Oxford; and not the least of all, that the world is not so bad as is claimed for it, that it isn't worth while hating and cherishing hate, that evil is half-accidental, half-natural, and that hard work in the face of nature is the thing to pull a man together and strengthen him for his place in the universe. Having burned his ships behind him, that is the way Lawless feels. And the story is told."

Just Trafford sat looking musingly but imperturbably at Sir Duke for a minute; then he said:

"That is your interpretation of the story, but not the story. Let us turn the medal over now. And, first, let Trafford say that he has the permission of Emily Dorset--"

Sir Duke interrupted: "Of her who was Emily Dorset."

"Of Miss Emily Dorset, to tell what she did not tell that day five years ago. After this other reading of the tale has been rendered, her letter and those documents are there for fuller testimony. Just Trafford's part in the drama begins, of course, with the library scene. Now Duke Lawless had never known Trafford's half-brother, Hall Vincent. Hall was born in India, and had lived there most of his life. He was in the Indian Police, and had married a clever, beautiful, but impossible kind of girl, against the wishes of her parents. The marriage was not a very happy one. This was partly owing to the quick Lawless and Trafford blood,

partly to the wife's wilfulness. Hall thought that things might go better if he came to England to live. On their way from Madras to Colombo he had some words with his wife one day about the way she arranged her hair, but nothing serious. This was shortly after tiffin. That evening they entered the harbour at Colombo; and Hall going to his cabin to seek his wife, could not find her; but in her stead was her hair, arranged carefully in flowing waves on the pillow, where through the voyage her head had lain. That she had cut it off and laid it there was plain; but she could not be found, nor was she ever found. The large porthole was open; this was the only clue. But we need not go further into that. Hall Vincent came home to England. He told his brother the story as it has been told to you, and then left for South America, a broken-spirited man. The wife's family came on to England also. They did not meet Hall Vincent; but one day Just Trafford met at a country seat in Devon, for the first time, the wife's sister. She had not known of the relationship between Hall Vincent and the Traffords; and on a memorable afternoon he told her the full story of the married life and the final disaster, as Hall had told it to him."

Sir Duke sprang to his feet. "You mean, Just, that--"

"I mean that Emily Dorset was the sister of Hall Vincent's wife."

Sir Duke's brown fingers clasped and unclasped nervously. He was about to speak, but the Honourable said: "That is only half the story--wait."

"Emily Dorset would have told Lawless all in due time, but women don't like to be bullied ever so little, and that, and the unhappiness of the thing, kept her silent in her short interview with Lawless. She could not have guessed that Lawless would go as he did. Now, the secret of her diplomacy with the uncle--diplomacy is the best word to use--was Duke Lawless's advancement. She knew how he had set his heart on the ranching or planting life. She would have married him without a penny, but she felt his pride in that particular, and respected it. So, like a clever girl, she determined to make the old chap give Lawless a cheque on his possible future. Perhaps, as things progressed, the same old chap got an absurd notion in his head about marrying her to Just Trafford, but that was meanwhile all the better for Lawless. The very day that Emily Dorset and Just Trafford succeeded in melting Admiral Lawless's heart to the tune of eight thousand, was the day that Duke Lawless doubted his friend and challenged the loyalty of the girl he loved."

Sir Duke's eyes filled. "Great Heaven! Just--" he said.

"Be quiet for a little. You see she had taken Trafford into her scheme against his will, for he was never good at mysteries and theatricals, and he saw the danger. But the cause was a good one, and he joined the sweet conspiracy, with what result these five years bear witness. Admiral Lawless has been dead a year and a half, his wife a year. For he married out of anger with Duke Lawless; but he did not marry Emily Dorset, nor did he beget a child."

"In Australia I saw a paragraph speaking of a visit made by him and Lady Lawless to a hospital, and I thought--"

"You thought he had married Emily Dorset and--well, you had better read that letter now."

Sir Duke's face was flushing with remorse and pain. He drew his hand

quickly across his eyes. "And you've given up London, your profession, everything, just to hunt for me, to tell me this--you who would have profited by my eternal absence! What a beast and ass I've been!"

"Not at all; only a bit poetical and hasty, which is not unnatural in the Lawless blood. I should have been wild myself, maybe, if I had been in your position; only I shouldn't have left England, and I should have taken the papers regularly and have asked the other fellow to explain. The other fellow didn't like the little conspiracy. Women, however, seem to find that kind of thing a moral necessity. By the way, I wish when you go back you'd send me out my hunting traps. I've made up my mind to--oh, quite so--read the letter--I forgot!"

Sir Duke opened the letter and read it, putting it away from him now and then as if it hurt him, and taking it up a moment after to continue the reading. The Honourable watched him.

At last Sir Duke rose. "Just--"

"Yes? Go on."

"Do you think she would have me now?"

"Don't know. Your outfit is not so beautiful as it used to be."

"Don't chaff me."

"Don't be so funereal, then."

Under the Honourable's matter of fact air Sir Duke's face began to clear. "Tell me, do you think she still cares for me?"

"Well, I don't know. She's rich now--got the grandmother's stocking. Then there's Pedley, of the Scots Guards; he has been doing loyal service for a couple of years. What does the letter say?"

"It only tells the truth, as you have told it to me, but from her standpoint; not a word that says anything but beautiful reproach and general kindness. That is all."

"Quite so. You see it was all four years ago, and Pedley--"

But the Honourable paused. He had punished his friend enough. He stepped forward and laid his hand on Sir Duke's shoulder. "Duke, you want to pick up the threads where they were dropped. You dropped them. Ask me nothing about the ends that Emily Dorset held. I conspire no more. But go you and learn your fate. If one remembers, why should the other forget?"

Sir Duke's light heart and eager faith came back with a rush. "I'll start for England at once. I'll know the worst or the best of it before three months are out." The Honourable's slow placidity turned.

"Three months.--Yes, you may do it in that time. Better go from Victoria to San Francisco and then overland. You'll not forget about my hunting traps, and--oh, certainly, Gordineer; come in."

"Say," said Gordineer. "I don't want to disturb the meeting, but Shon's in chancery somehow; breathing like a white pine, and thrashing about!"

He's red-hot with fever."

Before he had time to say more, Sir Duke seized the candle and entered the room. Shon was moving uneasily and suppressing the groans that shook him. "Shon, old friend, what is it?"

"It's the pain here, Lawless," laying his hand on his chest.

After a moment Sir Duke said, "Pneumonia!"

From that instant thoughts of himself were sunk in the care and thought of the man who in the heart of Queensland had been mate and friend and brother to him. He did not start for England the next day, nor for many a day.

Pretty Pierre and Jo Gordineer and his party carried Sir Duke's letters over into the Pipi Valley, from where they could be sent on to the coast. Pierre came back in a few days to see how Shon was, and expressed his determination of staying to help Sir Duke, if need be.

Shon hovered between life and death. It was not alone the pneumonia that racked his system so; there was also the shock he had received in his flight down the glacier. In his delirium he seemed to be always with Lawless:

"'For it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise'--It's share and share even, Lawless, and ye'll ate the rest of it, or I'll lave ye--Did ye say ye'd found water--Lawless--water!--Sure you're drinkin' none yourself--I'll sing it again for you then--'And it's back with the ring of the chain and the spur'--'But burn all your ships behind you'--'I'll never go back to Farcalladen more!'"

Sir Duke's fingers had a trick of kindness, a suggestion of comfort, a sense of healing, that made his simple remedies do more than natural duty. He was doctor, nurse,--sleepless nurse,--and careful apothecary. And when at last the danger was past and he could relax watching, he would not go, and he did not go, till they could all travel to the Pipi Valley.

In the blue shadows of the firs they stand as we take our leave of one of them. The Honourable and Sir Duke have had their last words, and Sir Duke has said he will remember about the hunting traps. They understand each other. There is sunshine in the face of all--a kind of Indian summer sunshine, infused with the sadness of a coming winter; and theirs is the winter of parting. Yet it is all done quietly.

"We'll meet again, Shon," said Sir Duke, "and you'll remember your promise to write to me."

"I'll keep my promise, and I hope the news that'll please you best is what you'll send us first from England. And if you should go to ould Donegal--I've no words for me thoughts at all!"

"I know them. Don't try to say them. We've not had the luck together, all kinds and all weathers, for nothing."

Sir Duke's eyes smiled a good-bye into the smiling eyes of Shon. They were much alike, these two, whose stations were so far apart. Yet somewhere, in generations gone, their ancestors may have toiled, feasted,

or governed, in the same social hemisphere; and here in the mountains life was levelled to one degree again.

Sir Duke looked round. The pines were crowding up elate and warm towards the peaks of the white silence. The river was brawling over a broken pathway of boulders at their feet; round the edge of a mighty mountain crept a mule train; a far-off glacier glistened harshly in the lucid morning, yet not harshly either, but with the rugged form of a vast antiquity, from which these scarred and grimly austere hills had grown. Here Nature was filled with a sense of triumphant mastery--the mastery of ageless experience. And down the great piles there blew a wind of stirring life, of the composure of great strength, and touched the four, and the man that mounted now was turned to go. A quick good-bye from him to all; a God-speed-you from the Honourable; a wave of the hand between the rider and Shon, and Sir Duke Lawless was gone.

"You had better cook the last of that bear this morning, Pierre," said the Honourable. And their life went on.

.....

It was eight months after that, sitting in their hut after a day's successful mining, the Honourable handed Shon a newspaper to read. A paragraph was marked. It concerned the marriage of Miss Emily Dorset and Sir Duke Lawless.

And while Shon read, the Honourable called into the tent: "Have you any lemons for the whisky, Pierre?"

A satisfactory reply being returned, the Honourable proceeded: "We'll begin with the bottle of Pommery, which I've been saving months for this."

The royal-flush toast of the evening belonged to Shon.

"God bless him! To the day when we see him again!"

And all of them saw that day.

PERE CHAMPAGNE

"Is it that we stand at the top of the hill and the end of the travel has come, Pierre? Why don't you spake?"

"We stand at the top of the hill, and it is the end."

"And Lonely Valley is at our feet and Whiteface Mountain beyond?"

"One at our feet, and the other beyond, Shon McGann."

"It's the sight of my eyes I wish I had in the light of the sun this mornin'. Tell me, what is't you see?"

"I see the trees on the foot-hills, and all the branches shine with

frost. There is a path--so wide!--between two groves of pines. On Whiteface Mountain lies a glacier-field . . . and all is still." . . .

"The voice of you is far-away-like, Pierre--it shivers as a hawk cries. It's the wind, the wind, maybe."

"There's not a breath of life from hill or valley."

"But I feel it in my face."

"It is not the breath of life you feel."

"Did you not hear voices coming athwart the wind? . . . Can you see the people at the mines?"

"I have told you what I see."

"You told me of the pine-trees, and the glacier, and the snow--"

"And that is all."

"But in the Valley, in the Valley, where all the miners are?"

"I cannot see them."

"For love of heaven, don't tell me that the dark is fallin' on your eyes too."

"No, Shon, I am not growing blind."

"Will you not tell me what gives the ache to your words?"

"I see in the Valley--snow . . . snow."

"It's a laugh you have at me in your cheek, whin I'd give years of my ill-spent life to watch the chimney smoke come curlin' up slow through the sharp air in the Valley there below."

"There is no chimney and there is no smoke in all the Valley."

"Before God, if you're a man, you'll put your hand on my arm and tell me what trouble quakes your speech."

"Shon McGann, it is for you to make the sign of the Cross . . . there, while I put my hand on your shoulder--so!"

"Your hand is heavy, Pierre."

"This is the sight of the eyes that see. In the Valley there is snow; in the snow of all that was, there is one poppet-head of the mine that was called St. Gabriel . . . upon the poppet-head there is the figure of a woman."

"Ah!"

"She does not move--"

"She will never move?"

"She will never move."

"The breath o' my body hurts me. . . . There is death in the Valley, Pierre?"

"There is death."

"It was an avalanche--that path between the pines?"

"And a great storm after."

"Blessed be God that I cannot behold that thing this day! . . . And the woman, Pierre, the woman aloft?"

"She went to watch for someone coming, and as she watched, the avalanche came--and she moves not."

"Do we know that woman?"

"Who can tell?"

"What was it you whispered soft to yourself, then, Pierre?"

"I whispered no word."

"There, don't you hear it, soft and sighin'? . . . Nathalie!"

"'Mon Dieu!' It is not of the world."

"It's facin' the poppet-head where she stands I'd be."

"Your face is turned towards her."

"Where is the sun?"

"The sun stands still above her head."

"With the bitter over, and the avil past, come rest for her and all that lie there."

"Eh, 'bien,' the game is done!"

"If we stay here we shall die also."

"If we go we die, perhaps." . . .

"Don't spake it. We will go, and we will return when the breath of summer comes from the South."

"It shall be so."

"Hush! Did you not hear--?"

"I did not hear. I only see an eagle, and it flies towards Whiteface Mountain."

And Shon McGann and Pretty Pierre turned back from the end of their quest--from a mighty grave behind to a lonely waste before; and though one was snow-blind, and the other knew that on him fell the chieffer

weight of a great misfortune, for he must provide food and fire and be as a mother to his comrade--they had courage; without which, men are as the standing straw in an unreaped field in winter; but having become like the hooded pine, that keepeth green in frost, and hath the bounding blood in all its icy branches.

And whence they came and wherefore was as thus:

A French Canadian once lived in Lonely Valley. One day great fortune came to him, because it was given him to discover the mine St. Gabriel. And he said to the woman who loved him, "I will go with mules and much gold, that I have hewn and washed and gathered, to a village in the East where my father and my mother are. They are poor, but I will make them rich; and then I will return to Lonely Valley, and a priest shall come with me, and we will dwell here at Whiteface Mountain, where men are men and not children." And the woman blessed him, and prayed for him, and let him go.

He travelled far through passes of the mountains, and came at last where new cities lay upon the plains, and where men were full of evil and of lust of gold. And he was free of hand and light of heart; and at a place called Diamond City false friends came about him, and gave him champagne wine to drink, and struck him down and robbed him, leaving him for dead.

And he was found, and his wounds were all healed: all save one, and that was in the brain. Men called him mad.

He wandered through the land, preaching to men to drink no wine, and to shun the sight of gold. And they laughed at him, and called him Pere Champagne.

But one day much gold was found at a place called Reef o' Angel; and jointly with the gold came a plague which scars the face and rots the body; and Indians died by hundreds and white men by scores; and Pere Champagne, of all who were not stricken down, feared nothing, and did not flee, but went among the sick and dying, and did those deeds which gold cannot buy, and prayed those prayers which were never sold. And who can count how high the prayers of the feckless go!

When none was found to bury the dead, he gave them place himself beneath the prairie earth,--consecrated only by the tears of a fool,--and for extreme unction he had but this: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Now it happily chanced that Pierre and Shon McGann, who travelled westward, came upon this desperate battle-field, and saw how Pere Champagne dared the elements of scourge and death; and they paused and laboured with him--to save where saving was granted of Heaven, and to bury when the Reaper reaped and would not stay his hand. At last the plague ceased, because winter stretched its wings out swiftly o'er the plains from frigid ranges in the West. And then Pere Champagne fell ill again.

And this last great sickness cured his madness: and he remembered whence he had come, and what befell him at Diamond City so many moons ago. And he prayed them, when he knew his time was come, that they would go to Lonely Valley and tell his story to the woman whom he loved; and say that he was going to a strange but pleasant Land, and that there he would await her coming. He begged them that they would go at once, that she might know, and not strain her eyes to blindness, and be sick at heart

because he came not. And he told them her name, and drew the coverlet up about his head and seemed to sleep; but he waked between the day and dark, and gently cried: "The snow is heavy on the mountain . . . and the Valley is below. . . 'Gardez, mon Pere!' . . . Ah, Nathalie!" And they buried him between the dark and dawn.

Though winds were fierce, and travel full of peril, they kept their word, and passed along wide steppes of snow, until they entered passes of the mountains, and again into the plains; and at last one 'poudre' day, when frost was shaking like shreds of faintest silver through the air, Shon McGann's sight fled. But he would not turn back--a promise to a dying man was sacred, and he could follow if he could not lead; and there was still some pemmican, and there were martens in the woods, and wandering deer that good spirits hunted into the way of the needy; and Pierre's finger along the gun was sure.

Pierre did not tell Shon that for many days they travelled woods where no sunshine entered; where no trail had ever been, nor foot of man had trod: that they had lost their way. Nor did he make his comrade know that one night he sat and played a game of solitaire to see if they would ever reach the place called Lonely Valley. Before the cards were dealt, he made a sign upon his breast and forehead. Three times he played, and three times he counted victory; and before three suns had come and gone, they climbed a hill that perched over Lonely Valley. And of what they saw and their hearts felt we know.

And when they turned their faces eastward they were as men who go to meet a final and a conquering enemy; but they had kept their honour with the man upon whose grave-tree Shon McGann had carved beneath his name these words:

"A Brother of Aaron."

Upon a lonely trail they wandered, the spirits of lost travellers hungering in their wake--spirits that mumbled in cedar thickets, and whimpered down the flumes of snow. And Pierre, who knew that evil things are exorcised by mighty conjuring, sang loudly, from a throat made thin by forced fasting, a song with which his mother sought to drive away the devils of dreams that flaunted on his pillow when a child: it was the song of the Scarlet Hunter. And the charm sufficed; for suddenly of a cheerless morning they came upon a trapper's hut in the wilderness, where their sufferings ceased, and the sight of Shon's eyes came back. When strength returned also, they journeyed to an Indian village, where a priest laboured. Him they besought; and when spring came they set forth to Lonely Valley again that the woman and the smothered dead--if it might chance so--should be put away into peaceful graves. But thither coming they only saw a grey and churlish river; and the poppet-head of the mine of St. Gabriel, and she who had knelt thereon, were vanished into solitudes, where only God's cohorts have the rights of burial. . . .

But the priest prayed humbly for their so swiftly summoned souls.

THE SCARLET HUNTER

"News out of Egypt!" said the Honourable Just Trafford. "If this is true, it gives a pretty finish to the season. You think it possible, Pierre? It is every man's talk that there isn't a herd of buffaloes in the whole country; but this-eh?"

Pierre did not seem disposed to answer. He had been watching a man's face for some time; but his eyes were now idly following the smoke of his cigarette as it floated away to the ceiling in fading circles. He seemed to take no interest in Trafford's remarks, nor in the tale that Shangi the Indian had told them; though Shangi and his tale were both sufficiently uncommon to justify attention.

Shon McGann was more impressionable. His eyes swam; his feet shifted nervously with enjoyment; he glanced frequently at his gun in the corner of the hut; he had watched Trafford's face with some anxiety, and accepted the result of the tale with delight. Now his look was occupied with Pierre.

Pierre was a pretty good authority in all matters concerning the prairies and the North. He also had an instinct for detecting veracity, having practised on both sides of the equation. Trafford became impatient, and at last the half-breed, conscious that he had tried the temper of his chief so far as was safe, lifted his eyes, and, resting them casually on the Indian, replied: "Yes, I know the place. . . . No, I have not been there, but I was told-ah, it was long ago! There is a great valley between hills, the Kimash Hills, the hills of the Mighty Men. The woods are deep and dark; there is but one trail through them, and it is old. On the highest hill is a vast mound. In that mound are the forefathers of a nation that is gone. Yes, as you say, they are dead, and there is none of them alive in the valley--which is called the White Valley--where the buffalo are. The valley is green in summer, and the snow is not deep in winter; the noses of the buffalo can find the tender grass. The Injin speaks the truth, perhaps. But of the number of buffaloes, one must see. The eye of the red man multiplies."

Trafford looked at Pierre closely. "You seem to know the place very well. It is a long way north where--ah yes, you said you had never been there; you were told. Who told you?"

The half-breed raised his eyebrows slightly as he replied: "I can remember a long time, and my mother, she spoke much and sang many songs at the campfires." Then he puffed his cigarette so that the smoke clouded his face for a moment, and went on,--"I think there may be buffaloes."

"It's along the barrel of me gun I wish I was lookin' at thim now," said McGann.

"'Tiens,' you will go"? inquired Pierre of Trafford. "To have a shot at the only herd of wild buffaloes on the continent! Of course I'll go. I'd go to the North Pole for that. Sport and novelty I came here to see; buffalo-hunting I did not expect. I'm in luck, that's all. We'll start to-morrow morning, if we can get ready, and Shangi here will lead us; eh, Pierre?"

The half-breed again was not polite. Instead of replying he sang almost below his breath the words of a song unfamiliar to his companions, though the Indian's eyes showed a flash of understanding. These were the words:

"They ride away with a waking wind, away, away!
With laughing lip and with jocund mind at break of day.
A rattle of hoofs and a snatch of song, they ride, they ride!
The plains are wide and the path is long,--so long, so wide!"

Just Trafford appeared ready to deal with this insolence, for the half-breed was after all a servant of his, a paid retainer. He waited, however. Shon saw the difficulty, and at once volunteered a reply. "It's aisy enough to get away in the mornin', but it's a question how far we'll be able to go with the horses. The year is late; but there's dogs beyand, I suppose, and bedad, there y' are!"

The Indian spoke slowly: "It is far off. There is no colour yet in the leaf of the larch. The river-hen still swims northward. It is good that we go. There is much buffalo in the White Valley."

Again Trafford looked towards his follower, and again the half-breed, as if he were making an effort to remember, sang abstractedly:

"They follow, they follow a lonely trail, by day, by night,
By distant sun, and by fire-fly pale, and northern light.
The ride to the Hills of the Mighty Men, so swift they go!
Where buffalo feed in the wilding glen in sun and snow."

"Pierre," said Trafford, sharply, "I want an answer to my question."

"Mais, pardon,' I was thinking . . . well, we can ride until the deep snows come, then we can walk; and Shanghi, he can get the dogs, maybe, one team of dogs."

"But," was the reply, "one team of dogs will not be enough. We'll bring meat and hides, you know, as well as pemmican. We won't cache any carcasses up there. What would be the use? We shall have to be back in the Pipi Valley by the spring-time."

"Well," said the half-breed with a cold decision, "one team of dogs will be enough; and we will not cache, and we shall be back in the Pipi Valley before the spring, perhaps." But this last word was spoken under his breath.

And now the Indian spoke, with his deep voice and dignified manner: "Brothers, it is as I have said, the trail is lonely and the woods are deep and dark. Since the time when the world was young, no white man hath been there save one, and behold sickness fell on him; the grave is his end. It is a pleasant land, for the gods have blessed it to the Indian forever. No heathen shall possess it. But you shall see the White Valley and the buffalo. Shanghi will lead, because you have been merciful to him, and have given him to sleep in your wigwam, and to eat of your wild meat. There are dogs in the forest. I have spoken."

Trafford was impressed, and annoyed too. He thought too much sentiment was being squandered on a very practical and sportive thing. He disliked functions; speech-making was to him a matter for prayer and fasting. The Indian's address was therefore more or less gratuitous, and he hastened to remark: "Thank you, Shanghi; that's very good, and you've put it poetically. You've turned a shooting-excursion into a mediaeval romance. But we'll get down to business now, if you please, and make the romance a fact, beautiful enough to send to the 'Times' or the New York 'Call'. Let's see, how would they put it in the Call?--'Extraordinary Discovery

--Herd of buffaloes found in the far North by an Englishman and his Franco-Irish Party--Sport for the gods--Exodus of 'brules' to White Valley!--and so on, screeching to the end."

Shon laughed heartily. "The fun of the world is in the thing," he said; "and a day it would be for a notch on a stick and a rasp of gin in the throat. And if I get the sight of me eye on a buffalo-ruck, it's down on me knees I'll go, and not for prayin' aither. Here's both hands up for a start in the mornin'!"

Long before noon next day they were well on their way. Trafford could not understand why Pierre was so reserved, and, when speaking, so ironical. It was noticeable that the half-breed watched the Indian closely, that he always rode behind him, that he never drank out of the same cup. The leader set this down to the natural uncertainty of Pierre's disposition. He had grown to like Pierre, as the latter had come in course to respect him. Each was a man of value after his kind. Each also had recognised in the other qualities of force and knowledge having their generation in experiences which had become individuality, subterranean and acute, under a cold surface. It was the mutual recognition of these equivalents that led the two men to mutual trust, only occasionally disturbed, as has been shown; though one was regarded as the most fastidious man of his set in London, the fairest-minded of friends, the most comfortable of companions; while the other was an outlaw, a half-heathen, a lover of but one thing in this world, the joyous god of Chance. Pierre was essentially a gamester. He would have extracted satisfaction out of a death-sentence which was contingent on the trumping of an ace. His only honour was the honour of the game.

Now, with all the swelling prairie sloping to the clear horizon, and the breath of a large life in their nostrils, these two men were caught up suddenly, as it were, by the throbbing soul of the North, so that the subterranean life in them awoke and startled them. Trafford conceived that tobacco was the charm with which to exorcise the spirits of the past. Pierre let the game of sensations go on, knowing that they pay themselves out in time. His scheme was the wiser. The other found that fast riding and smoking were not sufficient. He became surrounded by the ghosts of yesterdays; and at length he gave up striving with them, and let them storm upon him, until a line of pain cut deeply across his forehead, and bitterly and unconsciously he cried aloud,--"Hester, ah, Hester!"

But having spoken, the spell was broken, and he was aware of the beat of hoofs beside him, and Shangi the Indian looking at him with a half smile. Something in the look thrilled him; it was fantastic, masterful. He wondered that he had not noticed this singular influence before. After all, he was only a savage with cleaner buckskin than his race usually wore. Yet that glow, that power in the face--was he Piegan, Blackfoot, Cree, Blood? Whatever he was, this man had heard the words which broke so painfully from him.

He saw the Indian frame her name upon his lips, and then came the words, "Hester--Hester Orval!"

He turned sternly, and said, "Who are you? What do you know of Hester Orval?"

The Indian shook his head gravely, and replied, "You spoke her name, my brother."

"I spoke one word of her name. You have spoken two."

"One does not know what one speaks. There are words which are as sounds, and words which are as feelings. Those come to the brain through the ear; these to the soul through sign, which is more than sound. The Indian hath knowledge, even as the white man; and because his heart is open, the trees whisper to him; he reads the language of the grass and the wind, and is taught by the song of the bird, the screech of the hawk, the bark of the fox. And so he comes to know the heart of the man who hath sickness, and calls upon someone, even though it be a weak woman, to cure his sickness; who is bowed low as beside a grave, and would stand upright. Are not my words wise? As the thoughts of a child that dreams, as the face of the blind, the eye of the beast, or the anxious hand of the poor, are they not simple, and to be understood?"

Just Trafford made no reply. But behind, Pierre was singing in the plaintive measure of a chant:

"A hunter rideth the herd abreast,
The Scarlet Hunter from out of the West,
Whose arrows with points of flame are drest,
Who loveth the beast of the field the best,
The child and the young bird out of the nest,
They ride to the hunt no more, no more!"

They travelled beyond all bounds of civilisation; beyond the northernmost Indian villages, until the features of the landscape became more rugged and solemn, and at last they paused at a place which the Indian called Misty Mountain, and where, disappearing for an hour, he returned with a team of Eskimo dogs, keen, quick-tempered, and enduring. They had all now recovered from the disturbing sentiments of the first portion of the journey; life was at full tide; the spirit of the hunter was on them.

At length one night they camped in a vast pine grove wrapped in coverlets of snow and silent as death. Here again Pierre became moody and alert and took no part in the careless chat at the camp-fire led by Shon McGann. The man brooded and looked mysterious. Mystery was not pleasing to Trafford. He had his own secrets, but in the ordinary affairs of life he preferred simplicity. In one of the silences that fell between Shon's attempts to give hilarity to the occasion, there came a rumbling far-off sound, a sound that increased in volume till the earth beneath them responded gently to the vibration. Trafford looked up inquiringly at Pierre, and then at the Indian, who, after a moment, said slowly: "Above us are the hills of the Mighty Men, beneath us is the White Valley. It is the tramp of buffalo that we hear. A storm is coming, and they go to shelter in the mountains."

The information had come somewhat suddenly, and McGann was the first to recover from the pleasant shock: "It's divil a wink of sleep I'll get this night, with the thought of them below there ripe for slaughter, and the tumble of fight in their beards."

Pierre, with a meaning glance from his half-closed eyes, added: "But it is the old saying of the prairies that you do not shout dinner till you have your knife in the loaf. Your knife is not yet in the loaf, Shon McGann."

The boom of the trampling ceased, and now there was a stirring in the

snow-clad tree tops, and a sound as if all the birds of the North were flying overhead. The weather began to moan and the boles of the pines to quake. And then there came war,--a trouble out of the north, a wave of the breath of God to show inconsequent man that he who seeks to live by slaughter hath slaughter for his master.

They hung over the fire while the forest cracked round them, and the flame smarted with the flying snow. And now the trees, as if the elements were closing in on them, began to break close by, and one lurched forward towards them. Trafford, to avoid its stroke, stepped quickly aside right into the line of another which he did not see. Pierre sprang forward and swung him clear, but was himself struck senseless by an outreaching branch.

As if satisfied with this achievement, the storm began to subside. When Pierre recovered consciousness Trafford clasped his hand and said,-- "You've a sharp eye, a quick thought, and a deft arm, comrade."

"Ah, it was in the game. It is good play to assist your partner," the half-breed replied sententiously. Through all, the Indian had remained stoical. But McGann, who swore by Trafford--as he had once sworn by another of the Trafford race--had his heart on his lips, and said:

"There's a swate little cherub that sits up aloft,
Who cares for the soul of poor Jack!"

It was long after midnight ere they settled down again, with the wreck of the forest round them. Only the Indian slept; the others were alert and restless. They were up at daybreak, and on their way before sunrise, filled with desire for prey. They had not travelled far before they emerged upon a plateau. Around them were the hills of the Mighty Men-- austere, majestic; at their feet was a vast valley on which the light newly-fallen snow had not hidden all the grass. Lonely and lofty, it was a world waiting chastely to be peopled! And now it was peopled, for there came from a cleft of the hills an army of buffaloes lounging slowly down the waste, with tossing manes and hoofs stirring the snow into a feathery scud.

The eyes of Trafford and McGann swam; Pierre's face was troubled, and strangely enough he made the sign of the cross.

At that instant Trafford saw smoke issuing from a spot on the mountain opposite. He turned to the Indian: "Someone lives there"? he said.

"It is the home of the dead, but life is also there."

"White man, or Indian?"

But no reply came. The Indian pointed instead to the buffalo rumbling down the valley. Trafford forgot the smoke, forgot everything except that splendid quarry. Shon was excited. "Sarpints alive," he said, "look at the troops of thim! Is it standin' here we are with our tongues in our cheeks, whin there's bastes to be killed, and mate to be got, and the call to war on the ground below! Clap spurs with your heels, sez I, and down the side of the turf together and give 'em the teeth of our guns!" The Irishman dashed down the slope. In an instant, all followed, or at least Trafford thought all followed, swinging their guns across their saddles to be ready for this excellent foray. But while Pierre rode hard, it was at first without the fret of battle in him, and he

smiled strangely, for he knew that the Indian had disappeared as they rode down the slope, though how and why he could not tell. There ran through his head tales chanted at camp-fires when he was not yet in stature so high as the loins that bore him. They rode hard, and yet they came no nearer to that flying herd straining on with white streaming breath and the surf of snow rising to their quarters. Mile upon mile, and yet they could not ride these monsters down!

Now Pierre was leading. There was a kind of fury in his face, and he seemed at last to gain on them. But as the herd veered close to a wall of stalwart pines, a horseman issued from the trees and joined the cattle. The horseman was in scarlet from head to foot; and with his coming the herd went faster, and ever faster, until they vanished into the mountain-side; and they who pursued drew in their trembling horses and stared at each other with wonder in their faces.

"In God's name what does it mean"? Trafford cried.

"Is it a trick of the eye or the hand of the devil"? added Shon.

"In the name of God we shall know perhaps. If it is the hand of the devil it is not good for us," remarked Pierre.

"Who was the man in scarlet who came from the woods"? asked Trafford of the half-breed.

"'Voila,' it is strange! There is an old story among the Indians! My mother told many tales of the place and sang of it, as I sang to you. The legend was this:--In the hills of the North which no white man, nor no Injin of this time hath seen, the forefathers of the red men sleep; but some day they will wake again and go forth and possess all the land; and the buffalo are for them when that time shall come, that they may have the fruits of the chase, and that it be as it was of old, when the cattle were as clouds on the horizon. And it was ordained that one of these mighty men who had never been vanquished in fight, nor done an evil thing, and was the greatest of all the chiefs, should live and not die, but be as a sentinel, as a lion watching, and preserve the White Valley in peace until his brethren waked and came into their own again. And him they called the Scarlet Hunter; and to this hour the red men pray to him when they lose their way upon the plains, or Death draws aside the curtains of the wigwam to call them forth."

"Repeat the verses you sang, Pierre," said Trafford. The half-breed did so. When he came to the words, "Who loveth the beast of the field the best," the Englishman looked round. "Where is Shang?" he asked. McGann shook his head in astonishment and negation. Pierre explained: "On the mountain-side where we ride down he is not seen--he vanish . . . 'mon Dieu,' look!"

On the slope of the mountain stood the Scarlet Hunter with drawn bow. From it an arrow flew over their heads with a sorrowful twang, and fell where the smoke rose among the pines; then the mystic figure disappeared.

McGann shuddered, and drew himself together. "It is the place of spirits," he said; "and it's little I like it, God knows; but I'll follow that Scarlet Hunter, or red devil, or whatever he is, till I drop, if the Honourable gives the word. For flesh and blood I'm not afraid of; and the other we come to, whether we will or not, one day."

But Trafford said: "No, we'll let it stand where it is for the present. Something has played our eyes false, or we're brought here to do work different from buffalo-hunting. Where that arrow fell among the smoke we must go first. Then, as I read the riddle, we travel back the way we came. There are points in connection with the Pipi Valley superior to the hills of the Mighty Men."

They rode away across the glade, and through a grove of pines upon a hill, till they stood before a log but with parchment windows.

Trafford knocked, but there was no response. He opened the door and entered. He saw a figure rise painfully from a couch in a corner,--the figure of a woman young and beautiful, but wan and worn. She seemed dazed and inert with suffering, and spoke mournfully: "It is too late. Not you, nor any of your race, nor anything on earth can save him. He is dead--dead now."

At the first sound of her voice Trafford started. He drew near to her, as pale as she was, and wonder and pity were in his face. "Hester," he said, "Hester Orval!"

She stared at him like one that had been awakened from an evil dream, then tottered towards him with the cry,--"Just, Just, have you come to save me? O Just!" His distress was sad to see, for it was held in deep repression, but he said calmly and with protecting gentleness: "Yes, I have come to save you. Hester, how is it you are here in this strange place--you?"

She sobbed so that at first she could not answer; but at last she cried: "O Just, he is dead . . . in there, in there! . . . Last night, it was last night; and he prayed that I might go with him. But I could not die unforgiven, and I was right, for you have come out of the world to help me, and to save me."

"Yes, to help you and to save you,--if I can," he added in a whisper to himself, for he was full of foreboding. He was of the earth, earthy, and things that had chanced to him this day were beyond the natural and healthy movements of his mind. He had gone forth to slay, and had been foiled by shadows; he had come with a tragic, if beautiful, memory haunting him, and that memory had clothed itself in flesh and stood before him, pitiful, solitary,--a woman. He had scorned all legend and superstition, and here both were made manifest to him. He had thought of this woman as one who was of this world no more, and here she mourned before him and bade him go and look upon her dead, upon the man who had wronged him, into whom, as he once declared, the soul of a cur had entered,--and now what could he say? He had carried in his heart the infinite something that is to men the utmost fulness of life, which, losing, they must carry lead upon their shoulders where they thought the gods had given pinions.

McGann and Pierre were nervous. This conjunction of unusual things was easier to the intelligences of the dead than the quick. The outer air was perhaps less charged with the unnatural, and with a glance towards the room where death was quartered, they left the hut.

Trafford was alone with the woman through whom his life had been turned awry. He looked at her searchingly; and as he looked the mere man in him asserted itself for a moment. She was dressed in coarse garments; it struck him that her grief had a touch of commonness about it; there was

something imperfect in the dramatic setting. His recent experiences had had a kind of grandeur about them; it was not thus that he had remembered her in the hour when he had called upon her in the plains, and the Indian had heard his cry. He felt, and was ashamed in feeling, that there was a grim humour in the situation. The fantastic, the melodramatic, the emotional, were huddled here in too marked a prominence; it all seemed, for an instant, like the tale of a woman's first novel. But immediately again there was roused in him the latent force of loyalty to himself and therefore to her; the story of her past, so far as he knew it, flashed before him, and his eyes grew hot.

He remembered the time he had last seen her in an English country-house among a gay party in which royalty smiled, and the subject was content beneath the smile. But there was one rebellious subject, and her name was Hester Orval. She was a wilful girl who had lived life selfishly within the lines of that decorous yet pleasant convention to which she was born. She was beautiful,--she knew that, and royalty had graciously admitted it. She was warm-thoughted, and possessed the fatal strain of the artistic temperament. She was not sure that she had a heart; and many others, not of her sex, after varying and enthusiastic study of the matter, were not more confident than she. But it had come at last that she had listened with pensive pleasure to Trafford's tale of love; and because to be worshipped by a man high in all men's, and in most women's, esteem, ministered delicately to her sweet egotism, and because she was proud of him, she gave him her hand in promise, and her cheek in privilege, but denied him--though he knew this not--her heart and the service of her life. But he was content to wait patiently for that service, and he wholly trusted her, for there was in him some fine spirit of the antique world.

