

WOODSMOKE

F. BRETT YOUNG



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Title: Woodsmoke

Date of first publication: 1924

Author: Francis Brett Young (1884-1954)

Date first posted: May 23, 2014

Date last updated: May 23, 2014

Faded Page eBook #20140532

This ebook was produced by: David T. Jones, Al Haines, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpcanada.net>

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WOODSMOKE

by

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG



LONDON: 48 PALL MALL
W. COLLINS SONS & CO. LTD.
GLASGOW MELBOURNE AUCKLAND

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First	Impression,	March, 1924
Second	”	May, 1924
Third	”	June, 1924
Fourth	”	October, 1924

Manufactured in Great Britain.

To
Nancy and Alfred Brett
in whose African house this book was begun.

PROLOGUE

I first met Jimmy Antrim at a detestable spot called M'bagwe, half-way through Smuts's invasion of German East Africa. Our hands were full of pitiful wounded after the fight at M'kalamo, and so my ambulance had lagged behind, arriving in the cool of the evening at a place where we had been told that water would be found. By the time we reached it the Division had done its worst; all that remained of the promised river was a series of rock-pools from which one scooped with difficulty a creamy liquid coloured like coffee grounds; but once it had been water, and that was enough for us. Near it, like a jealous watch-dog, Antrim had pitched his tent, or, rather, slung between two acacias of a vivid and illusive greenness the piece of rotten tarpaulin that sheltered him from the sun.

As I rode up he rose, in defence of his coffee-grounds, from the yellow patch of grass on which he had been lying. He came staggering out into the sun, a tall man in a captain's uniform, his pale face blotched with freckles like a leopard's skin, reddish hair, and eyes of deep blue, singularly honest, that looked straight into mine from their cavernous orbits. I told him who we were; and as soon as he was satisfied that we needed water and had a right to it he trotted off like a dog to its kennel, and left us to ourselves.

Later in the evening I strolled round again to his bivouac, partly because he was the only white man with whom I could talk, and partly because I felt certain that the man was ill and hoped that I might do something for him. There he still lay on his patch of grass, sticking to his post as if he feared that he would be court-martialled for letting the water evaporate. Evidently he resented my visit. He asked me gruffly what I wanted, and when I told him that I'd come round for a smoke and a talk, he was silent, as if he didn't believe me.

"At any rate," I said, "you'd better let me have a look at you. When a man's as ill as you are he shouldn't sniff at a doctor."

"Doctors?" he said, with a laugh. "I think I know more about malaria than most of them. Don't talk to me about quinine, I'm what the Germans call *chinin-fest*. I might as well eat charcoal as quinine. You'd better take a pew."

The pew was another tuft of grass, and I took it. When I lit my pipe I discovered that he, poor devil, had run out of tobacco. With difficulty I made him accept a spare bag of Magaliesburg that one of Brits's troopers had given me. "That's better than quinine," he said, loading his pipe with fingers that trembled.

He lit a hurricane lamp. The air danced with moths and mosquitoes. Once again

I was struck with the extreme pallor of his face. "A candidate for blackwater fever," I thought. "This fellow ought to be sent back to the base." I told him so.

At this he became excited. "All you medicine-wallahs are just the same," he said. "I know all about myself. I know what I feel like, and I also know that I'm perfectly fit to carry on. When I report sick you can do what you like with me."

"You should have reported sick long ago," I told him.

"But I've not done so," he said, "and I'm not going to."

Of course, the type of man was familiar; you get him in all ranks: the old regular soldier who thinks that fitness is a point of honour. In German East they died like flies for their pains. But this man was somehow different. There was more than fever on his mind, and what it was I couldn't guess until we began to talk about the country through which we were passing. Then he soon showed that he knew more about it than the German maps told us.

"You know this country pretty well," I said.

"Yes. How long have you been in East Africa?"

"Six months."

"Up at Nairobi," he sneered.

"For five days."

"My name is Antrim."

This sudden information seemed unnecessary. I told him mine, vaguely flattering myself that it might be familiar. But it wasn't.

"It's an extraordinary country," I said, "full of atmosphere."

"Atmosphere? What do you mean?"

That was a question that it would take a book to answer.

"I mean that there's more in it than you can see with your eyes or survey with triangles. You never know what you're going to find. You spoke of Nairobi. Well, Nairobi, to my mind, has none. This country here is full of secrets—ghosts, if you like to put it that way."

"Ghosts?" he echoed. "You're right. You're right. Ghosts. But you're the first man I've met here that's seen it. What did you say your name was? I've a regular East African memory. You say you never know what you're going to find. That's where you differ from me. I do." He chuckled to himself. "That's why I'm not reporting sick, doctor. D'you see?"

I didn't; but I pretended that I did. Or perhaps I really thought I did. I thought he was going to find an attack of blackwater and a shallow seven-foot trench. And of course I was wrong, as doctors usually are.

Next day we moved on and caught up with the division. All through the day's

march my meeting with Antrim had stuck in my mind, and in the evening I made some inquiries about him.

“An old regular,” they told me. “Jimmy Antrim. He’s well known in Nairobi; used to be in the K.A.R. *Bwana Chui*, the natives call him. His freckles *do* make him look like a leopard. Antrim’s a curious fellow. In the old days up at Nairobi he was a popular man, thorough good sportsman all round. Then there was a queer story about a hunting trip—somewhere down in this country. He went out with a man and his wife. There was trouble with the wife; a queer business that was never properly explained. If you get hold of some of the old East Africans they’ll tell you all about it with accumulated interest.”

Of course that explained why Antrim had tested me with his name and asked me if I’d been in Nairobi. I didn’t ask the old East Africans. It struck me that if there were any story I’d rather hear it from Antrim’s side. I was prejudiced in his favour. I liked his eyes. I could have sworn that whatever had happened the man was a sahib. His figure was often in my thoughts although I never met him. I kept on thinking of the way in which he had risen when I spoke of the atmosphere of German East; the eagerness with which he had jumped at the word “ghosts.” I began to wonder if the extraordinary atmosphere which had impressed itself on me that night had really arisen from the country at all, whether, in fact, Antrim himself had not been responsible for it; for men who see ghosts have a habit of carrying their visions along with them. I wondered if I should ever meet him again. Probably if I did he would have forgotten me.

Weeks went by. Twice we imagined we had the enemy in our net, and twice they slipped us. It seemed to us all that the campaign was getting stale; we grew sick of the whole weary business of bush-fighting and thirst and starvation. Our thrust was stopping of its own inertia. We settled down in a bush country at the edge of the Masai steppe and watched our cattle and mules and horses dying of fly. When they died in camp the doctors had to see that they were buried. We might just as well have left them to the lions.

At that camp—it was called N’dalo—Antrim suddenly reappeared. In the meantime they had kept him doing odd jobs on lines of communication. Sometimes he was political officer, sometimes intelligence, sometimes A.P.M. In all these billets his knowledge of native languages was useful. It was as political officer, in white tabs, that he came to us; but, quite apart from the change of uniform, I wouldn’t have known him.

The man had looked awful enough by the water at M’bagwe; now there was nothing left of him but his eyes. His uniform bagged about him; his hands were claws,

his face a dirty yellow. There was nothing left but those two points of burning blue. And how they burned! It was just as if the quivering flame of his life were concentrated in them. Puff that out, the man would be dead, and death a mercy. Still, he was carrying on. His tent was full every day of natives who had been arrested on the edge of the camp by our patrols. He was even full of a curious, fierce energy. "Fey" was the only word that one could give it. I suppose that, as an Irishman, he had a right to it.

One day, inspecting a fatigue party of Baluchis who were burying the last of their transport animals, I made a gruesome discovery. One of the sepoy, who had scattered through the bush in search of soft ground for the burial, had suddenly thrown up his arms like a drowning man and disappeared into the earth. The others ran up to see what had happened, and found him, frightened, but none the worse, at the bottom of an old game-pit of the kind that the natives dig to catch animals. The mouth of the pit had been quite masked by a growth of creeping vines and thorns. They pulled him up, laughing at the mishap, with a cable of linked belts, and as soon as he got his breath he began to tell the Jemadar what he had seen. When he came to himself at the bottom of the pit he had found himself lying between two human skeletons. It would have been natural enough to find the pit full of bones; but these two seemed to be complete, just lying there together undisturbed as the ants had left them. . . . "Some poor devils of natives," I thought, "probably driven to hide there by our friend Zahn." Zahn was the German officer who had been in charge of that district in peace-time; a hard case, and one of the blackest in the black book with which the intelligence supplied us.

"Will the sahib see for himself?" the Jemadar asked me; and since the discovery would have to be reported, I said "Yes," watching the Baluchis as they cleared the tangles of undergrowth from the mouth of the pit and let in the light.

Then I climbed down. There were two complete skeletons, as the sepoy had told us. In one of them the right thigh-bone was completely broken; an ugly fracture in the middle third. The bones were those of a big man, more than six foot, I judged him. The shape of his skull told me that he had been a European. The other, shorter, but massively built, had obviously been a native. No scrap of clothing was to be found; the ants had seen to that; but scattered over the floor of the pit was a number of metallic objects: a gold hunter watch, on the dial of which I was surprised to read the name of an English maker; a rusty hammer; a couple of corroded pans of the kind which men use for prospecting; a clasp knife, a pencil case of untarnished gold; and, last of all, a gold locket which had once hung round the white man's neck, but now dangled within the cage of his ribs. These things I collected and carried to

headquarters, leaving a guard of Baluchis to see that nothing was disturbed.