There had come to Falkenstowe, this country-house and her father's home, a man who bore a knightly name, but who had no knightly heart; and he told Ulysses' tales, and covered a hazardous and cloudy past with that fascinating colour which makes evil appear to be good, so that he roused in her the pulse of art, which she believed was soul and life, and her allegiance swerved. And when her mother pleaded with her, and when her father said stern things, and even royalty, with uncommon use, rebuked her gently, her heart grew hard; and almost on the eve of her wedding-day she fled with her lover, and married him, and together they sailed away over the seas.

The world was shocked and clamorous for a matter of nine days, and then it forgot this foolish and awkward circumstance; but Just Trafford never forgot it. He remembered all vividly until the hour, a year later, when London journals announced that Hester Orval and her husband had gone down with a vessel wrecked upon the Alaskan and Canadian coast. And there new regret began, and his knowledge of her ended.

But she and her husband had not been drowned; with a sailor they had reached the shore in safety. They had travelled inland from the coast through the great mountains by unknown paths, and as they travelled, the sailor died; and they came at last through innumerable hardships to the Kimash Hills, the hills of the Mighty Men, and there they stayed. It was not an evil land; it had neither deadly cold in winter nor wanton heat in summer. But they never saw a human face, and everything was lonely and spectral. For a time they strove to go eastwards or southwards but the mountains were impassable, and in the north and west there was no hope. Though the buffalo swept by them in the valley they could not slay them, and they lived on forest fruits until in time the man sickened. The

woman nursed him faithfully, but still he failed; and when she could go forth no more for food, some unseen dweller of the woods brought buffalo meat, and prairie fowl, and water from the spring, and laid them beside her door.

She had seen the mounds upon the hill, the wide couches of the sleepers, and she remembered the things done in the days when God seemed nearer to the sons of men than now; and she said that a spirit had done this thing, and trembled and was thankful. But the man weakened and knew that he should die, and one night when the pain was sharp upon him he prayed bitterly that he might pass, or that help might come to snatch him from the grave. And as they sobbed together, a form entered at the door,-- a form clothed in scarlet,--and he bade them tell the tale of their lives as they would some time tell it unto heaven. And when the tale was told he said that succour should come to them from the south by the hand of the Scarlet Hunter, that the nation sleeping there should no more be disturbed by their moaning. And then he had gone forth, and with his going there was a storm such as that in which the man had died, the storm that had assailed the hunters in the forest yesterday.

This was the second part of Hester Orval's life as she told it to Just Trafford. And he, looking into her eyes, knew that she had suffered, and that she had sounded her husband's unworthiness. Then he turned from her and went into the room where the dead man lay. And there all hardness passed from him, and he understood that in the great going forth man reckons to the full with the deeds done in that brief pilgrimage called life; and that in the bitter journey which this one took across the dread spaces between Here and There, he had repented of his sins, because they, and they only, went with him in mocking company; the good having gone first to plead where evil is a debtor and hath a prison. And the woman came and stood beside Trafford, and whispered, "At first--and at the last--he was kind."

But he urged her gently from the room: "Go away," he said; "go away. We cannot judge him. Leave me alone with him."

They buried him upon the hill-side, far from the mounds where the Mighty Men waited for their summons to go forth and be the lords of the North again. At night they buried him when the moon was at its full; and he had the fragrant pines for his bed, and the warm darkness to cover him; and though he is to those others resting there a heathen and an alien, it may be that he sleeps peacefully.

When Trafford questioned Hester Orval more deeply of her life there, the unearthly look quickened in her eyes, and she said: "Oh, nothing, nothing is real here, but suffering; perhaps it is all a dream, but it has changed me, changed me. To hear the tread of the flying herds, to see no being save him, the Scarlet Hunter, to hear the voices calling in the night! . . . Hush! There, do you not hear them? It is midnight--listen!"

He listened, and Pierre and Shon McGann looked at each other apprehensively, while Shon's fingers felt hurriedly along the beads of a rosary which he did not hold. Yes, they heard it, a deep sonorous sound: "Is the daybreak come?" "It is still the night," came the reply as of one clear voice. And then there floated through the hills more softly: "We sleep--we sleep!" And the sounds echoed through the valley--"Sleep--sleep!"

Yet though these things were full of awe, the spirit of the place held them there, and the fever of the hunter descended on them hotly. In the morning they went forth, and rode into the White Valley where the buffalo were feeding, and sought to steal upon them; but the shots from their guns only awoke the hills, and none were slain. And though they rode swiftly, the wide surf of snow was ever between them and the chase, and their striving availed nothing. Day after day they followed that flying column, and night after night they heard the sleepers call from the hills. The desire of the thing wasted them, and they forgot to eat and ceased to talk among themselves. But one day Shon McGann, muttering aves as he rode, gained on the cattle, until once again the Scarlet Hunter came forth from a cleft of the mountains, and drove the herd forward with swifter feet. But the Irishman had learned the power in this thing, and had taught Trafford, who knew not those availing prayers, and with these sacred conjurations on their lips they gained on the cattle length by length, though the Scarlet Hunter rode abreast of the thundering horde. Within easy range, Trafford swung his gun shoulder-wards to fire, but at that instant a cloud of snow rose up between him and his quarry so that they all were blinded. And when they came into the clear sun again the buffalo were gone; but flaming arrows from some unseen hunter's bow came singing over their heads towards the south; and they obeyed the sign, and went back to where Hester wore her life out with anxiety for them, because she knew the hopelessness of their quest. Women are nearer to the heart of things. And now she begged Trafford to go southwards before winter froze the plains impassably, and the snow made tombs of the valleys. Thereupon he gave the word to go, and said that he had done wrong--for now the spell was falling from him.

But she, seeing his regret, said: "Ah, Just, it could not have been different. The passion of it was on you as it was on us, as if to teach us that hunger for happiness is robbery, and that the covetous desire of man is not the will of the gods. The herds are for the Mighty Men when they awake, not for the stranger and the Philistine."

"You have grown wise, Hester," he replied.

"No, I am sick in brain and body; but it may be that in such sickness there is wisdom."

"Ah," he said, "it has turned my head, I think. Once I laughed at all such fanciful things as these. This Scarlet Hunter, how many times have you seen him?"

"But once."

"What were his looks?"

"A face pale and strong, with noble eyes; and in his voice there was something strange."

Trafford thought of Shangi, the Indian,--where had he gone? He had disappeared as suddenly as he had come to their camp in the South.

As they sat silent in the growing night, the door opened and the Scarlet Hunter stood before them. "There is food," he said, "on the threshold--food for those who go upon a far journey to the South in the morning. Unhappy are they who seek for gold at the rainbow's foot, who chase the fire-fly in the night, who follow the herds in the White Valley. Wise are they who anger not the gods, and who fly before the rising storm.

There is a path from the valley for the strangers, the path by which they came; and when the sun stares forth again upon the world, the way shall be open, and there shall be safety for you until your travel ends in the quick world whither you go. You were foolish; now you are wise. It is time to depart; seek not to return, that we may have peace and you safety. When the world cometh to her spring again we shall meet." Then he turned and was gone, with Trafford's voice ringing after him,--"Shangi! Shangi!"

They ran out swiftly, but he had vanished. In the valley where the moonlight fell in icy coldness a herd of cattle was moving, and their breath rose like the spray from sea-beaten rocks, and the sound of their breathing was borne upwards to the watchers.

At daybreak they rode down into the valley. All was still. Not a trace of life remained; not a hoofmark in the snow, nor a bruised blade of grass. And when they climbed to the plateau and looked back, it seemed to Trafford and his companions, as it seemed in after years, that this thing had been all a fantasy. But Hester's face was beside them, and it told of strange and unsubstantial things. The shadows of the middle world were upon her. And yet again when they turned at the last there was no token. It was a northern valley, with sun and snow, and cold blue shadows, and the high hills,--that was all.

Then Hester said: "O Just, I do not know if this is life or death--and yet it must be death, for after death there is forgiveness to those who repent, and your face is forgiving and kind."

And he--for he saw that she needed much human help and comfort--gently laid his hand on hers and replied: "Hester, this is life, a new life for both of us. Whatever has been was a dream; whatever is now"--and he folded her hand in his--"is real; and there is no such thing as forgiveness to be spoken of between us. There shall be happiness for us yet, please God!"

"I want to go to Falkenstowe. Will--will my mother forgive me?"

"Mothers always forgive, Hester, else half the world had slain itself in shame."

And then she smiled for the first time since he had seen her. This was in the shadows of the scented pines; and a new life breathed upon her, as it breathed upon them all, and they knew that the fever of the White Valley had passed away from them forever.

After many hardships they came in safety to the regions of the south country again; and the tale they told, though doubted by the race of pale-faces, was believed by the heathen; because there was none among them but, as he cradled at his mother's breasts, and from his youth up, had heard the legend of the Scarlet Hunter.

For the romance of that journey, it concerned only the man and woman to whom it was as wine and meat to the starving. Is not love more than legend, and a human heart than all the beasts of the field or any joy of slaughter?

THE STONE

The Stone hung on a jutting crag of Purple Hill. On one side of it, far beneath, lay the village, huddled together as if, through being close compacted, its handful of humanity should not be a mere dust in the balance beside Nature's portentousness. Yet if one stood beside The Stone, and looked down, the flimsy wooden huts looked like a barrier at the end of a great flume. For the hill hollowed and narrowed from The Stone to the village, as if giants had made this concave path by trundling boulders to that point like a funnel where the miners' houses now formed a cul-de-sac. On the other side of the crag was a valley also; but it was lonely and untenanted; and at one flank of The Stone were serried legions of trees.

The Stone was a mighty and wonderful thing. Looked at from the village direct, it had nothing but the sky for a background. At times, also, it appeared to rest on nothing; and many declared that they could see clean between it and the oval floor of the crag on which it rested. That was generally in the evening, when the sun was setting behind it. Then the light coiled round its base, between it and its pedestal, thus making it appear to hover above the hill-point, or, planet-like, to be just settling on it. At other times, when the light was perfectly clear and not too strong, and the village side of the crag was brighter than the other, more accurate relations of The Stone to its pedestal could be discovered. Then one would say that it balanced on a tiny base, a toe of granite. But if one looked long, especially in the summer, when the air throbbed, it evidently rocked upon that toe; if steadily, and very long, he grew tremulous, perhaps afraid. Once, a woman who was about to become a mother went mad, because she thought The Stone would hurtle down the hill at her great moment and destroy her and her child. Indians would not live either on the village side of The Stone or in the valley beyond. They had a legend that, some day, one, whom they called The Man Who Sleeps, would rise from his hidden couch in the mountains, and, being angry that any dared to cumber his playground, would hurl The Stone upon them that dwelt at Purple Hill. But white men pay little heed to Indian legends. At one time or another every person who had come to the village visited The Stone. Colossal as it was, the real base on which its weight rested was actually very small: the view from the village had not been all deceitful. It is possible, indeed, that at one time it had really rocked, and that the rocking had worn for it a shallow cup, or socket, in which it poised. The first man who came to Purple Valley prospecting had often stopped his work and looked at The Stone in a half-fear that it would spring upon him unawares. And yet he had as often laughed at himself for doing so, since, as he said, it must have been there hundreds of thousands of years. Strangers, when they came to the village, went to sleep somewhat timidly the first night of their stay, and not infrequently left their beds to go and look at The Stone, as it hung there ominously in the light of the moon; or listened towards it if it was dark. When the moon rose late, and The Stone chanced to be directly in front of it, a black sphere seemed to be rolling into the light to blot it out.

But none who lived in the village looked upon The Stone in quite the same fashion as did that first man who had come to the valley. He had seen it through three changing seasons, with no human being near him, and only occasionally a shy, wandering elk, or a cloud of wild ducks whirring down the pass, to share his companionship with it. Once he had waked in the

early morning, and, possessed of a strange feeling, had gone out to look a The Stone. There, perched upon it, was an eagle; and though he said to himself that an eagle's weight was to The Stone as a feather upon the world, he kept his face turned towards it all day; for all day the eagle stayed. He was a man of great stature and immense strength. The thews of his limbs stood out like soft unbreakable steel. Yet, as if to cast derision on his strength and great proportions, God or Fate turned his bread to ashes, gave failure into his hands where he hugely grasped at fortune, and hung him about with misery. He discovered gold, but others gathered it. It was his daughter that went mad, and gave birth to a dead child in fearsome thought of The Stone. Once, when he had gone over the hills to another mining field, and had been prevented from coming back by unexpected and heavy snows, his wife was taken ill, and died alone of starvation, because none in the village remembered of her and her needs. Again, one wild night, long after, his only son was taken from his bed and lynched for a crime that was none of his, as was discovered by his murderers next day. Then they killed horribly the real criminal, and offered the father such satisfaction as they could. They said that any one of them was ready there to be killed by him; and they threw a weapon at his feet. At this he stood looking upon them for a moment, his great breast heaving, and his eyes glowering; but presently he reached out his arms, and taking two of them by the throat, brought their heads together heavily, breaking their skulls; and, with a cry in his throat like a wounded animal, left them, and entered the village no more. But it became known that he had built a rude hut on Purple Hill, and that he had been seen standing beside The Stone or sitting among the boulders below it, with his face bent upon the village. Those who had come near to him said that he had greatly changed; that his hair and beard had grown long and strong, and, in effect, that he looked like some rugged fragment of an antique world.

The time came when they associated The Man with The Stone: they grew to speak of him simply as The Man. There was something natural and apt in the association. Then they avoided these two singular dwellers on the height. What had happened to The Man when he lived in the village became almost as great a legend as the Indian fable concerning The Stone. In the minds of the people one seemed as old as the other. Women who knew the awful disasters which had befallen The Man brooded at times most timidly, regarding him as they did at first--and even still--The Stone. Women who carried life unborn about with them had a strange dread of both The Stone and The Man. Time passed on, and the feeling grew that The Man's grief must be a terrible thing, since he lived alone with The Stone and God. But this did not prevent the men of the village from digging gold, drinking liquor, and doing many kinds of evil. One day, again, they did an unjust and cruel thing. They took Pierre, the gambler, whom they had at first sought to vanquish at his own art, and, possessed suddenly of the high duty of citizenship, carried him to the edge of a hill and dropped him over, thinking thereby to give him a quick death, while the vultures would provide him a tomb. But Pierre was not killed, though to his grave--unprepared as yet--he would bear an arm which should never be lifted higher than his shoulder. When he waked from the crashing gloom which succeeded the fall, he was in the presence of a being whose appearance was awesome and massive--an outlawed god: whose hair and beard were white, whose eye was piercing, absorbing, painful, in the long perspective of its woe. This being sat with his great hand clasped to the side of his head. The beginning of his look was the village, and--though the vision seemed infinite--the village was the end of it too. Pierre, looking through the doorway beside which he lay, drew in his breath sharply, for it seemed at first as if The Man was an

unnatural fancy, and not a thing. Behind The Man was The Stone, which was not more motionless nor more full of age than this its comrade. Indeed, The Stone seemed more a thing of life as it poised above the hill: The Man was sculptured rock. His white hair was chiselled on his broad brow, his face was a solemn pathos petrified, his lips were curled with an iron contempt, an incalculable anger.

The sun went down, and darkness gathered about The Man. Pierre reached out his hand, and drank the water and ate the coarse bread that had been put near him. He guessed that trees or protruding ledges had broken his fall, and that he had been rescued and brought here. As he lay thinking, The Man entered the doorway, stooping much to do so. With flints he lighted a wick which hung from a wooden bowl of bear's oil; then kneeling, held it above his head, and looked at Pierre. And Pierre, who had never feared anyone, shrank from the look in The Man's eyes. But when the other saw that Pierre was awake, a distant kindness came upon his face, and he nodded gravely; but he did not speak. Presently a great tremor as of pain shook all his limbs, and he set the candle on the ground, and with his stalwart hands arranged afresh the bandages about Pierre's injured arm and leg. Pierre spoke at last.

"You are The Man"? he said. The other bowed his head.

"You saved me from those devils in the valley?" A look of impregnable hardness came into The Man's face, but he pressed Pierre's hand for answer; and though the pressure was meant to be gentle, Pierre winced painfully. The candle spluttered, and the hut filled with a sickly smoke. The Man brought some bear skins and covered the sufferer, for, the season being autumn, the night was cold. Pierre, who had thus spent his first sane and conscious hour in many days, fell asleep. What time it was when he waked he was not sure, but it was to hear a metallic click-click come to him through the clear air of night. It was a pleasant noise as of steel and rock: the work of some lonely stone-cutter of the hills. The sound reached him with strange, increasing distinctness. Was this Titan that had saved him sculpturing some figure from the metal hill? Click-click! it vibrated as regularly as the keen pulse of a watch. He lay and wondered for a long time, but fell asleep again; and the steely iteration went on in his dreams.

In the morning The Man came to him, and cared for his hurts, and gave him food; but still would speak no word. He was gone nearly all day in the hills; yet when evening came he sought the place where Pierre had seen him the night before, and the same weird scene was re-enacted. And again in the night the clicking sound went on; and every night it was renewed. Pierre grew stronger, and could, with difficulty, stand upon his feet. One night he crept out, and made his way softly, slowly towards the sound. He saw The Man kneeling beside The Stone, he saw a hammer rise and fall upon a chisel; and the chisel was at the base of The Stone. The hammer rose and fell with perfect but dreadful precision. Pierre turned and looked towards the village below, whose lights were burning like a bunch of fire-flies in the gloom. Again he looked at The Stone and The Man.

Then the thing came to him sharply. The Man was chiselling away the socket of The Stone, bringing it to that point of balance where the touch of a finger, the wing of a bird, or the whistle of a north-west wind, would send it down upon the offending and unsuspecting village.

The thought held him paralysed. The Man had nursed his revenge long past

the thought of its probability by the people beneath. He had at first sat and watched the village, hated, and mused dreadfully upon the thing he had determined to do. Then he had worked a little, afterwards more, and now, lastly, since he had seen what they had done to Pierre, with the hot but firm eagerness of an avenging giant. Pierre had done some sad deeds in his time, and had tasted some sweet revenges, but nothing like to this had ever entered his brain. In that village were men who--as they thought--had cast him to a death fit only for a coward or a cur. Well, here was the most exquisite retaliation. Though his hand should not be in the thing, he could still be the cynical and approving spectator.

But yet: had all those people hovering about those lights below done harm to him? He thought there were a few--and they were women--who would not have followed his tumbril to his death with cries of execration. The rest would have done so,--most of them did so, not because he was a criminal, but because he was a victim, and because human nature as it is thirsts inordinately at times for blood and sacrifice--a living strain of the old barbaric instinct. He remembered that most of these people were concerned in having injured The Man. The few good women there had vile husbands; the few pardonable men had hateful wives: the village of Purple Hill was an ill affair.

He thought: now doubtfully, now savagely, now with irony.

The hammer and steel clicked on.

He looked at the lights of the village again. Suddenly there came to his mind the words of a great man who sought to save a city manifold centuries ago. He was not sure that he wished to save this village; but there was a grim, almost grotesque, fitness in the thing that he now intended. He spoke out clearly through the night:

"Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten righteous shall be found there."

The hammer stopped. There was a silence, in which the pines sighed lightly. Then, as if speaking was a labour, The Man replied in a deep, harsh voice:

"I will not spare it for ten's sake."

Again there was a silence, in which Pierre felt his maimed body bend beneath him; but presently the voice said,--"Now!"

At this the moon swung from behind a cloud. The Man stood behind The Stone. His arm was raised to it. There was a moment's pause--it seemed like years to Pierre; a wind came softly crying out of the west, the moon hurried into the dark, and then a monster sprang from its pedestal upon Purple Hill, and, with a sound of thunder and an awful speed, raced upon the village below. The boulders of the hillside crumbled after it.

And Pierre saw the lights go out.

The moon shone out again for an instant, and Pierre saw that The Man stood where The Stone had been; but when he reached the place The Man was gone. Forever!

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

At first--and at the last--he was kind
Courage; without which, men are as the standing straw
Evil is half-accidental, half-natural
Fascinating colour which makes evil appear to be good
Had the luck together, all kinds and all weathers
Hunger for happiness is robbery
If one remembers, why should the other forget
Instinct for detecting veracity, having practised on both sides
Mothers always forgive
The higher we go the faster we live
The Injin speaks the truth, perhaps--eye of red man multiplies
The world is not so bad as is claimed for it
Whatever has been was a dream; whatever is now is real
You do not shout dinner till you have your knife in the loaf

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 4.

THE TALL MASTER
THE CRIMSON FLAG
THE FLOOD
IN PIPI VALLEY

THE TALL MASTER

The story has been so much tossed about in the mouths of Indians, and half-breeds, and men of the Hudson's Bay Company, that you are pretty sure to hear only an apocryphal version of the thing as you now travel in the North. But Pretty Pierre was at Fort Luke when the battle occurred, and, before and after, he sifted the business thoroughly. For he had a philosophical turn, and this may be said of him, that he never lied except to save another from danger. In this matter he was cool and impartial from first to last, and evil as his reputation was in many ways there were those who believed and trusted him. Himself, as he travelled here and there through the North, had heard of the Tall Master. Yet he had never met anyone who had seen him; for the Master had dwelt, it was said, chiefly among the strange tribes of the Far-Off Metal River whose faces were almost white, and who held themselves aloof from the southern races. The tales lost nothing by being retold, even when the historians were the men of the H. B. C.;--Pierre knew what accomplished liars may be found among that Company of Adventurers trading in Hudson's Bay, and

how their art had been none too delicately engrafted by his own people. But he was, as became him, open to conviction, especially when, journeying to Fort Luke, he heard what John Hybar, the Chief Factor-- a man of uncommon quality--had to say. Hybar had once lived long among those Indians of the Bright Stone, and had seen many rare things among them. He knew their legends of the White Valley and the Hills of the Mighty Men, and how their distinctive character had imposed itself on the whole Indian race of the North, so that there was none but believed, even though vaguely, in a pleasant land not south but Arcticwards; and Pierre himself, with Shon McGann and Just Trafford, had once had a strange experience in the Kimash Hills. He did not share the opinion of Lazenby, the Company's clerk at Fort Luke, who said, when the matter was talked of before him, that it was all hanky-panky,--which was evidence that he had lived in London town, before his anxious relatives, sending him forth under the delusive flag of adventure and wild life, imprisoned him in the Arctic regions with the H. B. C.

Lazenby admired Pierre; said he was good stuff, and voted him amusing, with an ingenious emphasis of heathen oaths; but advised him, as only an insolent young scoundrel can, to forswear securing, by the seductive game of poker or euchre, larger interest on his capital than the H. B. C.; whose record, he insisted, should never be rivalled by any single man in any single lifetime. Then he incidentally remarked that he would like to empty the Company's cash-box once--only once;--thus reconciling the preacher and the sinner, as many another has done. Lazenby's morals were not bad, however. He was simply fond of making them appear terrible; even when in London he was more idle than wicked. He gravely suggested at last, as a kind of climax, that he and Pierre should go out on the pad together. This was a mere stroke of pleasantry on his part, because, the most he could loot in that far North were furs and caches of buffalo meat; and a man's capacity and use for them were limited. Even Pierre's especial faculty and art seemed valueless so far Polewards; but he had his beat throughout the land, and he kept it like a perfect patrolman. He had not been at Fort Luke for years, and he would not be there again for more years; but it was certain that he would go on reappearing till he vanished utterly. At the end of the first week of this visit at Fort Luke, so completely had he conquered the place, that he had won from the Chief Factor the year's purchases of skins, the stores, and the Fort itself; and every stitch of clothing owned by Lazenby: so that, if he had insisted on the redemption of the debts, the H. B. C. and Lazenby had been naked and hungry in the wilderness. But Pierre was not a hard creditor. He instantly and nonchalantly said that the Fort would be useless to him, and handed it back again with all therein, on a most humorously constructed ninety-nine years' lease; while Lazenby was left in pawn. Yet Lazenby's mind was not at certain ease; he had a wholesome respect for Pierre's singularities, and dreaded being suddenly called upon to pay his debt before he could get his new clothes made, maybe, in the presence of Wind Driver, chief of the Golden Dogs, and his demure and charming daughter, Wine Face, who looked upon him with the eye of affection--a matter fully, but not ostentatiously, appreciated by Lazenby. If he could have entirely forgotten a pretty girl in South Kensington, who, at her parents' bidding, turned her shoulder on him, he would have married Wine Face; and so he told Pierre. But the half-breed had only a sardonic sympathy for such weakness. Things changed at once when Shon McGann arrived. He should have come before, according to a promise given Pierre, but there were reasons for the delay; and these Shon elaborated in his finely picturesque style.

He said that he had lost his way after he left the Wapiti Woods, and

should never have found it again, had it not been for a strange being who came upon him and took him to the camp of the White Hand Indians, and cared for him there, and sent him safely on his way again to Fort Luke.

"Sorra wan did I ever see like him," said Shon, with a face that was divil this minute and saint the next; pale in the cheek, and black in the eye, and grizzled hair flowin' long at his neck and lyin' like snakes on his shoulders; and whin his fingers closed on yours, bedad! they didn't seem human at all, for they clamped you so cold and strong."

"For they clamped you so cold and strong," replied Pierre, mockingly, yet greatly interested, as one could see by the upward range of his eye towards Shon. "Well, what more?"

"Well, squeeze the acid from y'r voice, Pierre; for there's things that better become you: and listen to me, for I've news for all here at the Fort, before I've done, which'll open y'r eyes with a jerk."

"With a wonderful jerk, hold! let us prepare, messieurs, to be waked with an Irish jerk!" and Pierre pensively trifled with the fringe on Shon's buckskin jacket, which was whisked from his fingers with smothered anger. For a few moments he was silent; but the eager looks of the Chief Factor and Lazenby encouraged him to continue. Besides, it was only Pierre's way--provoking Shon was the piquant sauce of his life.

"Lyin' awake I was," continued Shon, "in the middle of the night, not bein' able to sleep for a pain in a shoulder I'd strained, whin I heard a thing that drew me up standin'. It was the sound of a child laughin'; so wonderful and bright, and at the very door of me tent it seemed. Then it faded away till it was only a breath, lovely, and idle, and swingin'. I wint to the door and looked out. There was nothin' there, av coorse." "And why 'av coorse'?" rejoined Pierre. The Chief Factor was intent on what Shon was saying, while Lazenby drummed his fingers on the table, his nose in the air.

"Divils me darlin', but ye know as well as I, that there's things in the world neither for havin' nor handlin'. And that's wan of thim, says I to meself. . . . I wint back and lay down, and I heard the voice singin' now and comin' nearer and nearer, and growin' louder and louder, and then there came with it a patter of feet, till it was as a thousand children were dancin' by me door. I was shy enough, I'll own; but I pulled aside the curtain of the tent to see again: and there was nothin' beyand for the eye. But the singin' was goin' past and recedin' as before, till it died away along the waves of prairie grass. I wint back and give Grey Nose, my Injin bed-fellow, a lift wid me fut. 'Come out of that,' says I, 'and tell me if dead or alive I am.' He got up, and there was the noise soft and grand again, but with it now the voices of men, the flip of birds' wings and the sighin' of tree tops, and behind all that the long wash of a sea like none I ever heard. . . . 'Well,' says I to the Injin grinnin' before me, 'what's that, in the name o' Moses?' 'That,' says he, laughin' slow in me face, 'is the Tall Master--him that brought you to the camp.' Thin I remimbered all the things that's been said of him, and I knew it was music I'd been hearin' and not children's voices nor anythin' else at all.

"Come with me,' says Grey Nose; and he took me to the door of a big tent standin' alone from the rest.

"Wait a minute,' says he, and he put his hand on the tent curtain; and at

that there was a crash, as a million gold hammers were fallin' on silver drums. And we both stood still; for it seemed an army, with swords wranglin' and bridle-chains rattlin', was marchin' down on us. There was the divil's own uproar, as a battle was comin' on; and a long line of spears clashed. But just then there whistled through the larrup of sound a clear voice callin', gentle and coaxin', yet commandin' too; and the spears dropped, and the pounding of horsehoofs ceased, and then the army marched away; far away; iver so far away, into--"

"Into Heaven!" flippantly interjected Lazenby. "Into Heaven, say I, and be choked to you! for there's no other place for it; and I'll stand by that, till I go there myself, and know the truth o' the thing." Pierre here spoke. "Heaven gave you a fine trick with words, Shon McGann. I sometimes think Irishmen have gifts for only two things--words and women. . . . 'Bien,' what then?"

Shon was determined not to be angered. The occasion was too big. "Well, Grey Nose lifted the curtain and wint in. In a minute he comes out. 'You can go in,' says he. So in I wint, the Injin not comin', and there in the middle of the tint stood the Tall Master, alone. He had his fiddle to his chin, and the bow hoverin' above it. He looked at me for a long time along the thing; then, all at once, from one string I heard the child laughin' that pleasant and distant, though the bow seemed not to be touchin'. Soon it thinned till it was the shadow of a laugh, and I didn't know whin it stopped, he smilin' down at the fiddle bewhiles. Then he said without lookin' at me,--'It is the spirit of the White Valley and the Hills of the Mighty Men; of which all men shall know, for the North will come to her spring again one day soon, at the remaking of the world. They thought the song would never be found again, but I have given it a home here.' And he bent and kissed the strings. After, he turned sharply as if he'd been spoken to, and looked at someone beside him; someone that I couldn't see. A cloud dropped upon his face, he caught the fiddle hungrily to his breast, and came limpin' over to me--for there was somethin' wrong with his fut--and lookin' down his hook-nose at me, says he,--'I've a word for them at Fort Luke, where you're goin', and you'd better be gone at once; and I'll put you on your way. There's to be a great battle. The White Hands have an ancient feud with the Golden Dogs, and they have come from where the soft Chinook wind ranges the Peace River, to fight until no man of all the Golden Dogs be left, or till they themselves be destroyed. It is the same north and south,' he wint on; 'I have seen it all in Italy, in Greece, in--' but here he stopped and smiled strangely. After a minute he wint on: 'The White Hands have no quarrel with the Englishmen of the Fort, and I would warn them, for Englishmen were once kind to me--and warn also the Golden Dogs. So come with me at once,' says he. And I did. And he walked with me till mornin', carryin' the fiddle under his arm, but wrapped in a beautiful velvet cloth, havin' on it grand figures like the arms of a king or queen. And just at the first whisk of sun he turned me into a trail and give me good-bye, sayin' that maybe he'd follow me soon, and, at any rate, he'd be there at the battle. Well, divils betide me! I got off the track again; and lost a day; but here I am; and there's me story to take or lave as you will."

Shon paused and began to fumble with the cards on the table before him, looking the while at the others.

The Chief Factor was the first to speak. "I don't doubt but he told you true about the White Hands and the Golden Dogs," he said; "for there's been war and bad blood between them beyond the memory of man--at least

since the time that the Mighty Men lived, from which these date their history. But there's nothing to be done to-night; for if we tell old Wind Driver, there'll be no sleeping at the Fort. So we'll let the thing stand."

"You believe all this poppy-cock, Chief"? said Lazenby to the Factor, but laughing in Shon's face the while. The Factor gravely replied: "I knew of the Tall Master years ago on the Far-Off Metal River; and though I never saw him I can believe these things--and more. You do not know this world through and through, Lazenby; you have much to learn."

Pierre said nothing. He took the cards from Shon and passed them to and fro in his hand. Mechanically he dealt them out, and as mechanically they took them up and in silence began to play.

The next day there was commotion and excitement at Fort Luke. The Golden Dogs were making preparations for the battle. Pow-wow followed pow-wow, and paint and feathers followed all. The H. B. C. people had little to do but look to their guns and house everything within the walls of the Fort.

At night, Shon, Pierre, and Lazenby were seated about the table in the common-room, the cards lying dealt before them, waiting for the Factor to come. Presently the door opened and the Factor entered, followed by another. Shon and Pierre sprang to their feet.

"The Tall Master," said Shon with a kind of awe; and then stood still.

Their towering visitor slowly unloosed something he carried very carefully and closely beneath his arm, and laid it on the table, dropping his compass-like fingers softly on it. He bowed gravely to each, yet the bow seemed grotesque, his body was so ungainly. With the eyes of all drawn to him absolutely, he spoke in a low sonorous tone: "I have followed the traveller fast"--his hand lifted gently towards Shon--"for there are weighty concerns abroad, and I have things to say and do before I go again to my people--and beyond. . . . I have hungered for the face of a white man these many years, and his was the first I saw;"--again he tossed a long finger towards the Irishman--"and it brought back many things. I remember. . . . " He paused, then sat down; and they all did the same. He looked at them one by one with distant kindness. "I remember," he continued, and his strangely articulated fingers folded about the thing on the table beside him, "when"--here the cards caught his eye. His face underwent a change. An eager fantastic look shot from his eye, "when I gambled this away at Lucca,"--his hand drew the bundle closer to him--"but I won it back again--at a price!" he gloomily added, glancing sideways as to someone at his elbow.

He remained, eyes hanging upon space for a moment, then he recollected himself and continued: "I became wiser; I never risked it again; but I loved the game always. I was a gamester from the start--the artist is always so when he is greatest,--like nature herself. And once, years after, I played with a mother for her child--and mine. And yet once again at Parma with"--here he paused, throwing that sharp sidelong glance--"with the greatest gamester, for the infinite secret of Art: and I won it; but I paid the price! . . . I should like to play now."

He reached his hand, drew up five cards, and ran his eye through them. "Play!" he said. "The hand is good--very good. . . . Once when I played with the Princess--but it is no matter; and Tuscany is far away!

. . . Play!" he repeated.

Pierre instantly picked up the cards, with an air of cool satisfaction. He had either found the perfect gamester or the perfect liar. He knew the remedy for either.

The Chief Factor did not move. Shon and Lazenby followed Pierre's action. By their positions Lazenby became his partner. They played in silence for a minute, the Tall Master taking all. "Napoleon was a wonderful player, but he lost with me," he said slowly as he played a card upon three others and took them.

Lazenby was so taken back by this remark that, presently, he trumped his partner's ace, and was rewarded by a talon-like look from the Tall Master's eye; but it was immediately followed by one of saturnine amusement.

They played on silently.

"Ah, you are a wonderful player!" he presently said to Pierre, with a look of keen scrutiny. "Come, I will play with you--for values--the first time in seventy-five years; then, no more!"

Lazenby and Shon drew away beside the Chief Factor. The two played. Meanwhile Lazenby said to Shon: "The man's mad. He talks about Napoleon as if he'd known him--as if it wasn't three-fourths of a century ago. Does he think we're all born idiots? Why, he's not over sixty years old now. But where the deuce did he come from with that Italian face? And the funniest part of it is, he reminds me of someone. Did you notice how he limped--the awkward beggar!"

Lazenby had unconsciously lifted his voice, and presently the Tall Master turned and said to him: "I ran a nail into my foot at Leyden seventy-odd years ago."

"He's the devil himself," rejoined Lazenby, and he did not lower his voice.

"Many with angelic gifts are children of His Dark Majesty," said the Tall Master, slowly; and though he appeared closely occupied with the game, a look of vague sadness came into his face.

For a half-hour they played in silence, the slight, delicate-featured half-breed, and the mysterious man who had for so long been a thing of wonder in the North, a weird influence among the Indians.

There was a strange, cold fierceness in the Tall Master's face. He now staked his precious bundle against the one thing Pierre prized--the gold watch received years ago for a deed of heroism on the Chaudiere. The half-breed had always spoken of it as amusing, but Shon at least knew that to Pierre it was worth his right hand.

Both men drew breath slowly, and their eyes were hard. The stillness became painful; all were possessed by the grim spirit of Chance. . . . The Tall Master won. He came to his feet, his shambling body drawn together to a height. Pierre rose also. Their looks clinched. Pierre stretched out his hand. "You are my master at this," he said.

The other smiled sadly. "I have played for the last time. I have not

forgotten how to win. If I had lost, uncommon things had happened. This,"--he laid his hand on the bundle and gently undid it,"--is my oldest friend, since the warm days at Parma . . . all dead . . . all dead." Out of the velvet wrapping, brodered with royal and ducal arms, and rounded by a wreath of violets--which the Chief Factor looked at closely--he drew his violin. He lifted it reverently to his lips.

"My good Garnerius!" he said. "Three masters played you, but I am chief of them all. They had the classic soul, but I the romantic heart--'les grandes caprices.'" His head lifted higher. "I am the master artist of the world. I have found the core of Nature. Here in the North is the wonderful soul of things. Beyond this, far beyond, where the foolish think is only inviolate ice, is the first song of the Ages in a very pleasant land. I am the lost Master, and I shall return, I shall return . . . but not yet . . . not yet."

He fetched the instrument to his chin with a noble pride. The ugliness of his face was almost beautiful now.

The Chief Factor's look was fastened on him with bewilderment; he was trying to remember something: his mind went feeling, he knew not why, for a certain day, a quarter of a century before, when he unpacked a box of books and papers from England. Most of them were still in the Fort. The association of this man with these things fretted him.