Headquarters was not interested in my find. Nobody seemed to know what I should do with my trophies until a languid brigade-major suggested that Antrim was my man. "Take them to Captain Antrim, with my compliments, and ask him to report."

Antrim was sitting at his table, writing under the same old tarpaulin. When he saw me coming he cleared away the natives that were waiting to be examined and rose with difficulty to his feet.

"So you've come at last," he said bewilderingly.

"Headquarters sent me——" I began.

"Yes, yes, I know. Sit down. Let me see what you've got."

The sepoy whom I had borrowed from the Baluchis dumped everything on the table. Antrim went paler and paler. I thought the man was going to faint and jumped up to catch him.

"No, I'm all right," he said. "Leave me alone."

He picked up the watch and opened it. It had stopped at ten minutes past five. He closed it with a snap. Then his thin fingers strayed over the other rubbish. It was just as if he were afraid to touch them, but felt compelled to do so. Last of all he came to the locket. He pressed the spring; but it wouldn't open. He forced it with a pen-knife. A scrap of paper fluttered out on to the ground. I picked it up and read a dozen English words that were written on it in pencil: *Dinga found me. Too late, though. Leg smashed. Nobody to blame. Lacey has the figures.—J. D. R.*

I handed the paper to Antrim; but he took no notice of me. His eyes were fixed on a portrait, a coloured miniature, that the locket contained. I leaned over him and looked. The portrait was that of a young girl with dark hair and a pale, serious face at which Antrim gazed and gazed.

"English," I said. "Look at the paper. It's a beautiful face."

"Beautiful?" he echoed. "Not beautiful enough." He laughed nervously. "It's my wife."

He looked at me with his blue eyes blazing, his lips trembling. Evidently the poor devil's mind had given way. That sometimes happens after months of malaria.

"It's my wife," he repeated, with an awful smile. "Don't you believe me?"

Then he tottered, his hands dropped the locket, I caught him and lowered him gently to the ground. He lay there quietly, his eyes closed. I was glad that he'd closed his eyes. They were unbearable. But his lips still smiled. That was the funny thing. He looked as if he had suddenly lost all anxiety.

I sent the Baluchi running round to the ambulance for bearers and a stretcher.

Antrim was still lying quiet when they arrived. I roused him.

“Look here, I’m going to shove you into hospital,” I said.

He took it like a lamb.

“Right-o! You can do what you like with me now. I’ve finished with the ghosts.”

Evidently he remembered our conversation at M’bagwe in spite of the “East African memory.”

We hoisted him on to the stretcher and carried him away. He lay there placidly, his eyes still closed. I walked by his side, thinking what a tragedy it was that he hadn’t given way before his reason went. Suddenly I heard him whispering: “Doctor!”

“Yes?” I bent over him and listened.

“Will you do me a favour?”

“Of course.” He sounded sane enough.

“I want you to go round to the wireless people—Harrison’s a friend of mine—and put through a private cable for me. Really important. Will you take it down?”

“Very good. Fire away!”

He dictated: “*Antrim, Chalke Manor, Wilts*. I don’t know if you’ll have to put *England*. . . .”

“I’ll see about that.”

“Thanks. Go on: *Ghost laid. Love. Jim*. Got it?”

I read it over. He was wonderfully collected. I began to wonder if I’d made a mistake in diagnosis.

“Yes, that’s right,” he said. “A thousand thanks.”

He closed his eyes again. The stretcher passed into the shadow of the hospital *banda*. A fortnight later, when I lay convalescent beside him on the way to the base, I heard his incredible story; and this is what I made of it.

CHAPTER I

1

Five years before the beginning of this adventure, James Antrim had been seconded from the Indian regiment to which he belonged for a term of service with the King's African Rifles at Nairobi. It was a pleasant life that he came to, and the only one that he understood; for in those days, before the penetration of Jewish shopkeepers and Christian landsharks which has given the town a flavour of the Rand, the atmosphere of Nairobi was, as near as may be, that of an Indian hill station. Its social traditions were those of Indian official life; its inhabitants, soldiers and civil servants, members of two connected castes, speaking the same language, accepting the same conventions of behaviour and the same code of sport.

A good life . . . Antrim—Jimmy, as everybody called him—could not have asked for a better. First, he was a keen soldier—heredity answered for that—and the K.A.R. of those days was a crack corps of magnificent physique tempered by the fires of war that still smouldered in every border of the colony. He was proud of his men, and, being born to the job, he soon came to know them and like them as well as his own Pathans. Next, he was a born sportsman; and this was the best country in the world for sport. One could shoot lion within an hour's ride of Nairobi; there was a racecourse with two annual meetings, a pack of hounds that hunted jackal, a polo ground. No man of his kind could complain.

He lived comfortably in the K.A.R. Headquarters mess on the brow of Nairobi Hill, within a stone's throw of his lines. If, at sunset, he passed through the wide alley of the cantonment between the rows of thatched *bandas* that his men inhabited and saw the blue smoke curling upward while the *askaris'* women moved between the huts swathed in their long printed cloths, he accepted the whole exotic scene without questioning or wonder. To him it was just part of the daily life. Even when he passed through the length of the lines and stood for a moment on the edge of the escarpment, seeing beneath him the green sea of the Athi Plains, or, perhaps, the gleaming cone of Kilima N'jaro, he didn't realise that he was in Africa, or think of the desperate adventures of the men who had pushed inward before him, through the veldt of fever and the Taru jungle to plant this station on the edge of the hills. Aldershot or Pindi or Nairobi: it made no difference in this life of bugle calls and parades. Nairobi was just a station, like any other, in which he would serve his time and then pass on. The green plain beneath him was just the game-reserve, a reservoir of magnificent shooting, made for the sport of men. Kilima N'jaro? Kilima

N'jaro was in German East, and did not concern him. He would not wait to see its cone loom greater, dominating all the South, for, between six o'clock and half-past, the sun would set, and at this hour all sensible men made tracks for the club or for the ante-room, that they might get in a rubber of bridge before dinner. He played bridge well. For every game in which the muscles or brain of one man were pitted against those of another he had a kind of clear, instinctive aptitude. Other men liked to play with him, for he was a generous winner and a good loser.

This was the time of day when women emerged with their cool dresses, fragile and seductive in the twilight; but Antrim never bothered his head about them. Poodle-faking was a subaltern's game. He had learnt all he wanted to know about it years ago in India, at a station too hot for any other amusement, and emerged from this tuition with a profound distrust. Not, for one moment, that he was insusceptible. It was a game for which he had an aptitude as marked as for any other. The trouble, to his mind, was that it was a game without rules—or rather that women, in his experience, wouldn't stick to those that he accepted. The theory that all was fair in love and war offended him. It had been part of his training to absorb the rules of the Geneva Convention in one, and he looked for its equivalent in the other. In vain, of course; for women, who wouldn't sneak a point at tennis for the world, were apt, in matters of sex, to argue with the umpire. What was more, he had invariably found them bad losers. With one loser, in Mau, he had had a hell of a time; and another, a winner, had wiped her feet on him in Poona. It wasn't good enough. That was why he preferred bridge . . . and male bridge at that.

For this reason he came to Nairobi with a reputation for "difficulty" among women. Throughout the whole of his service there he lived up to it; and this was confusing to hostesses who were simple enough to be led by his perfectly delightful manners into the idea that they had made a conquest. There wasn't a woman in Nairobi who could complain that Jimmy had ever been rude to her, nor yet one who could boast that he had been attentive; and this was not for want of opportunities of either. A waste of the very best material; for in many ways he was attractive to women; in his air of perfect physical efficiency, his reputation for good sportsmanship, his breeding, and, above all, his voice, which was low and strong with the inflections rather than the accents of a brogue.

Perhaps it was a feeling of disappointment, long suppressed, that made the outcry which raised itself against his first adventure at N'dalo so bitter and so prolonged. To Antrim himself it was also inexplicable, for he had left B.E.A. after five years of service with the battalion, to all intents a popular figure. Certainly no man could have asked for a better send off. He didn't suppose that he would ever

see Nairobi again; but as he left it he felt more kindly towards it than to any station in which he had served.

In after years he was often to remember that downhill journey to the coast. He had never been fitter in his life; he was modestly conscious of a job well done, and sure of a first-rate confidential report on his service. In front of him lay the prospect of six months' leave. What he would do with it he didn't know. It was enough to be sure that he would be in Ireland for the white trout and the grouse, and six months was a deuce of a time in any case. Three days at least he must spend in Mombasa waiting for his boat; but that, on the whole, would be rather fun, for he was booked to spend it with the provincial Commissioner Kilgour, another Irishman whose house was the oldest quarter on the island, overlooking the harbour in which he could swim at dusk. In the daytime, perhaps, he would have a go at trolling for baracuta. And sleep. After the altitude of Nairobi it would be hard to keep awake at the coast.

By the time that he had reached these pleasant determinations the train was running fast through the game reserve and his eyes became watchful. It was good to see them, those great straggling herds of antelope on which he would never set eyes again, unless, indeed, he should some day take another trip from India on long leave. It pleased him to reflect that he could see nothing to touch the collection of heads that he was bringing home with his luggage. He thought lovingly of the record Roan that he had stalked and shot at N'joro six months before; and with this there came into his mind the memory of many golden days on those rolling highlands.