The Tall Master swung his bow upward, but at that instant there came a knock, and, in response to a call, Wind Driver and Wine Face entered. Wine Face was certainly a beautiful girl; and Lazenby might well have been pardoned for throwing in his fate with such a heathen, if he despaired of ever seeing England again. The Tall Master did not turn towards these. The Indians sat gracefully on a bearskin before the fire. The eyes of the girl were cast shyly upon the Man as he stood there unlike an ordinary man; in his face a fine hardness and the cold light of the North. He suddenly tipped his bow upward and brought it down with a most delicate crash upon the strings. Then softly, slowly, he passed into a weird fantasy. The Indians sat breathless. Upon them it acted more impressively than the others: besides, the player's eye was searching them now; he was playing into their very bodies. And they responded with some swift shocks of recognition crossing their faces. Suddenly the old Indian sprang up. He thrust his arms out, and made, as if unconsciously, some fantastic yet solemn motions. The player smiled in a far-off fashion, and presently ran the bow upon the strings in an exquisite cry; and then a beautiful avalanche of sound slid from a distance, growing nearer and nearer, till it swept through the room, and imbedded all in its sweetness.

At this the old Indian threw himself forward at the player's feet. "It is the song of the White Weaver, the maker of the world--the music from the Hills of the Mighty Men. . . . I knew it--I knew it--but never like that. . . . It was lost to the world; the wild cry of the lofty stars. . . ." His face was wet.

The girl too had risen. She came forward as if in a dream and reverently touched the arm of the musician, who paused now, and was looking at them from under his long eyelashes. She said whisperingly: "Are you a spirit? Do you come from the Hills of the Mighty Men?"

He answered gravely: "I am no spirit. But I have journeyed in the Hills of the Mighty Men and along their ancient hunting-grounds. This that I

have played is the ancient music of the world--the music of Jubal and his comrades. It comes humming from the Poles; it rides laughing down the planets; it trembles through the snow; it gives joy to the bones of the wind. . . . And I am the voice of it," he added; and he drew up his loose unmanageable body till it looked enormous, firm, and dominant.

The girl's fingers ran softly over to his breast. "I will follow you," she said, "when you go again to the Happy Valleys."

Down from his brow there swept a faint hue of colour, and, for a breath, his eyes closed tenderly with hers. But he straightway gathered back his look again, his body shrank, not rudely, from her fingers, and he absently said: "I am old-in years the father of the world. It is a man's life gone since, at Genoa, she laid her fingers on my breast like that. . . . These things can be no more . . . until the North hath its summer again; and I stand young--the Master--upon the summits of my renown."

The girl drew slowly back. Lazenby was muttering under his breath now; he was overwhelmed by this change in Wine Face. He had been impressed to awe by the Tall Master's music, but he was piqued, and determined not to give in easily. He said sneeringly that Maskelyne and Cooke in music had come to life, and suggested a snake-dance.

The Tall Master heard these things, and immediately he turned to Lazenby with an angry look on his face. His brows hung heavily over the dull fire of his eyes; his hair itself seemed like Medusa's, just quivering into savage life; the fingers spread out white and claw-like upon the strings as he curved his violin to his chin, whereof it became, as it were, a piece. The bow shot out and down upon the instrument with a great clangour. There eddied into a vast arena of sound the prodigious elements of war. Torture rose from those four immeasurable chords; destruction was afoot upon them; a dreadful dance of death supervened.

Through the Chief Factor's mind there flashed--though mechanically, and only to be remembered afterwards--the words of a schoolday poem. It shuttled in and out of the music:

"Wheel the wild dance,
While lightnings glance,
And thunders rattle loud;
And call the brave to bloody grave,
To sleep without a shroud."

The face of the player grew old and drawn. The skin was wrinkled, but shone, the hair spread white, the nose almost met the chin, the mouth was all malice. It was old age with vast power: conquest volleyed from the fingers.

Shon McGann whispered aves, aching with the sound; the Chief Factor shuddered to his feet; Lazenby winced and drew back to the wall, putting his hand before his face as though the sounds were striking him; the old Indian covered his head with his arms upon the floor. Wine Face knelt, her face all grey, her fingers lacing and interlacing with pain. Only Pierre sat with masterful stillness, his eyes never moving from the face of the player; his arms folded; his feet firmly wedged to the floor. The sound became strangely distressing. It shocked the flesh and angered the nerves. Upon Lazenby it acted singularly. He cowered from it, but presently, with a look of madness in his eyes, rushed forward, arms

outstretched, as though to seize this intolerable minstrel. There was a sudden pause in the playing; then the room quaked with noise, buffeting Lazenby into stillness. The sounds changed instantly again, and music of an engaging sweetness and delight fell about them as in silver drops--an enchanting lyric of love. Its exquisite tenderness subdued Lazenby, who, but now, had a heart for slaughter. He dropped on his knees, threw his head into his arms, and sobbed hard. The Tall Master's fingers crept caressingly along one of those heavenly veins of sound, his bow poising softly over it. The farthest star seemed singing.

At dawn the next day the Golden Dogs were gathered for war before the Fort. Immediately after the sun rose, the foe were seen gliding darkly out of the horizon. From another direction came two travellers. These also saw the White Hands bearing upon the Fort, and hurried forward. They reached the gates of the Fort in good time, and were welcomed. One was a chief trader from a fort in the west. He was an old man, and had been many years in the service of the H. B. C.; and, like Lazenby, had spent his early days in London, a connoisseur in all its pleasures; the other was a voyageur. They had posted on quickly to bring news of this crusade of the White Hands.

The hostile Indians came steadily to within a few hundred yards of the Golden Dogs. Then they sent a brave to say that they had no quarrel with the people of the Fort; and that if the Golden Dogs came on they would battle with them alone; since the time had come for "one to be as both," as their Medicine Men had declared since the days of the Great Race. And this signified that one should destroy the other.

At this all the Golden Dogs ranged into line. The sun shone brightly, the long hedge of pine woods in the distance caught the colour of the sky, the flowers of the plains showed handsomely as a carpet of war. The bodies of the fighters glistened. You could see the rise and fall of their bare, strenuous chests. They stood as their forefathers in battle, almost naked, with crested head, gleaming axe, scalp-knife, and bows and arrows. At first there was the threatening rustle of preparation; then a great stillness came and stayed for a moment; after which, all at once, there sped through the air a big shout of battle, and the innumerable twang of flying arrows; and the opposing hosts ran upon each other.

Pierre and Shon McGann, watching from the Fort, cried out with excitement.

"Divils me darlin'!" called Shon, "are we gluin' our eyes to a chink in the wall, whin the tangle of battle goes on beyand? Bedad, I'll not stand it! Look at them twistin' the neck o' war! Open the gates, open the gates say I, and let us have play with our guns."

"Hush! 'Mon Dieu!'" interrupted Pierre. "Look! The Tall Master!"

None at the Fort had seen the Tall Master since the night before. Now he was covering the space between the walls and the battle, his hair streaming behind him.

When he came near to the vortex of fight he raised his violin to his chin, and instantly a piercingly sweet call penetrated the wild uproar. The Call filled it, drained through it, wrapped it, overcame it; so that it sank away at last like the outwash of an exhausted tide: the weft of battle stayed unfinished in the loom.

Then from the Indian lodges came the women and children. They drew near to the unearthly luxury of that Call, now lifting with an unbounded joy. Battleaxes fell to the ground; the warriors quieted even where they stood locked with their foes. The Tall Master now drew away from them, facing the north and west. That ineffable Call drew them after him with grave joy; and they brought their dead and wounded along. The women and children glided in among the men and followed also. Presently one girl ran away from the rest and came close into the great leader's footsteps.

At that instant, Lazenby, from the wall of the Fort, cried out madly, sprang down, opened the gates, and rushed towards the girl, crying: "Wine Face! Wine Face!"

She did not look behind. But he came close to her and caught her by the waist. "Come back! Come back! O my love, come back!" he urged; but she pushed him gently from her.

"Hush! Hush!" she said. "We are going to the Happy Valleys. Don't you hear him calling"? . . . And Lazenby fell back.

The Tall Master was now playing a wonderful thing, half dance, half carnival; but with that Call still beating through it. They were passing the Fort at an angle. All within issued forth to see. Suddenly the old trader who had come that morning started forward with a cry; then stood still. He caught the Factor's arm; but he seemed unable to speak yet; his face was troubled, his eyes were hard upon the player.

The procession passed the empty lodges, leaving the ground strewn with their weapons, and not one of their number stayed behind. They passed away towards the high hills of the north-west-beautiful austere barriers.

Still the trader gazed, and was pale, and trembled. They watched long. The throng of pilgrims grew a vague mass; no longer an army of individuals; and the music came floating back with distant charm. At last the old man found voice. "My God, it is--"

The Factor touched his arm, interrupting him, and drew a picture from his pocket--one but just now taken from that musty pile of books, received so many years before. He showed it to the old man.

"Yes, yes," said the other, "that is he. . . . And the world buried him forty years ago!"

Pierre, standing near, added with soft irony: "There are strange things in the world. He is the gamester of the world. 'Mais' a grand comrade also."

The music came waving back upon them delicately but the pilgrims were fading from view.

Soon the watchers were alone with the glowing day.

Talk and think as one would, The Woman was striking to see; with marvellous flaxen hair and a joyous violet eye. She was all pulse and dash; but she was as much less beautiful than the manager's wife as Tom Liffey was as nothing beside the manager himself; and one would care little to name the two women in the same breath if the end had been different. When The Woman came to Little Goshen there were others of her class there, but they were of a commoner sort and degree. She was the queen of a lawless court, though she never, from first to last, spoke to one of those others who were her people; neither did she hold commerce with any of the ordinary miners, save Pretty Pierre, but he was more gambler than miner,--and he went, when the matter was all over, and told her some things that stripped her soul naked before her eyes. Pierre had a wonderful tongue. It was only the gentlemen-diggers--and there were many of them at Little Goshen--who called upon her when the lights were low; and then there was a good deal of muffled mirth in the white house among the pines. The rougher miners made no quarrel with this, for the gentlemen-diggers were popular enough, they were merely sarcastic and humorous, and said things which, coming to The Woman's ears, made her very merry; for she herself had an abundant wit, and had spent wild hours with clever men. She did not resent the playful insolence that sent a dozen miners to her house in the dead of night with a crimson flag, which they quietly screwed to her roof; and paint, with which they deftly put a wide stripe of scarlet round the cornice, and another round the basement. In the morning, when she saw what had been done, she would not have the paint removed nor the flag taken down; for, she said, the stripes looked very well, and the other would show that she was always at home.

Now, the notable thing was that Heldon, the manager, was in The Woman's house on the night this was done. Tom Liffey, the lumpish guide and trapper, saw him go in; and, days afterwards, he said to Pierre: "Divils me own, but this is a bad hour for Heldon's wife--she with a face like a princess and eyes like the fear o' God. Nivir a wan did I see like her, since I came out of Erin with a clatter of hoofs behoid me and a squall on the sea before. There's wimmin there wid cheeks like roses and buthermilk, and a touch that'd make y'r heart pound on y'r ribs; but none that's grander than Heldon's wife. To lave her for that other, standin' hip-high in her shame, is temptin' the fires of Heaven, that basted the sinners o' Sodom."

Pierre, pausing between the whiffs of a cigarette, said: "So? But you know more of catching foxes in winter, and climbing mountains in summer, and the grip of the arm of an Injin girl, than of these things. You are young, quite young in the world, Tom Liffey."

"Young I may be with a glint o' grey at me temples from a night o' trouble beyand in the hills; but I'm the man, an' the only man, that's climbed to the glacier-top--God's Playground, as they call it: and nivir a dirty trick have I done to Injin girl or any other; and be damned to you there!"

"Sometimes I think you are as foolish as Shon McGann," compassionately replied the half-breed.

"You have almighty virtue, and you did that brave trick of the glacier; but great men have fallen. You are not dead yet. Still, as you say, Heldon's wife is noble to see. She is grave and cold, and speaks little; but there is something in her which is not of the meek of the earth. Some women say nothing, and suffer and forgive, and take such as Heldon back to their bosoms; but there are others--I remember a woman--bien, it

is no matter, it was long ago; but they two are as if born of one mother; and what comes of this will be mad play--mad play."

"Av coorse his wife may not get to know of it, and--"

"Not get to know it! 'Tsh, you are a child--"

"Faith, I'll say what I think, and that in y'r face! Maybe he'll tire of the handsome rip--for handsome she is, like a yellow lily growin' out o' mud--and go back to his lawful wife, that believes he's at the mines, when he's drinkin' and colloquin' wid a fly-away."

Pierre slowly wheeled till he had the Irishman straight in his eye. Then he said in a low, cutting tone: "I suppose your heart aches for the beautiful lady, eh?" Here he screwed his slight forefinger into Tom's breast; then he added sharply: "'Nom de Dieu,' but you make me angry! You talk too much. Such men get into trouble. And keep down the riot of that heart of yours, Tom Liffey, or you'll walk on the edge of knives one day. And now take an inch of whisky and ease the anxious soul. 'Voila!'" After a moment he added: "Women work these things out for themselves." Then the two left the hut, and amiably strolled together to the centre of the village, where they parted. It was as Pierre had said: the woman would work the thing out for herself. Later that evening Heldon's wife stood cloaked and veiled in the shadows of the pines, facing the house with The Crimson Flag. Her eyes shifted ever from the door to the flag, which was stirred by the light breeze. Once or twice she shivered as with cold, but she instantly stilled again, and watched. It was midnight. Here and there beyond in the village a light showed, and straggling voices floated faintly towards her. For a long time no sound came from the house. But at last she heard a laugh. At that she drew something from her pocket, and held it firmly in her hand. Once she turned and looked at another house far up on the hill, where lights were burning. It was Heldon's house--her home. A sharp sound as of anguish and anger escaped her; then she fastened her eyes on the door in front of her.

At that moment Tom Liffey was standing with his hands on his hips looking at Heldon's home on the hill; and he said some rumbling words, then strode on down the road, and suddenly paused near the wife. He did not see her. He faced the door at which she was looking, and shook his fist at it.

"A murrain on y'r sow!" said he, "as there's plague in y'r body, and hell in the slide of y'r feet, like the trail of the red spider. And out o' that come ye, Heldon, for I know y're there. Out of that, ye beast! . . . But how can ye go back--you that's rolled in that sewer--to the loveliest woman that ever trod the neck o' the world! Damned y' are in every joint o' y'r frame, and damned is y'r sow, I say, for bringing sorrow to her; and I hate you as much for that, as I could worship her was she not your wife and a lady o' blood, God save her!"

Then shaking his fist once more, he swung away slowly down the road. During this the wife's teeth held together as though they were of a piece. She looked after Tom Liffey and smiled; but it was a dreadful smile.

"He worships me, that common man--worships me," she said. "This man who was my husband has shamed me, left me. Well--"

The door of the house opened; a man came out. His wife leaned a little forward, and something clicked ominously in her hand. But a voice came up the road towards them through the clear air--the voice of Tom Liffey. The husband paused to listen; the wife mechanically did the same. The husband remembered this afterwards: it was the key to, and the beginning of, a tragedy. These are the words the Irishman sang:

"She was a queen, she stood up there before me,
My blood went roarin' when she touched my hand;
She kissed me on the lips, and then she swore me
To die for her--and happy was the land."

A new and singular look came into her face. It transformed her. "That," she said in a whisper to herself--"that! He knows the way."

As her husband turned towards his home, she turned also. He heard the rustle of garments, and he could just discern the cloaked figure in the shadows. He hurried on; the figure flitted ahead of him. A fear possessed him in spite of his will. He turned back. The figure stood still for a moment, then followed him. He braced himself, faced about, and walked towards it: it stopped and waited. He had not the courage. He went back again swiftly towards the house he had left. Again he looked behind him. The figure was standing, not far, in the pines. He wheeled suddenly towards the house, turned a key in the door, and entered.

Then the wife went to that which had been her home: Heldon did not go thither until the first flush of morning. Pierre, returning from an all-night sitting at cards, met him, and saw the careworn look on his face. The half-breed smiled. He knew that the event was doubling on the man. When Heldon reached his house, he went to his wife's room. It was locked. Then he walked down to his mines with a miserable shame and anger at his heart. He did not pass The Crimson Flag. He went by another way.

That evening, in the dusk, a woman knocked at Tom Liffey's door. He opened it.

"Are you alone"? she said. "I am alone, lady."

"I will come in," she added. "You will--come in"? he faltered.

She drew near him, and reached out and gently caught his hand.

"Ah!" he said, with a sound almost like a sob in its intensity, and the blood flushed to his hair.

He stepped aside, and she entered. In the light of the candle her eye burned into his, but her face wore a shining coldness. She leaned towards him.

"You said you could worship me," she whispered, "and you cursed him. Well--worship me--altogether--and that will curse him, as he has killed me."

"Dear lady!" he said, in an awed, overwhelmed murmur; and he fell back to the wall.

She came towards him. "Am I not beautiful"? she urged. She took his

hand. His eye swam with hers. But his look was different from hers, though he could not know that. His was the madness of a man in a dream; hers was a painful thing. The Furies dwelt in her. She softly lifted his hand above his head, and whispered: "Swear." And she kissed him. Her lips were icy, though he did not think so. The blood tossed in his veins. He swore: but, doing so, he could not conceive all that would be required of him. He was hers, body and soul, and she had resolved on a grim thing. . . . In the darkness, they left the hut and passed into the woods, and slowly up through the hills.

Heldon returned to his home that night to find it empty. There were no servants. There was no wife. Her cat and dog lay dead upon the hearthrug. Her clothing was cut into strips. Her wedding-dress was a charred heap on the fireplace. Her jewellery lay molten with it. Her portrait had been torn from its frame.

An intolerable fear possessed him. Drops of sweat hung on his forehead and his hands. He fled towards the town. He bit his finger-nails till they bled as he passed the house in the pines. He lifted his arm as if the flappings of The Crimson Flag were blows in his face.

At last he passed Tom Liffey's hut. He saw Pierre, coming from it. The look on the gambler's face was one, of gloomy wonder. His fingers trembled as he lighted a cigarette, and that was an unusual thing. The form of Heldon edged within the light. Pierre dropped the match and said to him,--"You are looking for your wife?"

Heldon bowed his head. The other threw open the door of the hut. "Come in here," he said. They entered. Pierre pointed to a woman's hat on the table. "Do you know that"? he asked, huskily, for he was moved. But Heldon only nodded dazedly. Pierre continued: "I was to have met Tom Liffey here--to-night. He is not here. You hoped--I suppose--to see your wife in your--home. She is not there. He left a word on paper for me. I have torn it up. Writing is the enemy of man. But I know where he is gone. I know also where your wife has gone."

Heldon's face was of a hateful paleness. . . . They passed out into the night.

"Where are you going"? Heldon said.

"To God's Playground, if we can get there."

"To God's Playground? To the glacier-top? You are mad."

"No, but he and she were mad. Come on." Then he whispered something, and Heldon gave a great cry, and they plunged into the woods.

In the morning the people of Little Goshen, looking towards the glacier, saw a flag (they knew afterwards that it was crimson) flying on it. Near it were two human figures. A miner, looking through a field-glass, said that one figure was crouching by the flag-staff, and that it was a woman. The other figure near was a man. As the morning wore on, they saw upon a crag of ice below the sloping glacier two men looking upwards towards the flag. One of them seemed to shriek out, and threw up his hands, and made as if to rush forward; but the other drew him back.

Heldon knew what revenge and disgrace may be at their worst. In vain he tried to reach God's Playground. Only one man knew the way, and he was

dead upon it--with Heldon's wife: two shameless suicides. . . . When he came down from the mountain the hair upon his face was white, though that upon his head remained black as it had always been. And those frozen figures stayed there like statues with that other crimson flag: until, one day, a great-bodied wind swept out of the north, and, in pity, carried them down a bottomless fissure.

But long before this happened, The Woman had fled from Little Goshen in the night, and her house was burned to the ground.

THE FLOOD

Wendling came to Fort Anne on the day that the Reverend Ezra Badgley and an unknown girl were buried. And that was a notable thing. The man had been found dead at his evening meal; the girl had died on the same day; and they were buried side by side. This caused much scandal, for the man was holy, and the girl, as many women said, was probably evil altogether. At the graves, when the minister's people saw what was being done, they piously protested; but the Factor, to whom Pierre had whispered a word, answered them gravely that the matter should go on: since none knew but the woman was as worthy of heaven as the man. Wendling chanced to stand beside Pretty Pierre.

"Who knows!" he said aloud, looking hard at the graves, "who knows!.... She died before him, but the dead can strike."

Pierre did not answer immediately, for the Factor was calling the earth down on both coffins; but after a moment he added: "Yes, the dead can strike." And then the eyes of the two men caught and stayed, and they knew that they had things to say to each other in the world.

They became friends. And that, perhaps, was not greatly to Wendling's credit; for in the eyes of many Pierre was an outcast as an outlaw. Maybe some of the women disliked this friendship most; since Wendling was a handsome man, and Pierre was never known to seek them, good or bad; and they blamed him for the other's coldness, for his unconcerned yet respectful eye.

"There's Nelly Nolan would dance after him to the world's end," said Shon McGann to Pierre one day; "and the Widdy Jerome herself, wid her flamin' cheeks and the wild fun in her eye, croons like a babe at the breast as he slides out his cash on the bar; and over on Gansonby's Flat there's--"

"There's many a fool, 'voila,'" sharply interjected Pierre, as he pushed the needle through a button he was sewing on his coat.

"Bedad, there's a pair of fools here, anyway, I say; for the women might die without lift at waist or brush of lip, and neither of ye'd say, 'Here's to the joy of us, goddess, me own!'"

Pierre seemed to be intently watching the needlepoint as it pierced up the button-eye, and his reply was given with a slowness corresponding to the sedate passage of the needle. "Wendling, you think, cares nothing for women? Well, men who are like that cared once for one woman, and

when that was over--But, pshaw! I will not talk. You are no thinker, Shon McGann. You blunder through the world. And you'll tremble as much to a woman's thumb in fifty years as now."

"By the holy smoke," said Shon, "though I tremble at that, maybe, I'll not tremble, as Wendling, at nothing at all." Here Pierre looked up sharply, then dropped his eyes on his work again. Shon lapsed suddenly into a moodiness.

"Yes," said Pierre, "as Wendling, at nothing at all? Well?"

"Well, this, Pierre, for you that's a thinker from me that's none. I was walking with him in Red Glen yesterday. Sudden he took to shiverin', and snatched me by the arm, and a mad look shot out of his handsome face. 'Hush!' says he. I listened. There was a sound like the hard rattle of a creek over stones, and then another sound behind that. 'Come quick,' says he, the sweat standin' thick on him; and he ran me up the bank--for it was at the beginnin' of the Glen where the sides were low--and there we stood pantin' and starin' flat at each other. 'What's that? and what's got its hand on ye? for y' are cold as death, an' pinched in the face, an' you've bruised my arm,' said I. And he looked round him slow and breathed hard, then drew his fingers through the sweat on his cheek. 'I'm not well, and I thought I heard--you heard it; what was it like?' said he; and he peered close at me. 'Like water,' said I; 'a little creek near, and a flood comin' far off.' 'Yes, just that,' said he; 'it's some trick of wind in the place, but it makes a man foolish, and an inch of brandy would be the right thing.' I didn't say no to that. And on we came, and brandy we had with a wish in the eye of Nelly Nolan that'd warm the heart of a tomb. . . . And there's a cud for your chewin', Pierre. Think that by the neck and the tail, and the devil absolve ye."

During this, Pierre had finished with the button. He had drawn on his coat and lifted his hat, and now lounged, trying the point of the needle with his forefinger. When Shon ended, he said with a sidelong glance: "But what did you think of all that, Shon?"

"Think! There it was! What's the use of thinkin'? There's many a trick in the world with wind or with spirit, as I've seen often enough in ould Ireland, and it's not to be guessed by me." Here his voice got a little lower and a trifle solemn. "For, Pierre," spoke he, "there's what's more than life or death, and sorra wan can we tell what it is; but we'll know some day whin--"

"When we've taken the leap at the Almighty Ditch," said Pierre, with a grave kind of lightness. "Yes, it is all strange. But even the Almighty Ditch is worth the doing: nearly everything is worth the doing; being young, growing old, fighting, loving--when youth is on--hating, eating, drinking, working, playing big games. All is worth it except two things."

"And what are they, bedad?"

"Thy neighbour's wife and murder. Those are horrible. They double on a man one time or another; always."

Here, as in curiosity, Pierre pierced his finger with the needle, and watched the blood form in a little globule. Looking at it meditatively and sardonically, he said: "There is only one end to these. Blood for blood is a great matter; and I used to wonder if it would not be terrible

for a man to see his death coming on him drop by drop, like that." He let the spot of blood fall to the floor. "But now I know that there is a punishment worse than that . . . 'mon Dieu!' worse than that," he added.

Into Shon's face a strange look had suddenly come. "Yes, there's something worse than that, Pierre."

"So, 'bien?'"

Shon made the sacred gesture of his creed. "To be punished by the dead. And not see them--only hear them." And his eyes steadied firmly to the other's.

Pierre was about to reply, but there came the sound of footsteps through the open door, and presently Wendling entered slowly. He was pale and worn, and his eyes looked out with a searching anxiousness. But that did not render him less comely. He had always dressed in black and white, and this now added to the easy and yet severe refinement of his person. His birth and breeding had occurred in places unfrequented by such as Shon and Pierre; but plains and wild life level all; and men are friends according to their taste and will, and by no other law. Hence these with Wendling. He stretched out his hand to each without a word. The handshake was unusual; he had little demonstration ever. Shon looked up surprised, but responded. Pierre followed with a swift, inquiring look; then, in the succeeding pause, he offered cigarettes. Wendling took one; and all, silent, sat down. The sun streamed intemperately through the doorway, making a broad ribbon of light straight across the floor to Wendling's feet. After lighting his cigarette, he looked into the sunlight for a moment, still not speaking. Shon meanwhile had started his pipe, and now, as if he found the silence awkward,--"It's a day for God's country, this," he said: "to make man a Christian for little or much, though he play with the Devil betunewhiles." Without looking at them, Wendling said, in a low voice: "It was just such a day, down there in Quebec, when it happened. You could hear the swill of the river, the water licking the piers, and the saws in the Big Mill and the Little Mill as they marched through the timber, flashing their teeth like bayonets. It's a wonderful sound on a hot, clear day--that wild, keen singing of the saws, like the cry of a live thing fighting and conquering. Up from the fresh-cut lumber in the yards there came a smell like the juice of apples, and the sawdust, as you thrust your hand into it, was as cool and soft as the leaves of a clove-flower in the dew. On these days the town was always still. It looked sleeping, and you saw the heat quivering up from the wooden walls and the roofs of cedar shingles as though the houses were breathing."

Here he paused, still intent on the shaking sunshine. Then he turned to the others as if suddenly aware that he had been talking to them. Shon was about to speak, but Pierre threw a restraining glance, and, instead, they all looked through the doorway and beyond. In the settlement below they saw the effect that Wendling had described. The houses breathed. A grasshopper went clacking past, a dog at the door snapped up a fly; but there seemed no other life of day. Wendling nodded his head towards the distance. "It was quiet, like that. I stood and watched the mills and the yards, and listened to the saws, and looked at the great slide, and the logs on the river: and I said ever to myself that it was all mine--all. Then I turned to a big house on the hillock beyond the cedars, whose windows were open, with a cool dusk lying behind them. More than all else, I loved to think I owned that house and what was in it. . . ."

She was a beautiful woman. And she used to sit in a room facing the mill--though the house fronted another way--thinking of me, I did not doubt, and working at some delicate needle-stuff. There never had been a sharp word between us, save when I quarrelled bitterly with her brother, and he left the mill and went away. But she got over that mostly, though the lad's name was, never mentioned between us. That day I was so hungry for the sight of her that I got my field-glass--used to watch my vessels and rafts making across the bay--and trained it on the window where I knew she sat. I thought, it would amuse her, too, when I went back at night, if I told her what she had been doing. I laughed to myself at the thought of it as I adjusted the glass. . . . I looked. . . . There was no more laughing. . . . I saw her, and in front of her a man, with his back half on me. I could not recognise him, though at the instant I thought he was something familiar. I failed to get his face at all. Hers I found indistinctly. But I saw him catch her playfully by the chin! After a little they rose. He put his arm about her and kissed her, and he ran his fingers through her hair. She had such fine golden hair--so light, and it lifted to every breath. Something got into my brain. I know now it was the maggot which sent Othello mad. The world in that hour was malicious, awful. . . .

"After a time--it seemed ages, she and everything had receded so far-- I went . . . home. At the door I asked the servant who had been there. She hesitated, confused, and then said the young curate of the parish. I was very cool: for madness is a strange thing; you see everything with an intense aching clearness--that is the trouble. . . . She was more kind than common. I do not think I was unusual. I was playing a part well, my grandmother had Indian blood like yours, Pierre, and I was waiting. I was even nicely critical of her to myself. I balanced the mole on her neck against her general beauty; the curve of her instep, I decided, was a little too emphatic. I passed her backwards and forwards, weighing her at every point; but yet these two things were the only imperfections. I pronounced her an exceeding piece of art--and infamy. I was much interested to see how she could appear perfect in her soul. I encouraged her to talk. I saw with devilish irony that an angel spoke. And, to cap it all, she assumed the fascinating air of the mediator--for her brother; seeking a reconciliation between us. Her amazing art of person and mind so worked upon me that it became unendurable; it was so exquisite--and so shameless. I was sitting where the priest had sat that afternoon; and when she leaned towards me I caught her chin lightly and trailed my fingers through her hair as he had done: and that ended it, for I was cold, and my heart worked with horrible slowness. Just as a wave poises at its height before breaking upon the shore, it hung at every pulse-beat, and then seemed to fall over with a sickening thud. I arose, and acting still, spoke impatiently of her brother. Tears sprang to her eyes. Such divine dissimulation, I thought--too good for earth. She turned to leave the room, and I did not stay her. Yet we were together again that night. . . . I was only waiting."

The cigarette had dropped from his fingers to the floor, and lay there smoking. Shon's face was fixed with anxiety; Pierre's eyes played gravely with the sunshine. Wendling drew a heavy breath, and then went on.

"Again, next day, it was like this--the world draining the heat. . . . I watched from the Big Mill. I saw them again. He leaned over her chair and buried his face in her hair. The proof was absolute now. . . . I started away, going a roundabout, that I might not be seen. It took me

some time. I was passing through a clump of cedar when I saw them making towards the trees skirting the river. Their backs were on me. Suddenly they diverted their steps--towards the great slide, shut off from water this last few months, and used as a quarry to deepen it. Some petrified things had been found in the rocks, but I did not think they were going to these. I saw them climb down the rocky steps; and presently they were lost to view. The gates of the slide could be opened by machinery from the Little Mill. A terrible, deliciously malignant thought came to me. I remember how the sunlight crept away from me and left me in the dark. I stole through that darkness to the Little Mill. I went to the machinery for opening the gates. Very gently I set it in motion, facing the slide as I did so. I could see it through the open sides of the mill. I smiled to think what the tiny creek, always creeping through a faint leak in the gates and falling with a granite rattle on the stones, would now become. I pushed the lever harder--harder. I saw the gates suddenly give, then fly open, and the river sprang roaring massively through them. I heard a shriek through the roar. I shuddered; and a horrible sickness came on me. . . . And as I turned from the machinery, I saw the young priest coming at me through a doorway! . . . It was not the priest and my wife that I had killed; but my wife and her brother. . . ."

He threw his head back as though something clamped his throat. His voice roughened with misery. "The young priest buried them both, and people did not know the truth. They were even sorry for me. But I gave up the mills--all; and I became homeless . . . this."

Now he looked up at the two men, and said: "I have told you because you know something, and because there will, I think, be an end soon." He got up and reached out a trembling hand for a cigarette. Pierre gave him one. "Will you walk with me"? he asked.

Shon shook his head. "God forgive you," he replied, "I can't do it."

But Wendling and Pierre left the hut together. They walked for an hour, scarcely speaking, and not considering where they went. At last Pierre mechanically turned to go down into Red Glen. Wendling stopped short, then, with a sighing laugh, strode on. "Shoo has told you what happened here"? he said.

Pierre nodded.

"And you know what came once when you walked with me.... The dead can strike," he added. Pierre sought his eye. "The minister and the girl buried together that day," he said, "were--"

He stopped, for behind him he heard the sharp, cold trickle of water. Silent they walked on. It followed them. They could not get out of the Glen now until they had compassed its length--the walls were high. The sound grew. The men faced each other.

"Good-bye," said Wendling; and he reached out his hand swiftly. But Pierre heard a mighty flood groaning on them, and he blinded as he stretched his arm in response. He caught at Wendling's shoulder, but felt him lifted and carried away, while he himself stood still in a screeching wind and heard impalpable water rushing over him. In a minute it was gone; and he stood alone in Red Glen.

He gathered himself up and ran. Far down, where the Glen opened to the

plain, he found Wendling. The hands were wrinkled; the face was cold; the body was wet: the man was drowned and dead.

IN PIPI VALLEY

"Divils me darlins, it's a memory I have of a time whin luck wasn't foldin' her arms round me, and not so far back aither, and I on the wallaby track hot-foot for the City o' Gold."

Shon McGann said this in the course of a discussion on the prosperity of Pipi Valley. Pretty Pierre remarked nonchalantly in reply,--"The wallaby track--eh--what is that, Shon?"

"It's a bit of a haythen y' are, Pierre. The wallaby track? That's the name in Australia for trampin' west through the plains of the Never-Never Country lookin' for the luck o' the world; as, bedad, it's meself that knows it, and no other, and not by book or tellin' either, but with the grip of thirst at me throat and a reef in me belt every hour to quiet the gnawin'." And Shon proceeded to light his pipe afresh.

"But the City o' Gold--was there much wealth for you there, Shon?"

Shon laughed, and said between the puffs of smoke, "Wealth for me, is it? Oh, mother o' Moses! wealth of work and the pride of livin' in the heart of us, and the grip of an honest hand betunewhiles; and what more do y' want, Pierre?"

The Frenchman's drooping eyelids closed a little more, and he replied, meditatively: "Money? No, that is not Shon McGann. The good fellowship of thirst?--yes, a little. The grip of the honest hand, quite, and the clinch of an honest waist? Well, 'peut-etre.'

"Of the waist which is not honest?--tsh! he is gay--and so!"

The Irishman took his pipe from his mouth, and held it poised before him. He looked inquiringly and a little frowningly at the other for a moment, as if doubtful whether to resent the sneer that accompanied the words just spoken; but at last he good-humouredly said: "Blood o' me bones, but it's much I fear the honest waist hasn't always been me portion--Heaven forgive me!"

"'Nom de pipe,' this Irishman!" replied Pierre. "He is gay; of good heart; he smiles, and the women are at his heels; he laughs, and they are on their knees--Such a fool he is!"

Still Shon McGann laughed.

"A fool I am, Pierre, or I'd be in ould Ireland at this minute, with a roof o' me own over me and the friends o' me youth round me, and brats on me knee, and the fear o' God in me heart."

"'Mais,' Shon," mockingly rejoined the Frenchman, "this is not Ireland, but there is much like that to be done here. There is a roof, and there is that woman at Ward's Mistake, and the brats--eh, by and by?"

Shon's face clouded. He hesitated, then replied sharply: "That woman, do y' say, Pierre, she that nursed me when the Honourable and meself were taken out o' Sandy Drift, more dead than livin'; she that brought me back to life as good as ever, barrin' this scar on me forehead and a stiffness at me elbow, and the Honourable as right as the sun, more luck to him! which he doesn't need at all, with the wind of fortune in his back and shiftin' neither to right nor left. --That woman! faith, y'd better not cut the words so sharp betune yer teeth, Pierre."

"But I will say more--a little--just the same. She nursed you--well, that is good; but it is good also, I think, you pay her for that, and stop the rest. Women are fools, or else they are worse. This one? She is worse. Yes; you will take my advice, Shon McGann." The Irishman came to his feet with a spring, and his words were angry.

"It doesn't come well from Pretty Pierre, the gambler, to be revilin' a woman; and I throw it in y'r face, though I've slept under the same blanket with ye, an' drunk out of the same cup on manny a tramp, that you lie dirty and black when ye spake ill--of my wife."

This conversation had occurred in a quiet corner of the bar-room of the Saints' Repose. The first few sentences had not been heard by the others present; but Shon's last speech, delivered in a ringing tone, drew the miners to their feet, in expectation of seeing shots exchanged at once. The code required satisfaction, immediate and decisive. Shon was not armed, and some one thrust a pistol towards him; but he did not take it. Pierre rose, and coming slowly to him, laid a slender finger on his chest, and said:

"So! I did not know that she was your wife. That is a surprise."

The miners nodded assent. He continued:

"Lucy Rives your wife! Hola, Shon McGann, that is such a joke."

"It's no joke, but God's truth, and the lie is with you, Pierre."

Murmurs of anticipation ran round the room; but the half-breed said: "There will be satisfaction altogether; but it is my whim to prove what I say first; then"--fondling his revolver--"then we shall settle. But, see: you will meet me here at ten o'clock to-night, and I will make it, I swear to you, so clear, that the woman is vile."

The Irishman suddenly clutched the gambler, shook him like a dog, and threw him against the farther wall. Pierre's pistol was levelled from the instant Shon moved; but he did not use it. He rose on one knee after the violent fall, and pointing it at the other's head, said coolly: "I could kill you, my friend, so easy! But it is not my whim. Till ten o'clock is not long to wait, and then, just here, one of us shall die. Is it not so?" The Irishman did not flinch before the pistol. He said with low fierceness, "At ten o'clock, or now, or any time, or at any place, y'll find me ready to break the back of the lies y've spoken, or be broken meself. Lucy Rives is my wife, and she's true and straight as the sun in the sky. I'll be here at ten o'clock, and as ye say, Pierre, one of us makes the long reckoning for this." And he opened the door and went out.

The half-breed moved to the bar, and, throwing down a handful of silver,

said: "It is good we drink after so much heat. Come on, come on, comrades."

The miners responded to the invitation. Their sympathy was mostly with Shon McGann; their admiration was about equally divided; for Pretty Pierre had the quality of courage in as active a degree as the Irishman, and they knew that some extraordinary motive, promising greater excitement, was behind the Frenchman's refusal to send a bullet through Shon's head a moment before.

King Kinkley, the best shot in the Valley next to Pierre, had watched the unusual development of the incident with interest; and when his glass had been filled he said, thoughtfully: "This thing isn't according to Hoyle. There's never been any trouble just like it in the Valley before. What's that McGann said about the lady being his wife? If it's the case, where hev we been in the show? Where was we when the license was around? It isn't good citizenship, and I hev my doubts."

Another miner, known as the Presbyterian, added: "There's some skulduggery in it, I guess. The lady has had as much protection as if she was the sister of every citizen of the place, just as much as Lady Jane here (Lady Jane, the daughter of the proprietor of the Saints' Repose, administered drinks), and she's played this stacked hand on us, has gone one better on the sly."

"Pierre," said King Kinkley, "you're on the track of the secret, and appear to hev the advantage of the lady: blaze it--blaze it out."

Pierre rejoined, "I know something; but it is good we wait until ten o'clock. Then I will show you all the cards in the pack. Yes, so, 'bien sur.'"

And though there was some grumbling, Pierre had his way. The spirit of adventure and mutual interest had thrown the French half-breed, the Irishman, and the Hon. Just Trafford together on the cold side of the Canadian Rockies; and they had journeyed to this other side, where the warm breath from the Pacific passed to its congealing in the ranges. They had come to the Pipi field when it was languishing. From the moment of their coming its luck changed; it became prosperous. They conquered the Valley each after his kind. The Honourable--he was always called that--mastered its resources by a series of "great lucks," as Pierre termed it, had achieved a fortune, and made no enemies; and but two months before the day whose incidents are here recorded, had gone to the coast on business. Shon had won the reputation of being a "white man," to say nothing of his victories in the region of gallantry. He made no wealth; he only got that he might spend. Irishman-like he would barter the chances of fortune for the lilt of a voice or the clatter of a pretty foot.

Pierre was different. "Women, ah, no!" he would say, "they make men fools or devils."

His temptation lay not that way. When the three first came to the Pipi, Pierre was a miner, simply; but nearly all his life he had been something else, as many a devastated pocket on the east of the Rockies could bear witness; and his new career was alien to his soul. Temptation grew greatly on him at the Pipi, and in the days before he yielded to it he might have been seen at midnight in his but playing solitaire. Why he abstained at first from practising his real profession is accounted for

in two ways: he had tasted some of the sweets of honest companionship with the Honourable and Shon, and then he had a memory of an ugly night at Pardon's Drive a year before, when he stood over his own brother's body, shot to death by accident in a gambling row having its origin with himself. These things had held him back for a time; but he was weaker than his ruling passion.

The Pipi was a young and comparatively virgin field; the quarry was at his hand. He did not love money for its own sake; it was the game that enthralled him. He would have played his life against the treasury of a kingdom, and, winning it with loaded double sixes, have handed back the spoil as an unredeemable national debt.

He fell at last, and in falling conquered the Pipi Valley; at the same time he was considered a fearless and liberal citizen, who could shoot as straight as he played well. He made an excursion to another field, however, at an opportune time, and it was during this interval that the accident to Shon and the Honourable had happened. He returned but a few hours before this quarrel with Shon occurred, and in the Saints' Repose, whither he had at once gone, he was told of the accident. While his informant related the incident and the romantic sequence of Shon's infatuation, the woman passed the tavern and was pointed out to Pierre. The half-breed had not much excitableness in his nature, but when he saw this beautiful woman with a touch of the Indian in her contour, his pale face flushed, and he showed his set teeth under his slight moustache. He watched her until she entered a shop, on the signboard of which was written--written since he had left a few months ago--Lucy Rives, Tobacconist.

Shon had then entered the Saints' Repose; and we know the rest. A couple of hours after this nervous episode, Pierre might have been seen standing in the shadow of the pines not far from the house at Ward's Mistake, where, he had been told, Lucy Rives lived with an old Indian woman. He stood, scarcely moving, and smoking cigarettes, until the door opened. Shon came out and walked down the hillside to the town. Then Pierre went to the door, and without knocking, opened it, and entered. A woman started up from a seat where she was sewing, and turned towards him. As she did so, the work, Shon's coat, dropped from her hands, her face paled, and her eyes grew big with fear. She leaned against a chair for support--this man's presence had weakened her so. She stood silent, save for a slight moan that broke from her lips, as Pierre lighted a cigarette coolly, and then said to an old Indian woman who sat upon the floor braiding a basket: "Get up, Ikni, and go away."

Ikni rose, came over, and peered into the face of the half-breed. Then she muttered: "I know you--I know you. The dead has come back again." She caught his arm with her bony fingers as if to satisfy herself that he was flesh and blood, and shaking her head dolefully, went from the room. When the door closed behind her there was silence, broken only by an exclamation from the man.

The other drew her hand across her eyes, and dropped it with a motion of despair. Then Pierre said, sharply: "Bien?"

"Francois," she replied, "you are alive!"

"Yes, I am alive, Lucy."

She shuddered, then grew still again and whispered: "Why did you let it

be thought that you were drowned? Why? Oh, why"? she moaned.

He raised his eyebrows slightly, and between the puffs of smoke, said:

"Ah yes, my Lucy, why? It was so long ago. Let me see: so--so--ten years. Ten years is a long time to remember, eh?"

He came towards her. She drew back; but her hand remained on the chair. He touched the plain gold ring on her finger, and said:

"You still wear it. To think of that--so loyal for a woman! How she remembers, holy Mother! . . . But shall I not kiss you, yes, just once after eight years--my wife?"

She breathed hard and drew back against the wall, dazed and frightened, and said:

"No, no, do not come near me; do not speak to me--ah, please, stand back, for a moment--please!"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and continued, with mock tenderness:

"To think that things come round so! And here you have a home. But that is good. I am tired of much travel and life all alone. The prodigal goes not to the home, the home comes to the prodigal." He stretched up his arms as if with a feeling of content.

"Do you--do you not know," she said, "that--that--"

He interrupted her:

"Do I not know, Lucy, that this is your home? Yes. But is it not all the same? I gave you a home ten years ago--to think, ten years ago! We quarrelled one night, and I left you. Next morning my boat was found below the White Cascade--yes, but that was so stale a trick! It was not worthy of Francois Rives. He would do it so much better now; but he was young then; just a boy, and foolish. Well, sit down, Lucy, it is a long story, and you have much to tell, how much--who knows?" She came slowly forward and said with a painful effort:

"You did a great wrong, Francois. You have killed me.

"Killed you, Lucy, my wife! Pardon! Never in those days did you look so charming as now--never. But the great surprise of seeing your husband, it has made you shy, quite shy. There will be much time now for you to change all that. It is quite pleasant to think on, Lucy. . . . You remember the song we used to sing on the Chaudiere at St. Antoine? See, I have not forgotten it--

"Nos amants sont en guerre,
Vole, mon coeur, vole."

He hummed the lines over and over, watching through his half-shut eyes the torture he was inflicting.

"Oh, Mother of God," she whispered, "have mercy! Can you not see, do you not know? I am not as you left me."

"Yes, my wife, you are just the same; not an hour older. I am glad that

you have come to me. But how they will envy Pretty Pierre!"

"Envy--Pretty-Pierre," she repeated, in distress; "are you Pretty Pierre? Ah, I might have known, I might have known!"

"Yes, and so! Is not Pretty Pierre as good a name as Francois Rives? Is it not as good as Shon McGann?"

"Oh, I see it all, I see it all now!" she said mournfully. "It was with you he quarrelled, and about me. He would not tell me what it was. You know, then, that I am--that I am married--to him?"

"Quite. I know all that; but it is no marriage." He rose to his feet slowly, dropping the cigarette from his lips as he did so. "Yes," he continued, "and I know that you prefer Shon McGann to Pretty Pierre."

She spread out her hands appealingly.

"But you are my wife, not his. Listen: do you know what I shall do? I will tell you in two hours. It is now eight o'clock. At ten o'clock Shon McGann will meet me at the Saints' Repose. Then you shall know.... Ah, it is a pity! Shon was my good friend, but this spoils all that. Wine--it has danger; cards--there is peril in that sport; women--they make trouble most of all."

"O God," she piteously said, "what did I do? There was no sin in me. I was your faithful wife, though you were cruel to me. You left me, cheated me, brought this upon me. It is you that has done this wickedness, not I." She buried her face in her hands, falling on her knees beside the chair.

He bent above her: "You loved the young avocat better, eight years ago."

She sprang to her feet. "Ah, now I understand," she said. "That was why you quarrelled with me; why you deserted me. You were not man enough to say what made you so much the--so wicked and hard, so--"

"Be thankful, Lucy, that I did not kill you then," he interjected.

"But it is a lie," she cried; "a lie!"

She went to the door and called the Indian woman. "Ikni," she said. "He dares to say evil of Andre and me. Think--of Andre!"

Ikni came to him, put her wrinkled face close to his, and said: "She was yours, only yours; but the spirits gave you a devil. Andre, oh, oh, Andre! The father of Andre was her father--ah, that makes your sulky eyes to open. Ikni knows how to speak. Ikni nursed them both. If you had waited you should have known. But you ran away like a wolf from a coal of fire; you shammed death like a fox; you come back like the snake to crawl into the house and strike with poison tooth, when you should be with the worms in the ground. But Ikni knows--you shall be struck with poison too, the Spirit of the Red Knife waits for you. Andre was her brother."

He pushed her aside savagely: "Be still!" he said. "Get out-quick. 'Sacre'--quick!"

When they were alone again he continued with no anger in his tone: "So,

Andre the avocat and you--that, eh? Well, you see how much trouble has come; and now this other--a secret too. When were you married to Shon McGann?"

"Last night," she bitterly replied; "a priest came over from the Indian village."

"Last night," he musingly repeated. "Last night I lost two thousand dollars at the Little Goshen field. I did not play well last night; I was nervous. In ten years I had not lost so much at one game as I did last night. It was a punishment for playing too honest, or something; eh, what do you think, Lucy--or something, 'hein?'"

She said nothing, but rocked her body to and fro.

"Why did you not make known the marriage with Shon?"

"He was to have told it to-night," she said.

There was silence for a moment, then a thought flashed into his eyes, and he rejoined with a jarring laugh, "Well, I will play a game to-night, Lucy Rives; such a game that Pretty Pierre will never be forgotten in the Pipi Valley--a beautiful game, just for two. And the other who will play--the wife of Francois Rives shall see if she will wait; but she must be patient, more patient than her husband was ten years ago."

"What will you do--tell me, what will you do?"

"I will play a game of cards--just one magnificent game; and the cards shall settle it. All shall be quite fair, as when you and I played in the little house by the Chaudiere--at first, Lucy,--before I was a devil."

Was this peculiar softness to his last tones assumed or real? She looked at him inquiringly; but he moved away to the window, and stood gazing down the hillside towards the town below. His eyes smarted.

"I will die," she said to herself in whispers--"I will die." A minute passed, and then Pierre turned and said to her: "Lucy, he is coming up the hill. Listen. If you tell him that I have seen you, I will shoot him on sight, dead. You would save him, for a little, for an hour or two--or more? Well, do as I say; for these things must be according to the rules of the game, and I myself will tell him all at the Saints' Repose. He gave me the lie there, and I will tell him the truth before them all there. Will you do as I say?"

She hesitated an instant, and then replied: "I will not tell him."

"There is only one way, then," he continued. "You must go at once from here into the woods behind there, and not see him at all. Then at ten o'clock you will come to the Saints' Repose, if you choose, to know how the game has ended."

She was trembling, moaning, no longer. A set look had come into her face; her eyes were steady and hard. She quietly replied: "Yes, I shall be there."

He came to her, took her hand, and drew from her finger the wedding-ring which last night Shon McGann had placed there. She submitted passively.

Then, with an upward wave of his fingers, he spoke in a mocking lightness, but without any of the malice which had first appeared in his tones, words from an old French song:

"I say no more, my lady
Mironton, Mironton, Mirontaine!
I say no more, my lady,
As nought more can be said."

He opened the door, motioned to the Indian woman, and, in a few moments, the broken-hearted Lucy Rives and her companion were hidden in the pines; and Pretty Pierre also disappeared into the shadow of the woods as Shon McGann appeared on the crest of the hill.

The Irishman walked slowly to the door, and pausing, said to himself: "I couldn't run the big risk, me darlin', without seein' you again, God help me! There's danger ahead which little I'd care for if it wasn't for you."

Then he stepped inside the house--the place was silent; he called, but no one answered; he threw open the doors of the rooms, but they were empty; he went outside and called again, but no reply came, except the flutter of a night-hawk's wings and the cry of a whippoorwill. He went back into the house and sat down with his head between his hands. So, for a moment, and then he raised his head, and said with a sad smile: "Faith, Shon, me boy, this takes the life out of you! the empty house where she ought to be, and the smile of her so swate, and the hand of her that falls on y'r shoulder like a dove on the blessed altar-gone, and lavin' a chill on y'r heart like a touch of the dead. Sure, nivir a wan of me saw any that could stand wid her for goodness, barrin' the angel that kissed me good-bye with one foot in the stirrup an' the troopers behind me, now twelve years gone, in ould Donegal, and that I'll niver see again, she lyin' where the hate of the world will vex the heart of her no more, and the masses gone up for her soul. Twice, twice in y'r life, Shon McGann, has the cup of God's joy been at y'r lips, and is it both times that it's to spill?--Pretty Pierre shoots straight and sudden, and maybe it's aisy to see the end of it; but as the just God is above us, I'll give him the lie in his throat betimes for the word he said agin me darlin'. What's the avil thing that he has to say? What's the divil's proof he would bring? And where is she now? Where are you, Lucy? I know the proof I've got in me heart that the wreck of the world couldn't shake, while that light, born of Heaven, swims up to your eyes whin you look at me!"

He rose to his feet again and walked to and fro; he went once more to the doors; he looked here and there through the growing dusk, but to no purpose. She had said that she would not go to her shop this night; but if not, then where could she have gone and Ikni, too? He felt there was more awry in his life than he cared to put into thought or speech. He picked up the sewing she had dropped and looked at it as one would regard a relic of the dead; he lifted her handkerchief, kissed it, and put it in his breast. He took a revolver from his pocket and examined it closely, looked round the room as though to fasten it in his memory, and then passed out, closing the door behind him. He walked down the hillside and went to her shop in the one street of the town, but she was not there, nor had the lad in charge seen her.

Meanwhile, Pretty Pierre had made his way to the Saints' Repose, and was sitting among the miners indolently smoking. In vain he was asked to

play cards. His one reply was, "No, pardon, no! I play one game only to-night, the biggest game ever played in Pipi Valley." In vain, also, was he asked to drink. He refused the hospitality, defying the danger that such lack of good-fellowship might bring forth. He hummed in patches to himself the words of a song that the 'brules' were wont to sing when they hunted the buffalo:

"Voila! it is the sport to ride--
Ah, ah the brave hunter!

To thrust the arrow in his hide,
To send the bullet through his side
'Ici,' the buffalo, 'joli!
Ah, ah the buffalo!"

He nodded here and there as men entered; but he did not stir from his seat. He smoked incessantly, and his eyes faced the door of the bar-room that entered upon the street. There was no doubt in the minds of any present that the promised excitement would occur. Shon McGann was as fearless as he was gay. And Pipi Valley remembered the day in which he had twice risked his life to save two women from a burning building--Lady Jane and another. And Lady Jane this evening was agitated, and once or twice furtively looked at something under the bar-counter; in fact, a close observer would have noticed anger or anxiety in the eyes of the daughter of Dick Waldron, the keeper of the Saints' Repose. Pierre would certainly have seen it had he been looking that way. An unusual influence was working upon the frequenters of the busy tavern. Planned, premeditated excitement was out of their line. Unexpectedness was the salt of their existence. This thing had an air of system not in accord with the suddenness of the Pipi mind. The half-breed was the only one entirely at his ease; he was languid and nonchalant; the long lashes of his half-shut eyelids gave his face a pensive look. At last King Kinkley walked over to him and said: "There's an almighty mysteriousness about this event which isn't joyful, Pretty Pierre. We want to see the muss cleared up, of course; we want Shon McGann to act like a high-toned citizen, and there's a general prejudice in favour of things bein' on the flat of your palm, as it were. Now this thing hangs fire, and there's a lack of animation about it, isn't there?"

To this, Pretty Pierre replied: "What can I do? This is not like other things; one had to wait; great things take time. To shoot is easy; but to shoot is not all, as you shall see if you have a little patience. Ah, my friend, where there is a woman, things are different. I throw a glass in your face, we shoot, someone dies, and there it is quite plain of reason; you play a card which was dealt just now, I call you--something, and the swiftest finger does the trick; but in such as this, one must wait for the sport."

It was at this point that Shon McGann entered, looked round, nodded to all, and then came forward to the table where Pretty Pierre sat. As the other took out his watch, Shon said firmly but quietly: "Pierre, I gave you the lie to-day concerning me wife, and I'm here, as I said I'd be, to stand by the word I passed then."

Pierre waved his fingers lightly towards the other, and slowly rose. Then he said in sharp tones: "Yes, Shon McGann, you gave me the lie. There is but one thing for that in Pipi Valley. You choked me; I would not take that from a saint of heaven; but there was another thing to do first. Well, I have done it; I said I would bring proofs--I have them."

He paused, and now there might have been seen a shining moisture on his forehead, and his words came menacingly from between his teeth, while the room became breathlessly still, save that in the silence a sleeping dog sighed heavily: "Shon McGann," he added, "you are living with my wife."

Twenty men drew in a sharp breath of excitement, and Shon came a step nearer the other, and said in a strange voice: "I--am--living--with--your--wife?"

"As I say, with my wife, Lucy Rives. Francois Rives was my name ten years ago. We quarrelled. I left her, and I never saw her again until to-night. You went to see her two hours ago. You did not find her. Why? She was gone because her husband, Pierre, told her to go. You want a proof? You shall have it. Here is the wedding-ring you gave her last night."

He handed it over, and Shon saw inside it his own name and hers.

"My God!" he said. "Did she know? Tell me she didn't know, Pierre?"

"No, she did not know. I have truth to speak to night. I was jealous, mad, and foolish, and I left her. My boat was found upset. They believed I was drowned. 'Bien,' she waited until yesterday, and then she took you--but she was my wife; she is my wife--and so you see!"

The Irishman was deadly pale.

"It's an avil heart y' had in y' then, Pretty Pierre, and it's an avil day that brought this thing to pass, and there's only wan way to the end of it."

"So, that is true. There is only one way," was the reply; "but what shall that way be? Someone must go: there must be no mistake. I have to propose. Here on this table we lay a revolver. We will give up these which we have in our pockets. Then we will play a game of euchre, and the winner of the game shall have the revolver. We will play for a life. That is fair, eh--that is fair"? he said to those around.

King Kinkley, speaking for the rest, replied: "That's about fair. It gives both a chance, and leaves only two when it's over. While the woman lives, one of you is naturally in the way. Pierre left her in a way that isn't handsome; but a wife's a wife, and though Shon was all in the glum about the thing, and though the woman isn't to be blamed either, there's one too many of you, and there's got to be a vacation for somebody. Isn't that so?"

The rest nodded assent. They had been so engaged that they did not see a woman enter the bar from behind, and crouch down beside Lady Jane, a woman whom the latter touched affectionately on the shoulder and whispered to once or twice, while she watched the preparations for the game.

The two men sat down, Shon facing the bar and Pierre with his back to it.

The game began, neither man showing a sign of nervousness, though Shon was very pale. The game was to finish for ten points. Men crowded about the tables silent but keenly excited; cigars were chewed instead of smoked, and liquor was left undrunk. At the first deal Pierre made a march, securing two. At the next Shon made a point, and at the next also

a march. The half-breed was playing a straight game. He could have stacked the cards, but he did not do so; deft as he was he might have cheated even the vigilant eyes about him, but it was not so; he played as squarely as a novice. At the third, at the fourth, deal he made a march; at the fifth, sixth, and seventh deals, Shon made a march, a point, and a march. Both now had eight points. At the next deal both got a point, and both stood at nine!

Now came the crucial play.

During the progress of the game nothing had been heard save the sound of a knuckle on the table, the flip flip of the pasteboard, or the rasp of a heel on the floor. There was a set smile on Shon's face--a forgotten smile, for the rest of the face was stern and tragic. Pierre smoked cigarettes, pausing, while his opponent was shuffling and dealing, to light them.

Behind the bar as the game proceeded the woman who knelt beside Lady Jane listened to every sound. Her eyes grew more agonised as the numbers, whispered to her by her companion, climbed to the fatal ten.

The last deal was Shon's; there was that much to his advantage. As he slowly dealt, the woman--Lucy Rives--rose to her feet behind Lady Jane. So absorbed were all that none saw her. Her eyes passed from Pierre to Shon, and stayed.

When the cards were dealt, with but one point for either to gain, and so win and save his life, there was a slight pause before the two took them up. They did not look at one another; but each glanced at the revolver, then at the men nearest them, and lastly, for an instant, at the cards themselves, with their pasteboard faces of life and death turned downward. As the players picked them up at last and spread them out fan-like, Lady Jane slipped something into the hand of Lucy Rives.

Those who stood behind Shon McGann stared with anxious astonishment at his hand; it contained only nine and ten spots. It was easy to see the direction of the sympathy of Pipi Valley. The Irishman's face turned a slight shade paler, but he did not tremble or appear disturbed.

Pierre played his biggest card and took the point. He coolly counted one, and said, "Game. I win." The crowd drew back. Both rose to their feet. In the painful silence the half-breed's hand was gently laid on the revolver. He lifted it, and paused slightly, his eyes fixed to the steady look in those of Shon McGann. He raised the revolver again, till it was level with Shon's forehead, till it was even with his hair! Then there was a shot, and someone fell--not Shon, but Pierre, saying, as they caught him, "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! From behind!"

Instantly there was another shot, and someone crashed against the bottles in the bar. The other factor in the game, the wife, had shot at Pierre, and then sent a bullet through her own lungs.

Shon stood for a moment as if he was turned to stone, and then his head dropped in his arms upon the table. He had seen both shots fired, but could not speak in time.

Pierre was severely but not dangerously wounded in the neck.

But the woman--? They brought her out from behind the counter. She

still breathed; but on her eyes was the film of coming death. She turned to where Shon sat. Her lips framed his name, but no voice came forth. Someone touched him on the shoulder. He looked up and caught her last glance. He came and stooped beside her; but she had died with that one glance from him, bringing a faint smile to her lips. And the smile stayed when the life of her had fled--fled through the cloud over her eyes, from the tide-beat of her pulse. It swept out from the smoke and reeking air into the open world, and beyond, into those untried paths where all must walk alone, and in what bitterness, known only to the Master of the World who sees these piteous things, and orders in what fashion distorted lives shall be made straight and wholesome in the Places of Readjustment.

Shon stood silent above the dead body.

One by one the miners went out quietly. Presently Pierre nodded towards the door, and King Kinkley and another lifted him and carried him towards it. Before they passed into the street he made them turn him so that he could see Shon. He waved his hand towards her that had been his wife, and said: "She should have shot but once and straight, Shon McGann, and then!--Eh, 'bien!'"

The door closed, and Shon McGann was left alone with the dead.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Irishmen have gifts for only two things--words and women
More idle than wicked
Reconciling the preacher and the sinner, as many another has

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 5.

ANTOINE AND ANGELIQUE
THE CIPHER
A TRAGEDY OF NOBODIES
A SANCTUARY OF THE PLAINS

ANTOINE AND ANGELIQUE

"The birds are going south, Antoine--see--and it is so early!"

"Yes, Angelique, the winter will be long."

There was a pause, and then: "Antoine, I heard a child cry in the night, and I could not sleep."

"It was a devil-bird, my wife; it flies slowly, and the summer is dead."

"Antoine, there was a rushing of wings by my bed before the morn was breaking."

"The wild-geese know their way in the night, Angelique; but they flew by the house and not near thy bed."

"The two black squirrels have gone from the hickory tree."

"They have hidden away with the bears in the earth; for the frost comes, and it is the time of sleep."

"A cold hand was knocking at my heart when I said my aves last night, my Antoine."

"The heart of a woman feels many strange things: I cannot answer, my wife."

"Let us go also southward, Antoine, before the great winds and the wild frost come."

"I love thee, Angelique, but I cannot go."

"Is not love greater than all?"

"To keep a pledge is greater."

"Yet if evil come?"

"There is the mine."

"None travels hither; who should find it?"

He said to me, my wife: 'Antoine, will you stay and watch the mine until I come with the birds northward, again?' and I said: 'I will stay, and Angelique will stay; I will watch the mine.'"

"This is for his riches, but for our peril, Antoine."

"Who can say whither a woman's fancy goes? It is full of guessing. It is clouds and darkness to-day, and sunshine--so much--to-morrow. I cannot answer."

"I have a fear; if my husband loved me--"

"There is the mine," he interrupted firmly.

"When my heart aches so--"

"Angelique, there is the mine."

"Ah, my Antoine!"

And so these two stayed on the island of St. Jean, in Lake Superior, through the purple haze of autumn, into the white brilliancy of winter, guarding the Rose Tree Mine, which Falding the Englishman and his companions had prospected and declared to be their Ophir.

But St. Jean was far from the ways of settlement, and there was little food and only one hut, and many things must be done for the Rose Tree Mine in the places where men sell their souls for money; and Antoine and Angelique, French peasants from the parish of Ste. Irene in Quebec, were left to guard the place of treasure, until, to the sound of the laughing spring, there should come many men and much machinery, and the sinking of shafts in the earth, and the making, of riches.

But when Antoine and Angelique were left alone in the waste, and God began to draw the pale coverlet of frost slowly across land and water, and to surround St. Jean with a stubborn moat of ice, the heart of the woman felt some coming danger, and at last broke forth in words of timid warning. When she once had spoken she said no more, but stayed and builded the heaps of earth about the house, and filled every crevice against the inhospitable Spirit of Winds, and drew her world closer and closer within those two rooms where they should live through many months.

The winter was harsh, but the hearts of the two were strong. They loved; and Love is the parent of endurance, the begetter of courage. And every day, because it seemed his duty, Antoine inspected the Rose Tree Mine; and every day also, because it seemed her duty, Angelique said many aves. And one prayer was much with her--for spring to come early that the child should not suffer: the child which the good God was to give to her and Antoine.

In the first hours of each evening Antoine smoked, and Angelique sang the old songs which their ancestors learned in Normandy. One night Antoine's face was lighted with a fine fire as he talked of happy days in the parish of Ste. Irene; and with that romantic fervour of his race which the stern winters of Canada could not kill, he sang, 'A la Claire Fontaine,' the well-beloved song-child of the 'voyageurs' hearts.

And the wife smiled far away into the dancing flames--far away, because the fire retreated, retreated to the little church where they two were wed; and she did as most good women do--though exactly why, man the insufficient cannot declare--she wept a little through her smiles. But when the last verse came, both smiles and tears ceased. Antoine sang it with a fond monotony:

"Would that each rose were growing
Upon the rose-tree gay,
And that the fatal rose-tree
Deep in the ocean lay.
'I ya longtemps que je t'aime
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

Angelique's heart grew suddenly heavy. From the rose-tree of the song her mind fled and shivered before the leafless rose-tree by the mine; and her old dread came back.

Of course this was foolish of Angelique; of course the wise and great throw contumely on all such superstition; and knowing women will smile at each other meaningly, and with pity for a dull man-writer, and will whisper, "Of course, the child." But many things, your majesties, are

hidden from your wisdom and your greatness, and are given to the simple
--to babes, and the mothers of babes.

It was upon this very night that Falding the Englishman sat with other men in a London tavern, talking joyously. "There's been the luck of Heaven," he said, "in the whole exploit. We'd been prospecting for months. As a sort of try in a back-water we rowed over one night to an island and pitched tents. Not a dozen yards from where we camped was a rose-tree--think of it, Belgard, a rose-tree on a rag-tag island of Lake Superior! 'There's luck in odd numbers, says Rory O'More.' 'There's luck here,' said I; and at it we went just beside the rose-tree. What's the result? Look at that prospectus: a company with a capital of two hundred thousand; the whole island in our hands in a week; and Antoine squatting on it now like Bonaparte on Elbe."

"And what does Antoine get out of this"? said Belgard.

"Forty dollars a month and his keep."

"Why not write him off twenty shares to propitiate the gods--gifts unto the needy, eh!--a thousand-fold--what?"

"Yes; it might be done, Belgard, if--"

But someone just then proposed the toast, "The Rose Tree Mine!" and the souls of these men waxed proud and merry, for they had seen the investor's palm filled with gold, the maker of conquest. While Antoine was singing with his wife, they were holding revel within the sound of Bow Bells. And far into the night, through silent Cheapside, a rolling voice swelled through much laughter thus:

"Gai lon la, gai le rosier,
Du joli mois de Mai."

The next day there were heavy heads in London; but the next day, also, a man lay ill in the hut on the island of St. Jean.

Antoine had sung his last song. He had waked in the night with a start of pain, and by the time the sun was halting at noon above the Rose Tree Mine, he had begun a journey, the record of which no man has ever truly told, neither its beginning nor its end; because that which is of the spirit refuseth to be interpreted by the flesh. Some signs there be, but they are brief and shadowy; the awe of It is hidden in the mind of him that goeth out lonely unto God.

When the call goes forth, not wife nor child nor any other can hold the wayfarer back, though he may loiter for an instant on the brink. The poor medicaments which Angelique brings avail not; these soothing hands and healing tones, they pass through clouds of the middle place between heaven and earth to Antoine. It is only when the second midnight comes that, with conscious, but pensive and far-off, eyes, he says to her: "Angelique, my wife."

For reply her lips pressed his cheek, and her fingers hungered for his neck. Then: "Is there pain now Antoine?"

"There is no pain, Angelique."

He closed his eyes slowly; her lips framed an ave. "The mine," he said,

"the mine--until the spring."

"Yes, Antoine, until the spring."

"Have you candles--many candles, Angelique?"

"There are many, my husband."

"The ground is as iron; one cannot dig, and the water under the ice is cruel--is it not so, Angelique?"

"No axe could break the ground, and the water is cruel," she said.

"You will see my face until the winter is gone, my wife."

She bowed her head, but smoothed his hand meanwhile, and her throat was quivering.

He partly slept--his body slept, though his mind was feeling its way to wonderful things. But near the morning his eyes opened wide, and he said: "Someone calls out of the dark, Angelique."

And she, with her hand on her heart, replied: "It is the cry of a dog, Antoine."

"But there are footsteps at the door, my wife."

"Nay, Antoine; it is the snow beating upon the window."

"There is the sound of wings close by--dost thou not hear them, Angelique?"

"Wings--wings," she falteringly said: "it is the hot blast through the chimney; the night is cold, Antoine."

"The night is very cold," he said; and he trembled. . . "I hear, O my wife, I hear the voice of a little child . . . the voice is like thine, Angelique."

And she, not knowing what to reply, said softly:

"There is hope in the voice of a child;" and the mother stirred within her; and in the moment he knew also that the Spirits would give her the child in safety, that she should not be alone in the long winter.

The sounds of the harsh night had ceased--the snapping of the leafless branches, the cracking of the earth, and the heaving of the rocks: the Spirits of the Frost had finished their work; and just as the grey forehead of dawn appeared beyond the cold hills, Antoine cried out gently: "Angelique . . . Ah, mon Capitaine . . . Jesu" . . . and then, no more.

Night after night Angelique lighted candles in the place where Antoine smiled on in his frozen silence; and masses were said for his soul--the masses Love murmurs for its dead. The earth could not receive him; its bosom was adamant; but no decay could touch him; and she dwelt alone with this, that was her husband, until one beautiful, bitter day, when, with no eye save God's to see her, and no human comfort by her, she gave birth to a man-child. And yet that night she lighted the candles at the dead

man's head and feet, dragging herself thither in the cold; and in her heart she said that the smile on Antoine's face was deeper than it had been before.

In the early spring, when the earth painfully breathed away the frost that choked it, with her child for mourner, and herself for sexton and priest, she buried Antoine with maimed rites: but hers were the prayers of the poor, and of the pure in heart; and she did not fret because, in the hour that her comrade was put away into the dark, the world was laughing at the thought of coming summer.

Before another sunrise, the owners of the island of St. Jean claimed what was theirs; and because that which had happened worked upon their hearts, they called the child St. Jean, and from that time forth they made him to enjoy the goodly fruits of the Rose Tree Mine.

THE CIPHER

Hilton was staying his horse by a spring at Guidon Hill when he first saw her. She was gathering may-apples; her apron was full of them. He noticed that she did not stir until he rode almost upon her. Then she started, first without looking round, as does an animal, dropping her head slightly to one side, though not exactly appearing to listen. Suddenly she wheeled on him, and her big eyes captured him. The look bewildered him. She was a creature of singular fascination. Her face was expressive. Her eyes had wonderful light. She looked happy, yet grave withal; it was the gravity of an uncommon earnestness. She gazed through everything, and beyond. She was young--eighteen or so.

Hilton raised his hat, and courteously called a good-morning at her. She did not reply by any word, but nodded quaintly, and blinked seriously and yet blithely on him. He was preparing to dismount. As he did so he paused, astonished that she did not speak at all. Her face did not have a familiar language; its vocabulary was its own. He slid from his horse, and, throwing his arm over its neck as it stooped to the spring, looked at her more intently, but respectfully too. She did not yet stir, but there came into her face a slight inflection of confusion or perplexity. Again he raised his hat to her, and, smiling, wished her a good-morning. Even as he did so a thought sprung in him. Understanding gave place to wonder; he interpreted the unusual look in her face.

Instantly he made a sign to her. To that her face responded with a wonderful speech--of relief and recognition. The corners of her apron dropped from her fingers, and the yellow may-apples fell about her feet. She did not notice this. She answered his sign with another, rapid, graceful, and meaning. He left his horse and advanced to her, holding out his hand simply--for he was a simple and honest man. Her response to this was spontaneous. The warmth of her fingers invaded him. Her eyes were full of questioning. He gave a hearty sign of admiration. She flushed with pleasure, but made a naive, protesting gesture.

She was deaf and dumb.

Hilton had once a sister who was a mute. He knew that amazing primal gesture-language of the silent race, whom God has sent like one-winged

birds into the world. He had watched in his sister just such looks of absolute nature as flashed from this girl. They were comrades on the instant; he reverential, gentle, protective; she sanguine, candid, beautifully aboriginal in the freshness of her cipher-thoughts. She saw the world naked, with a naked eye. She was utterly natural. She was the maker of exquisite, vital gesture-speech.

She glided out from among the may-apples and the long, silken grass, to charm his horse with her hand. As she started to do so, he hastened to prevent her, but, utterly surprised, he saw the horse whinny to her cheek, and arch his neck under her white palm--it was very white. Then the animal's chin sought her shoulder and stayed placid. He had never done so to anyone before save Hilton. Once, indeed, he had kicked a stableman to death. He lifted his head and caught with playful shaking lips at her ear. Hilton smiled; and so, as we said, their comradeship began.

He was a new officer of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Guidon. She was the daughter of a ranchman. She had been educated by Father Corrairie, the Jesuit missionary, Protestant though she was. He had learned the sign-language while assistant-priest in a Parisian chapel for mutes. He taught her this gesture-tongue, which she, taking, rendered divine; and, with this, she learned to read and write.

Her name was Ida.

Ida was faultless. Hilton was not; but no man is. To her, however, he was the best that man can be. He was unselfish and altogether honest, and that is much for a man.

When Pierre came to know of their friendship he shook his head doubtfully. One day he was sitting on the hot side of a pine near his mountain hut, soaking in the sun. He saw them passing below him, along the edge of the hill across the ravine. He said to someone behind him in the shade, who was looking also, "What will be the end of that, eh?"

And the someone replied: "Faith, what the Serpent in the Wilderness couldn't cure."

"You think he'll play with her?"

"I think he'll do it without wishin' or willin', maybe. It'll be a case of kiss and ride away."

There was silence. Soon Pierre pointed down again. She stood upon a green mound with a cool hedge of rock behind her, her feet on the margin of solid sunlight, her forehead bared. Her hair sprinkled round her as she gently threw back her head. Her face was full on Hilton. She was telling him something. Her gestures were rhythmical, and admirably balanced. Because they were continuous or only regularly broken, it was clear she was telling him a story. Hilton gravely, delightedly, nodded response now and then, or raised his eyebrows in fascinated surprise. Pierre, watching, was only aware of vague impressions--not any distinct outline of the tale. At last he guessed it as a perfect pastoral--birds, reaping, deer, winds, sundials, cattle, shepherds, hunting. To Hilton it was a new revelation. She was telling him things she had thought, she was recalling her life.