When they ran into Kiu in the early evening and were turned out at the Dak Bungalow for tea, he realised that he was saying good-bye to these happy hunting grounds; for at this point the climate of the highlands ends and the line begins its long descent to the sea. It wasn't like Antrim to be sentimental, and yet, when he had bolted his boiled eggs, he stood on the platform looking backward over the rising plateau, so vast, so piercingly green after the greater rains; and in that moment Africa, that old enchantress, sealed her claim on him. He didn't know it. He just hung on to the platform as long as he dared while the pump of the engine wheezed like a winded roarer; and, when the train started, he watched in a dream the wide park-steppe unfolding its slow panorama—flat-topped acacias, of the kind that giraffes love, and stony shallow dongas whose bush might shelter a lion—watched it eagerly, jealously, till night swooped down like a bird of prey, a pitch-black night, in which he could only smell, seeing nothing but the engine's flying sparks, hearing nothing but the rumble of the coaches.

And he thought: Well, this is good-bye. This is the end of Africa for me. I'm still in it, but every moment I'm moving away from it. Funny how a damned *shenzi*

country like this gets hold of one! There's nothing much to it that one can see except the game. But there it is! That's the way of life. You live in a place for four years, just rub along and put up with it, and when you move on to another you could kick yourself for not having made the most of it. All through that evening he was thinking more of Africa than of Connemara.

In the middle of the night (as it seemed) they pulled up at Tsavo. A railway *babu* in a frockcoat and turban strutted up and down the platform swinging a hurricane lamp, as though he owned the place. "Fancies himself a hell of a *bahadur*," Antrim thought. "This country's no place for Indians. You can see why the Africans hate 'em!" He thought lovingly of his own *askaris*, and while he gazed out into the dark that possessed the wilderness on every side, he heard the shrilling of frogs and smelt the aroma of the dry bush blowing in at his window. "Lions," he thought. This was the place where one of the railway-wallahs shot some man-eaters. It was all very well to shoot lions; but no one had any business to make a song about it. He yawned. He remembered passing through the same station on his way up-country. If it had been light he could have caught a last glimpse of Kilima N'jaro. Now he would never see the Mountain of the Spirit again. A pity. . . .

Why it was a pity he couldn't for the life of him say. Twelve hours before, such an idea wouldn't have entered his head. He cursed the voice of the officious *babu* who had wakened him. When the train moved on he couldn't get to sleep. He wasn't at all sure that this railway coach, seconded, like himself, from India, wasn't infested with bugs. At least the railway people might give one a decent light.

Lying there awake and, as it seemed, less and less likely to sleep, his thoughts became possessed by the fantastic idea of cancelling the passage he had taken, throwing up the idea of Europe, and spending his six months' leave in Africa. It might be his last opportunity, and, in any case, he could never again do it so cheaply. He calculated the saving of fares, the money that he was bound to lose in London, and set it off against his balance at Grindlay's. Supposing he fitted up a small *safari* in Mombasa and started down South, over the German border into new country. . . . The idea was ridiculous, but he couldn't banish it from his mind; and at last surrendered to working out its details. It passed the wakeful time as well as watching sheep go through a gate; but when once he had admitted the project to his thoughts, his brain began to work so clearly and with such enthusiasm that he was astonished. It was as if the plans had lain hidden, ready-made, in some dark region of his consciousness, and this impressed him with the suspicion that there might be something in it.

In matters of this kind he was a little superstitious. He believed in the rightness of

instinct, and felt that if he neglected the impulses that it prompted he might live to regret it. And, indeed, when he came to think of this change of plans as possible and not as a fantastic speculation, it had its points. The aspect of it which appealed to him most was not so much that it implied the recovery of lost opportunity (though this, no doubt, was its origin and its excuse), as the fact that all spheres of adventure in this small world were contracting day by day. Twenty years ago the whole of the country through which the train ran clanking in the night had been unexplored. Now its transit was as unadventurous as a run from Paddington to Plymouth. Further south the Germans were already building two railways. In ten years' time there wouldn't be a spot uncharted on the map of Africa. Supposing that he stuck to his original plan and made another visit on long leave from India? The odds were that by that time all accessible country would have lost its virginity and, therefore, be useless to his fastidious taste. "If I don't go now," he told himself, "I might just as well not go at all. Damn it, why *shouldn't* I go now?"

His sister Honoria, down near Athenry, would be disappointed not to see him. Honoria was married and had two children. She was said to be happy, and told him so herself. So she should be, for she'd got what she wanted. He didn't know Honoria's husband; but he had heard hints that he was a Nationalist, and if once he started talking politics there'd be the devil to pay. That three months' visit to Athenry was a risky business, though Honoria, poor old thing, didn't guess it. And if he were not going to stay for three months with Honoria, why, in heaven's name, was he going home?

He began to reckon the pleasures on which he had counted, trivial, ridiculous things: the prospect of a hair-cut at Guy's under the skilled hands of the old fellow with the mutton-chop whiskers who always remembered him.

"Pleased to see you, Captain! (He always called him Captain.) Back from India, as usual?"

And himself: "No, Africa this time—East Africa."

"Ah, yes, the Gold Coast. Isn't that what they call the White Man's Grave? Though, I must say, sir, you don't show it. You'll find London greatly changed. *We* don't change much here." A chuckle. "Friction, of course, sir?"

A visit to his tailor's. The vanity of stepping out into Piccadilly in well-cut mufti, just as if he'd never left it. The trees of the park in the pale green of spring. The smell of a May shower on London dust. A dinner at the Rag with his cousin Harry Persse. Good things all of them—yet only good by contrast. He and his friends would talk together of old times, old names, old faces; but, if he were to tell himself the truth, he knew that Persse didn't care a button for him. Harry's life was not his. He didn't

know Harry; that was the truth of the matter. And he didn't know Honoria either—much less her husband.

It wouldn't be a bad idea, he decided, to send her his heads in place of himself. No doubt they would look topping in the hall; and, as a matter of fact, he had nowhere else to store them. He didn't suppose she really wanted him, and, if she did, she could console herself with the colobus monkey skins, black and white, that he had shot up Kijabe mountain. Make a muff of them; or tippets for the kids—if modern kids wore tippets. Poor old Honoria! It was all very well to think about her; but the pleasure and the pity that he got out of it were equally sentimental. Really, they were strangers.

When he came to think of it there was nobody in his life at present who wasn't a stranger. It had been his rule to cultivate the pleasant superficial relationships that were necessary to his army career, and to leave it at that. Much better all round. You expected less of people and weren't open to disappointment, and the men at headquarters decided you were a sound fellow. What was more, it allowed you to lead your own life. If there was any point in living one's own life . . . three-score years and ten. "Too deep, my friend! Ask me another," he thought.

It was a bad thing, he told himself, just as Honoria would have told him, to cut oneself off from the graces of life. It was necessary, so to speak, to be inoculated with the germs of civilisation once in every so many years. Otherwise one felt a barbarian and found oneself speaking a different language from one's peers. His mind rebelled against this suggestion. "The truth of the matter is," he told himself, "we do all these things for women. Fashions in manners; fashions in words. It's a kind of sexual tyranny! And since there's no woman in the world that I particularly want to please—— Besides, if ever I want to marry, the woman will be above such trifles, and I've yet to meet her."

He saw, rather grimly and quite unjustly, the pale women of India: a flight of white moths fluttering out in a warm dusk. His resentment rose against them "Dictating the whole behaviour of the Indian Empire! Coming out at night like a lot of *cocottes*!"

In this state of mind he couldn't even make allowances for climatic conditions; he couldn't see that the delight of his mind in these savage generalisations was a token of weakness rather than of strength; but in that moment he had remembered the woman at Poona, and thought no more of Africa. The train had reached the thorn desert of Taru before he fell asleep.

On the platform at Mombasa next morning two of Kilgour's boys in uniform were waiting for him. Outside the station he mounted Kilgour's private trolley, and was propelled through the long avenues of flamboyant and false almond like a Buddha carried in procession. On the way to Kilgour's quarters he caught, between two baobabs, one glimpse of the long arm of Kilindini Harbour. There, in mid-stream swung the *Vandal*, the ship on which his passage was booked, lazily loading a cargo of hides from up-country. Antrim eyed her carelessly. She looked a solid, comfortable packet. In three days' time he would probably be better acquainted; for the wild schemes that had kept his brain buzzing through the night had been jolted into it by the Uganda Railway, and were not to be taken seriously. He could imagine how Kilgour, just back from Europe and not overpleased with himself, would laugh at them. And Kilgour would be right.

So he passed on. It was good to smell Mombasa again, to see the great rounded clumps of its mangoes, to breathe the moist sea air. He was content to do this while the trolley-boys sweated behind. It was useless trying to think about anything until he had bathed and scrubbed his body and washed the red dust of the train out of his eyes. He didn't suppose he'd see old Kilgour before *tiffin*—no doubt he'd be saving his face at the office; but Kilgour's *memsahib*, one of the best sportswomen in the colony, would make him comfortable.

The trolley swung round a corner, and there she was, in pyjamas, mosquito-boots, and a topee, talking fluent Swahili to a couple of gardeners.

"*Jambo, Bwana!*" she called, waving a sun-shade, the handle of which was made from the horn of a gazelle and looked more like a weapon than the implement of a refined civilisation. "How are you?" she asked, looking him up and down with her keen, candid eyes. "Pat's down at his office doing a job of work. You look like a Red Indian. Better make a start with a bath. Sorry I'm too busy with these *shenzis* to show you in; but you can find your way."

He thanked her, and she called after him:

"Lunch at one, Jimmy. Better make yourself pretty. There's a lady coming: just arrived on your boat. If you don't feel at home it'll be your own fault."

He did feel at home. He liked Mrs. Kilgour: her downrightness, her pluck, the hospitality that had turned their house into a hostel and run away with every penny of their income. He liked to hear her capping Kilgour's inimitable lies, the mixture of tolerance and prejudice with which she astonished official womenkind. Admirable creature! He wondered how on earth old Kilgour had married her, unless it were that her stories were taller than his. "The most accomplished exaggerator I ever met," said Kilgour. Meanwhile, having scrubbed himself he lay luxuriously in a bath

of cool water until the gun warned him that he must dress.

When he descended he found them waiting in the cool-flagged drawing-room: Pat Kilgour, a little thinner than usual, with a twinkle in his eye that meant stories: Mrs. Kilgour, clothed almost elegantly in white, and the two strangers to whom she introduced him with a rush: "Mrs. Rawley—Mr. Rawley. Captain Antrim is going home on your boat. You'll be able to tell him all about it." The man bowed: the woman held out her hand; the introduction was swept aside by the Provincial Commissioner's story. "Lions?" I've told her times without number that I draw the line at her shooting them with a twelve-bore shot gun. When we were up at Fort Hall—I made the place by the way—she used to go out shooting them before breakfast."

"But weren't you proud of her?" Mrs. Rawley asked, with a look of admiration toward Mrs. Kilgour.

"Proud? My dear lady, it nearly lost me my job. In my official capacity it wouldn't do. The natives complained to the game warden that there wasn't a lion left for miles."

"They used to take my chickens, you know," said Mrs. Kilgour confidentially.

"Perhaps Mrs. Kilgour is pulling your leg," said Rawley heavily, pinching his wife's shoulder. Antrim thought she winced.

"But it's perfectly true," Kilgour protested.

"The chickens?" Mrs. Rawley's tone was a little reproachful.

"Not at all. Don't you believe a thing she tells you. But every word I've said about the lions. It's her one weakness. Twice at least I could have let her be killed if I hadn't fired over her shoulder. Think of the temptation. No one the wiser, and myself a free man! Mr. Rawley, this is the easiest country in the world to get rid of a wife in. That's why we're suspicious of every married couple that comes here. It's far cheaper than divorce, and there's no publicity."

"Yes, I could tell you some stories," said Mrs. Kilgour dreamily.

"Though nobody that knows her would believe them," giped her husband.

"*Chakula tayari*," said a tall white figure at the door, and they passed in to lunch, Kilgour following, with a friendly grip on Antrim's arm.

At lunch, if he had wished it, Antrim had plenty of opportunity to examine the other guests, for Kilgour and his wife, treating him as a familiar of the house who could look after himself, spent most of their cares on them; Kilgour speaking in a low voice to Mrs. Rawley, who sat on Antrim's left, and was only perceptible to him through the medium of a faint and unobtrusive perfume, while Mrs. Kilgour tried to keep things moving with Rawley—partly no doubt from sheer politeness, and partly

to give her husband a chance with a pretty woman. Perhaps, also, she felt a little sorry for Rawley—though this seemed a waste of charity, since Rawley was not sorry for himself.

A curious pair. At the first glance Antrim had not found either prepossessing. Physically Rawley was a man, standing at least six feet in height; but his figure was ill-balanced, its lines tapering downward from shoulders that were massive, over too-slender hips, to feet of a ridiculous smallness; and this gave him the silhouette of a tall peg-top. His arms were too long; his hands huge, clumsy, slow-moving; his head set low on his shoulders; his eyes habitually lowered in a way that seemed shy rather than furtive. He spoke little, rising, with the sluggishness of an overfed trout, to the quick casts Mrs. Kilgour made in his direction; and when he did speak it was only to confirm a point that he had grasped five seconds too late with a hurried “Yes, yes. Quite so,” that led nowhere.

Once, at the end of a conversational blind-alley, Mrs. Kilgour’s eyes met Antrim’s in an appeal for help; but he only smiled to himself. It amused him to see her carrying on; for he had just realised why Rawley didn’t or wouldn’t listen. The man was looking at his wife, straining his ears to catch the least word that she spoke to Kilgour at the other end of the table. “Poor beggar, he’s jealous,” Antrim thought. And then Rawley, in a paroxysm of awkwardness, upset the salt.

“Throw it over your shoulder quickly!” Mrs. Kilgour commanded.

Rawley took her seriously. “You’ve no idea how I detest superstitions,” he said.

“Well, your blood’s on your own head. Don’t blame me if you come to grief.”

“Yes, yes; quite so,” said Rawley, flushed, and a little late. “That sort of thing is a weakness of my wife’s, I don’t encourage it. She’s what the spiritualist humbugs call a sensitive. I’m quite of a different make. I’m sceptical and scientific.”

“Scientific!” Mrs. Kilgour jumped at the word. She was going to get something out of the man at last. “Do tell me!”

“I’ve played with chemistry; and I’m very keen on geology.”

Geology! Antrim found himself suppressing a smile. Rawley wasn’t his idea of a scientist.

“How interesting!” said Mrs. Kilgour encouragingly. But she played into Rawley’s hands. “Yes, yes. Quite so,” he said. She looked from him to Jimmy Antrim in despair, and the sight of Jimmy seemed to reassure her, for in no person better than in him could she have found a contrast to Rawley’s lumbering heaviness. He realised the unspoken compliment, and this set him finding excuses for Rawley. A clumsy overgrown schoolboy, he told himself, and probably quite a decent sort. Women, even exceptional women like Mrs. Kilgour, would always judge by

appearances and in a hurry. If the fellow had been in the army and learned to carry himself better, he'd be all right. And then, suddenly, he realised that Rawley was wearing an Eton tie. "Bought it by mistake," he thought, "because he liked the colours. Probably knows no better. But his wife might have told him all the same. And yet there must be something in him somewhere. Otherwise she wouldn't have married him."

For, even though Kilgour had not yet given him the opportunity of speaking ten words to her, Antrim was already attracted by his neighbour on the left. So, obviously, was Kilgour; but Antrim did not in the least grudge him his attentions. It amused him to catch the charming superficialities with which the old dog entertained her, and, what was more, gave him a chance of examining her at leisure. He felt like being amused; the soft coastal air was in his head; he was too sleepy to talk, but wakeful enough to listen. At the same time, he found her something of a puzzle.

If there was one thing in the world that he disliked it was the scent with which women were pleased to drench themselves. Whatever its refinements might be he smelt in it the musk of the harem. But the faint perfume which had stood to him for this woman's presence had not annoyed him: it seemed as natural and particular to her as the scent of a flower. Now he began to examine her more closely. She was tall for a woman, slim and dark. Of her head he could see little, for a white topee shadowed it. Certainly, in profile, she was not typical of the refined stock from which, presumably, she had sprung; her nose, though finely modelled, was too small; her chin short, determined; her cheek-bones too high for beauty. But when she smiled, with a quick sensitiveness to Kilgour's humour, he saw that she had beautiful teeth and that her lips returned to a line of firm seriousness. A good mouth, he decided, a plucky mouth. Even in a young girl you could judge a good deal by that.

Her eyes he could not see; but he liked her voice, for it was low, with a certain reedy quality. He found himself listening for it. As a rule he hated the high-pitched voices of women. This was the voice of a boy, speaking English that was delicate and clear-cut. When he came to think of it, her voice was like the rest of her; it had given him the clue to her quality. She was all like a boy, straight, flexible, narrow in the hips, without a hint of looseness in her firm figure, without a hint of restraint. And that no doubt was why he had liked her: there was nothing consciously feminine about her, nothing that insisted on her sex—not even, strangely enough, her perfume. She wore no jewellery but a necklace of small, well-matched pearls, luminous on the pallor of her skin. Pallor he must call it, and yet she was not pale. Her cheeks showed no flush of colour, and yet her skin was alive; ivory, and yet warmer than ivory; the colour of an egg, faintly brown. And nothing could have been more alive

than her hands, tanned with sea-air, and delicately formed. On the left she wore a small signet and a wedding ring that seemed unduly massive. "Newly married," Antrim told himself. The weight of that gold circlet symbolised the heaviness and the jealousy of Rawley. He, no doubt, had chosen it, determined that there should be no mistake. "Perhaps she's proud of it," he thought; "they usually are, to begin with." Was she proud of it? Who the devil was she, and why had she married Rawley?

Towards the end of the meal, for the first time, he spoke to her. Rawley glanced quickly in his direction, but she had not heard. Evidently, up to this point, she hadn't realised his existence; and this, on the whole, pleased him. Most women were acutely conscious of the men on either side of them. Perhaps she hadn't taken to him. Well, there was no wonder in that, seeing that she *had* taken to Rawley. And in any case it didn't matter. Probably he would never see her again.

But when they rose from the table and he pulled back her chair she turned to him, and for part of a second their eyes met. Hers were golden-brown, and very frank. In that glance she seemed to be summing him up, deciding exactly what manner of man he was. After that the wonder that she should have married Rawley increased. But though she looked at him she didn't speak. She didn't even say thank you. And he was filled not with annoyance but with compassion. "Poor kid!" he thought.

Kilgour was showing Rawley his collection of heads, Mrs. Kilgour was capping her husband's stories of their achievement, and once more they found themselves together and alone. The resources of Antrim's politeness forsook him; he had nothing to say. They stood in silence, facing each other, in the middle of the room. He couldn't think what had happened to him that he should be tongue-tied like this; the excuse of sleepiness no longer held, for he was wide awake. And yet he was not ashamed or troubled by it. He did not feel that in this case small-talk was demanded. It would make no difference to her: she would understand. The experience was new to him. And then, suddenly, she raised her eyes to him, and faintly smiled, just as though she had read his thoughts and recognised the amazement with which he perceived them. She spoke:

"Mrs. Kilgour told me that you were returning to England on our boat. I am sorry I didn't catch your name."