Towards the last, she said in gesture: "You can forget the winter, but

not the spring. You like to remember the spring. It is the beginning. When the daisy first peeps, when the tall young deer first stands upon its feet, when the first egg is seen in the oriole's nest, when the sap first sweats from the tree, when you first look into the eye of your friend--these you want to remember. . . ."

She paused upon this gesture--a light touch upon the forehead, then the hands stretched out, palms upward, with coaxing fingers. She seemed lost in it. Her eyes rippled, her lips pressed slightly, a delicate wine crept through her cheek, and tenderness wimpled all. Her soft breast rose modestly to the cool texture of her dress. Hilton felt his blood bound joyfully; he had the wish of instant possession. But yet he could not stir, she held him so; for a change immediately passed upon her. She glided slowly from that almost statue-like repose into another gesture. Her eyes drew up from his, and looked away to plumbless distance, all glowing and childlike, and the new ciphers slowly said:

"But the spring dies away. We can only see a thing born once. And it may be ours, yet not ours. I have sighted the perfect Sharon-flower, far up on Guidon, yet it was not mine; it was too distant; I could not reach it. I have seen the silver bullfinch floating along the canon. I called to it, and it came singing; and it was mine, yet I could not hear its song, and I let it go; it could not be happy so with me. . . . I stand at the gate of a great city, and see all, and feel the great shuttles of sounds, the roar and clack of wheels, the horses' hoofs striking the ground, the hammer of bells; all: and yet it is not mine; it is far, far away from me. It is one world, mine is another; and sometimes it is lonely, and the best things are not for me. But I have seen them, and it is pleasant to remember, and nothing can take from us the hour when things were born, when we saw the spring--nothing--never!"

Her manner of speech, as this went on, became exquisite in fineness, slower, and more dream-like, until, with downward protesting motions of the hand, she said that "nothing--never!" Then a great sigh surged up her throat, her lips parted slightly, showing the warm moist whiteness of her teeth, her hands falling lightly, drew together and folded in front of her. She stood still.

Pierre had watched this scene intently, his chin in his hands, his elbows on his knees. Presently he drew himself up, ran a finger meditatively along his lip, and said to himself: "It is perfect. She is carved from the core of nature. But this thing has danger for her. . . . 'bien!' . . . ah!"

A change in the scene before him caused this last expression of surprise.

Hilton, rousing from the enchanting pantomime, took a step towards her; but she raised her hand pleadingly, restrainingly, and he paused. With his eyes he asked her mutely why. She did not answer, but, all at once transformed into a thing of abundant sprightliness, ran down the hillside, tossing up her arms gaily. Yet her face was not all brilliance. Tears hung at her eyes. But Hilton did not see these. He did not run, but walked quickly, following her; and his face had a determined look. Immediately, a man rose up from behind a rock on the same side of the ravine, and shook clenched fists after the departing figures; then stood gesticulating angrily to himself, until, chancing to look up, he sighted Pierre, and straightway dived into the underbrush. Pierre rose to his feet, and said slowly: "Hilton, here may be trouble for you also. It is a tangled world."

Towards evening Pierre sauntered to the house of Ida's father. Light of footstep, he came upon the girl suddenly. They had always been friends since the day when, at uncommon risk, he rescued her dog from a freshet on the Wild Moose River. She was sitting utterly still, her hands folded in her lap. He struck his foot smartly on the ground. She felt the vibration, and looked up. He doffed his hat, and she held out her hand. He smiled and took it, and, as it lay in his, looked at it for a moment musingly. She drew it back slowly. He was then thinking that it was the most intelligent hand he had ever seen. . . . He determined to play a bold and surprising game. He had learned from her the alphabet of the fingers--that is, how to spell words. He knew little gesture-language. He, therefore, spelled slowly: "Hawley is angry, because you love Hilton." The statement was so matter-of-fact, so sudden, that the girl had no chance. She flushed and then paled. She shook her head firmly, however, and her fingers slowly framed the reply: "You guess too much. Foolish things come to the idle."

"I saw you this afternoon," he silently urged.

Her fingers trembled slightly. "There was nothing to see." She knew he could not have read her gestures. "I was telling a story."

"You ran from him--why?" His questioning was cruel that he might in the end be kind.

"The child runs from its shadow, the bird from its nest, the fish jumps from the water--that is nothing." She had recovered somewhat.

But he: "The shadow follows the child, the bird comes back to its nest, the fish cannot live beyond the water. But it is sad when the child, in running, rushes into darkness, and loses its shadow; when the nest falls from the tree; and the hawk catches the happy fish. . . . Hawley saw you also."

Hawley, like Ida, was deaf and dumb. He lived over the mountains, but came often. It had been understood that, one day, she should marry him. It seemed fitting. She had said neither yes nor no. And now?

A quick tremor of trouble trailed over her face, then it became very still. Her eyes were bent upon the ground steadily. Presently a bird hopped near, its head coquetting at her. She ran her hand gently along the grass towards it. The bird tripped on it. She lifted it to her chin, at which it pecked tenderly. Pierre watched her keenly--admiring, pitying. He wished to serve her. At last, with a kiss upon its head, she gave it a light toss into the air, and it soared, lark-like, straight up, and hanging over her head, sang the day into the evening. Her eyes followed it. She could feel that it was singing. She smiled and lifted a finger lightly towards it. Then she spelled to Pierre this: "It is singing to me. We imperfect things love each other."

"And what about loving Hawley, then?" Pierre persisted. She did not reply, but a strange look came upon her, and in the pause Hilton came from the house and stood beside them. At this, Pierre lighted a cigarette, and with a good-natured nod to Hilton, walked away.

Hilton stooped over her, pale and eager. "Ida," he gestured, "will you answer me now? Will you be my wife?"

She drew herself together with a little shiver. "No," was her steady reply. She ruled her face into stillness, so that it showed nothing of what she felt. She came to her feet wearily, and drawing down a cool flowering branch of chestnut, pressed it to her cheek. "You do not love me"? he asked nervously.

"I am going to marry Luke Hawley," was her slow answer. She spelled the words. She used no gesture to that. The fact looked terribly hard and inflexible so. Hilton was not a vain man, and he believed he was not loved. His heart crowded to his throat.

"Please go away, now," she begged with an anxious gesture. While the hand was extended, he reached and brought it to his lips, then quickly kissed her on the forehead, and walked away. She stood trembling, and as the fingers of one hand hung at her side, they spelled mechanically these words: "It would spoil his life. I am only a mute--a dummy!"

As she stood so, she felt the approach of someone. She did not turn instantly, but with the aboriginal instinct, listened, as it were, with her body; but presently faced about--to Hawley. He was red with anger. He had seen Hilton kiss her. He caught her smartly by the arm, but, awed by the great calmness of her face, dropped it, and fell into a fit of sullenness. She spoke to him: he did not reply. She touched his arm: he still was gloomy. All at once the full price of her sacrifice rushed upon her; and overpowered her. She had no help at her critical hour, not even from this man she had intended to bless. There came a swift revulsion, all passions stormed in her at once. Despair was the resultant of these forces. She swerved from him immediately, and ran hard towards the high-banked river!

Hawley did not follow her at once: he did not guess her purpose. She had almost reached the leaping-place, when Pierre shot from the trees, and seized her. The impulse of this was so strong, that they slipped, and quivered on the precipitous edge: but Pierre righted then, and presently they were safe.

Pierre held her hard by both wrists for a moment. Then, drawing her away, he loosed her, and spelled these words slowly: "I understand. But you are wrong. Hawley is not the man. You must come with me. It is foolish to die."

The riot of her feelings, her momentary despair, were gone. It was even pleasant to be mastered by Pierre's firmness. She was passive. Mechanically she went with him. Hawley approached. She looked at Pierre. Then she turned on the other. "Yours is not the best love," she signed to him; "it does not trust; it is selfish." And she moved on.

But, an hour later, Hilton caught her to his bosom, and kissed her full on the lips. . . . And his right to do so continues to this day.

A TRAGEDY OF NOBODIES

At Fort Latrobe sentiment was not of the most refined kind. Local customs were pronounced and crude in outline; language was often highly

coloured, and action was occasionally accentuated by a pistol shot. For the first few months of its life the place was honoured by the presence of neither wife, nor sister, nor mother. Yet women lived there.

When some men did bring wives and children, it was noticed that the girl Blanche was seldom seen in the streets. And, however it was, there grew among the men a faint respect for her. They did not talk of it to each other, but it existed. It was known that Blanche resented even the most casual notice from those men who had wives and homes. She gave the impression that she had a remnant of conscience.

"Go home," she said to Harry Delong, who asked her to drink with him on New Year's Day. "Go home, and thank God that you've got a home--and a wife."

After Jacques, the long-time friend of Pretty Pierre, came to Fort Latrobe, with his sulky eye and scrupulously neat attire, Blanche appeared to withdraw still more from public gaze, though no one saw any connection between these events. The girl also became fastidious in her dress, and lost all her former dash and smart aggression of manner. She shrank from the women of her class, for which, as might be expected, she was duly reviled. But the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, nor has it been written that a woman may not close her ears, and bury herself in darkness, and travel alone in the desert with her people--those ghosts of herself, whose name is legion, and whose slow white fingers mock more than the world dare at its worst.

Suddenly, she was found behind the bar of Weir's Tavern at Cedar Point, the resort most frequented by Jacques. Word went about among the men that Blanche was taking a turn at religion, or, otherwise, reformation. Soldier Joe was something sceptical on this point from the fact that she had developed a very uncertain temper. This appeared especially noticeable in her treatment of Jacques. She made him the target for her sharpest sarcasm. Though a peculiar glow came to his eyes at times, he was never roused from his exasperating coolness. When her shafts were unusually direct and biting, and the temptation to resent was keen, he merely shrugged his shoulders, almost gently, and said: "Eh, such women!"

Nevertheless, there were men at Fort Latrobe who prophesied trouble, for they knew there was a deep strain of malice in the French half-breed which could be the more deadly because of its rare use. He was not easily moved, he viewed life from the heights of a philosophy which could separate the petty from the prodigious. His reputation was not wholly disquieting; he was of the goats, he had sometimes been found with the sheep, he preferred to be numbered with the transgressors. Like Pierre, his one passion was gambling. There were legends that once or twice in his life he had had another passion, but that some Gorgon drew out his heartstrings painfully, one by one, and left him inhabited by a pale spirit now called Irony, now Indifference--under either name a fret and an anger to women.

At last Blanche's attacks on Jacques called out anxious protests from men like rollicking Soldier Joe, who said to her one night, "Blanche, there's a devil in Jacques. Some day you'll startle him, and then he'll shoot you as cool as he empties the pockets of Freddy Tarlton over there."

And Blanche replied: "When he does that, what will you do, Joe?"

"Do? Do?" The man stroked his beard softly. "Why, give him ditto-- cold."

"Well, then, there's nothing to row about, is there?" And Soldier Joe was not on the instant clever enough to answer her sophistry; but when she left him and he had thought awhile, he said, convincingly:

"But where would you be then, Blanche? . . . That's the point."

One thing was known and certain: Blanche was earning her living by honest, if not high-class, labour. Weir the tavern-keeper said she was "worth hundreds" to him. But she grew pale, her eyes became peculiarly brilliant, her voice took a lower key, and lost a kind of hoarseness it had in the past. Men came in at times merely to have a joke at her expense, having heard of her new life; but they failed to enjoy their own attempts at humour. Women of her class came also, some with half-uncertain jibes, some with a curious wistfulness, and a few with scornful oaths; but the jibes and oaths were only for a time. It became known that she had paid the coach fare of Miss Dido (as she was called) to the hospital at Wapiti, and had raised a subscription for her maintenance there, heading it herself with a liberal sum. Then the atmosphere round her became less trying; yet her temper remained changeable, and had it not been that she was good-looking and witty, her position might have been insecure. As it was, she ruled in a neutral territory where she was the only woman. One night, after an inclement remark to Jacques, in the card-room, Blanche came back to the bar, and not noticing that, while she was gone, Soldier Joe had entered and laid himself down on a bench in a corner, she threw her head passionately forward on her arms as they rested on the counter, and cried: "O my God! my God!"

Soldier Joe lay still as if sleeping, and when Blanche was called away again he rose, stole out, went down to Freddy Tarlton's office, and offered to bet Freddy two to one that Blanche wouldn't live a year. Joe's experience of women was limited. He had in his mind the case of a girl who had accidentally smothered her child; and so he said:

"Blanche has something on her mind that's killing her, Freddy. When trouble fixes on her sort it kills swift and sure. They've nothing to live for but life, and it isn't good enough, you see, for--for--"
Joe paused to find out where his philosophy was taking him.

Freddy Tarlton finished the sentence for him: "For an inner sorrow is a consuming fire."

Fort Latrobe soon had an unexpected opportunity to study Soldier Joe's theory. One night Jacques did not appear at Weir's Tavern as he had engaged to do, and Soldier Joe and another went across the frozen river to his log-hut to seek him. They found him by a handful of fire, breathing heavily and nearly unconscious. One of the sudden and frequently fatal colds of the mountains had fastened on him, and he had begun a war for life. Joe started back at once for liquor and a doctor, leaving his comrade to watch by the sick man.

He could not understand why Blanche should stagger and grow white when he told her; nor why she insisted on taking the liquor herself. He did not yet guess the truth.

The next day all Fort Latrobe knew that Blanche was nursing Jacques, on what was thought to be his no-return journey. The doctor said it was a

dangerous case, and he held out little hope. Nursing might bring him through, but the chance was very slight. Blanche only occasionally left the sick man's bedside to be relieved by Soldier Joe and Freddy Tarlton. It dawned on Joe at last, it had dawned on Freddy before, what Blanche meant by the heart-breaking words uttered that night in Weir's Tavern. Down through the crust of this woman's heart had gone something both joyful and painful. Whatever it was, it made Blanche a saving nurse, a good apothecary; for, one night the doctor pronounced Jacques out of danger, and said that a few days would bring him round if he was careful.

Now, for the first time, Jacques fully comprehended all Blanche had done for him, though he had ceased to wonder at her changed attitude to him. Through his suffering and his delirium had come the understanding of it. When, after the crisis, the doctor turned away from the bed, Jacques looked steadily into Blanche's eyes, and she flushed, and wiped the wet from his brow with her handkerchief. He took the handkerchief from her fingers gently before Soldier Joe came over to the bed.

The doctor had insisted that Blanche should go to Weir's Tavern and get the night's rest, needed so much, and Joe now pressed her to keep her promise. Jacques added an urging word, and after a time she started. Joe had forgotten to tell her that a new road had been made on the ice since she had crossed, and that the old road was dangerous. Wandering with her thoughts she did not notice the spruce bushes set up for signal, until she had stepped on a thin piece of ice. It bent beneath her. She slipped: there was a sudden sinking, a sharp cry, then another, piercing and hopeless--and it was the one word--"Jacques!" Then the night was silent as before. But someone had heard the cry. Freddy Tarlton was crossing the ice also, and that desolating Jacques! had reached his ears. When he found her he saw that she had been taken and the other left. But that other, asleep in his bed at the sacred moment when she parted, suddenly waked, and said to Soldier Joe: "Did you speak, Joe? Did you call me?"

But Joe, who had been playing cards with himself, replied, "I haven't said a word."

And Jacques then added: "Perhaps I dream--perhaps."

On the advice of the doctor and Freddy Tarlton, the bad news was kept from Jacques. When she did not come the next day, Joe told him that she couldn't; that he ought to remember she had had no rest for weeks, and had earned a long rest. And Jacques said that was so.

Weir began preparations for the funeral, but Freddy Tarlton took them out of his hands--Freddy Tarlton, who visited at the homes of Fort Latrobe. But he had the strength of his convictions such as they were. He began by riding thirty miles and back to ask the young clergyman at Purple Hill to come and bury Blanche. She'd reformed and been baptised, Freddy said with a sad sort of humour. And the clergyman, when he knew all, said that he would come. Freddy was hardly prepared for what occurred when he got back. Men were waiting for him, anxious to know if the clergyman was coming. They had raised a subscription to cover the cost of the funeral, and among them were men such as Harry Delong.

"You fellows had better not mix yourselves up in this," said Freddy.

But Harry Delong replied quickly: "I am going to see the thing through."

And the others endorsed his words. When the clergyman came, and looked at the face of this Magdalene, he was struck by its comeliness and quiet. All else seemed to have been washed away. On her breast lay a knot of white roses--white roses in this winter desert.

One man present, seeing the look of wonder in the clergyman's eyes, said quietly: "My--my wife sent them. She brought the plant from Quebec. It has just bloomed. She knows all about her."

That man was Harry Delong. The keeper of his home understood the other homeless woman. When she knew of Blanche's death she said: "Poor girl, poor girl!" and then she had gently added, "Poor Jacques!"

And Jacques, as he sat in a chair by the fire four days after the tragedy, did not know that the clergyman was reading over a grave on the hillside, words which are for the hearts of the quick as for the untenanted dead.

To Jacques's inquiries after Blanche, Soldier Joe had made changing and vague replies. At last he said that she was ill; then, that she was very ill, and again, that she was better, almighty better--now. The third day following the funeral, Jacques insisted that he would go and see her. The doctor at length decided he should be taken to Weir's Tavern, where, they declared, they would tell him all. And they took him, and placed him by the fire in the card-room, a wasted figure, but fastidious in manner and scrupulously neat in person as of old. Then he asked for Blanche; but even now they had not the courage for it. The doctor nervously went out, as if to seek her; and Freddy Tarlton said, "Jacques, let us have a little game, just for quarters, you know. Eh?"

The other replied without eagerness: "Voila, one game, then!"

They drew him to the table, but he played listlessly. His eyes shifted ever to the door. Luck was against him. Finally he pushed over a silver piece, and said: "The last. My money is all gone. 'Bien!'" He lost that too.

Just then the door opened, and a ranchman from Purple Hill entered. He looked carelessly round, and then said loudly:

"Say, Joe, so you've buried Blanche, have you? Poor old girl!"

There was a heavy silence. No one replied. Jacques started to his feet, gazed around searchingly, painfully, and presently gave a great gasp. His hands made a chafing motion in the air, and then blood showed on his lips and chin. He drew a handkerchief from his breast.

"Pardon! . . . Pardon!" he faintly cried in apology, and put it to his mouth.

Then he fell backwards in the arms of Soldier Joe, who wiped a moisture from the lifeless cheek as he laid the body on a bed.

In a corner of the stained handkerchief they found the word,

Blanche.

A SANCTUARY OF THE PLAINS

Father Corraine stood with his chin in his hand and one arm supporting the other, thinking deeply. His eyes were fixed on the northern horizon, along which the sun was casting oblique rays; for it was the beginning of the winter season.

Where the prairie touched the sun it was responsive and radiant; but on either side of this red and golden tapestry there was a tawny glow and then a duskiness which, curving round to the north and east, became blue and cold--an impalpable but perceptible barrier rising from the earth, and shutting in Father Corraine like a prison wall. And this shadow crept stealthily on and invaded the whole circle, until, where the radiance had been, there was one continuous wall of gloom, rising as upon a rise to invasion of the zenith, and pierced only by some intrusive wandering stars.

And still the priest stood there looking, until the darkness closed down on him with an almost tangible consistency. Then he appeared to remember himself, and turned away with a gentle remonstrance of his head, and entered the hut behind him. He lighted a lamp, looked at it doubtfully, blew it out, set it aside, and lighted a candle. This he set in the one window of the room which faced the north and west.

He went to a door opening into the only other room in the hut, and with his hand on the latch looked thoughtfully and sorrowfully at something in the corner of the room where he stood. He was evidently debating upon some matter,--probably the removal of what was in the corner to the other room. If so, he finally decided to abandon the intention. He sat down in a chair, faced the candle, again dropped his chin upon his hand, and kept his eyes musingly on the light. He was silent and motionless a long time, then his lips moved, and he seemed to repeat something to himself in whispers.

Presently he took a well-worn book from his pocket, and read aloud from it softly what seemed to be an office of his Church. His voice grew slightly louder as he continued, until, suddenly, there ran through the words a deep sigh which did not come from himself. He raised his head quickly, started to his feet, and turning round, looked at that something in the corner. It took the form of a human figure, which raised itself on an elbow and said: "Water--water--for the love of God!"

Father Corraine stood painfully staring at the figure for a moment, and then the words broke from him "Not dead--not dead--wonderful!" Then he stepped quickly to a table, took therefrom a pannikin of water, and kneeling, held it to the lips of the gasping figure of a woman, throwing his arm round the shoulder, and supporting the head on his breast. Again he spoke "Alive--alive! Blessed be Heaven!"

The hands of the woman seized the hand of the priest, which held the pannikin, and kissed it, saying faintly: "You are good to me. . . . But I must sleep--I must sleep--I am so tired; and I've--very far--to go --across the world."

This was said very slowly, then the head thick with brown curls dropped again on the priest's breast, heavy with sleep. Father Corraine,

flushing slightly at first, became now slightly pale, and his brow was a place of war between thankfulness and perplexity. But he said something prayerfully, then closed his lips firmly, and gently laid the figure down, where it was immediately clothed about with slumber. Then he rose, and standing with his eyes bent upon the sleeper and his fingers clasping each other tightly before him, said: "Poor girl! So, she is alive. And now what will come of it?"

He shook his grey head in doubt, and immediately began to prepare some simple food and refreshment for the sufferer when she should awake. In the midst of doing so he paused and repeated the words, "And what will come of it?" Then he added: "There was no sign of pulse nor heart-beat when I found her. But life hides itself where man cannot reach it."

Having finished his task, he sat down, drew the book of holy offices again from his bosom, and read it, whisperingly, for a time; then fell to musing, and, after a considerable time, knelt down as if in prayer. While he knelt, the girl, as if startled from her sleep by some inner shock, opened her eyes wide and looked at him, first with bewilderment, then with anxiety, then with wistful thankfulness. "Oh, I thought-- I thought when I awoke before that it was a woman. But it is the good Father Corraine--Corraine, yes, that was the name."

The priest's clean-shaven face, long hair, and black cassock had, in her first moments of consciousness, deceived her. Now a sharp pain brought a moan to her lips; and this drew the priest's attention. He rose, and brought her some food and drink. "My daughter," he said, "you must take these." Something in her face touched his sensitive mind, and he said, solemnly: "You are alone with me and God, this hour. Be at peace. Eat."

Her eyes swam with instant tears. "I know--I am alone--with God," she said. Again he gently urged the food upon her, and she took a little; but now and then she put her hand to her side as if in pain. And once, as she did so, she said: "I've far to go and the pain is bad. Did they take him away?"

Father Corraine shook his head. "I do not know of whom you speak," he replied. "When I went to my door this morning I found you lying there. I brought you in, and, finding no sign of life in you, sent Featherfoot, my Indian, to Fort Cypress for a trooper to come; for I feared that there had been ill done to you, somehow. This border-side is but a rough country. It is not always safe for a woman to travel alone."

The girl shuddered. "Father," she said "Father Corraine, I believe you are?" (Here the priest bowed his head.) "I wish to tell you all, so that if ever any evil did come to me, if I should die without doin' what's in my heart to do, you would know, and would tell him if you ever saw him, how I remembered, and kept rememberin' him always, till my heart got sick with waitin', and I came to find him far across the seas."

"Tell me your tale, my child," he patiently said. Her eyes were on the candle in the window questioningly. "It is for the trooper--to guide him," the other remarked. "'Tis past time that he should be here. When you are able you can go with him to the Fort. You will be better cared for there, and will be among women."

"The man--the man who was kind to me--I wish I knew of him," she said.

"I am waiting for your story, my child. Speak of your trouble, whether

it be of the mind and body, or of the soul."

"You shall judge if it be of the soul," she answered.

"I come from far away. I lived in old Donegal since the day that I was born there, and I had a lover, as brave and true a lad as ever trod the world. But sorrow came. One night at Farcalladen Rise there was a crack of arms and a clatter of fleeing hoofs, and he that I loved came to me and said a quick word of partin', and with a kiss--it's burnin' on my lips yet--askin' pardon, father, for speech of this to you--and he was gone, an outlaw, to Australia. For a time word came from him. Then I was taken ill and couldn't answer his letters, and a cousin of my own, who had tried to win my love, did a wicked thing. He wrote a letter to him and told him I was dyin', and that there was no use of farther words from him. And never again did word come to me from him. But I waited, my heart sick with longin' and full of hate for the memory of the man who, when struck with death, told me of the cruel deed he had done between us two."

She paused, as she had to do several times during the recital, through weariness or pain; but, after a moment, proceeded. "One day, one beautiful day, when the flowers were like love to the eye, and the larks singin' overhead, and my thoughts goin' with them as they swam until they were lost in the sky, and every one of them a prayer for the lad livin' yet, as I hoped, somewhere in God's universe--there rode a gentleman down Farcalladen Rise. He stopped me as I walked, and said a kind good-day to me; and I knew when I looked into his face that he had word for me--the whisperin' of some angel, I suppose, and I said to him as though he had asked me for it, 'My name is Mary Callen, sir.'

"At that he started, and the colour came quick to his face; and he said: 'I am Sir Duke Lawless. I come to look for Mary Callen's grave. Is there a Mary Callen dead, and a Mary Callen livin'? and did both of them love a man that went from Farcalladen Rise one wild night long ago?'

"'There's but one Mary Callen,' said I, 'but the heart of me is dead, until I hear news that brings it to life again?'

"'And no man calls you wife?' he asked.

"'No man, Sir Duke Lawless,' answered I. 'And no man ever could, save him that used to write me of you from the heart of Australia; only there was no Sir to your name then.'

"'I've come to that since,' said he.

"'Oh, tell me,' I cried, with a quiverin' at my heart, 'tell me, is he livin'?'"

"And he replied: 'I left him in the Pipi Valley of the Rocky Mountains a year ago.'

"'A year ago!' said I, sadly.

"'I'm ashamed that I've been so long in comin' here,' replied he; 'but, of course, he didn't know that you were alive, and I had been parted from a lady for years--a lover's quarrel--and I had to choose between courtin' her again and marryin' her, or comin' to Farcalladen Rise at once. Well, I went to the altar first.'

"Oh, sir, you've come with the speed of the wind, for now that I've news of him, it is only yesterday that he went away, not years ago. But tell me, does he ever think of me?' I questioned.

"He thinks of you,' he said, 'as one for whom the masses for the dead are spoken; but while I knew him, first and last, the memory of you was with him.'

"With that he got off his horse, and said: 'I'll walk with you to his father's home.'

"You'll not do that,' I replied; 'for it's level with the ground. God punish them that did it! And they're lyin' in the glen by the stream that he loved and galloped over many a time.'

"They are dead--they are dead, then,' said he, with his bridle swung loose on his arm and his hat off reverently.

"Gone home to Heaven together,' said I, 'one day and one hour, and a prayer on their lips for the lad; and I closin' their eyes at the last. And before they went they made me sit by them and sing a song that's common here with us; for manny and manny of the strength and pride of Farcalladen Rise have sailed the wide seas north and south, and elsewhere, and comin' back maybe and maybe not.'

"Hark,' he said, very gravely, 'and I'll tell you what it is, for I've heard him sing it, I know, in the worst days and the best days that ever we had, when luck was wicked and big against us and we starvin' on the wallaby track; or when we found the turn in the lane to brighter days.'

"And then with me lookin' at him full in the eyes, gentleman though he was,--for comrade he had been with the man I loved,--he said to me there, so finely and kindly, it ought to have brought the dead back from their graves to hear, these words:

"You'll travel far and wide, dear, but you'll come back again,
You'll come back to your father and your mother in the glen,
Although we should be lyin' 'neath the heather grasses then
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'!"

"You'll see the icebergs sailin' along the wintry foam,
The white hair of the breakers, and the wild swans as they roam;
But you'll not forget the rowan beside your father's home--
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'!"

Here the girl paused longer than usual, and the priest dropped his forehead in his hand sadly.

"I've brought grief to your kind heart, father," she said.

"No, no," he replied, "not sorrow at all; but I was born on the Liffey side, though it's forty years and more since I left it, and I'm an old man now. That song I knew well, and the truth and the heart of it too.
. . . I am listening."

"Well, together we went to the grave of the father and mother, and the place where the home had been, and for a long time he was silent, as though they who slept beneath the sod were his, and not another's;

but at last he said:

"And what will you do? I don't quite know where he is, though; when last I heard from him and his comrades, they were in the Pipi Valley."

"My heart was full of joy; for though I saw how touched he was because of what he saw, it was all common to my sight, and I had grieved much, but had had little delight; and I said:

"There's only one thing to be done. He cannot come back here, and I must go to him--that is," said I, "if you think he cares for me still, --for my heart quakes at the thought that he might have changed."

"I know his heart," said he, "and you'll find him, I doubt not, the same, though he buried you long ago in a lonely tomb,--the tomb of a sweet remembrance, where the flowers are everlastin'." Then after more words he offered me money with which to go; but I said to him that the love that couldn't carry itself across the sea by the strength of the hands and the sweat of the brow was no love at all; and that the harder was the road to him the gladder I'd be, so that it didn't keep me too long, and brought me to him at last.

"He looked me up and down very earnestly for a minute, and then he said: 'What is there under the roof of heaven like the love of an honest woman! It makes the world worth livin' in.'

"Yes," said I, "when love has hope, and a place to lay its head."

"Take this," said he--and he drew from his pocket his watch--"and carry it to him with the regard of Duke Lawless, and this for yourself"--fetching from his pocket a revolver and putting it into my hands; "for the prairies are but rough places after all, and it's better to be safe than--worried. . . . Never fear though but the prairies will bring back the finest of blooms to your cheek, if fair enough it is now, and flush his eye with pride of you; and God be with you both, if a sinner may say that, and breakin' no saint's prerogative." And he mounted to ride away, havin' shaken my hand like a brother; but he turned again before he went, and said: "Tell him and his comrades that I'll shoulder my gun and join them before the world is a year older, if I can. For that land is God's land, and its people are my people, and I care not who knows it, whatever here I be."

"I worked my way across the sea, and stayed awhile in the East earning money to carry me over the land and into the Pipi Valley. I joined a party of emigrants that were goin' westward, and travelled far with them. But they quarrelled and separated, I goin' with these that I liked best. One night though, I took my horse and left; for I knew there was evil in the heart of a man who sought me continually, and the thing drove me mad. I rode until my horse could stumble no farther, and then I took the saddle for a pillow and slept on the bare ground. And in the morning I got up and rode on, seein' no house nor human being for many and many a mile. When everything seemed hopeless I came suddenly upon a camp. But I saw that there was only one man there, and I should have turned back, but that I was worn and ill, and, moreover, I had ridden almost upon him. But he was kind. He shared his food with me, and asked me where I was goin'. I told him, and also that I had quarrelled with those of my party and had left them nothing more. He seemed to wonder that I was goin' to Pipi Valley; and when I had finished my tale he said: 'Well, I must tell you that I am not good company for you. I have a name that doesn't pass

at par up here. To speak plain truth, troopers are looking for me, and --strange as it may be--for a crime which I didn't commit. That is the foolishness of the law. But for this I'm making for the American border, beyond which, treaty or no treaty, a man gets refuge.'

"He was silent after that, lookin' at me thoughtfully the while, but in a way that told me I might trust him, evil though he called himself. At length he said: 'I know a good priest, Father Corraine, who has a cabin sixty miles or more from here, and I'll guide you to him, if so be you can trust a half-breed and a gambler, and one men call an outlaw. If not, I'm feared it'll go hard with you; for the Cypress Hills are not easy travel, as I've known this many a year. And should you want a name to call me, Pretty Pierre will do, though my godfathers and godmothers did different for me before they went to Heaven.' And nothing said he irreverently, father."

Here the priest looked up and answered: "Yes, yes, I know him well--an evil man, and yet he has suffered too . . . Well, well, my daughter?"

"At that he took his pistol from his pocket and handed it. 'Take that,' he said. 'It will make you safer with me, and I'll ride ahead of you, and we shall reach there by sundown, I hope.'

"And I would not take his pistol, but, shamed a little, showed him the one Sir Duke Lawless gave me. 'That's right,' he said, 'and, maybe, it's better that I should carry mine, for, as I said, there are anxious gentlemen lookin' for me, who wish to give me a quiet but dreary home. And see,' he added, 'if they should come you will be safe, for they sit in the judgment seat, and the statutes hang at their saddles, and I'll say this for them, that a woman to them is as a saint of God out here where women and saints are few.'

"I do not speak as he spoke, for his words had a turn of French; but I knew that, whatever he was, I should travel peaceably with him. Yet I saw that he would be runnin' the risk of his own safety for me, and I told him that I could not have him do it; but he talked me lightly down, and we started. We had gone but a little distance, when there galloped over a ridge upon us, two men of the party I had left, and one, I saw, was the man I hated; and I cried out and told Pretty Pierre. He wheeled his horse, and held his pistol by him. They said that I should come with them, and they told a dreadful lie--that I was a runaway wife; but Pierre answered them they lied. At this, one rode forward suddenly, and clutched me at my waist to drag me from my horse. At this, Pierre's pistol was thrust in his face, and Pierre bade him cease, which he did; but the other came down with a pistol showin', and Pierre, seein' they were determined, fired; and the man that clutched at me fell from his horse. Then the other drew off; and Pierre got down, and stooped, and felt the man's heart, and said to the other: 'Take your friend away, for he is dead; but drop that pistol of yours on the ground first.' And the man did so; and Pierre, as he looked at the dead man, added: 'Why did he make me kill him?'

"Then the two tied the body to the horse, and the man rode away with it. We travelled on without speakin' for a long time, and then I heard him say absently: 'I am sick of that. When once you have played shuttlecock with human life, you have to play it to the end--that is the penalty. But a woman is a woman, and she must be protected.' Then afterward he turned and asked me if I had friends in Pipi Valley; and because what he had done for me had worked upon me, I told him of the man I was goin' to

find. And he started in his saddle, and I could see by the way he twisted the mouth of his horse that I had stirred him."

Here the priest interposed: "What is the name of the man in Pipi Valley to whom you are going?"

And the girl replied: "Ah, father, have I not told you? It is Shon McGann--of Farcalladen Rise."

At this, Father Corraine seemed suddenly troubled, and he looked strangely and sadly at her. But the girl's eyes were fastened on the candle in the window, as if she saw her story in it; and she continued: "A colour spread upon him, and then left him pale; and he said: 'To Shon McGann--you are going to him? Think of that--that!' For an instant I thought a horrible smile played upon his face, and I grew frightened, and said to him: 'You know him. You are not sorry that you are helping me? You and Shon McGann are not enemies?'

"After a moment the smile that struck me with dread passed, and he said, as he drew himself up with a shake: 'Shon McGann and I were good friends--as good as ever shared a blanket or split a loaf, though he was free of any evil, and I failed of any good.... Well, there came a change. We parted. We could meet no more; but who could have guessed this thing? Yet, hear me--I am no enemy of Shon McGann, as let my deeds to you prove.' And he paused again, but added presently: 'It's better you should have come now than two years ago.

"And I had a fear in my heart, and to this asked him why. 'Because then he was a friend of mine,' he said, 'and ill always comes to those who are such.' I was troubled at this, and asked him if Shon was in Pipi Valley yet. 'I do not know,' said he, 'for I've travelled long and far from there; still, while I do not wish to put doubt into your mind, I have a thought he may be gone. . . . He had a gay heart,' he continued, 'and we saw brave days together.'

"And though I questioned him, he told me little more, but became silent, scannin' the plains as we rode; but once or twice he looked at me in a strange fashion, and passed his hand across his forehead, and a grey look came upon his face. I asked him if he was not well. 'Only a kind of fightin' within,' he said; 'such things soon pass, and it is well they do, or we should break to pieces.'

"And I said again that I wished not to bring him into danger. And he replied that these matters were accordin' to Fate; that men like him must go on when once the die is cast, for they cannot turn back. It seemed to me a bitter creed, and I was sorry for him. Then for hours we kept an almost steady silence, and comin' at last to the top of a rise of land he pointed to a spot far off on the plains, and said that you, father, lived there; and that he would go with me still a little way, and then leave me. I urged him to go at once, but he would not, and we came down into the plains. He had not ridden far when he said sharply:

"The Riders of the Plains, those gentlemen who seek me, are there--see! Ride on or stay, which you please. If you go you will reach the priest, if you stay here where I shall leave you, you will see me taken perhaps, and it may be fightin' or death; but you will be safe with them. On the whole, it is best, perhaps, that you should ride away to the priest. They might not believe all that you told them, ridin' with me as you are.'

"But I think a sudden madness again came upon me. Rememberin' what things were done by women for refugees in old Donegal, and that this man had risked his life for me, I swung my horse round nose and nose with his, and drew my revolver, and said that I should see whatever came to him. He prayed me not to do so wild a thing; but when I refused, and pushed on along with him, makin' at an angle for some wooded hills, I saw that a smile played upon his face. We had almost reached the edge of the wood when a bullet whistled by us. At that the smile passed and a strange look came upon him, and he said to me:

"This must end here. I think you guess I have no coward's blood; but I am sick to the teeth of fightin'. I do not wish to shock you, but I swear, unless you turn and ride away to the left towards the priest's house, I shall save those fellows further trouble by killin' myself here; and there,' said he, 'would be a pleasant place to die--at the feet of a woman who trusted you.'