"My name is Antrim."

"You're Irish, like the Kilgours?"

"I am."

"When are you sailing?"

He hesitated. Not because he didn't know the date, but because he habitually

spoke the truth. Then he answered, as it seemed, in spite of himself: "I don't know."

"I suppose it depends on the cargo?"

"The boat sails on Thursday."

"I thought your passage was booked?"

"So it is. I booked it a month ago."

"And you've changed your mind?"

It was as though her questions were forcing him into a decision that his mind had not cared to face. It was certainly an easy way of arriving at conclusions. He smiled at himself as he answered her.

"Yes, I've changed my mind."

And she smiled back at him, curious, incredulous:

"What an extraordinary thing! I like people to do things like that. I wish you'd tell me why . . . if it isn't a secret."

He did not answer her. In any case he couldn't have done so, but the arrival of Rawley and the Kilgours saved him from the difficulty. Rawley made straight for his wife.

"Are you ready?" he said.

"Yes," she replied.

"But you are not going yet?" Mrs. Kilgour protested.

"Sorry, I'm afraid we must. I hope we shall see you again."

"Of course," said Kilgour warmly, "of course."

They made their farewells. This time Rawley shook hands with Antrim: it was a good firm hand-grip. His wife only bowed. Kilgour showed them to the verandah steps. He, at least, found conversation with Mrs. Rawley easy. Antrim and Mrs. Kilgour stood looking at each other in amazement as the voices of the others died away.

"Who are they?" he asked at last.

"Rawley's Chemical Dip. Didn't you know? I thought I told you."

"No. That accounts for the science . . . and the rest of him. But who was she?"

"She's an 'honourable.' Her name was Carlyon. A Cornish family. She's a daughter of Lord St. Pinnock, if that leaves you any the wiser. I'd never heard of him."

"No. It's strange what a number of obscure peerages there are knocking about. But I think I must have met one of her brothers in Simla. Nothing to boast of, by the way, and a good bit older than this girl."

"Yes; she's the youngest. I dare say they're a big family. Living down in Cornwall, poor creatures, I suppose they've nothing else to do. Rawley must be a

millionaire, to judge by the advertisements.”

“I wish she’d tell him not to wear that Eton tie.”

“He can’t help it, Jimmy. That’s the funny part of it. He’s an Etonian. He ‘let it slip,’ as they say.”

“Good Lord! You don’t say so?”

“In these days, Jimmy, you never know.”

Kilgour reappeared, flushed, and evidently a little flattered. “Charming woman!” he said.

“If you hadn’t overdone it, my boy,” his wife informed him, “she’d be here still. The poor man took fright.”

“But what are they doing in Africa at all?” Antrim asked.

“Going on a *safari* up country,” Kilgour replied. “It’s getting fashionable, worse luck! He’s been asking my advice about porters and equipment. If I don’t look after him he’ll get done brown. Those stiffes of yours up in Nairobi can scent a millionaire down at the coast. Once get him into the Norfolk and he’ll be landed with a farm that some one wants to get rid of within a week. But when you get him to talk, let me tell you, Rawley isn’t a fool by any means. He’s a clumsy fellow and all that, and he hasn’t a lot of conversation, but he seems to know what he wants. And he’s very fond of his wife. I don’t blame him. Charming woman, as I said before.”

“What did you make of her, Jimmy?” Mrs. Kilgour asked suddenly.

“I? Nothing at all,” Antrim replied.

CHAPTER II

1

In the cool of the evening—or, rather, in that pleasant, tepid air that envelops the island when the shadows of the baobabs lengthen seaward and the breeze begins to fall—Antrim saw them again. By this time he had shaken off the lethargy of the morning in a long sleep, he had bathed luxuriously, and was walking in from the Bluff to shake up his liver and look for old acquaintances in the Mombasa Club, an airy hospitable building that stands under the shadow of the whitewashed fort of Jesus and the red flag of Zanzibar. Reaching the corner of the wide avenue of flamboyants where the road from Kilindini dips downward to the fort, he became aware of a crowd collecting in the middle of the street. For Mombasa this was an unusual occurrence; for the police are an efficient corps that will stand no nonsense, and the inhabitants, who are fonder of litigation than of violence, know better than to settle their differences in the neighbourhood of the barracks.

Evidently the affair was exciting, for everybody in the street had immediately forsaken his business and run towards the scene of the disturbance: *ricksha* boys, trailing their vehicles behind them; raw natives with burdens of fruit from Mazeras; sober Goanese shop-keepers; Indians in long frockcoats—even the labourers from the foundations of new store, and women from the round huts of the native location over the way, all were running as hard as they could pelt and clustering in one black mass like bees about a queen. Antrim hated nothing in the world more than a row; but this seemed serious, and he could not pass it by. If there were trouble it was his business to be there; so he, too, hurried to the spot.

There, in the middle of the murmuring crowd, stood a *ricksha* with lowered shafts, and in it, erect, fragile and very pale, sat the white figure of Mrs. Rawley. Antrim pushed his way through the crowd that smelt of black flesh and spices and the sickly oil with which the natives smear themselves. In front of the *ricksha*, crumpled up in the dust, lay its owner; and above him, flushed and dishevelled, stood Rawley, snorting like an angry bull. In one clenched hand he held a green-backed Swahili vocabulary, in the other the splintered shaft of a walking-stick that he had broken over the fellow's back. He was cursing in English at the hostile crowd.

Antrim walked straight up to him and took him by the arm, but he seemed too consumed with anger to notice him or realise what he said.

“What’s the matter?” Antrim asked. He shook Rawley’s arm as if to wake him. “What’s the matter? Tell me quickly!”

“Matter? I told the brute to go slowly. He wouldn’t stop.”

“Are you sure he understood you?”

“Of course he understood me. It was just damned obstinacy. Then——”

Rawley began to splutter. “Then he had the impudence to stand up to me.”

The figure in the dust gave a groan that was echoed by the sympathetic crowd. Rawley took out a white silk handkerchief. “I’ve broken my knuckles on the beggar’s head,” he said.

Antrim gave the *ricksha* boy a poke with his foot. “Get up!” he said in Swahili. “What’s the matter?”

The native began to whine. “The *bwana* told me to go fast. I went fast. How could I go faster with such a weight behind? Then he stood up and beat me like an ox with his stick. What could I do? And then he jumped from the *ricksha* and knocked me down with his fist. Now I wait for the police.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” said Antrim. “Get up. Let me see what’s the matter with you.”

The *ricksha* boy rose to his feet. Apart from the dust, which was his natural portion in life, there wasn’t much amiss with him. It would have taken more than Rawley’s fist to damage an African skull.

“You see, he’s all right,” Rawley grumbled.

“How much does the *bwana* owe you?” Antrim asked.

“Two rupees.”

“Here are four. If I give you four you’ll be satisfied. You’ll say no more about it. Otherwise you’ll get nothing. The *bwana* says you attacked him, and the *memsahib* will say the same.”

The man rubbed his eyes with his hands. Then he pointed to his back on which the lines cut by Rawley’s stick already stood out in weals. “Four rupees?” he cried. “Look . . . see for yourself!”

The labourers from the cathedral laughed. Nothing appeals to an African sense of humour more than the sight of a painful thing. The whole crowd began laughing and talking at once.

“I’ll make it five,” said Antrim. “Will that do? Answer quickly, or you’ll get nothing.”

“*N’dio Bwana*,” said the man, with a feeble grin. He held out his hand. Antrim gave him five rupees.

“Come along,” he said, “we’d better get out of this. Will you come and have tea with me at the club?”

He offered his hand to Mrs. Rawley, who descended from her *ricksha*, and

made a way for her through the laughter of the disintegrating crowd. Antrim and she walked together, Rawley sullenly followed, still carrying in his hands the Swahili vocabulary and the butt of his splintered walking-stick. A ridiculous proceeding, Antrim thought, why didn't the fellow throw it away? The whole business had been unpleasant; just the sort of thing that oughtn't to happen in a British possession, the very last affair that he would have chosen to be mixed up with. If Rawley had been alone, he would have left him to stew in his own juice, by gad, he would! Nothing but the presence of his wife, her fineness, her fragility and her pathetic silence, could have persuaded him to butt in. He would have a straight talk with Rawley when the woman was out of the way and tell him a thing or two for the good of his soul. So far the fellow hadn't even had the decency to apologise for landing a luncheon acquaintance in a street row. All the way to the club, indeed, nobody spoke. It was a difficult situation. It needed every ounce of Antrim's social tact to carry it off.

He called for tea on the club balcony, a peaceful and civilised place commanding the ancient harbour and the water-gate of the fort. Rawley sank down in the most comfortable chair and mopped his forehead. Rotten condition, Antrim thought; his wife's as cool as can be. But it was emotion rather than walking that made Rawley sweat, and with the perspiration came out the apology for which Antrim had been waiting.

He didn't do it gracefully—it was inconceivable that Rawley should have done anything with grace—but he evidently meant what he said, and this, together with his size and his humility, made him rather pathetic, so much so that Antrim felt that some word of extenuation from himself was demanded. But he couldn't say it: that was the funny thing. He just sat awkwardly silent, listening to a piece of self-abasement as thorough as anything he'd ever heard, watching the two big tears that formed in Rawley's eyes and the ridiculous movements that he made with his broken stick. It wasn't decent. And then, to add to the fantastic situation, he heard in his left ear the clear unemotional tones of Mrs. Rawley's voice:

“Captain Antrim, may I give you milk and sugar?”

Cool, had he said? The woman was as cold as ice! What he really wanted was whisky, but he said “Yes.” He simply *had* to come to Rawley's rescue: “Yes, I quite understand,” he said. “You're new to Africa. But I assure you that in this country that sort of thing isn't done. You don't handle a man unless he's done something pretty serious. For instance, if he'd insulted your wife.”

Rawley flared up. “By God,” he said, “if he'd done that I should have killed him!” And he really looked as if he would.

“Would you mind passing my husband's tea?” said Mrs. Rawley.

"Thank you, but what I want to explain to you is this," Rawley went on. "I'm cursed with the most unfortunate temper. It's the one thing that's been in my way all through life. If once I let go, I'm done for. My wife will bear me out."

He looked at her appealingly; but she didn't. She didn't move an eyelid.

"It doesn't happen often; but when it does, it invariably lands me. When I was with the regiment . . ."

Antrim felt uneasy: some unpleasant story was obviously coming. Luckily it didn't come.

"No, I won't talk about that," Rawley said. "It's very wrong of me to bore you with these personal things. The point is that I must have got mixed up with my Swahili. I'm new to the language. Probably the fellow misunderstood me."

"He thought you wanted him to go faster," Antrim said.

"Exactly. And I thought I told him to stop. The phrases are close together, and the *ricksha* was jolting over the road. I'd better look it up." He began to fumble with his crumpled vocabulary.

"I shouldn't worry about it if I were you. Your tea's going cold. Have some more. Or would you prefer whisky?"

He chose whisky, and Antrim himself was grateful for the excuse; but this did not close the subject as he had intended.

"You paid him some money, I didn't gather how much."

"My dear fellow, don't worry about it."

"It was five rupees," said Mrs. Rawley.

Rawley took out his purse and fumbled with it. Another indecency, Antrim thought. He saw Rawley going through life stumping up cash periodically for incidents of this kind. One of the privileges of wealth! Only this time he'd got his pleasure cheaply. How disgusted the wife must feel! With an effort he said "Thank you" as Rawley handed him the coins. He needn't have rubbed it in by asking if it were right. A damned *parvenu* with no sense of proportion! He wondered how soon he could find an excuse for leaving him.

"Well, that's over," said Rawley with a sigh. "I wonder if it would bore you greatly if I talked about our plans?"

"Not at all," Antrim lied. Evidently he was stuck there for the evening and must make the best of it. "But let me tell you to begin with that—" he hesitated—"that this sort of thing won't pay in Africa. If it's going to happen again—I mean when you're somewhere out in the blue—I won't answer for your safety or that of your wife. You'd much better confine yourself to civilised countries."

"I've had enough of civilised countries," Rawley answered bitterly. "That's partly

why I'm here. That's . . . but I won't go into details."

Antrim was glad that he didn't. He was sure that the details would be unpleasant. And yet, as he sat there opposite to Rawley and realised the man's disadvantages of appearance and temperament he couldn't help feeling a little sorry for him. Perhaps it was the unconscious contrast between Rawley and himself that made condescension, if not kindness, seem a duty. If the fellow had tried to justify his unpardonable behaviour it would have been another matter; but he didn't. He was ashamed of himself, and made no bones about it. The incident of the five rupees had been sheer clumsiness. The man had been rattled and confused. Now, once more, he seemed, as Kilgour had said, to know what he was about. He took Antrim's reproof lying down.

"You're perfectly right," he said, "and I shouldn't have minded if you put it more strongly. I wish I could be sure of myself. Unfortunately I can't. It's ten to one that I shall make a fool of myself again; and the worst of it is, as you say, that my wife may suffer." From Mrs. Rawley not a word. "However, there it is," he went on, "and that's partly why I want you to listen to our plans. I may as well tell you that I'm not a sportsman in the ordinary sense of the term. I dislike killing things. That doesn't mean that I object to other people doing so or criticise them for it. It's their own business. With me it's temperamental. You understand, don't you?"

Antrim understood. He had met a few of this kind before. More than ever he was certain that Africa was no place for Rawley.

"I'm not even a naturalist. I'm merely interested in game from a photographic point of view. I want to get some pictures of lion and things like that at close quarters. And incidentally I want to see something of Africa. I'm not much of a reader, but when I was a kid I got hold of Livingstone on Sundays and ever since then I've been wanting to see the sort of things he saw. I want to get on to new ground. Do you mind if I call for another drink?"

"Not in the least." Antrim beckoned to one of the waiters.

"Thanks very much." Rawley drew in his chair. "Well, I've been talking to Mr. Kilgour about porters and all that; and what he's told me has rather put me off the idea of being sent on a kind of Cook's tour by one of the usual *safari* outfitters. He says that they bleed you white. Well, I don't mind that. I'm not a poor man. But I've been in business, and I like to get value for money. I shouldn't be satisfied if I merely 'saw the sights,' so to speak. I want to get into virgin country. I want to see things that other fellows haven't seen. It isn't a soft job; I know that. But I'm prepared for a certain amount of danger and discomfort, and so is my wife." He spoke of her with a pride that was almost touching. Antrim liked him for it.

"I see what you mean," he said, "but aren't you a bit ambitious? After all, you've had no experience of the country, and it isn't as easy as it looks. You'd much better begin with something simple, and work up to the greater thrills. Get your hand in, so to speak."

Rawley looked at him straightly.

"I'm not going to be persuaded out of this, you know," he said. "I don't *want* anything simple . . . I didn't come here for that."

"I know you didn't. If you were an old hand, understood natives and had a sense of the country, it'd be another matter. Your Swahili, to begin with . . ." They both smiled. "And you have to consider your wife."

"You needn't consider me, Captain Antrim," said Mrs. Rawley quickly. It was the first time she had entered the conversation. "It was my idea to begin with."

"Yes, yes, quite so, of course I see what you mean," Rawley broke in, "and that brings me to what I wanted to say. You've been up-country for some years, and I should imagine that you're a good judge of men. Can you suggest to me the name of any one—a gentleman—who knows the country and would go with us?"

"Upon my soul . . ." Antrim hesitated.

"Money is not to be considered," he added.

Antrim stiffened.

"No. I realise that. But what you want isn't exactly a marketable commodity. If you went up to Nairobi and made friends there . . ." he paused, for he was almost certain that Rawley and Nairobi wouldn't hit it off. "You see it's an intensely personal thing. I really don't know that I can help you."

"That's a pity. From what Kilgour told me I felt sure that you would. Will you think it over? It's hardly fair to bother you at such short notice. You're sailing the day after to-morrow, aren't you?"

"No," said Mrs. Rawley, "Captain Antrim isn't sailing on the *Vandal*."

"Really? But Mr. Kilgour said . . ."

"He changed his mind this morning. Didn't you?"

Antrim laughed. "Yes, I suppose so."

"That alters matters," said Rawley eagerly. "We had rather counted on your helping us."

"You also?" Antrim turned to her with a challenging smile.

"Yes, I was sure that you'd help us," she answered simply.

"That was kind of you," said Antrim.

Rawley leaned forward. "Would it be presumption on my part to ask what you intend to do, if you are staying in Africa?"

“Not in the least. I’ve made no plans. At present, if they’ll have me, I shall stay with the Kilgours.”

“But Kilgour . . .”

“Kilgour didn’t know he was going to have that pleasure.”

Rawley swallowed the remains of his second whisky and stared at the glass as though he wished it was full again.

“I want you to tell me straight away,” he said, “if the idea offends you. It may be out of the question. But I’ve just been thinking. If you would consent to be our guest on the trip that we’re planning, or if I could make any arrangement . . .”

“No, no. Thanks very much. But it’s quite out of the question.”

“Look here, I’m sorry. I should have known better. If I’ve offended you by suggesting that some arrangement might be made . . .”

“Please don’t speak of it. I’m not in the least offended. I hope you won’t think me rude if I leave you here? I’ll get some one to put your name in the book if you care to use this place.”

He rose, and Rawley rose and faced him.

“I’m very much your debtor already for that unfortunate business this afternoon, I assure you . . .”

“Not at all. Glad I was able to help you.” He took Rawley’s hand. “Good-bye.”

“Good-bye . . . and many thanks.”

“Good-bye, Mrs. Rawley.”

She rose and held out her hand. “We shall see you to-morrow,” she said.

The devil they would! An hour of it had been quite enough to go on with, and Rawley’s sudden proposal that they should join forces had frightened him. That it should have done so was ridiculous, for he was a free agent and should not have found it difficult to refuse. In point of fact it hadn’t been difficult; and yet he felt that if he had stayed to discuss the matter he might easily have made a fool of himself. This lack of confidence was a nuisance. It was new to him. Two days before, in Nairobi, he would have said that no man of his acquaintance knew his own mind better than himself. His passage had been booked without a moment’s hesitation. Before that disturbing night in the train he had questioned nothing. Then, in a casual moment at the Kilgours’, this woman, who never opened her mouth, had sprung a question on him, and straightway, without a second’s hesitation, he had announced a radical change in his plans, a change that, up to this point, he hadn’t really seriously contemplated. Even after he had told her that he wasn’t leaving Africa he hadn’t believed it. And yet, not two minutes since, he had confirmed the change again. It was ridiculous. He hadn’t meant to do anything of the sort. He had acted like a man

under hypnotic suggestion rather than the staid determined creature he believed himself to be. That alone should be enough to convince him that he'd had enough, and a little more than enough, of Africa. Up-country nerves: the traditional result of great altitudes. The sooner he was out of it the better. This business of waiting for the boat was a horrible bore. And she'd said that they would see him to-morrow! Not if he knew it!