"I knew by the look in his eye he would keep his word. "Oh, is this so?' I said.

"It is so,' he replied, 'and it shall be done quickly, for the courage to death is on me.'

"But if I go, you will still try to escape?' I said. And he answered that he would. Then I spoke a God-bless-you, at which he smiled and shook his head, and leanin' over, touched my hand, and spoke low: 'When you see Shon McGann, tell him what I did, and say that we are even now. Say also that you called Heaven to bless me.' Then we swung away from each other, and the troopers followed after him, but let me go my way; from which, I guessed, they saw I was a woman. And as I rode I heard shots, and turned to see; but my horse stumbled on a hole and we fell together, and when I waked, I saw that the poor beast's legs were broken. So I ended its misery, and made my way as best I could by the stars to your house; but I turned sick and fainted at the door, and knew no more until this hour. . . . You thought me dead, father?"

The priest bowed his head, and said: "These are strange, sad things, my child; and they shall seem stranger to you when you hear all."

"When I hear all! Ah, tell me, father, do you know Shon McGann? Can you take me to him?"

"I know him, but I do not know where he is. He left the Pipi Valley eighteen months ago, and I never saw him afterwards; still I doubt not he is somewhere on the plains, and we shall find him--we shall find him, please Heaven."

"Is he a good lad, father?"

"He is brave, and he was always kind. He came to me before he left the valley--for he had trouble--and said to me: 'Father, I am going away, and to what place is far from me to know, but wherever it is, I'll live a life that's fit for men, and not like a loafer on God's world;' and he gave me money for masses to be said--for the dead."

The girl put out her hand. "Hush! hush!" she said. "Let me think. Masses for the dead.... What dead? Not for me; he thought me dead long, long ago."

"No; not for you," was the slow reply.

She noticed his hesitation, and said: "Speak. I know that there is sorrow on him. Someone--someone--he loved?"

"Someone he loved," was the reply.

"And she died?" The priest bowed his head.

"She was his wife--Shon's wife"? and Mary Callen could not hide from her words the hurt she felt.

"I married her to him, but yet she was not his wife." There was a keen distress in the girl's voice. "Father, tell me, tell me what you mean."

"Hush, and I will tell you all. He married her, thinking, and she thinking, that she was a widowed woman. But her husband came back. A terrible thing happened. The woman believing, at a painful time, that he who came back was about to take Shon's life, fired at him, and wounded him, and then killed herself."

Mary Callen raised herself upon her elbow, and looked at the priest in piteous bewilderment. "It is dreadful," she said. . . . "Poor woman! . . . And he had forgotten--forgotten me. I was dead to him, and am dead to him now. There's nothing left but to draw the cold sheet of the grave over me. Better for me if I had never come--if I had never come, and instead were lyin' by his father and mother beneath the rowan."

The priest took her wrist firmly in his. "These are not brave nor Christian words, from a brave and Christian girl. But I know that grief makes one's words wild. Shon McGann shall be found. In the days when I saw him most and best, he talked of you as an angel gone, and he had never sought another woman had he known that you lived. The Mounted Police, the Riders of the Plains, travel far and wide. But now, there has come from the farther West a new detachment to Fort Cypress, and they may be able to help us. But listen. There is something more. The man Pretty Pierre, did he not speak puzzling words concerning himself and Shon McGann? And did he not say to you at the last that they were even now? Well, can you not guess?"

Mary Callen's bosom heaved painfully and her eyes stared so at the candle in the window that they seemed to grow one with the flame. At last a new look crept into them; a thought made the lids close quickly as though it burned them. When they opened again they were full of tears that shone in the shadow and dropped slowly on her cheeks and flowed on and on, quivering too in her throat.

The priest said: "You understand, my child?"

And she answered: "I understand. Pierre, the outlaw, was her husband."

Father Corraine rose and sat beside the table, his book of offices open before him. At length he said: "There is much that might be spoken; for the Church has words for every hour of man's life, whatever it be; but there comes to me now a word to say, neither from prayer nor psalm, but from the songs of a country where good women are; where however poor the fireside, the loves beside it are born of the love of God, though the tongue be angry now and then, the foot stumble, and the hand quick at a

blow." Then, with a soft, ringing voice, he repeated:

"New friends will clasp your hand, dear, new faces on you smile--
You'll bide with them and love them, but you'll long for us the while;

For the word across the water, and the farewell by the stile--
For the true heart's here, my darlin'."

Mary Callen's tears flowed afresh at first; but soon after the voice ceased she closed her eyes and her sobs stopped, and Father Corraine sat down and became lost in thought as he watched the candle. Then there went a word among the spirits watching that he was not thinking of the candle, or of them that the candle was to light on the way, nor even of this girl near him, but of a summer forty years gone when he was a goodly youth, with the red on his lip and the light in his eye, and before him, leaning on a stile, was a lass with--

" . . . cheeks like the dawn of day."

And all the good world swam in circles, eddying ever inward until it streamed intensely and joyously through her eyes "blue as the fairy flax." And he had carried the remembrance of this away into the world with him, but had never gone back again. He had travelled beyond the seas to live among savages and wear out his life in self-denial; and now he had come to the evening of his life, a benignant figure in a lonely land. And as he sat here murmuring mechanically bits of an office, his heart and mind were with a sacred and distant past. Yet the spirits recorded both these things on their tablets, as though both were worthy of their remembrance.

He did not know that he kept repeating two sentences over and over to himself:

"Quoniam ipse liberavit me de laqueo venantium et a verbo aspero.
Quoniam angelis suis mandavit de te: ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis."

These he said at first softly to himself, but unconsciously his voice became louder, so that the girl heard, and she said:

"Father Corraine, what are those words? I do not understand them, but they sound comforting."

And he, waking from his dream, changed the Latin into English, and said:

"For he hath delivered me from the snare of the hunter, and from the sharp sword.
For he hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

"The words are good," she said. He then told her he was going out, but that he should be within call, saying, at the same time, that someone would no doubt arrive from Fort Cypress soon: and he went from the house. Then the girl rose slowly, crept lamely to a chair and sat down. Outside, the priest paced up and down, stopping now and then, and listening as if for horses' hoofs. At last he walked some distance away from the house, deeply lost in thought, and he did not notice that a man came slowly, heavily, to the door of the hut, and opening it, entered.

Mary Callen rose from her seat with a cry in which was timidity, pity, and something of horror; for it was Pretty Pierre. She recoiled, but seeing how he swayed with weakness, and that his clothes had blood upon them, she helped him to a chair. He looked up at her with an enigmatical smile, but he did not speak. "Oh," she whispered, "you are wounded!"

He nodded; but still he did not speak. Then his lips moved dryly. She brought him water. He drank deeply, and a sigh of relief escaped him. "You got here safely," he now said. "I am glad of that--though you, too, are hurt."

She briefly told him how, and then he said: "Well, I suppose you know all of me now?"

"I know what happened in Pipi Valley," she said, timidly and wearily. "Father Corraine told me."

"Where is he?"

When she had answered him, he said: "And you are willing to speak with me still?"

"You saved me," was her brief, convincing reply. "How did you escape? Did you fight?"

"No," he said. "It is strange. I did not fight at all. As I said to you, I was sick of blood. These men were only doing their duty. I might have killed two or three of them, and have escaped, but to what good? When they shot my horse, my good Sacrament,--and put a bullet into this shoulder, I crawled away still, and led them a dance, and doubled on them; and here I am."

"It is wonderful that they have not been here," she said.

"Yes, it is wonderful; but be very sure they will be with that candle in the window. Why is it there?"

She told him. He lifted his brows in stoic irony, and said: "Well, we shall have an army of them soon." He rose again to his feet. "I do not wish to die, and I always said that I would never go to prison. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she replied. She went immediately to the window, took the candle from it, and put it behind an improvised shade. No sooner was this done than Father Corraine entered the room, and seeing the outlaw, said "You have come here, Pierre?" And his face showed wonder and anxiety.

"I have come, mon pere, for sanctuary."

"For sanctuary! But, my son, if I vex not Heaven by calling you so, why"--he saw Pierre stagger slightly. "But you are wounded." He put his arm round the other's shoulder, and supported him till he recovered himself. Then he set to work to bandage anew the wound, from which Pierre himself had not unskilfully extracted the bullet. While doing so, the outlaw said to him:

"Father Corraine, I am hunted like a coyote for a crime I did not commit. But if I am arrested they will no doubt charge me with other things--ancient things. Well, I have said that I should never be sent to gaol,

and I never shall; but I do not wish to die at this moment, and I do not wish to fight. What is there left?"

"How do you come here, Pierre?"

He lifted his eyes heavily to Mary Callen, and she told Father Corraine what had been told her. When she had finished, Pierre added:

"I am no coward, as you will witness; but as I said, neither gaol nor death do I wish. Well, if they should come here, and you said, Pierre is not here, even though I was in the next room, they would believe you, and they would not search. Well, I ask such sanctuary."

The priest recoiled and raised his hand in protest. Then, after a moment, he said:

"How do you deserve this? Do you know what you ask?"

"Ah, oui, I know it is immense, and I deserve nothing: and in return I can offer nothing, not even that I will repent. And I have done no good in the world; but still perhaps I am worth the saving, as may be seen in the end. As for you, well, you will do a little wrong so that the end will be right. So?"

The priest's eyes looked out long and sadly at the man from under his venerable brows, as though he would see through him and beyond him to that end; and at last he spoke in a low, firm voice:

"Pierre, you have been a bad man; but sometimes you have been generous, and of a few good acts I know--"

"No, not good," the other interrupted. "I ask this of your charity."

"There is the law, and my conscience."

"The law! the law!" and there was sharp satire in the half-breed's voice. "What has it done in the West? Think, 'mon pere!' Do you not know a hundred cases where the law has dealt foully? There was more justice before we had law. Law--" And he named over swiftly, scornfully, a score of names and incidents, to which Father Corraine listened intently. "But," said Pierre, gently, at last, "but for your conscience, m'sieu', that is greater than law. For you are a good man and a wise man; and you know that I shall pay my debts of every kind some sure day. That should satisfy your justice, but you are merciful for the moment, and you will spare until the time be come, until the corn is ripe in the ear. Why should I plead? It is foolish. Still, it is my whim, of which, perhaps, I shall be sorry tomorrow . . . Hark!" he added, and then shrugged his shoulders and smiled. There were sounds of hoof beats coming faintly to them. Father Corraine threw open the door of the other room of the hut, and said "Go in there--Pierre. We shall see . . . we shall see."

The outlaw looked at the priest, as if hesitating; but, after, nodded meaningly to himself, and entered the room and shut the door. The priest stood listening. When the hoof-beats stopped, he opened the door, and went out. In the dark he could see that men were dismounting from their horses. He stood still and waited. Presently a trooper stepped forward and said warmly, yet brusquely, as became his office: "Father Corraine, we meet again!"

The priest's face was overswept by many expressions, in which marvel and trouble were uppermost, while joy was in less distinctness.

"Surely," he said, "it is Shon McGann."

"Shon McGann, and no other.--I that laughed at the law for many a year, though never breaking it beyond repair,--took your advice, Father Corraine, and here I am, holding that law now as my bosom friend at the saddle's pommel. Corporal Shon McGann, at your service."

They clasped hands, and the priest said: "You have come at my call from Fort Cypress?"

"Yes. But not these others. They are after a man that's played ducks and drakes with the statutes--Heaven be merciful to him, I say. For there's naught I treasure against him; the will of God bein' in it all, with some doin' of the Devil, too, maybe."

Pretty Pierre, standing with ear to the window of the dark room, heard all this, and he pressed his upper lip hard with his forefinger, as if something disturbed him.

Shon continued. "I'm glad I wasn't sent after him as all these here know; for it's little I'd like to clap irons on his wrists, or whistle him to come to me with a Winchester or a Navy. So I'm here on my business, and they're here on theirs. Though we come together it's because we met each other hereaway. They've a thought that, maybe, Pretty Pierre has taken refuge with you. They'll little like to disturb you, I know. But with dead in your house, and you givin' the word of truth, which none other could fall from your lips, they'll go on their way to look elsewhere."

The priest's face was pinched, and there was a wrench at his heart. He turned to the others. A trooper stepped forward.

"Father Corraine," he said, "it is my duty to search your house; but not a foot will I stretch across your threshold if you say no, and give the word that the man is not with you."

"Corporal McGann," said the priest, "the woman whom I thought was dead did not die, as you shall see. There is no need for inquiry. But she will go with you to Fort Cypress. As for the other, you say that Father Corraine's threshold is his own, and at his own command. His home is now a sanctuary--for the afflicted." He went towards the door. As he did so, Mary Callen, who had been listening inside the room with shaking frame and bursting heart, dropped on her knees beside the table, her head in her arms. The door opened. "See," said the priest, "a woman who is injured and suffering."

"Ah," rejoined the trooper, "perhaps it is the woman who was riding with the half-breed. We found her dead horse."

The priest nodded. Shon McGann looked at the crouching figure by the table pityingly. As he looked he was stirred, he knew not why. And she, though she did not look, knew that his gaze was on her; and all her will was spent in holding her eyes from his face, and from crying out to him.

"And Pretty Pierre," said the trooper, "is not here with her?"

There was an unfathomable sadness in the priest's eyes, as, with a slight motion of the hand towards the room, he said: "You see--he is not here."

The trooper and his men immediately mounted; but one of them, young Tim Kearney, slid from his horse, and came and dropped on his knee in front of the priest.

"It's many a day," he said, "since before God or man I bent a knee--more shame to me for that, and for mad days gone; but I care not who knows it, I want a word of blessin' from the man that's been out here like a saint in the wilderness, with a heart like the Son o' God."

The priest looked at the man at first as if scarce comprehending this act so familiar to him, then he slowly stretched out his hand, said some words in benediction, and made the sacred gesture. But his face had a strange and absent look, and he held the hand poised, even when the man had risen and mounted his horse. One by one the troopers rode through the faint belt of light that stretched from the door, and were lost in the darkness, the thud of their horses' hoofs echoing behind them. But a change had come over Corporal Shon McGann. He looked at Father Corraine with concern and perplexity. He alone of those who were there had caught the unreal note in the proceedings. His eyes were bent on the darkness into which the men had gone, and his fingers toyed for an instant with his whistle; but he said a hard word of himself under his breath, and turned to meet Father Corraine's hand upon his arm.

"Shon McGann," the priest said, "I have words to say to you concerning this poor girl,"

"You wish to have her taken to the Fort, I suppose? What was she doing with Pretty Pierre?"

"I wish her taken to her home."

"Where is her home, father?" And his eyes were cast with trouble on the girl, though he could assign no cause for that.

"Her home, Shon,"--the priest's voice was very gentle--"her home was where they sing such words as these of a wanderer:

"'You'll hear the wild birds singin' beneath a brighter sky,
The roof-tree of your home, dear, it will be grand and high;
But you'll hunger for the hearthstone where a child you used to lie,
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'.'"

During these words Shon's face ran white, then red; and now he stepped inside the door like one in a dream, and the girl's face was lifted to his as though he had called her. "Mary--Mary Callen!" he cried. His arms spread out, then dropped to his side, and he fell on his knees by the table facing her, and looked at her with love and horror warring in his face; for the remembrance that she had been with Pierre was like the hand of the grave upon him. Moving not at all, she looked at him, a numb despondency in her face. Suddenly Shon's look grew stern, and he was about to rise; but Father Corraine put a hand on his shoulder, and said: "Stay where you are, man--on your knees. There is your place just now. Be not so quick to judge, and remember your own sins before you charge others without knowledge. Listen now to me."

And he spoke Mary Callen's tale as he knew it, and as she had given it to

him, not forgetting to mention that she had been told the thing which had occurred in Pipi Valley.

The heroic devotion of this woman, and Pretty Pierre's act of friendship to her, together with the swift panorama of his past across the seas, awoke the whole man in Shon, as the staunch life that he had lately led rendered it possible. There was a grave, kind look upon his face when he rose at the ending of the tale, and came to her, saying:

"Mary, it is I who need forgiveness. Will you come now to the home you wanted"? and he stretched his arms to her. . . .

An hour after, as the three sat there, the door of the other room opened, and Pretty Pierre came out silently, and was about to pass from the hut; but the priest put a hand on his arm, and said:

"Where do you go, Pierre?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulder slightly:

"I do not know. 'Mon Dieu!'--that I have put this upon you!--you that never spoke but the truth."

"You have made my sin of no avail," the priest replied; and he motioned towards Shon McGann, who was now risen to his feet, Mary clinging to his arm. "Father Corraine," said Shon, "it is my duty to arrest this man; but I cannot do it, would not do it, if he came and offered his arms for the steel. I'll take the wrong of this now, sir, and such shame as there is in that falsehood on my shoulders. And she here and I, and this man too, I doubt not, will carry your sin--as you call it--to our graves, without shame."

Father Corraine shook his head sadly, and made no reply, for his soul was heavy. He motioned them all to sit down. And they sat there by the light of a flickering candle, with the door bolted and a cassock hung across the window, lest by any chance this uncommon thing should be seen. But the priest remained in a shadowed corner, with a little book in his hand, and he was long on his knees. And when morning came they had neither slept nor changed the fashion of their watch, save for a moment now and then, when Pierre suffered from the pain of his wound, and silently passed up and down the little room.

The morning was half gone when Shon McGann and Mary Callen stood beside their horses, ready to mount and go; for Mary had persisted that she could travel--joy makes such marvellous healing. When the moment of parting came, Pierre was not there. Mary whispered to her lover concerning this. The priest went to the door of the but and called him. He came out slowly.

"Pierre," said Shon, "there's a word to be said between us that had best be spoken now, though it's not aisy. It's little you or I will care to meet again in this world. There's been credit given and debts paid by both of us since the hour when we first met; and it needs thinking to tell which is the debtor now, for deeds are hard to reckon; but, before God, I believe it's meself;" and he turned and looked fondly at Mary Callen.

And Pierre replied: "Shon McGann, I make no reckoning close; but we will square all accounts here, as you say, and for the last time; for never

again shall we meet, if it's within my will or doing. But I say I am the debtor; and if I pay not here, there will come a time!" and he caught his shoulder as it shrunk in pain of his wound. He tapped the wound lightly, and said with irony: "This is my note of hand for my debt, Shon McGann. Eh, bien!"

Then he tossed his fingers indolently towards Shon, and turning his eyes slowly to Mary Callen, raised his hat in good-bye. She put out her hand impulsively to him, but Pierre, shaking his head, looked away. Shon put his hand gently on her arm. "No, no," he said in a whisper, "there can be no touch of hands between us."

And Pierre, looking up, added: "C'est vrai. That is the truth. You go--home. I got to hide. So--so." And he turned and went into the hut.

The others set their faces northward, and Father Corraine walked beside Mary Callen's horse, talking quietly of their future life, and speaking, as he would never speak again, of days in that green land of their birth. At length, upon a dividing swell of the prairie, he paused to say farewell.

Many times the two turned to see, and he was there, looking after them; his forehead bared to the clear inspiring wind, his grey hair blown back, his hands clasped. Before descending the trough of a great landwave, they turned for the last time, and saw him standing motionless, the one solitary being in all their wide horizon.

But outside the line of vision there sat a man in a prairie hut, whose eyes travelled over the valley of blue sky stretching away beyond the morning, whose face was pale and cold. For hours he sat unmoving, and when, at last, someone gently touched him on the shoulder, he only shook his head, and went on thinking. He was busy with the grim ledger of his life.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

An inner sorrow is a consuming fire
Philosophy which could separate the petty from the prodigious
Remember your own sins before you charge others

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS FOR THE ENTIRE "PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE":

An inner sorrow is a consuming fire
At first--and at the last--he was kind
Awkward for your friends and gratifying to your enemies
Carrying with him the warm atmosphere of a good woman's love
Courage; without which, men are as the standing straw
Delicate revenge which hath its hour with every man
Evil is half-accidental, half-natural
Fascinating colour which makes evil appear to be good
Freedom is the first essential of the artistic mind
Good is often an occasion more than a condition

Had the luck together, all kinds and all weathers
He does not love Pierre; but he does not pretend to love him
Hunger for happiness is robbery
I was born insolent
If one remembers, why should the other forget
Instinct for detecting veracity, having practised on both sides
Irishmen have gifts for only two things--words and women
It is not Justice that fills the gaols, but Law
It is not much to kill or to die--that is in the game
Knowing that his face would never be turned from me
Likenesses between the perfectly human and the perfectly animal
Longed to touch, oftener than they did, the hands of children
Meditation is the enemy of action
Men and women are unwittingly their own executioners
More idle than wicked
Mothers always forgive
My excuses were making bad infernally worse
Noise is not battle
Nothing so good as courage, nothing so base as the shifting eye
Philosophy which could separate the petty from the prodigious
Reconciling the preacher and the sinner, as many another has
Remember your own sins before you charge others
She was beginning to understand that evil is not absolute
She wasn't young, but she seemed so
The soul of goodness in things evil
The Injin speaks the truth, perhaps--eye of red man multiplies
The Government cherish the Injin much in these days
The gods made last to humble the pride of men--there was rum
The higher we go the faster we live
The Barracks of the Free
The world is not so bad as is claimed for it
Time is the test, and Time will have its way with me
Whatever has been was a dream; whatever is now is real
Where I should never hear the voice of the social Thou must
You do not shout dinner till you have your knife in the loaf

A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS, Complete

BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE PERSONAL HISTORIES OF "PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE"
AND THE LAST EXISTING RECORDS OF PRETTY PIERRE

By Gilbert Parker

CONTENTS

Volume 1.

ACROSS THE JUMPING SANDHILLS

A LOVELY BULLY

THE FILIBUSTER

THE GIFT OF THE SIMPLE KING

Volume 2.
MALACHI
THE LAKE OF THE GREAT SLAVE
THE RED PATROL
THE GOING OF THE WHITE SWAN
AT BAMBER'S BOOM

Volume 3.
THE BRIDGE HOUSE
THE EPAULETTES
THE HOUSE WITH THE BROKEN SHUTTER
THE FINDING OF FINGALL
THREE COMMANDMENTS IN THE VULGAR TONGUE

Volume 4.
LITTLE BABICHE
AT POINT O' BUGLES
THE SPOIL OF THE PUMA
THE TRAIL OF THE SUN DOGS
THE PILOT OF BELLE AMOUR

Volume 5.
THE CRUISE OF THE "NINETY-NINE"
A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS
THE PLUNDERER

To SIR WILLIAM C. VAN HORNE.

MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

To the public it will seem fitting that these new tales of "Pierre and His People" should be inscribed to one whose notable career is inseparably associated with the life and development of the Far North.

But there is a deeper and more personal significance in this dedication, for some of the stories were begotten in late gossip by your fireside; and furthermore, my little book is given a kind of distinction, in having on its fore-page the name of one well known as a connoisseur of art and a lover of literature.

Believe me,

DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

Sincerely yours,

GILBERT PARKER.

7 PARK PLACE.
ST. JAMES'S.
LONDON. S. W.

INTRODUCTION

It can hardly be said that there were two series of Pierre stories. There never was but one series, in fact. Pierre moved through all the thirty-nine stories of Pierre and His People and A Romany of the Snows without any thought on my part of putting him out of existence in one series and bringing him to life again in another. The publication of the stories was continuous, and at the time that Pierre and His People appeared several of those which came between the covers of A Romany of the Snows were passing through the pages of magazines in England and America. All of the thirty-nine stories might have appeared in one volume under the title of Pierre and His People, but they were published in two volumes with different titles in England, and in three volumes in America, simply because there was enough material for the two and the three volumes. In America The Adventurer of the North was broken up into two volumes at the urgent request of my then publishers, Messrs. Stone & Kimball, who had the gift of producing beautiful books, but perhaps had not the same gift of business. These two American volumes succeeding Pierre were published under the title of An Adventurer of the North and A Romany of the Snows respectively. Now, the latter title, A Romany of the Snows, was that which I originally chose for the volume published in England as An Adventurer of the North. I was persuaded to reject the title, A Romany of the Snows, by my English publisher, and I have never forgiven myself since for being so weak. If a publisher had the infallible instinct for these things he would not be a publisher-- he would be an author; and though an author may make mistakes like everybody else, the average of his hits will be far higher than the average of his misses in such things. The title, An Adventurer of the North, is to my mind cumbrous and rough, and difficult in the mouth. Compare it with some of the stories within the volume itself: for instance, The Going of the White Swan, A Lovely Bully, At Bamber's Boom, At Point o' Bugles, The Pilot of Belle Amour, The Spoil of the Puma, A Romany of the Snows, and The Finding of Fingall. There it was, however; I made the mistake and it sticks; but the book now will be published in this subscription edition under the title first chosen by me, A Romany of the Snows. It really does express what Pierre was.

Perhaps some of the stories in A Romany of the Snows have not the sentimental simplicity of some of the earlier stories in Pierre and His People, which take hold where a deeper and better work might not seize the general public; but, reading these later stories after twenty years, I feel that I was moving on steadily to a larger, firmer command of my material, and was getting at closer grips with intimate human things. There is some proof of what I say in the fact that one of the stories in A Romany of the Snows, called The Going of the White Swan, appropriately enough published originally in Scribner's Magazine, has had an extraordinary popularity. It has been included in the programmes of reciters from the Murrumbidgee to the Vaal, from John O'Groat's to Land's End, and is now being published as a separate volume in England and America. It has been dramatised several times, and is more alive to-day than it was when it was published nearly twenty years ago. Almost the same may be said of The Three Commandments in the Vulgar Tongue.

It has been said that, apart from the colour, form, and setting, the incidents of these Pierre stories might have occurred anywhere. That is true beyond a doubt, and it exactly represents my attitude of mind. Every human passion, every incident springing out of a human passion to-day, had its counterpart in the time of Amenhotep. The only difference is in the setting, is in the language or dialect which

is the vehicle of expression, and in race and character, which are the media of human idiosyncrasy. There is nothing new in anything that one may write, except the outer and visible variation of race, character, and country, which reincarnates the everlasting human ego and its scena.

The atmosphere of a story or novel is what temperament is to a man. Atmosphere cannot be created; it is not a matter of skill; it is a matter of personality, of the power of visualisation, of feeling for the thing which the mind sees. It has been said that my books possess atmosphere. This has often been said when criticism has been more or less acute upon other things; but I think that in all my experience there has never been a critic who has not credited my books with that quality; and I should say that *Pierre and His People* and *A Romany of the Snows* have an atmosphere in which the beings who make the stories live seem natural to their environment. It is this quality which gives vitality to the characters themselves. Had I not been able to create atmosphere which would have given naturalness to *Pierre* and his friends, some of the characters, and many of the incidents, would have seemed monstrosities--melodramatic episodes merely. The truth is, that while the episode, which is the first essential of a short story, was always in the very forefront of my imagination, the character or characters in the episode meant infinitely more to me. To my mind the episode was always the consequence of character. That almost seems a paradox; but apart from the phenomena of nature, as possible incidents in a book, the episodes which make what are called "human situations" are, in most instances, the sequence of character and are incidental to the law of the character set in motion. As I realise it now, subconsciously, my mind and imagination were controlled by this point of view in the days of the writing of *Pierre and His People*.

In the life and adventures of *Pierre* and his people I came, as I think, to a certain command of my material, without losing real sympathy with the simple nature of things. Dexterity has its dangers, and one of its dangers is artificiality. It is very difficult to be skilful and to ring true. If I have not wholly succeeded in *A Romany of the Snows*, I think I have not wholly failed, as the continued appeal of a few of the stories would seem to show.

ACROSS THE JUMPING SANDHILLS

"Here now, Trader; aisy, aisy! Quicksands I've seen along the sayshore, and up to me half-ways I've been in wan, wid a double-and-twist in the rope to pull me out; but a suckin' sand in the open plain--aw, Trader, aw! the like o' that niver a bit saw I."

So said Macavoy the giant, when the thing was talked of in his presence.

"Well, I tell you it's true, and they're not three miles from Fort O'Glory. The Company's--[Hudson's Bay Company]--men don't talk about it--what's the use! Travellers are few that way, and you can't get the Indians within miles of them. Pretty *Pierre* knows all about them--better than anyone else almost. He'll stand by me in it--eh, *Pierre*?"

Pierre, the half-breed gambler and adventurer, took no notice, and was silent for a time, intent on his cigarette; and in the pause Mowley the trapper said: "*Pierre's* gone back on you, Trader. P'r'aps ye haven't

paid him for the last lie. I go one better, you stand by me--my treat --that's the game!"

"Aw, the like o' that," added Macavoy reproachfully. "Aw, yer tongue to the roof o' yer mouth, Mowley. Liars all men may be, but that's wid wimmin or landlords. But, Pierre, aff another man's bat like that--aw, Mowley, fill your mouth wid the bowl o' yer pipe."

Pierre now looked up at the three men, rolling another cigarette as he did so; but he seemed to be thinking of a distant matter. Meeting the three pairs of eyes fixed on him, his own held them for a moment musingly; then he lit his cigarette, and, half reclining on the bench where he sat, he began to speak, talking into the fire as it were.

"I was at Guidon Hill, at the Company's post there. It was the fall of the year, when you feel that there is nothing so good as life, and the air drinks like wine. You think that sounds like a woman or a priest? Mais, no. The seasons are strange. In the spring I am lazy and sad; in the fall I am gay, I am for the big things to do. This matter was in the fall. I felt that I must move. Yet, what to do? There was the thing. Cards, of course. But that's only for times, not for all seasons. So I was like a wild dog on a chain. I had a good horse--Tophet, black as a coal, all raw bones and joint, and a reach like a moose. His legs worked like piston-rods. But, as I said, I did not know where to go or what to do. So we used to sit at the Post loafing: in the daytime watching the empty plains all panting for travellers, like a young bride waiting her husband for the first time."

Macavoy regarded Pierre with delight. He had an unctuous spirit, and his heart was soft for women--so soft that he never had had one on his conscience, though he had brushed gay smiles off the lips of many. But that was an amiable weakness in a strong man. "Aw, Pierre," he said coaxingly, "kape it down; aisy, aisy. Me heart's goin' like a trip-hammer at thought av it; aw yis, aw yis, Pierre."

"Well, it was like that to me--all sun and a sweet sting in the air. At night to sit and tell tales and such things; and perhaps a little brown brandy, a look at the stars, a half-hour with the cattle--the same old game. Of course, there was the wife of Hilton the factor--fine, always fine to see, but deaf and dumb. We were good friends, Ida and me. I had a hand in her wedding. Holy, I knew her when she was a little girl. We could talk together by signs. She was a good woman; she had never guessed at evil. She was quick, too, like a flash, to read and understand without words. A face was a book to her.

"Eh bien. One afternoon we were all standing outside the Post, when we saw someone ride over the Long Divide. It was good for the eyes. I cannot tell quite how, but horse and rider were so sharp and clear-cut against the sky, that they looked very large and peculiar--there was something in the air to magnify. They stopped for a minute on the top of the Divide, and it seemed like a messenger out of the strange country at the farthest north--the place of legends. But, of course, it was only a traveller like ourselves, for in a half-hour she was with us.

"Yes, it was a girl dressed as a man. She did not try to hide it; she dressed so for ease. She would make a man's heart leap in his mouth--if he was like Macavoy, or the pious Mowley there."

Pierre's last three words had a touch of irony, for he knew that the

Trapper had a precious tongue for Scripture when a missionary passed that way, and a bad name with women to give it point. Mowley smiled sourly; but Macavoy laughed outright, and smacked his lips on his pipe-stem luxuriously.

"Aw now, Pierre--all me little failin's--aw!" he protested.

Pierre swung round on the bench, leaning upon the other elbow, and, cherishing his cigarette, presently continued:

"She had come far and was tired to death, so stiff that she could hardly get from her horse; and the horse too was ready to drop. Handsome enough she looked, for all that, in man's clothes and a peaked cap, with a pistol in her belt. She wasn't big built--just a feathery kind of sapling--but she was set fair on her legs like a man, and a hand that was as good as I have seen, so strong, and like silk and iron with a horse. Well, what was the trouble?--for I saw there was trouble. Her eyes had a hunted look, and her nose breathed like a deer's in the chase. All at once, when she saw Hilton's wife, a cry came from her and she reached out her hands. What would women of that sort do? They were both of a kind. They got into each other's arms. After that there was nothing for us men but to wait. All women are the same, and Hilton's wife was like the rest. She must get the secret first; then the men should know. We had to wait an hour. Then Hilton's wife beckoned to us. We went inside. The girl was asleep. There was something in the touch of Hilton's wife like sleep itself--like music. It was her voice--that touch. She could not speak with her tongue, but her hands and face were words and music. Bien, there was the girl asleep, all clear of dust and stain; and that fine hand it lay loose on her breast, so quiet, so quiet. Enfin, the real story--for how she slept there does not matter--but it was good to see when we knew the story."

The Trapper was laughing silently to himself to hear Pierre in this romantic mood. A woman's hand--it was the game for a boy, not an adventurer; for the Trapper's only creed was that women, like deer, were spoils for the hunter. Pierre's keen eye noted this, but he was above petty anger. He merely said: "If a man have an eye to see behind the face, he understands the foolish laugh of a man, or the hand of a good woman, and that is much. Hilton's wife told us all. She had rode two hundred miles from the south-west, and was making for Fort Micah, sixty miles farther north. For what? She had loved a man against the will of her people. There had been a feud, and Garrison--that was the lover's name--was the last on his own side. There was trouble at a Company's post, and Garrison shot a half-breed. Men say he was right to shoot him, for a woman's name must be safe up here. Besides, the half-breed drew first. Well, Garrison was tried, and must go to jail for a year. At the end of that time he would be free. The girl Janie knew the day. Word had come to her. She made everything ready. She knew her brothers were watching--her three brothers and two other men who had tried to get her love. She knew also that they five would carry on the feud against the one man. So one night she took the best horse on the ranch and started away towards Fort Micah. Alors, you know how she got to Guidon Hill after two days' hard riding--enough to kill a man, and over fifty yet to do. She was sure her brothers were on her track. But if she could get to Fort Micah, and be married to Garrison before they came; she wanted no more.

"There were only two horses of use at Hilton's Post then; all the rest were away, or not fit for hard travel. There was my Tophet, and a lean

chestnut, with a long propelling gait, and not an ounce of loose skin on him. There was but one way: the girl must get there. Allons, what is the good? What is life without these things? The girl loves the man: she must have him in spite of all. There was only Hilton and his wife and me at the Post, and Hilton was lame from a fall, and one arm in a sling. If the brothers followed, well, Hilton could not interfere--he was a Company's man; but for myself, as I said, I was hungry for adventure, I had an ache in my blood for something. I was tingling to the toes, my heart was thumping in my throat. All the cords of my legs were straightening as if I was in the saddle.

"She slept for three hours. I got the two horses saddled. Who could tell but she might need help? I had nothing to do; I knew the shortest way to Fort Micah, every foot--and then it is good to be ready for all things. I told Hilton's wife what I had done. She was glad. She made a gesture at me as to a brother, and then began to put things in a bag for us to carry. She had settled all how it was to be. She had told the girl. You see, a man may be--what is it they call me?--a plunderer, and yet a woman will trust him, *comme ca!*"

"Aw yis, aw yis, Pierre; but she knew yer hand and yer tongue niver wint agin a woman, Pierre. Naw, niver a wan. Aw swate, swate, she was, wid a heart--a heart, Hilton's wife, aw yis!"

Pierre waved Macavoy into silence. "The girl waked after three hours with a start. Her hand caught at her heart. 'Oh,' she said, still staring at us, 'I thought that they had come!' A little after she and Hilton's wife went to another room. All at once there was a sound of horses outside, and then a knock at the door, and four men come in. They were the girl's hunters.

"It was hard to tell what to do all in a minute; but I saw at once the best thing was to act for all, and to get all the men inside the house. So I whispered to Hilton, and then pretended that I was a great man in the Company. I ordered Hilton to have the horses cared for, and, not giving the men time to speak, I fetched out the old brown brandy, wondering all the time what could be done. There was no sound from the other room, though I thought I heard a door open once. Hilton played the game well, and showed nothing when I ordered him about, and agreed word for word with me when I said no girl had come, laughing when they told why they were after her. More than one of them did not believe at first; but, pshaw, what have I been doing all my life to let such fellows doubt me? So the end of it was that I got them all inside the house. There was one bad thing--their horses were all fresh, as Hilton whispered to me. They had only rode them a few miles--they had stole or bought them at the first ranch to the west of the Post. I could not make up my mind what to do. But it was clear I must keep them quiet till something shaped.

"They were all drinking brandy when Hilton's wife come into the room. Her face was, *mon Dieu!* so innocent, so childlike. She stared at the men; and then I told them she was deaf and dumb, and I told her why they had come. *Voila*, it was beautiful--like nothing you ever saw. She shook her head so innocent, and then told them like a child that they were wicked to chase a girl. I could have kissed her feet. Thunder, how she fooled them! She said, would they not search the house? She said all through me, on her fingers and by signs. And I told them at once. But she told me something else--that the girl had slipped out as the last man came in, had mounted the chestnut, and would wait for me by the iron

spring, a quarter of a mile away. There was the danger that some one of the men knew the finger-talk, so she told me this in signs mixed up with other sentences.

"Good! There was now but one thing--for me to get away. So I said, laughing, to one of the men. 'Come, and we will look after the horses, and the others can search the place with Hilton.' So we went out to where the horses were tied to the railing, and led them away to the corral.