2

As he walked up the hill he was thinking of the Rawleys' *safari*. A queer show it would be for certain. Rawley, his wife, and some unfortunate devil whom they'd get hold of to shoot for the pot, manage the porters and generally make things comfortable. Whoever it might be would have his work cut out. Probably there'd be trouble with Mrs. Rawley. One woman in a party was always a devil of a nuisance. Women had no business to go careering over Africa like that. As for all this rot about virgin country, and not being considered and the rest of it: that was just ignorance of the realities of the case. Exploration sounds all right when you come to write about it afterwards: there is nothing that a man's mind forgets so soon as physical discomfort: but when you're hacking your way inch by inch through forest or thornbush and wondering whether you're going to strike water or die of thirst, exploration is no joke.

Still, Mrs. Rawley was a spirited woman. He liked the way in which she had sat up in that *ricksha* with the crowd buzzing round her; and not the flicker of an eyelid. And he liked the way in which she handled Rawley's blundering offer. A less tactful woman might have pressed him to come with them; and that would have put him under the awkward necessity of letting her know that her personal attractions weren't sufficient to draw him. When he came to think of it Rawley hadn't pressed him either. Well, he wished her luck.

It was easy to do that. But supposing she didn't get it; supposing, for instance, that they found their man and were landed with a rotter, a fellow without qualifications who jumped at the job for the sake of Rawley's money? In that case the whole *safari* might meet with disaster. Supposing the man fell out with Rawley; nothing was more likely considering Rawley's temper. Supposing the whole bunch of them went down with fever? Supposing Rawley died, and she were left alone with the outsider; supposing the other fellow died and she were left alone with Rawley? He saw her alone, pitiful, tight-lipped, as he had seen her in the *ricksha*, and all Africa closing in on her—closing in and closing over. He began to reproach himself

for the way in which he had choked them off. Obviously, even if he didn't see them again, it was his duty to try to find them somebody reliable. Whatever Rawley might be, his wife was a lady, a woman of his own caste. He hadn't played the game with her. And he couldn't think why.

These sentimental twinges annoyed him. After all he wasn't under any particular obligation to these people; if anything the boot was on the other leg. And Rawley's proposal was monstrous: that he, for utter strangers, should give up his hard-earned leave. And then, the "arrangement!" What did they take him for? He wondered for a moment if this offer had been a put-up job; if Kilgour, the wily old rascal, were at the bottom of it. If that were so he'd tell Pat Kilgour what he thought of him. But it couldn't be so. His second meeting with the Rawleys had been the result of chance; to be exact, the result of Rawley's abominable behaviour with the *ricksha* boy—and Kilgour, to this moment, believed that he was sailing for Europe within thirty-six hours. No doubt in such a caravanserai as the Kilgours' house his bed was already booked. Nobody, in fact, but Mrs. Rawley knew that he had changed his mind. What was more, he hadn't. It was just about time to make a stand against this nonsense; to assert his real self, which had never for a moment doubted that he was sailing for England on the *Vandal*, against these ridiculous fancies. "This day, three weeks," he told himself firmly, "I will dine with Harry at the Rag. So that's all about it. No more nonsense, now!"

And there, as though it owed its creation to the potency of his thought, stood the shipping office, just on the other side of the street. No time like the present, he thought, I'll go in and pay for my ticket. He crossed the road, and this action, of itself, gave him a feeling of recovered virtue. An Indian clerk received him, bowing behind the counter.

"I've come about my passage on the *Vandal*," he said. "I think you've got my name. Antrim . . . Captain Antrim."

"Captain Antrim? Yes, sir. We've given you berth a hundred and six; port side. I think that was what you asked for?"

"Thanks. Yes. That'll do quite well." He put his hand into the breast-pocket in which he kept his cheque-book. It wasn't there. No doubt he had left it in the other coat. He swore.

"The *Vandal* is to sail at daybreak," said the clerk, tactfully ignoring the language. "It will be best to go on board to-night."

"To-night?" So he was in luck. "Yes. Very well." Perhaps he had put it in the pocket on the opposite side. The other pocket was empty. The clerk guessed what was the matter.

“That doesn’t matter, sir,” he said. “It’s quite all right. You can send along the cheque this evening, or pay when you get on board. The agent will be in the purser’s office up to the last moment. Or if you like you can pay the purser himself.”

“Can I? That’s not a bad idea. I think I’ll do that. It will save trouble.”

He went out into the street, annoyed that he had not done what he intended. By this time night had fallen. He hailed a *ricksha* and passed swiftly and silently through the tepid darkness to the Kilgours’ house.

Mrs. Kilgour had arranged a dinner-party in his honour. Wells, the District Commissioner; Tredinnick, the High Court Judge, and their wives. It was a very different affair from the Rawleys’ lunch, for all were well acquainted, being members of the same official family. Everybody envied Antrim his trip home, and told him so; but they did it as nicely as if they were extracting a vicarious pleasure out of his good fortune. It was such a jolly, good-humoured party that Antrim forgot all about his troubles, the Rawleys included, and settled down to enjoy himself in the sort of company that he understood.

Mrs. Kilgour was at the top of her form and egged the other women on to ask him questions about their official sisters in Nairobi. It was a good game to keep them anxiously waiting on the details of the latest scandal. He found himself examined and cross-examined: Tredinnick judicially deciding the propriety of the questions that were put to him. Antrim gave them a good run for their money. By the end of it his admissions led them to the worst—in other words what they had suspected from the first—and every one was pleased. He laughed with the rest of them; but he didn’t really like it. It was just the Nairobi Club all over again. He wouldn’t be sorry to be out of it. And that reminded him; he hadn’t yet told Mrs. Kilgour that the *Vandal’s* sailing hour had been altered. He must remember to do so after dinner.

The women left them. Kilgour produced some excellent port. They began to talk of more serious things; of the blunders of the Colonial Office, the incompetence of the Governor, the bitter feuds of local politics; and from this the Judge passed easily to legal anecdotes which Kilgour, who was himself a lawyer, capped with the extravagances of the Irish Bar. They laughed a great deal, being all in a mood for amusement. Antrim was enjoying himself. He liked the comfort of the red-shaded lights, the lustre of the dark mahogany table, the rubies of Kilgour’s best port, the white-robed native flitting through the shadows. The whole setting put him in mind of his early sentimental years. He caught back at the mood of a subaltern landing for the first time in India. Out in the enclosed verandah the D.C.’s wife was singing a song that his sister Honor used to sing. Antrim wasn’t musical. The only tunes of which he could be certain were “God Save the King” and “The Wearing of the Green,” but he

liked to think that he was. He found himself beating time with his foot to the rhythm of the song. For the third time the port went round.

“By the way,” said the Judge, “have any of you come across a fellow named Rawley?”

Antrim smiled to himself. Now that he was safe he could afford to smile. Again he reminded himself to tell Mrs. Kilgour of the altered sailing. It was Kilgour who answered the question.

“Yes,” he said, “I’ve met Rawley. He and his wife were lunching here this morning.” He could see from the Judge’s smile that there was more to come. “Out with it, Judge! Out with it!”

“No . . .” said Tredinnick, sipping his port, “I only wondered. I saw him down at the club. I’d no idea he was in this country.”

“Came in on the *Vandal* yesterday,” said Kilgour.

“He’s Rawley’s Chemical Dip, you know. Only son. Pots of money.”

“Yes, so I believe.”

“And his wife was old St. Pinnock’s daughter. They come from my part of the country. Rawley’s father bought the St. Pinnocks’ estate. The heir was killed up in the Chitral or somewhere. The title’s extinct. Very bad luck. Nice simple people, the St. Pinnocks.”

“And what about Rawley?” asked Kilgour.

“Rawley? Oh, I don’t know. He’s a queer chap. The old man did him well. Sent him to Eton; but somehow it didn’t fit. Then he was in the Grenadiers for a time. I don’t know how that ended. The next I heard of him was being married to Janet Carlyon.”

“How did that happen?” Kilgour asked.

“I suppose he took her over with the estate. There must be something decent about him, otherwise that wouldn’t have come off. The Carlyons are extraordinarily nice people. She was the only daughter. Still, I can never imagine how she did it.”

“Well, I must say it struck me as rather queer,” said Kilgour. “She’s a charming woman. I couldn’t make head or tail of Rawley. What’s the matter with him?”

“Well, really, it’s hard to say. Heredity, perhaps. Old Rawley married his housekeeper. Altogether the old man was a pretty tough customer; clever as they make ’em, and a first class man of business, but hard as nails. The mother was a pretty woman; regular East Cornish type. I only saw her once; but I gather she had rather a thin time. So did the son. The old man was a bully. One day he’d give the boy a couple of thousand to play with and encourage him to blue it. Then he’d cut him down to nothing. He liked the idea of power. Terrific temper, too. I gather

young Rawley inherited that from him. There was a police-court case. One of the keepers sued him for assault. It made a tremendous scandal at the time. I gather the father had to pay pretty heavily for it. Well, he could afford little luxuries of that kind."

"Then why the deuce did the girl marry him?" Kilgour asked.

"The housekeeper? Because she had to, I suppose. The usual reason."