"Of course you will understand how I did it. I clapped a hand on his mouth, put a pistol at his head, and gagged and tied him. Then I got my Tophet, and away I went to the spring. The girl was waiting. There were few words. I gripped her hand, gave her another pistol, and then we got away on a fine moonlit trail. We had not gone a mile when I heard a faint yell far behind. My game had been found out. There was nothing to do but to ride for it now, and maybe to fight. But fighting was not good; for I might be killed, and then the girl would be caught just the same. We rode on--such a ride, the horses neck and neck, their hoofs pounding the prairie like drills, rawbone to rawbone, a hell-to-split gait. I knew they were after us, though I saw them but once on the crest of a Divide about three miles behind. Hour after hour like that, with ten minutes' rest now and then at a spring or to stretch our legs. We hardly spoke to each other; but, nom de Dieu! my heart was warm to this girl who had rode a hundred and fifty miles in twenty-four hours. Just before dawn, when I was beginning to think that we should easy win the race if the girl could but hold out, if it did not kill her, the chestnut struck a leg into the crack of the prairie, and horse and girl spilt on the ground together. She could hardly move, she was so weak, and her face was like death. I put a pistol to the chestnut's head, and ended it. The girl stooped and kissed the poor beast's neck, but spoke nothing. As I helped her on my Tophet I put my lips to the sleeve of her dress. Mother of Heaven! what could a man do--she was so dam' brave.

"Dawn was just breaking oozy and grey at the swell of the prairie over the Jumping Sandhills. They lay quiet and shining in the green-brown plain; but I knew that there was a churn beneath which could set those swells of sand in motion, and make glory-to-God of an army. Who can tell what it is? A flood under the surface, a tidal river-what? No man knows. But they are sea monsters on the land. Every morning at sunrise they begin to eddy and roll--and who ever saw a stranger sight? Bien, I looked back. There were those four pirates coming on, about three miles away. What was there to do? The girl and myself on my blown horse were too much. Then a great idea come to me. I must reach and cross the Jumping Sandhills before sunrise. It was one deadly chance.

"When we got to the edge of the sand they were almost a mile behind. I was all sick to my teeth as my poor Tophet stepped into the silt. Sacre, how I watched the dawn! Slow, slow, we dragged over that velvet powder. As we reached the farther side I could feel it was beginning to move. The sun was showing like the lid of an eye along the plain. I looked back. All four horsemen were in the sand, plunging on towards us. By the time we touched the brown-green prairie on the farther side the sand was rolling behind us. The girl had not looked back. She seemed too dazed. I jumped from the horse, and told her that she must push on alone to the Fort, that Tophet could not carry both, that I should be in no danger. She looked at me so deep--ah, I cannot tell how! then stooped and kissed me between the eyes--I have never forgot. I struck Tophet, and she was gone to her happiness; for before 'lights out!' she reached

the Fort and her lover's arms.

"But I stood looking back on the Jumping Sandhills. So, was there ever a sight like that--those hills gone like a smelting-floor, the sunrise spotting it with rose and yellow, and three horses and their riders fighting what cannot be fought?--What could I do? They would have got the girl and spoiled her life, if I had not led them across, and they would have killed me if they could. Only one cried out, and then but once, in a long shriek. But after, all three were quiet as they fought, until they were gone where no man could see, where none cries out so we can hear. The last thing I saw was a hand stretching up out of the sands."

There was a long pause, painful to bear. The Trader sat with eyes fixed humbly as a dog's on Pierre. At last Macavoy said: "She kissed ye, Pierre, aw yis, she did that! Jist betune the eyes. Do yees iver see her now, Pierre?"

But Pierre, looking at him, made no answer.

A LOVELY BULLY

He was seven feet and fat. He came to Fort O'Angel at Hudson's Bay, an immense slip of a lad, very much in the way, fond of horses, a wonderful hand at wrestling, pretending a horrible temper, threatening tragedies for all who differed from him, making the Fort quake with his rich roar, and playing the game of bully with a fine simplicity. In winter he fattened, in summer he sweated, at all times he ate eloquently.

It was a picture to see him with the undercut of a haunch of deer or buffalo, or with a whole prairie-fowl on his plate, his eyes measuring it shrewdly, his coat and waistcoat open, and a clear space about him--for he needed room to stretch his mighty limbs, and his necessity was recognised by all.

Occasionally he pretended to great ferocity, but scowl he ever so much, a laugh kept idling in his irregular bushy beard, which lifted about his face in the wind like a mane, or made a kind of underbrush through which his blunt fingers ran at hide-and-seek.

He was Irish, and his name was Macavoy. In later days, when Fort O'Angel was invaded by settlers, he had his time of greatest importance.

He had been useful to the Chief Trader at the Fort in the early days, and having the run of the Fort and the reach of his knife, was little likely to discontinue his adherence. But he ate and drank with all the dwellers at the Post, and abused all impartially. "Malcolm," said he to the Trader, "Malcolm, me glutton o' the H.B.C., that wants the Far North for your footstool--Malcolm, you villain, it's me grief that I know you, and me thumb to me nose in token. "Wiley and Hatchett, the principal settlers, he abused right and left, and said, "Wasn't there land in the East and West, that you steal the country God made for honest men--you robbers o' the wide world! Me tooth on the Book, and I tell you what, it's only me charity that kapes me from spoilin' ye. For a wink of me

eye, an' away you'd go, leaving your tails behind you--and pass that shoulder of bear, you pirates, till I come to it sideways, like a hog to war."

He was even less sympathetic with Bareback the chief and his braves. "Sons o' Anak y'are; here today and away to-morrow, like the clods of the valley--and that's your portion, Bareback. It's the word o' the Pentytook--in pieces you go, like a potter's vessel. Don't shrug your shoulders at me, Bareback, you pig, or you'll think that Ballzeboob's loose on the mat. But take a sup o' this whisky, while you swear wid your hand on your chest, 'Amin' to the words o' Tim Macavoy."

Beside Macavoy, Pierre, the notorious, was a child in height. Up to the time of the half-breed's coming the Irishman had been the most outstanding man at Fort O'Angel, and was sure of a good-natured homage, acknowledged by him with a jovial tyranny.

Pierre put a flea in his ear. He was pensively indifferent to him even in his most royal moments. He guessed the way to bring down the gusto and pride of this Goliath, but, for a purpose, he took his own time, nodding indolently to Macavoy when he met him, but avoiding talk with him.

Among the Indian maidens Macavoy was like a king or khan; for they count much on bulk and beauty, and he answered to their standards--especially to Wonta's. It was a sight to see him of a summer day, sitting in the shade of a pine, his shirt open, showing his firm brawny chest, his arms bare, his face shining with perspiration, his big voice gurgling in his beard, his eyes rolling amiably upon the maidens as they passed or gathered near demurely, while he declaimed of mighty deeds in patois or Chinook to the braves.

Pierre's humour was of the quietest, most subterranean kind. He knew that Macavoy had not an evil hair in his head; that vanity was his greatest weakness, and that through him there never would have been more half-breed population. There was a tradition that he had a wife somewhere--based upon wild words he had once said when under the influence of bad liquor; but he had roared his accuser the lie when the thing was imputed to him.

At Fort Ste. Anne Pierre had known an old woman, by name of Kitty Whelan, whose character was all tatters. She had told him that many years ago she had had a broth of a lad for a husband; but because of a sharp word or two across the fire, and the toss of a handful of furniture, he had left her, and she had seen no more of him. "Tall, like a chimney he was," said she, "and a chest like a wall, so broad, and a voice like a huntsman's horn, though only a b'y, an' no hair an his face; an' little I know whether he is dead or alive; but dead belike, for he's sure to come rap agin' somethin' that'd kill him; for he, the darlin', was that aisy and gentle, he wouldn't pull his fightin' iron till he had death in his ribs."

Pierre had drawn from her that the name of this man whom she had cajoled into a marriage (being herself twenty years older), and driven to deserting her afterwards, was Tim Macavoy. She had married Mr. Whelan on the assumption that Macavoy was dead. But Mr. Whelan had not the nerve to desert her, and so he departed this life, very loudly lamented by Mrs. Whelan, who had changed her name with no right to do so. With his going her mind dwelt greatly upon the virtues of her mighty vanished Tim: and

ill would it be for Tim if she found him.

Pierre had travelled to Fort O'Angel almost wholly because he had Tim Macavoy in his mind: in it Mrs. Whelan had only an incidental part; his plans journeyed beyond her and her lost consort. He was determined on an expedition to capture Fort Comfort, which had been abandoned by the great Company, and was now held by a great band of the Shunup Indians.

Pierre had a taste for conquest for its own sake, though he had no personal ambition. The love of adventure was deep in him; he adored sport for its own sake; he had had a long range of experiences--some discreditable--and now he had determined on a new field for his talent.

He would establish a kingdom, and resign it. In that case he must have a man to take his place. He chose Macavoy.

First he must humble the giant to the earth, then make him into a great man again, with a new kind of courage. The undoing of Macavoy seemed a civic virtue. He had a long talk with Wonta, the Indian maiden most admired by Macavoy. Many a time the Irishman had cast an ogling, rolling eye on her, and had talked his loudest within her ear-shot, telling of splendid things he had done: making himself like another Samson as to the destruction of men, and a Hercules as to the slaying of cattle.

Wonta had a sense of humour also, and when Pierre told her what was required of her, she laughed with a quick little gurgle, and showed as handsome a set of teeth as the half-breed's; which said much for her. She promised to do as he wished. So it chanced when Macavoy was at his favourite seat beneath the pine, talking to a gaping audience, Wonta and a number of Indian girls passed by. Pierre was leaning against a door smoking, not far away. Macavoy's voice became louder.

"Stand them up wan by wan,' says I, 'and give me a leg loose, and a fist free; and at that--"

"At that there was thunder and fire in the sky, and because the great Macavoy blew his breath over them they withered like the leaves," cried Wonta, laughing; but her laugh had an edge.

Macavoy stopped short, open-mouthed, breathing hard in his great beard. He was astonished at Wonta's raillery; the more so when she presently snapped her fingers, and the other maidens, laughing, did the same. Some of the half-breeds snapped their fingers also in sympathy, and shrugged their shoulders. Wonta came up to him softly, patted him on the head, and said: "Like Macavoy there is nobody. He is a great brave. He is not afraid of a coyote, he has killed prairie-hens in numbers as pebbles by the lakes. He has a breast like a fat ox,"--here she touched the skin of his broad chest,--"and he will die if you do not fight him."

Then she drew back, as though in humble dread, and glided away with the other maidens, Macavoy staring after her, with a blustering kind of shame in his face. The half-breeds laughed, and, one by one, they got up, and walked away also. Macavoy looked round: there was no one near save Pierre, whose eye rested on him lazily. Macavoy got to his feet, muttering. This was the first time in his experience at Fort O'Angel that he had been bluffed--and by a girl; one for whom he had a very soft place in his big heart. Pierre came slowly over to him.

"I'd have it out with her," said he. "She called you a bully and a

brag."

"Out with her?" cried Macavoy. "How can ye have it out wid a woman?"

"Fight her," said Pierre pensively.

"Fight her? fight her? Holy smoke! How can you fight a woman?"

"Why, what--do you--fight?" asked Pierre innocently.

Macavoy grinned in a wild kind of fashion. "Faith, then, y'are a fool. Bring on the divil an' all his angels, say I, and I'll fight thim where I stand."

Pierre ran his fingers down Macavoy's arm, and said "There's time enough for that. I'd begin with the five."

"What five, then?"

"Her half-breed lovers: Big Eye, One Toe, Jo-John, Saucy Boy, and Limber Legs."

"Her lovers? Her lovers, is it? Is there truth on y'r tongue?"

"Go to her father's tent at sunset, and you'll find one or all of them there."

"Oh, is that it?" said the Irishman, opening and shutting his fists. "Then I'll carve their hearts out, an' ate thim wan by wan this night."

"Come down to Wiley's," said Pierre; "there's better company there than here."

Pierre had arranged many things, and had secured partners in his little scheme for humbling the braggart. He so worked on the other's good nature that by the time they reached the settler's place, Macavoy was stretching himself with a big pride. Seated at Wiley's table, with Hatchett and others near, and drink going about, someone drew the giant on to talk, and so deftly and with such apparent innocence did Pierre, by a word here and a nod there, encourage him, that presently he roared at Wiley and Hatchett:

"Ye shameless buccaneers that push your way into the tracks of honest men, where the Company's been three hundred years by the will o' God--if it wasn't for me, ye Jack Sheppards--"

Wiley and Hatchett both got to their feet with pretended rage, saying he'd insulted them both, that he was all froth and brawn, and giving him the lie.

Utterly taken aback, Macavoy could only stare, puffing in his beard, and drawing in his legs, which had been spread out at angles. He looked from Wiley to the impassive Pierre. "Buccaneers, you callus," Wiley went on; "well, we'll have no more of that, or there'll be trouble at Fort O'Angel."

"Ah, sure y'are only jokin'," said Macavoy, "for I love ye, ye scoundrels. It's only me fun."

"For fun like that you'll pay, ruffian!" said Hatchett, bringing down his fist on the table with a bang.

Macavoy stood up. He looked confounded, but there was nothing of the coward in his face. "Oh, well," said he, "I'll be goin', for ye've got y'r teeth all raspin'."

As he went the two men laughed after him mockingly. "Wind like a bag," said Hatchett. "Bone like a marrow-fat pea," added Wiley.

Macavoy was at the door, but at that he turned. "If ye care to sail agin' that wind, an' gnaw on that bone, I'd not be sayin' you no."

"Will to-night do--at sunset?" said Wiley.

"Bedad, then, me b'ys, sunset'll do--an' not more than two at a time," he added softly, all the roar gone from his throat. Then he went out, followed by Pierre.

Hatchett and Wiley looked at each other and laughed a little confusedly. "What's that he said?" muttered Wiley. "Not more than two at a time, was it?"

"That was it. I don't know that it's what we bargained for, after all." He looked round on the other settlers present, who had been awed by the childlike, earnest note in Macavoy's last words. They shook their heads now a little sagely; they weren't so sure that Pierre's little game was so jovial as it had promised.

Even Pierre had hardly looked for so much from his giant as yet. In a little while he had got Macavoy back to his old humour.

"What was I made for but war!" said the Irishman, "an' by war to kape thim at peace, wherever I am." Soon he was sufficiently restored in spirits to go with Pierre to Bareback's lodge, where, sitting at the tent door, with idlers about, he smoked with the chief and his braves. Again Pierre worked upon him adroitly, and again he became loud in speech, and grandly patronising.

"I've stood by ye like a father, ye loafers," he said, "an' I give you my word, ye howlin' rogues--"

Here Bareback and a half-dozen braves came up suddenly from the ground, and the chief said fiercely: "You speak crooked things. We are no rogues. We will fight."

Macavoy's face ran red to his hair. He scratched his head a little foolishly, and gathered himself up. "Sure, 'twas only me tasin', darlins," he said, "but I'll be comin' again, when y'are not so narvis." He turned to go away.

Pierre made a sign to Bareback, and the Indian touched the giant on the arm. "Will you fight?" said he.

"Not all o' ye at once," said Macavoy slowly, running his eye carefully along the half-dozen; "not more than three at a toime," he added with a simple sincerity, his voice again gone like the dove's. "At what time will it be convaynyint for ye?" he asked.

"At sunset," said the chief, "before the Fort." Macavoy nodded and walked away with Pierre, whose glance of approval at the Indians did not make them thoroughly happy.

To rouse the giant was not now so easy. He had already three engagements of violence for sunset. Pierre directed their steps by a roundabout to the Company's stores, and again there was a distinct improvement in the giant's spirits. Here at least he could be himself, he thought, here no one should say him nay. As if nerved by the idea, he plunged at once into boisterous raillery of the Chief Trader. "Oh, ho," he began, "me freebooter, me captain av the looters av the North!" The Trader snarled at him. "What d'ye mean, by such talk to me, sir? I've had enough--we've all had enough--of your brag and bounce; for you're all sweat and swill-pipe, and I give you this for your chewing, that though by the Company's rules I can't go out and fight you, you may have your pick of my men for it. I'll take my pay for your insults in pounded flesh--Irish pemmican!"

Macavoy's face became mottled with sudden rage. He roared, as, perhaps, he had never roared before: "Are ye all gone mad-mad-mad? I was jokin' wid ye, whin I called ye this or that. But by the swill o' me pipe, and the sweat o' me skin, I'll drink the blood o' yees, Trader, me darlin'. An' all I'll ask is, that ye mate me to-night whin the rest o' the pack is in front o' the Fort--but not more than four o' yees at a time--for little scrawney rats as y'are, too many o' yees wad be in me way." He wheeled and strode fiercely out. Pierre smiled gently.

"He's a great bully that, isn't he, Trader? There'll be fun in front of the Fort to-night. For he's only bragging, of course--eh?"

The Trader nodded with no great assurance, and then Pierre said as a parting word: "You'll be there, of course--only four av ye!" and hurried out after Macavoy, humming to himself--

"For the King said this, and the Queen said that,
But he walked away with their army, O!"

So far Pierre's plan had worked even better than he expected, though Macavoy's moods had not been altogether after his imaginings. He drew alongside the giant, who had suddenly grown quiet again. Macavoy turned and looked down at Pierre with the candour of a schoolboy, and his voice was very low:

"It's a long time ago, I'm thinkin'," he said, "since I lost me frinds--ages an' ages ago. For me frinds are me inimies now, an' that makes a man old. But I'll not say that it cripples his arm or humbles his back." He drew his arm up once or twice and shot it out straight into the air like a catapult. "It's all right," he added, very softly, "an', Half-breed, me b'y, if me frinds have turned inimies, why, I'm thinkin' me inimy has turned frind, for that I'm sure you were, an' this I'm certain y'are. So here's the grip av me fist, an' y'll have it." Pierre remembered that disconcerting, iron grip of friendship for many a day. He laughed to himself to think how he was turning the braggart into a warrior. "Well," said Pierre, "what about those five at Wonta's tent?"

"I'll be there whin the sun dips below the Little Red Hill," he said, as though his thoughts were far away, and he turned his face towards Wonta's tent. Presently he laughed out loud. "It's manny along day," he said, "since--"

Then he changed his thoughts. "They've spoke sharp words in me teeth," he continued, "and they'll pay for it. Bounce! sweat! brag! wind! is it? There's dancin' beyant this night, me darlins!"

"Are you sure you'll not run away when they come on?" said Pierre, a little ironically.

"Is that the word av a frind?" replied Macavoy, a hand fumbling in his hair.

"Did you never run away when faced?" Pierre asked pitilessly.

"I never turned tail from a man, though, to be sure, it's been more talk than fight up here: Fort Ste. Anne's been but a graveyard for fun these years."

"Eh, well," persisted Pierre, "but did you never turn tail from a slip of a woman?"

The thing was said idly. Macavoy gathered his beard in his mouth, chewing it confusedly. "You've a keen tongue for a question," was his reply. "What for should anny man run from a woman?"

"When the furniture flies, an' the woman knows more of the world in a day than the man does in a year; and the man's a hulking bit of an Irishman--bien, then things are so and so!"

Macavoy drew back dazed, his big legs trembling. "Come into the shade of these maples," said Pierre, "for the sun has set you quaking a little," and he put out his hand to take Macavoy's arm.

The giant drew away from the hand, but walked on to the trees. His face seemed to have grown older by years on the moment. "What's this y'are sayin' to me?" he asked hoarsely. "What do you know av--av that woman?"

"Malahide is a long way off," said Pierre, "but when one travels why shouldn't the other?"

Macavoy made a helpless motion with his lumbering hand. "Mother o' saints," he said, "has it come to that, after all these years? Is she--tell me where she is, me frind, and you'll niver want an arm to fight for ye, an' the half av a blanket, while I have wan!"

"But you'll run as you did before, if I tell you, an' there'll be no fighting to-night, accordin' to the word you've given."

"No fightin', did ye say? an' run away, is it? Then this in your eye, that if ye'll bring an army, I'll fight till the skin is in rags on me bones, whin it's only men that's before me; but woman--and that wan! Faith, I'd run, I'm thinkin', as I did, you know when--Don't tell me that she's here, man; arrah, don't say that!"

There was something pitiful and childlike in the big man's voice, so much so that Pierre, calculating gamester as he was, and working upon him as he had been for many weeks, felt a sudden pity, and dropping his fingers on the other's arm, said: "No, Macavoy, my friend, she is not here; but she is at Fort Ste. Anne--or was when I left there."

Macavoy groaned. "Does she know that I'm here?" he asked.

"I think not. Fort Ste. Anne is far away, and she may not hear."

"What--what is she doing?"

"Keeping your memory and Mr. Whelan's green." Then Pierre told him somewhat bluntly what he knew of Mrs. Macavoy.

"I'd rather face Ballzeboob himself than her," said Macavoy. "An' she's sure to find me."

"Not if you do as I say."

"An' what is it ye say, little man?"

"Come away with me where she'll not find you."

"An' where's that, Pierre darlin'?"

"I'll tell you that when to-night's fighting's over. Have you a mind for Wonta?" he continued.

"I've a mind for Wonta an' many another as fine, but I'm a married man," he said, "by priest an' by book; an' I can't forget that, though the woman's to me as the pit below."

Pierre looked curiously at him. "You're a wonderful fool," he said, "but I'm not sure that I like you less for that. There was Shon M'Gann--but it is no matter." He sighed and continued: "When to-night is over, you shall have work and fun that you've been fattening for this many a year, and the woman'll not find you, be sure of that. Besides--" he whispered in Macavoy's ear.

"Poor divil, poor divil, she'd always a throat for that; but it's a horrible death to die, I'm thinkin'." Macavoy's chin dropped on his breast.

When the sun was falling below Little Red Hill, Macavoy came to Wonta's tent. Pierre was not far away. What occurred in the tent Pierre never quite knew, but presently he saw Wonta run out in a frightened way, followed by the five half-breeds, who carried themselves awkwardly. Behind them again, with head shaking from one side to the other, travelled Macavoy; and they all marched away towards the Fort. "Well," said Pierre to Wonta, "he is amusing, eh?--so big a coward, eh?"

"No, no," she said, "you are wrong. He is no coward. He is a great brave. He spoke like a little child, but he said he would fight them all when--"

"When their turn came," interposed Pierre, with a fine "bead" of humour in his voice; "well, you see he has much to do." He pointed towards the Fort, where people were gathering fast. The strange news had gone abroad, and the settlement, laughing joyously, came to see Macavoy swagger; they did not think there would be fighting.

Those whom Macavoy had challenged were not so sure. When the giant reached the open space in front of the Fort, he looked slowly round him. A great change had come over him. His skin seemed drawn together more

firmly, and running himself up finely to his full height, he looked no longer the lounging braggart. Pierre measured him with his eye, and chuckled to himself. Macavoy stripped himself of his coat and waistcoat, and rolled up his sleeves. His shirt was flying at the chest.

He beckoned to Pierre.

"Are you standin' me frind in this?" he said. "Now and after," said Pierre.

His voice was very simple. "I never felt as I do since the day the coast-guardsmen dropped on me in Ireland far away, an' I drew blood an every wan o' them--fine beautiful b'ys they looked--stretchen' out on the ground wan by wan. D'ye know the double-an'-twist?" he suddenly added, "for it's a honey trick whin they gather in an you, an' you can't be layin' out wid yer fists. It plays the divil wid the spines av thim. Will ye have a drop av drink--cold water, man--near, an' a sponge betune whiles? For there's manny in the play--makin' up for lost time. Come on," he added to the two settlers, who stood not far away, "for ye began the trouble, an' we'll settle accordin' to a, b, c."

Wiley and Hatchett were there. Responding to his call, they stepped forward, though they had now little relish for the matter. They were pale, but they stripped their coats and waistcoats, and Wiley stepped bravely in front of Macavoy. The giant looked down on him, arms folded. "I said two of you," he crooned, as if speaking to a woman. Hatchett stepped forward also. An instant after the settlers were lying on the ground at different angles, bruised and dismayed, and little likely to carry on the war. Macavoy took a pail of water from the ground, drank from it lightly, and waited. None other of his opponents stirred. "There's three Injins," he said, "three rid divils, that wants showin' the way to their happy huntin' grounds. . . . Sure, y'are comin', ain't you, me darlins?" he added coaxingly, and he stretched himself, as if to make ready.

Bareback, the chief, now harangued the three Indians, and they stepped forth warily. They had determined on strategic wrestling, and not on the instant activity of fists. But their wiliness was useless, for Macavoy's double-and-twist came near to lessening the Indian population of Fort O'Angel. It only broke a leg and an arm, however. The Irishman came out of the tangle of battle with a wild kind of light in his eye, his beard all torn, and face battered. A shout of laughter, admiration and wonder went up from the crowd. There was a moment's pause, and then Macavoy, whose blood ran high, stood forth again. The Trader came to him.

"Must this go on?" he said; "haven't you had your fill of it?"

Had he touched Macavoy with a word of humour the matter might have ended there; but now the giant spoke loud, so all could hear.

"Had me fill av it, Trader, me angel? I'm only gittin' the taste av it. An' ye'll plaze bring on yer men--four it was--for the feed av Irish pemmican."

The Trader turned and swore at Pierre, who smiled enigmatically. Soon after, two of the best fighters of the Company's men stood forth. Macavoy shook his head. "Four, I said, an' four I'll have, or I'll ate the heads aff these."

Shamed, the Trader sent forth two more. All on an instant the four made a rush on the giant; and there was a stiff minute after, in which it was not clear that he was happy. Blows rattled on him, and one or two he got on the head, just as he tossed a man spinning senseless across the grass, which sent him staggering backwards for a moment, sick and stunned.

Pierre called over to him swiftly: "Remember Malahide!"

This acted on him like a charm. There never was seen such a shattered bundle of men as came out from his hands a few minutes later. As for himself, he had but a rag or two on him, but stood unmindful of his state, and the fever of battle untameable on him. The women drew away.

"Now, me babes o' the wood," he shouted, "that sit at the feet av the finest Injin woman in the North,--though she's no frind o' mine--and aren't fit to kiss her moccasin, come an wid you, till I have me fun wid your spines."

But a shout went up, and the crowd pointed. There were the five half-breeds running away across the plains.

The game was over.

"Here's some clothes, man; for Heaven's sake put them on," said the Trader.

Then the giant became conscious of his condition, and like a timid girl he hurried into the clothing.

The crowd would have carried him on their shoulders, but he would have none of it.

"I've only wan frind here," he said, "an' it's Pierre, an' to his shanty I go an' no other."

"Come, mon ami," said Pierre, "for to-morrow we travel far."

"And what for that?" said Macavoy.

Pierre whispered in his ear: "To make you a king, my lovely bully."

THE FILIBUSTER

Pierre had determined to establish a kingdom, not for gain, but for conquest's sake. But because he knew that the thing would pall, he took with him Macavoy the giant, to make him king instead. But first he made Macavoy from a lovely bully, a bulk of good-natured brag, into a Hercules of fight; for, having made him insult--and be insulted by--near a score of men at Fort O'Angel, he also made him fight them by twos, threes, and fours, all on a summer's evening, and send them away broken. Macavoy would have hesitated to go with Pierre, were it not that he feared a woman. Not that he had wronged her; she had wronged him: she had married him. And the fear of one's own wife is the worst fear in the world.

But though his heart went out to women, and his tongue was of the race that beguiles, he stood to his "lines" like a man, and people wondered. Even Wonta, the daughter of Foot-in-the-Sun, only bent him, she could not break him to her will. Pierre turned her shy coaxing into irony--that was on the day when all Fort O'Angel conspired to prove Macavoy a child and not a warrior. But when she saw what she had done, and that the giant was greater than his years of brag, she repented, and hung a dead coyote at Pierre's door as a sign of her contempt.

Pierre watched Macavoy, sitting with a sponge of vinegar to his head, for he had had nasty joltings in his great fight. A little laugh came crinkling up to the half-breed's lips, but dissolved into silence.

"We'll start in the morning," he said.

Macavoy looked up. "Whin you plaze; but a word in your ear; are you sure she'll not follow us?"

"She doesn't know. Fort Ste. Anne is in the south, and Fort Comfort, where we go, is far north."

"But if she kem!" the big man persisted.

"You will be a king; you can do as other kings have done," Pierre chuckled.

The other shook his head. "Says Father Nolan to me, says he, 'tis till death us do part, an' no man put asunder'; an' I'll stand by that, though I'd slice out the bist tin years av me life, if I niver saw her face again."

"But the girl, Wonta--what a queen she'd make!"

"Marry her yourself, and be king yourself, and be damned to you! For she, like the rest, laughed in me face, whin I told thim of the day whin I--"

"That's nothing. She hung a dead coyote at my door. You don't know women. There'll be your breed and hers abroad in the land one day."

Macavoy stretched to his feet--he was so tall that he could not stand upright in the room. He towered over Pierre, who blandly eyed him. "I've another word for your ear," he said darkly. "Keep clear av the likes o' that wid me. For I've swallowed a tribe av divils. It's fightin' you want. Well, I'll do it--I've an itch for the throats av men, but a fool I'll be no more wid wimin, white or red--that hell-cat that spoilt me life an' killed me child, or--"

A sob clutched him in the throat.

"You had a child, then?" asked Pierre gently.

"An angel she was, wid hair like the sun, an' 'd melt the heart av an iron god: none like her above or below. But the mother, ah, the mother of her! One day whin she'd said a sharp word, wid another from me, an' the child clinging to her dress, she turned quick and struck it, meanin' to anger me. Not so hard the blow was, but it sent the darlin's head agin' the chimney-stone, and that was the end av it. For she took to her bed, an' agin' the crowin' o' the cock wan midnight, she gives a little

cry an' snatched at me beard. 'Daddy,' says she, 'daddy, it hurts!' An' thin she floats away, wid a stitch av pain at her lips."

Macavoy sat down now, his fingers fumbling in his beard. Pierre was uncomfortable. He could hear of battle, murder, and sudden death unmoved--it seemed to him in the game; but the tragedy of a child, a mere counter yet in the play of life--that was different. He slid a hand over the table, and caught Macavoy's arm. "Poor little waif!" he said.

Macavoy gave the hand a grasp that turned Pierre sick, and asked: "Had ye iver a child av y'r own, Pierre-iver wan at all?"

"Never," said Pierre dreamily, "and I've travelled far. A child--a child --is a wonderful thing. . . . Poor little waif!"

They both sat silent for a moment. Pierre was about to rise, but Macavoy suddenly pinned him to his seat with this question: "Did y' iver have a wife, thin, Pierre?"

Pierre turned pale. A sharp breath came through his teeth. He spoke slowly: "Yes, once."

"And she died?" asked the other, awed.

"We all have our day," he replied enigmatically, "and there are worse things than death. . . . Eh, well, mon ami, let us talk of other things. To-morrow we go to conquer. I know where I can get five men I want. I have ammunition and dogs."

A few minutes afterwards Pierre was busy in the settlement. At the Fort he heard strange news. A new batch of settlers was coming from the south, and among them was an old Irishwoman who called herself now Mrs. Whelan, now Mrs. Macavoy. She talked much of the lad she was to find, one Tim Macavoy, whose fame Gossip had brought to her at last.

She had clung on to the settlers, and they could not shake her off. "She was comin'," she said, "to her own darlin' b'y, from whom she'd been parted many a year, believin' him dead, or Tom Whelan had nivir touched hand o' hers."

The bearer of the news had but just arrived, and he told it only to the Chief Trader and Pierre. At a word from Pierre the man promised to hold his peace. Then Pierre went to Wonta's lodge. He found her with her father alone, her head at her knees. When she heard his voice she looked up sharply, and added a sharp word also.

"Wait," he said; "women are such fools. You snapped your fingers in his face, and laughed at him. Bien, that is nothing. He has proved himself great. That is something. He will be greater still, if the other woman does not find him. She should die, but then some women have no sense."

"The other woman!" said Wonta, starting to her feet; "who is the other woman?"

Old Foot-in-the-Sun waked and sat up, but seeing that it was Pierre, dropped again to sleep. Pierre, he knew, was no peril to any woman. Besides, Wonta hated the half-breed, as he thought.

Pierre told the girl the story of Macavoy's life; for he knew that she

loved the man after her heathen fashion, and that she could be trusted.

"I do not care for that," she said, when he had finished; "it is nothing. I would go with him. I should be his wife, the other should die. I would kill her, if she would fight me. I know the way of knives, or a rifle, or a pinch at the throat--she should die!"

"Yes, but that will not do. Keep your hands free of her."

Then he told her that they were going away. She said she would go also. He said no to that, but told her to wait and he would come back for her.

Though she tried hard to follow them, they slipped away from the Fort in the moist gloom of the morning, the brown grass rustling, the prairie-hens fluttering, the osiers sighing as they passed, the Spirit of the North, ever hungry, drawing them on over the long Divides. They did not see each other's faces till dawn. They were guided by Pierre's voice; none knew his comrades. Besides Pierre and Macavoy, there were five half-breeds--Noel, Little Babiche, Corvette, Josh, and Jacques Parfaite. When they came to recognise each other, they shook hands, and marched on. In good time they reached that wonderful and pleasant country between the Barren Grounds and the Lake of Silver Shallows. To the north of it was Fort Comfort, which they had come to take. Macavoy's rich voice roared as of old, before his valour was questioned--and maintained--at Fort O'Angel. Pierre had diverted his mind from the woman who, at Fort O'Angel, was even now calling heaven and earth to witness that "Tim Macavoy was her Macavoy and no other, an' she'd find him--the divil and darlin', wid an arm like Broin Borhoime, an' a chest you could build a house on--if she walked till Doomsday!"

Macavoy stood out grandly, his fat all gone to muscle, blowing through his beard, puffing his cheek, and ready with tale or song. But now that they were facing the business of their journey, his voice got soft and gentle, as it did before the Fort, when he grappled his foes two by two and three by three, and wrung them out. In his eyes there was the thing which counts as many men in any soldier's sight, when he leads in battle. As he said himself, he was made for war, like Malachi o' the Golden Collar.

Pierre guessed that just now many of the Indians would be away for the summer hunt, and that the Fort would perhaps be held by only a few score of braves, who, however, would fight when they might easier play. He had no useless compunctions about bloodshed. A human life he held to be a trifle in the big sum of time, and that it was of little moment when a man went, if it seemed his hour. He lived up to his creed, for he had ever held his own life as a bird upon a housetop, which a chance stone might drop.

He was glad afterwards that he had decided to fight, for there was one in Fort Comfort against whom he had an old grudge--the Indian, Young Eye, who, many years before, had been one to help in killing the good Father Halen, the priest who dropped the water on his forehead and set the cross on top of that, when he was at his mother's breasts. One by one the murderers had been killed, save this man. He had wandered north, lived on the Coppermine River for a long time, and at length had come down among the warring tribes at the Lake of Silver Shallows.

Pierre was for direct attack. They crossed the lake in their canoes, at a point about five miles from the Fort, and, so far as they could tell,

without being seen. Then ammunition went round, and they marched upon the Fort. Pierre eyed Macavoy--measured him, as it were, for what he was worth. The giant seemed happy. He was humming a tune softly through his beard. Suddenly Jose paused, dropped to the foot of a pine, and put his ear to it. Pierre understood. He had caught at the same thing. "There is a dance on," said Jose, "I can hear the drum."

Pierre thought a minute. "We will reconnoitre," he said presently.

"It is near night now," remarked Little Babiche. "I know something of these. When they have a great snake dance at night, strange things happen." Then he spoke in a low tone to Pierre.

They halted in the bush, and Little Babiche went forward to spy upon the Fort. He came back just after sunset, reporting that the Indians were feasting. He had crept near, and had learned that the braves were expected back from the hunt that night, and that the feast was for their welcome.

The Fort stood in an open space, with tall trees for a background. In front, here and there, were juniper and tamarac bushes. Pierre laid his plans immediately, and gave the word to move on. Their presence had not been discovered, and if they could but surprise the Indians the Fort might easily be theirs. They made a detour, and after an hour came upon the Fort from behind. Pierre himself went forward cautiously, leaving Macavoy in command. When he came again he said:

"It's a fine sight, and the way is open. They are feasting and dancing. If we can enter without being seen, we are safe, except for food; we must trust for that. Come on."

When they arrived at the margin of the woods a wonderful scene was before them. A volcanic hill rose up on one side, gloomy and stern, but the reflection of the fires reached it, and made its sides quiver--the rock itself seemed trembling. The sombre pines showed up, a wall all round, and in the open space, turreted with fantastic fires, the Indians swayed in and out with weird chanting, their bodies mostly naked, and painted in strange colours. The earth itself was still and sober. Scarce a star peeped forth. A purple velvet curtain seemed to hang all down the sky, though here and there the flame bronzed it. The Indian lodges were empty, save where a few children squatted at the openings. The seven stood still with wonder, till Pierre whispered to them to get to the ground and crawl close in by the walls of the Fort, following him. They did so, Macavoy breathing hard--too hard; for suddenly Pierre clapped a hand on his mouth.

They were now near the Fort, and Pierre had seen an Indian come from the gate. The brave was within a few feet of them. He had almost passed them, for they were in the shadow, but Jose had burst a puffball with his hand, and the dust, flying up, made him sneeze. The Indian turned and saw them. With a low cry and the spring of a tiger Pierre was at his throat; and in another minute they were struggling on the ground. Pierre's hand never let go. His comrades did not stir; he had warned them to lie still. They saw the terrible game played out within arm's length of them. They heard Pierre say at last, as the struggles of the Indian ceased: "Beast! You had Father Halen's life. I have yours."

There was one more wrench of the Indian's limbs, and then he lay still.

They crawled nearer the gate, still hidden in the shadows and the grass. Presently they came to a clear space. Across this they must go, and enter the Fort before they were discovered. They got to their feet, and ran with wonderful swiftness, Pierre leading, to the gate. They had just reached it when there was a cry from the walls, on which two Indians were sitting. The Indians sprang down, seized their spears, and lunged at the seven as they entered. One spear caught Little Babiche in the arm as he swung aside, but with the butt of his musket Noel dropped him. The other Indian was promptly handled by Pierre himself. By this time Corvette and Jose had shut the gates, and the Fort was theirs--an easy conquest. The Indians were bound and gagged.

The adventurers had done it all without drawing the attention of the howling crowd without. The matter was in its infancy, however. They had the place, but could they hold it? What food and water were there within? Perhaps they were hardly so safe besieged as besiegers. Yet there was no doubt on Pierre's part. He had enjoyed the adventure so far up to the hilt. An old promise had been kept, and an old wrong avenged.

"What's to be done now?" said Macavoy. "There'll be hell's own racket; and they'll come on like a flood."

"To wait," said Pierre, "and dam the flood as it comes. But not a bullet till I give the word. Take to the chinks. We'll have them soon."

He was right: they came soon. Someone had found the dead body of Young Eye; then it was discovered that the gate was shut. A great shout went up. The Indians ran to their lodges for spears and hatchets, though the weapons of many were within the Fort, and soon they were about the place, shouting in impotent rage. They could not tell how many invaders were in the Fort; they suspected it was the Little Skins, their ancient enemies. But Young Eye, they saw, had not been scalped. This was brought to the old chief, and he called to his men to fall back. They had not seen one man of the invaders; all was silent and dark within the Fort; even the two torches which had been burning above the gate were down. At that moment, as if to add to the strangeness, a caribou came suddenly through the fires, and, passing not far from the bewildered Indians, plunged into the trees behind the Fort.

The caribou is credited with great powers. It is thought to understand all that is said to it, and to be able to take the form of a spirit. No Indian will come near it till it is dead, and he that kills it out of season is supposed to bring down all manner of evil.

So at this sight they cried out--the women falling to the ground with their faces in their arms--that the caribou had done this thing. For a moment they were all afraid. Besides, as a brave showed, there was no mark on the body of Young Eye.

Pierre knew quite well that this was a bull caribou, travelling wildly till he found another herd. He would carry on the deception. "Wail for the dead, as your women do in Ireland. That will finish them," he said to Macavoy.

The giant threw his voice up and out, so that it seemed to come from over the Fort to the Indians, weird and crying. Even the half-breeds standing by felt a light shock of unnatural excitement. The Indians without drew back slowly from the Fort, leaving a clear space between. Macavoy had uncanny tricks with his voice, and presently he changed the song into a

shrill, wailing whistle, which went trembling about the place and then stopped suddenly.

"Sure, that's a poor game, Pierre," he whispered; "an' I'd rather be pluggin' their hides wid bullets, or givin' the double-an'-twist. It's fightin' I come for, and not the trick av Mother Kilkevin."

Pierre arranged a plan of campaign at once. Every man looked to his gun, the gates were slowly opened, and Macavoy stepped out. Pierre had thrown over the Irishman's shoulders the great skin of a musk-ox which he had found inside the stockade. He was a strange, immense figure, as he walked into the open space, and, folding his arms, looked round. In the shadow of the gate behind were Pierre and the halfbreeds, with guns cocked.

Macavoy had lived so long in the north that he knew enough of all the languages to speak to this tribe. When he came out a murmur of wonder ran among the Indians. They had never seen anyone so tall, for they were not great of stature, and his huge beard and wild shock of hair were a wonderful sight. He remained silent, looking on them. At last the old chief spoke. "Who are you?"

"I am a great chief from the Hills of the Mighty Men, come to be your king," was his reply.

"He is your king," cried Pierre in a strange voice from the shadow of the gate, and he thrust out his gun-barrel, so that they could see it.

The Indians now saw Pierre and the half-breeds in the gateway, and they had not so much awe. They came a little nearer, and the women stopped crying. A few of the braves half-raised their spears. Seeing this, Pierre instantly stepped forward to the giant. He looked a child in stature thereby. He spoke quickly and well in the Chinook language.

"This is a mighty man from the Hills of the Mighty Men. He has come to rule over you, to give all other tribes into your hands; for he has strength like a thousand, and fears nothing of gods nor men. I have the blood of red men in me. It is I who have called this man from his distant home. I heard of your fighting and foolishness: also that warriors were to come from the south country to scatter your wives and children, and to make you slaves. I pitied you, and I have brought you a chief greater than any other. Throw your spears upon the ground, and all will be well; but raise one to throw, or one arrow, or axe, and there shall be death among you, so that as a people you shall die. The spirits are with us. . . . Well?"

The Indians drew a little nearer, but they did not drop their spears, for the old chief forbade them.

"We are no dogs nor cowards," he said, "though the spirits be with you, as we believe. We have seen strange things"--he pointed to Young Eye--"and heard voices not of men; but we would see great things as well as strange. There are seven men of the Little Skins tribe within a lodge yonder. They were to die when our braves returned from the hunt, and for that we prepared the feast. But this mighty man, he shall fight them all at once, and if he kills them he shall be our king. In the name of my tribe I speak. And this other," pointing to Pierre, "he shall also fight with a strong man of our tribe, so that we shall know if you are all brave, and not as those who crawl at the knees of the mighty."

This was more than Pierre had bargained for. Seven men at Macavoy, and Indians too, fighting for their lives, was a contract of weight. But Macavoy was blowing in his beard cheerfully enough.

"Let me choose me ground," he said, "wid me back to the wall, an' I'll take thim as they come."

Pierre instantly interpreted this to the Indians, and said for himself that he would welcome their strongest man at the point of a knife when he chose.

The chief gave an order, and the Little Skins were brought. The fires still burned brightly, and the breathing of the pines, as a slight wind rose and stirred them, came softly over. The Indians stood off at the command of the chief. Macavoy drew back to the wall, dropped the musk-ox skin to the ground, and stripped himself to the waist. But in his waistband there was what none of these Indians had ever seen--a small revolver that barked ever so softly. In the hands of each Little Skin there was put a knife, and they were told their cheerful exercise. They came on cautiously, and then suddenly closed in, knives flashing. But Macavoy's little bulldog barked, and one dropped to the ground. The others fell back. The wounded man drew up, made a lunge at Macavoy, but missed him. As if ashamed, the other six came on again at a spring. But again the weapon did its work smartly, and one more came down. Now the giant put it away, ran in upon the five, and cut right and left. So sudden and massive was his rush that they had no chance. Three fell at his blows, and then he drew back swiftly to the wall. "Drop your knives," he said, as they cowered, "or I'll kill you all." They did so. He dropped his own.

"Now come on, ye scuts!" he cried, and suddenly he reached and caught them, one with each arm, and wrestled with them, till he bent the one like a willow-rod, and dropped him with a broken back, while the other was at his mercy. Suddenly loosing him, he turned him towards the woods, and said: "Run, ye rid divil, run for y'r life!"

A dozen spears were raised, but the rifles of Pierre's men came in between: the Indian reached cover and was gone. Of the six others, two had been killed, the rest were severely wounded, and Macavoy had not a scratch.

Pierre smiled grimly. "You've been doing all the fighting, Macavoy," he said.

"There's no bein' a king for nothin'," he replied, wiping blood from his beard.

"It's my turn now, but keep your rifles ready, though I think there's no need."

Pierre had but a short minute with the champion, for he was an expert with the knife. He carried away four fingers of the Indian's fighting hand, and that ended it; for the next instant the point was at the red man's throat. The Indian stood to take it like a man; but Pierre loved that kind of courage, and shot the knife into its sheath instead.

The old chief kept his word, and after the spears were piled, he shook hands with Macavoy, as did his braves one by one, and they were all moved

by the sincerity of his grasp: their arms were useless for some time after. They hailed as their ruler, King Macavoy I.; for men are like dogs--they worship him who beats them. The feasting and dancing went on till the hunters came back. Then there was a wild scene, but in the end all the hunters, satisfied, came to greet their new king.

The king himself went to bed in the Fort that night, Pierre and his bodyguard--by name Noel, Little Babiche, Corvette, Jose, and Parfaite--its only occupants, singing joyfully:

"Did yees iver hear tell o' Long Barney,
That come from the groves o' Killarney?
He wint for a king, oh, he wint for a king,
But he niver keen back to Killarney
Wid his crown, an' his soord, an' his army!"

As a king Macavoy was a success, for the brag had gone from him. Like all his race he had faults as a subject, but the responsibility of ruling set him right. He found in the Fort an old sword and belt, left by some Hudson's Bay Company's man, and these he furbished up and wore.

With Pierre's aid he drew up a simple constitution, which he carried in the crown of his cap, and he distributed beads and gaudy trappings as marks of honour. Nor did he forget the frequent pipe of peace, made possible to all by generous gifts of tobacco. Anyone can found a kingdom abaft the Barren Grounds with tobacco, beads, and red flannel.

For very many weeks it was a happy kingdom. But presently Pierre yawned, and was ready to return. Three of the half-breeds were inclined to go with him. Jose and Little Babiche had formed alliances which held them there--besides, King Macavoy needed them.

On the eve of Pierre's departure a notable thing occurred.

A young brave had broken his leg in hunting, had been picked up by a band of another tribe, and carried south. He found himself at last at Fort O'Angel. There he had met Mrs. Whelan, and for presents of tobacco, and purple and fine linen, he had led her to her consort. That was how the king and Pierre met her in the yard of Fort Comfort one evening of early autumn. Pierre saw her first, and was for turning the King about and getting him away; but it was too late. Mrs. Whelan had seen him, and she called out at him:

"Oh, Tim! me jool, me king, have I found ye, me imp'ror!"

She ran at him, to throw her arms round him. He stepped back, the red of his face going white, and said, stretching out his hand, "Woman, y'are me wife, I know, whatever y' be; an' y've right to have shelter and bread av me; but me arms, an' me bed, are me own to kape or to give; and, by God, ye shall have nayther one nor the other! There's a ditch as wide as hell betune us."

The Indians had gathered quickly; they filled the yard, and crowded the gate. The woman went wild, for she had been drinking. She ran at Macavoy and spat in his face, and called down such a curse on him as, whoever hears, be he one that's cursed or any other, shudders at till he dies. Then she fell in a fit at his feet. Macavoy turned to the Indians, stretched out his hands and tried to speak, but could not. He

stooped down, picked up the woman, carried her into the Fort, and laid her on a bed of skins.

"What will you do?" asked Pierre.

"She is my wife," he answered firmly.

"She lived with Whelan."

"She must be cared for," was the reply. Pierre looked at him with a curious quietness. "I'll get liquor for her," he said presently. He started to go, but turned and felt the woman's pulse. "You would keep her?" he asked.

"Bring the liquor." Macavoy reached for water, and dipping the sleeve of his shirt in it, wetted her face gently.

Pierre brought the liquor, but he knew that the woman would die. He stayed with Macavoy beside her all the night. Towards morning her eyes opened, and she shivered greatly.

"It's bither cold," she said. "You'll put more wood on the fire, Tim, for the babe must be kept warrum."

She thought she was at Malahide.

"Oh, wurra, wurra, but 'tis freezin'!" she said again. "Why d'ye kape the door opin whin the child's perishin'?"

Macavoy sat looking at her, his trouble shaking him.

"I'll shut the door meself, thin," she added; "for 'twas I that lift it opin, Tim." She started up, but gave a cry like a wailing wind, and fell back.

"The door is shut," said Pierre.

"But the child--the child!" said Macavoy, tears running down his face and beard.

THE GIFT OF THE SIMPLE KING

Once Macavoy the giant ruled a tribe of Northern people, achieving the dignity by the hands of Pierre, who called him King Macavoy. Then came a time when, tiring of his kingship, he journeyed south, leaving all behind, even his queen, Wonta, who, in her bed of cypresses and yarrow, came forth no more into the morning. About Fort Guidon they still gave him his title, and because of his guilelessness, sincerity, and generosity, Pierre called him "The Simple King." His seven feet and over shambled about, suggesting unjointed power, unshackled force. No one hated Macavoy, many loved him, he was welcome at the fire and the cooking-pot; yet it seemed shameful to have so much man useless--such an engine of life, which might do great things, wasting fuel. Nobody thought much of that at Fort Guidon, except, perhaps, Pierre,

who sometimes said, "My simple king, some day you shall have your great chance again; but not as a king--as a giant, a man--voila!"

The day did not come immediately, but it came. When Ida, the deaf and dumb girl, married Hilton, of the H.B.C., every man at Fort Guidon, and some from posts beyond, sent her or brought her presents of one kind or another. Pierre's gift was a Mexican saddle. He was branding Ida's name on it with the broken blade of a case-knife when Macavoy entered on him, having just returned from a vagabond visit to Fort Ste. Anne.

"Is it digging out or carvin' in y'are?" he asked, puffing into his beard.

Pierre looked up contemptuously, but did not reply to the insinuation, for he never saw an insult unless he intended to avenge it; and he would not quarrel with Macavoy.

"What are you going to give?" he asked.

"Aw, give what to who, hop-o-me-thumb?" Macavoy said, stretching himself out in the doorway, his legs in the sun, head in the shade.

"You've been taking a walk in the country, then?" Pierre asked, though he knew.

"To Fort Ste. Anne: a buryin', two christ'nin's, an' a weddin'; an' lashin's av grog an' swill-aw that, me button o' the North!"

"La la! What a fool you are, my simple king! You've got the things end foremost. Turn your head to the open air, for I go to light a cigarette, and if you breathe this way, there will be a grand explode."

"Aw, yer thumb in yer eye, Pierre! It's like a baby's, me breath is, milk and honey it is--aw yis; an' Father Corraine, that was doin' the trick for the love o' God, says he to me, 'Little Tim Macavoy,'--aw yis, little Tim Macavoy,--says he, 'when are you goin' to buckle to, for the love o' God?' says he. Ashamed I was, Pierre, that Father Corraine should spake to me like that, for I'd only a twig twisted at me hips to kape me trousies up, an' I thought 'twas that he had in his eye! 'Buckle to,' says I, 'Father Corraine? Buckle to, yer riv'rinces?'--feelin' I was at the twigs the while. 'Ay, little Tim Macavoy,' he says, says he, 'you've bin 'atin' the husks av idleness long enough; when are you goin' to buckle to? You had a kingdom and ye guv it up,' says he; 'take a field, get a plough, and buckle to,' says he, 'an' turn back no more'--like that, says Father Corraine; and I thinkin' all the time 'twas the want o' me belt he was drivin' at."

Pierre looked at him a moment idly, then said: "Such a tom-fool! And where's that grand leather belt of yours, eh, my monarch?"

A laugh shook through Macavoy's beard. "For the weddin' it wint: buckled the two up wid it for better or worse--an' purty they looked, they did, standin' there in me cinch, an' one hole left--aw yis, Pierre."

"And what do you give to Ida?" Pierre asked, with a little emphasis of the branding-iron.

Macavoy got to his feet. "Ida! Ida!" said he. "Is that saddle for Ida? Is it her and Hilton that's to ate aff one dish together? That

rose o' the valley, that bird wid a song in her face and none an her tongue. That daisy dot av a thing, steppin' through the world like a sprig o' glory. Aw, Pierre, thim two!--an' I've divil a scrap to give, good or bad. I've nothin' at all in the wide wurruld but the clothes an me back, an' thim hangin' on the underbrush!--giving a little twist to the twigs. "An' many a meal an' many a dipper o' drink she's guv me, little smiles dancin' at her lips."

He sat down in the doorway again, with his face turned towards Pierre, and the back of his head in the sun. He was a picture of perfect health, sumptuous, huge, a bull in beauty, the heart of a child looking out of his eyes, but a sort of despair, too, in his bearing.

Pierre watched him with a furtive humour for a time, then he said languidly: "Never mind your clothes, give yourself."

"Yer tongue in yer cheek, me spot o' vinegar. Give meself! What's that for? A purty weddin' gift, says I? Handy thing to have in the house! Use me for a clothes-horse, or shtand me in the garden for a fairy bower--aw yis, wid a hole in me face that'd ate thim out o' house and home!"

Pierre drew a piece of brown paper towards him, and wrote on it with a burnt match. Presently he held it up. "Voila, my simple king, the thing for you to do: a grand gift, and to cost you nothing now. Come, read it out, and tell me what you think."

Macavoy took the paper, and in a large, judicial way, read slowly:

"On demand, for value received, I promise to pay to . . . IDA HILTON . . . or order, meself, Tim Macavoy, standin' seven foot three on me bare fut, wid interest at nothin' at all."

Macavoy ended with a loud smack of the lips. "McGuire!" he said, and nothing more.

McGuire was his strongest expression. In the most important moments of his career he had said it, and it sounded deep, strange, and more powerful than many usual oaths. A moment later he said again "McGuire!" Then he read the paper once more out loud. "What's that, me Frinchman?" he asked. "What Ballzeboob's tricks are y'at now?"

Pierre was complacently eyeing his handiwork on the saddle. He now settled back with his shoulders to the wall, and said: "See, then, it's a little promissory note for a wedding-gift to Ida. When she says some day, 'Tim Macavoy, I want you to do this or that, or to go here or there, or to sell you or trade you, or use you for a clothes-horse, or a bridge over a canyon, or to hold up a house, or blow out a prairie-fire, or be my second husband,' you shall say, 'Here I am'; and you shall travel from Heaven to Halifax, but you shall come at the call of this promissory."

Pierre's teeth glistened behind a smile as he spoke, and Macavoy broke into a roar of laughter. "Black's the white o' yer eye," he said at last, "an' a joke's a joke. Seven fut three I am, an' sound av wind an' limb--an' a weddin'-gift to that swate rose o' the valley! Aisy, aisy, Pierre. A bit o' foolin' 'twas ye put on the paper, but truth I'll make it, me cock o' the walk. That's me gift to her an' Hilton, an' no other. An' a dab wid red wax it shall have, an' what more be the word o' Freddy Tarlton the lawyer?"

"You're a great man," said Pierre with a touch of gentle irony, for his natural malice had no play against the huge ex-king of his own making. With these big creatures--he had connived with several in his time--he had ever been superior, protective, making them to feel that they were as children beside him. He looked at Macavoy musingly, and said to himself: "Well, why not? If it is a joke, then it is a joke; if it is a thing to make the world stand still for a minute sometime, so much the better. He is all waste now. By the holy, he shall do it. It is amusing, and it may be great by and by."

Presently Pierre said aloud: "Well, my Macavoy, what will you do? Send this good gift?"

"Aw yis, Pierre; I shtand by that from the crown av me head to the sole av me fut sure. Face like a mornin' in May, and hands like the tunes of an organ, she has. Spakes wid a look av her eye and a twist av her purty lips an' swaying body, an' talkin' to you widout a word. Aw motion--motion--motion; yis, that's it. An' I've seen her an tap av a hill wid the wind blowin' her hair free, and the yellow buds on the tree, and the grass green beneath her feet, the world smilin' betune her and the sun: pictures--pictures, aw yis! Promissory notice on demand is it anny toime? Seven fut three on me bare toes--but Father o' Sin! when she calls I come, yis."

"On your oath, Macavoy?" asked Pierre; "by the book av the Mass?"

Macavoy stood up straight till his head scraped the cobwebs between the rafters, the wild indignation of a child in his eye. "D'ye think I'm a thafe to stale me own word? Hut! I'll break ye in two, ye wisp o' straw, if ye doubt me word to a lady. There's me note av hand, and ye shall have me fist on it, in writin', at Freddy Tarlton's office, wid a blotch av red an' the Queen's head at the bottom. McGuire!" he said again, and paused, puffing his lips through his beard.

Pierre looked at him a moment, then waving his fingers idly, said, "So, my straw-breaker! Then tomorrow morning at ten you will fetch your wedding-gift. But come so soon now to M'sieu' Tarlton's office, and we will have it all as you say, with the red seal and the turn of your fist --yes. Well, well, we travel far in the world, and sometimes we see strange things, and no two strange things are alike--no; there is only one Macavoy in the world, there was only one Shon McGann. Shon McGann was a fine fool, but he did something at last, truly yes: Tim Macavoy, perhaps, will do something at last on his own hook. Hey, I wonder!" He felt the muscles of Macavoy's arm musingly, and then laughed up in the giant's face. "Once I made you a king, my own, and you threw it all away; now I make you a slave, and we shall see what you will do. Come along, for M'sieu' Tarlton."

Macavoy dropped a heavy hand on Pierre's shoulder. "'Tis hard to be a king, Pierre, but 'tis aisy to be a slave for the likes o' her. I'd kiss her dirty shoe sure!"

As they passed through the door, Pierre said, "Dis done, perhaps, when all is done, she will sell you for old bones and rags. Then I will buy you, and I will burn your bones and the rags, and I will scatter to the four winds of the earth the ashes of a king, a slave, a fool, and an Irishman--truly!"

"Bedad, ye'll have more earth in yer hands then, Pierre, than ye'll ever

earn, and more heaven than ye'll ever shtand in."

Half an hour later they were in Freddy Tarlton's office on the banks of the Little Big Swan, which tumbled past, swelled by the first rain of the early autumn. Freddy Tarlton, who had a gift of humour, entered into the spirit of the thing, and treated it seriously; but in vain did he protest that the large red seal with Her Majesty's head on it was unnecessary; Macavoy insisted, and wrote his name across it with a large indistinctness worthy of a king. Before the night was over everybody at Guidon Hill, save Hilton and Ida, knew what gift would come from Macavoy to the wedded pair.

II

The next morning was almost painfully beautiful, so delicate in its clearness, so exalted by the glory of the hills, so grand in the limitless stretch of the green-brown prairie north and south. It was a day for God's creatures to meet in, and speed away, and having flown round the boundaries of that spacious domain, to return again to the nest of home on the large plateau between the sea and the stars. Gathered about Ida's home was everybody who lived within a radius of a hundred miles. In the large front room all the presents were set: rich furs from the far north, cunningly carved bowls, rocking-chairs made by hand, knives, cooking utensils, a copy of Shakespeare in six volumes from the Protestant missionary who performed the ceremony, a nugget of gold from the Long Light River; and outside the door, a horse, Hilton's own present to his wife, on which was put Pierre's saddle, with its silver mounting and Ida's name branded deep on pommel and flap. When Macavoy arrived, a cheer went up, which was carried on waves of laughter into the house to Hilton and Ida, who even then were listening to the first words of the brief service which begins, "I charge you both if you do know any just cause or impediment--" and so on.

They did not turn to see what it was, for just at that moment they themselves were the very centre of the universe. Ida being deaf and dumb, it was necessary to interpret to her the words of the service by signs, as the missionary read it, and this was done by Pierre himself, the half-breed Catholic, the man who had brought Hilton and Ida together, for he and Ida had been old friends. After Father Corraine had taught her the language of signs, Pierre had learned them from her, until at last his gestures had become as vital as her own. The delicate precision of his every movement, the suggestiveness of look and motion, were suited to a language which was nearer to the instincts of his own nature than word of mouth. All men did not trust Pierre, but all women did; with those he had a touch of Machiavelli, with these he had no sign of Mephistopheles, and few were the occasions in his life when he showed outward tenderness to either: which was equally effective. He had learnt, or knew by instinct, that exclusiveness as to men and indifference as to women are the greatest influences on both. As he stood there, slowly interpreting to Ida, by graceful allusive signs, the words of the service, one could not think that behind his impassive face there was any feeling for the man or for the woman. He had that disdainful smile which men acquire who are all their lives aloof from the hopes of the hearthstone and acknowledge no laws but their own.

More than once the eyes of the girl filled with tears, as the pregnancy of some phrase in the service came home to her. Her face responded to

Pierre's gestures, as do one's nerves to the delights of good music, and there was something so unique, so impressive in the ceremony, that the laughter which had greeted Macavoy passed away, and a dead silence; beginning from where the two stood, crept out until it covered all the prairie. Nothing was heard except Hilton's voice in strong tones saying, "I take thee to be my wedded wife," etc.; but when the last words of the service were said, and the newmade bride turned to her husband's embrace, and a little sound of joy broke from her lips, there was plenty of noise and laughter again, for Macavoy stood in the doorway, or rather outside it, stooping to look in upon the scene. Someone had lent him the cinch of a broncho and he had belted himself with it, no longer carrying his clothes about "on the underbrush." Hilton laughed and stretched out his hand. "Come in, King," he said, "come and wish us joy."

Macavoy parted the crowd easily, forcing his way, and instantly was stooping before the pair--for he could not stand upright in the room.

"Aw, now, Hilton, is it you, is it you, that's pluckin' the rose av the valley, snatchin' the stars out av the sky! aw, Hilton, the like o' that! Travel down I did yesterday from Fort Ste. Anne, and divil a word I knew till Pierre hit me in the eye wid it last night--and no time for a present, for a wedding-gift--no, aw no!"

Just here Ida reached up and touched him on the shoulder. He smiled down on her, puffing and blowing in his beard, bursting to speak to her, yet knowing no word by signs to say; but he nodded his head at her, and he patted Hilton's shoulder, and he took their hands and joined them together, hers on top of Hilton's, and shook them in one of his own till she almost winced. Presently, with a look at Hilton, who nodded in reply, Ida lifted her cheek to Macavoy to kiss--Macavoy, the idle, ill-cared-for, boisterous giant. His face became red like that of a child caught in an awkward act, and with an absurd shyness he stooped and touched her cheek. Then he turned to Hilton, and blurted out, "Aw, the rose o' the valley, the pride o' the wide wurruld! aw, the bloom o' the hills! I'd have kissed her dirty shoe. McQuire!"

A burst of laughter rolled out on the clear air of the prairie, and the hills seemed to stir with the pleasure of life. Then it was that Macavoy, following Hilton and Ida outside, suddenly stopped beside the horse, drew from his pocket the promissory note that Pierre had written, and said, "Yis, but all the weddin'-gifts aren't in. 'Tis nothin' I had to give-divil a cent in the wurruld, divil a pound av baccy, or a pot for the fire, or a bit av linin for the table; nothin' but meself and me dirty clothes, standin' seven fut three an me bare toes. What was I to do? There was only meself to give, so I give it free and hearty, and here it is wid the Queen's head an it, done in Mr. Tarlton's office. Ye'd better had had a dog, or a gun, or a ladder, or a horse, or a saddle, or a quart o' brown brandy; but such as it is I give it ye-- I give it to the rose o' the valley and the star o' the wide wurruld."

In a loud voice he read the promissory note, and handed it to Ida. Men laughed till there were tears in their eyes, and a keg of whisky was opened; but somehow Ida did not laugh. She and Pierre had seen a serious side to Macavoy's gift: the childlike manliness in it. It went home to her woman's heart without a touch of ludicrousness, without a sound of laughter.

After a time the interest in this wedding-gift declined at Fort Guidon, and but three people remembered it with any singular distinctness--Ida, Pierre, and Macavoy. Pierre was interested, for in his primitive mind he knew that, however wild a promise, life is so wild in its events, there comes the hour for redemption of all I O U's.

Meanwhile, weeks, months, and even a couple of years passed, Macavoy and Pierre coming and going, sometimes together, sometimes not, in all manner of words at war, in all manner of fact at peace. And Ida, out of the bounty of her nature, gave the two vagabonds a place at her fireside whenever they chose to come. Perhaps, where speech was not given, a gift of divination entered into her instead, and she valued what others found useless, and held aloof from what others found good. She had powers which had ever been the admiration of Guidon Hill. Birds and animals were her friends--she called them her kinsmen. A peculiar sympathy joined them; so that when, at last, she tamed a white wild duck, and made it do the duties of a carrier-pigeon, no one thought it strange.

Up in the hills, beside the White Sun River, lived her sister and her sister's children; and, by and by, the duck carried messages back and forth, so that when, in the winter, Ida's health became delicate, she had comfort in the solicitude and cheerfulness of her sister, and the gaiety of the young birds of her nest, who sent Ida many a sprightly message and tales of their good vagrancy in the hills. In these days Pierre and Macavoy were little at the Post, save now and then to sit with Hilton beside the fire, waiting for spring and telling tales. Upon Hilton had settled that peaceful, abstracted expectancy which shows man at his best, as he waits for the time when, through the half-lights of his fatherhood, he shall see the broad fine dawn of motherhood spreading up the world--which, all being said and done, is that place called Home. Something gentle came over him while he grew stouter in body and in all other ways made a larger figure among the people of the West.

As Pierre said, whose wisdom was more to be trusted than his general morality, "It is strange that most men think not enough of themselves till a woman shows them how. But it is the great wonder that the woman does not despise him for it. Quel caractere! She has so often to show him his way like a babe, and yet she says to him, Mon grand homme! my master! my lord! Pshaw! I have often thought that women are half saints, half fools, and men half fools, half rogues. But Quelle vie!--what life! without a woman you are half a man; with one you are bound to a single spot in the world, you are tied by the leg, your wing is clipped--you cannot have all. Quelle vie--what life!"

To this Macavoy said: "Spit-spat! But what the devil good does all yer thinkin' do ye, Pierre? It's argufy here and argufy there, an' while yer at that, me an' the rest av us is squeezin' the fun out o' life. Aw, go 'long wid ye. Y'are only a bit o' hell and grammar, annyway. Wid all yer cuttin' and carvin' things to see the internals av thim, I'd do more to the call av a woman's finger than for all the logic and knowalogy y' ever chewed--an' there y'are, me little tailor o' jur'sprudince!"

"To the finger call of Hilton's wife, eh?"

Macavoy was not quite sure what Pierre's enigmatical tone meant. A wild light showed in his eyes, and his tongue blundered out: "Yis, Hilton's wife's finger, or a look av her eye, or nothin' at all. Aisy, aisy, ye

wasp! Ye'd go stalkin' devils in hell for her yerself, so ye would. But the tongue av ye--but, it's gall to the tip."

"Maybe, my king. But I'd go hunting because I wanted; you because you must. You're a slave to come and to go, with a Queen's seal on the promissory."

Macavoy leaned back and roared. "Aw, that! The rose o' the valley--the joy o' the wurruld! S't, Pierre--" his voice grew softer on a sudden, as a fresh thought came to him--"did y' ever think that the child might be dumb like the mother?"

This was a day in the early spring, when the snows were melting in the hills, and freshets were sweeping down the valleys far and near. That night a warm heavy rain came on, and in the morning every stream and river was swollen to twice its size. The mountains seemed to have stripped themselves of snow, and the vivid sun began at once to colour the foothills with green. As Pierre and Macavoy stood at their door, looking out upon the earth cleansing itself, Macavoy suddenly said: "Aw, look, look, Pierre--her white duck off to the nest on Champak Hill!"

They both shaded their eyes with their hands. Circling round two or three times above the Post, the duck then stretched out its neck to the west, and floated away beyond Guidon Hill, and was hid from view.

Pierre, without a word, began cleaning his rifle, while Macavoy smoked, and sat looking into the distance, surveying the sweet warmth and light. His face blossomed with colour, and the look of his eyes was that of an irresponsible child. Once or twice he smiled and puffed in his beard, but perhaps that was involuntary, or was, maybe, a vague reflection of his dreams, themselves most vague, for he was only soaking in sun and air and life.

Within an hour they saw the wild duck--again passing the crest of Guidon, and they watched it sailing down to the Post, Pierre idly fondling the gun, Macavoy half roused from his dreams. But presently they were altogether roused, the gun was put away, and both were on their feet; for after the pigeon arrived there was a stir at the Post, and Hilton could be seen running from the store to his house, not far away.

"Something's wrong there," said Pierre.

"D'ye think 'twas the duck brought it?" asked Macavoy.

Without a word Pierre started away towards the Post, Macavoy following. As they did so, a half-breed boy came from the house, hurrying towards them.

Inside the house Hilton's wife lay in her bed, her great hour coming on before the time, because of ill news from beyond the Guidon. There was with her an old Frenchwoman, who herself, in her time, had brought many children into the world, whose heart brooded tenderly, if uncouthly, over the dumb girl. She it was who had handed to Hilton the paper the wild duck had brought, after Ida had read it and fallen in a faint on the floor.

The message that had felled the young wife was brief and awful. A cloud-burst had fallen on Champak Hill, had torn part of it away, and a part of this part had swept down into the path that led to the little house,

having been stopped by some falling trees and a great boulder. It blocked the only way to escape above, and beneath, the river was creeping up to sweep away the little house. So, there the mother and her children waited (the father was in the farthest north), facing death below and above. The wild duck had carried the tale in its terrible simplicity. The last words were, "There mayn't be any help for me and my sweet chicks, but I am still hoping, and you must send a man or many. But send soon, for we are cut off, and the end may come any hour."

Macavoy and Pierre were soon at the Post, and knew from Hilton all there was to know. At once Pierre began to gather men, though what one or many could do none could say. Eight white men and three Indians watched the wild duck sailing away again from the bedroom window where Ida lay, to carry a word of comfort to Champak Hill. Before it went, Ida asked for Macavoy, and he was brought to her bedroom by Hilton. He saw a pale, almost unearthly, yet beautiful face, flushing and paling with a coming agony, looking up at him; and presently two trembling hands made those mystic signs which are the primal language of the soul. Hilton interpreted to him this: "I have sent for you. There is no man so big or strong as you in the north. I did not know that I should ever ask you to redeem the note. I want my gift, and I will give you your paper with the Queen's head on it. Those little lives, those pretty little dears, you will not see them die. If there is a way, any way, you will save them. Sometimes one man can do what twenty cannot. You were my wedding-gift: I claim you now."

She paused, and then motioned to the nurse, who laid the piece of brown paper in Macavoy's hand. He held it for a moment as delicately as if it were a fragile bit of glass, something that his huge fingers might crush by touching. Then he reached over and laid it on the bed beside her and said, looking Hilton in the eyes, "Tell her, the slip av a saint she is, if the breakin' av me bones, or the lettin' av me blood's what'll set all right at Champak Hill, let her mind be aisy--aw yis!"

Soon afterwards they were all on their way--all save Hilton, whose duty was beside this other danger, for the old nurse said that, "like as not," her life would hang upon the news from Champak Hill; and if ill came, his place was beside the speechless traveller on the Brink.

In a few hours the rescuers stood on the top of Champak Hill, looking down. There stood the little house, as it were, between two dooms. Even Pierre's face became drawn and pale as he saw what a very few hours or minutes might do. Macavoy had spoken no word, had answered no question since they had left the Post. There was in his eye the large seriousness, the intentness which might be found in the face of a brave boy, who had not learned fear, and yet saw a vast ditch of danger at which he must leap. There was ever before him the face of the dumb wife; there was in his ears the sound of pain that had followed him from Hilton's house out into the brilliant day.

The men stood helpless, and looked at each other. They could not say to the river that it must rise no farther, and they could not go to the house, nor let a rope down, and there was the crumbled moiety of the hill which blocked the way to the house: elsewhere it was sheer precipice without trees.

There was no corner in these hills that Macavoy and Pierre did not know, and at last, when despair seemed to settle on the group, Macavoy, having spoken a low word to Pierre, said: "There's wan way, an' maybe I can an'

maybe I can't, but I'm fit to try. I'll go up the river to an aisy p'int a mile above, get in, and drift down to a p'int below there, thin climb up and loose the stuff."

Every man present knew the double danger: the swift headlong river, and the sudden rush of rocks and stones, which must be loosed on the side of the narrow ravine opposite the little house. Macavoy had nothing to say to the head-shakes of the others, and they did not try to dissuade him; for women and children were in the question, and there they were below beside the house, the children gathered round the mother, she waiting--waiting.

Macavoy, stripped to the waist, and carrying only a hatchet and a coil of rope tied round him, started away alone up the river. The others waited, now and again calling comfort to the woman below, though their words could not be heard. About half an hour passed, and then someone called out: "Here he comes!" Presently they could see the rough head and the bare shoulders of the giant in the wild churning stream. There was only one point where he could get

Livros Grátis

(<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

[Baixar livros de Administração](#)

[Baixar livros de Agronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Arquitetura](#)

[Baixar livros de Artes](#)

[Baixar livros de Astronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Biologia Geral](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência Política](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde](#)

[Baixar livros de Comunicação](#)

[Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE](#)

[Baixar livros de Defesa civil](#)

[Baixar livros de Direito](#)

[Baixar livros de Direitos humanos](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial](#)

[Baixar livros de Farmácia](#)

[Baixar livros de Filosofia](#)

[Baixar livros de Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Geociências](#)

[Baixar livros de Geografia](#)

[Baixar livros de História](#)

[Baixar livros de Línguas](#)

[Baixar livros de Literatura](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil](#)
[Baixar livros de Matemática](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária](#)
[Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente](#)
[Baixar livros de Meteorologia](#)
[Baixar Monografias e TCC](#)
[Baixar livros Multidisciplinar](#)
[Baixar livros de Música](#)
[Baixar livros de Psicologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Química](#)
[Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva](#)
[Baixar livros de Serviço Social](#)
[Baixar livros de Sociologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Teologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Trabalho](#)
[Baixar livros de Turismo](#)