"No, no. St. Pinnock's daughter. I'm talking about the son."

"Oh, the son? Really I don't know. Sentiment, perhaps. All the Carlyons were awfully keen on Withiel. I don't blame them. It's a charming place. They were desperately poor, too. And young Rawley was just about the only educated man in the district. Besides, one always felt that the boy was more sinned against than sinning. Possibly she was sorry for him. You know what women are. And besides all that it's quite likely that he has a decent side. Upon my soul, if I'd had a father like that, I should have made a fool of myself out of sheer desperation. He may be quite an attractive fellow when you get to know him."

"It doesn't exactly leap to the eye," Kilgour suggested.

"No, it doesn't. You're quite right. And then, of course, he drinks."

"Drinks? The devil he does?"

"He was fairly obviously tight when I saw him down at the club to-night."

"Was his wife there?"

"Yes. That's why I didn't speak to them. I thought it would embarrass the poor soul. I expect she knows how to manage him by now."

Antrim was seized with a sudden uneasiness. He remembered the eager way in which Rawley had mopped up his second whisky. The fellow must have lost no time if the judge had seen him the worse for liquor between that time and dinner. Antrim felt that he himself was partly responsible. He shouldn't have left the Rawleys so precipitately. Indeed, he would never have done so if he hadn't felt that it was necessary to escape, though from what he was escaping he couldn't say. His own ignorance of Rawley's unfortunate tendency didn't mend matters. Why, in Heaven's name, hadn't the woman dropped him a hint? Too proud, he supposed. But then, she might have known that he would understand. Now he saw her piloting her husband back to their hotel through the dark. It was damnable. He felt an impulse to get up, to leave his host talking, and make a dash for it. Perhaps it was already too late for him to be of any use; and yet the fact that he had made an attempt might ease his conscience.

The impulse was difficult to resist. And then he realised that it was not the business of a stranger to throw himself into the lives of these queer people; he felt,

once more, a shade of resentment that he had already experienced against this couple who were diverting him from the ordered course of his life. They must fight their own battles, like every one else. For the woman a lonely, losing battle. . . . It wasn't pleasant to think of. He had already allowed himself to picture her as stranded in the middle of Africa; but, at this moment, she was stranded just as surely in a comfortless Mombasa hotel. Tredinnick expected she knew how to manage him. Well, perhaps she did. Even if he obeyed his impulse and went he would probably end by making a fool of himself.

"More port?" said Kilgour. "No? Well, then, I think we'd better join them."

On the verandah the women were waiting. As they entered Mrs. Kilgour beckoned to Antrim. "I've news for you, young man," she said, "they've just sent up a message from Kilindini to say that the boat will sail at daybreak. We'd better arrange to get your heavy baggage aboard. Just tell me what you want to keep by you and I'll see that they leave it behind. Rather short notice!"

"Yes," said Antrim penitently. "I'm afraid I've let you in for a lot of unnecessary trouble. They told me about the change at the office this afternoon. I meant to let you know, but somehow it slipped me."

"What's this, what's this?" Kilgour sang out cheerfully from the other side of the verandah.

"Jimmy has to be aboard to-night. The *Vandal's* off at daybreak."

"What an awful shame!" said the D.C.'s wife. "I was going to book him for tennis to-morrow. I want him to meet some people named Rawley who have a letter for John."

"What about this baggage, Jimmy?" Kilgour called. "You'd better settle it now, and get it off your mind."

"I've done that already," said Antrim. "Don't bother about it. I've decided not to sail on the *Vandal*."

"Not to sail on the *Vandal*?" cried Mrs. Kilgour. "My dear Jimmy, what do you mean? You've booked your passage."

"I know," said Antrim, smiling at her and at himself, "and jolly nearly paid for it, too. That's why I went to the office this evening. Fortunately I left my cheques behind."

"My dear fellow," said Kilgour, "you must be ill."

"Not a bit of it," said Antrim. "Never fitter. Can't I change my mind?"

"You don't usually," Kilgour reminded him. "Still, there it is! Only I think you might tell us the lady's name!"

"Nothing doing, *bwanam kubwa*," Antrim laughed. "You're on the wrong

horse.”

“And to think of the emotions we’ve wasted on him!” said Mrs. Kilgour. “After all these good-byes, I don’t see how any decent man could stay.”

“At any rate you’ll be able to play tennis to-morrow,” said the D.C.’s wife. “We’ll expect you.”

“Delighted,” said Antrim.

At the end of a pleasant and futile evening he found himself alone with the Kilgours. This was the moment that they had been awaiting with some curiosity.

“Well, Jimmy, what’s it all about?” Kilgour asked him.

“I don’t know. All the way down from Nairobi I felt in my bones that I didn’t want to go.”

“Rubbish!” said Kilgour. “I’ve heard of that sort of thing before. There ought to be a regulation compelling officers to take their leave out of the country. It’s morbid. Result of altitude. Pull yourself together and I’ll drive you down to the ship.”

“No, Pat . . . I’ve made up my mind. No use talking about it.”

“Obstinate old devil! What the deuce do you think you’re going to do?”

“A long *safari*. See something of the country.”

“Good God, man! When you might be in Ireland! Where do you think of going?”

“I don’t know. Nothing is fixed. I’m going with the Rawleys.”

“The Rawleys . . . ? My dear Jimmy, are you mad?”

“When I want a medical board I’ll ask for it.”

“You heard what the judge said about him?”

“What did the judge say?” asked Mrs. Kilgour eagerly.

“Drinks like a fish. A very queer customer. Jimmy, this is all damned nonsense.”

“Well, it may be. But I’m going.”

“Then God help you for a bigger ass than I ever believed you!”

“Jimmy,” said Mrs. Kilgour seriously, “there’s more in this than meets the eye.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Antrim.

CHAPTER III

1

A fortnight later, to the wonder and solicitude of his friends, Antrim had arranged to leave Mombasa in the company of the Rawleys. By this time the visitors must have become aware that the attitude of Mombasa toward them was not inviting, for though Rawley had not repeated his exhibition of the first night in the club, and though such a lapse from respectability had been known and even forgiven in the past, the fact that he was a stranger of unprepossessing appearance, with a commercial origin and no known virtues to mitigate his offence, made his crime not easily condoned.

That his wife had been with him when it happened, crowned his infamy. Add to this that the story of the injured *ricksha* boy had found its way into many kitchens, and from the kitchens, spiced and garnished, to the drawing-rooms. In any other community Rawley's money might have excused him, but in this, where the only rich men were Goanese or Arab traders, the very fact of Rawley's wealth made him suspect. Even his wife's birth couldn't help him; for a wife, as Mrs. Kilgour observed in the height of her indignation for the rape of Antrim, takes the station of her husband, and Rawley's was that of a man with a number of queer stories behind him. What these stories were never emerged. That was one of the disadvantages of an island that had to wait on the caprices of Aden for its mails. They had to be taken for granted or imagined, and the English are an imaginative race.

No doubt the person who suffered most was Antrim. Morning and evening—for he was still living with the Kilgours—he had to stand the fire of Mrs. Kilgour's reproaches. She stormed at him, giped at him, reasoned with him, but none of these methods could alter his purpose or draw him into an explanation of his motives; the last for the very best of reasons—that he himself couldn't explain them.

What annoyed her most was that she couldn't get a rise out of him. All her assaults, persuasions, scorns or reproaches were met with the same good humour; and this was disappointing, for she dearly loved a scrap. When she told him that he was making himself ridiculous he took it like a lamb.

"You wouldn't allow me to say things like this to you, Jimmy," she said, "unless you were in love. You, after all these years, to go trotting after a petticoat!"

At this he laughed outright. "My dear *burra memsahib*," he assured her, "that's the widest shot of all. I've scarcely spoken ten words to the woman. I don't even know her."

"That makes no difference," said Mrs. Kilgour darkly. "All I can say is that it's mighty unpleasant for us who are fond of you to have your name associated with these Perfectly Poisonous People. I think you might drop it for our sake."

But Antrim didn't drop it. When he laughed at the idea of his being in love with Mrs. Rawley he was perfectly honest with himself. He wasn't in love with her and didn't intend to be. When he said that he had scarcely spoken to her he told the exact truth. At all his interviews with Rawley, including that extraordinary one on the morning after the *Vandal* had sailed when he went to their hotel and told him that he was ready to take charge of their party, she had been present; but Rawley had done all the talking; his wife sat there quietly disinterested, a presence rather than a person. It didn't seem to matter to her whether they went to Nairobi or Timbuktu. For all that, it was obvious that Rawley deferred to her in everything. He was always prefacing his decisions with: "My wife says . . ." or "My wife thinks . . ." acting, in fact, as a kind of interpreter of her ideas.

Altogether the experience was a puzzle. Every word that Antrim spoke this woman heard, and yet, not once in all the long debates that they had held in the shabby lounge of the hotel, did she offer an opinion. If Antrim had given a truthful answer to a direct question he would have said that he didn't really like her. Now, after ten days of her acquaintance, she seemed no nearer and certainly no more attractive than she had been at the Kilgours' luncheon party. It bothered him a little to think that it was she who had actually forced his decision to stay in Africa, not by any active intervention, but just as an inactive body will precipitate crystallisation in a saturated solution. She had forced him to decide by a question, not by a suggestion. And he was glad to assure himself of this; to tell himself that he had not been influenced by her or any one else, that he had merely given expression to a resolve already formed in some secret chamber of his brain. If for one moment he had admitted her as an active influence he would have taken fright and backed out of the affair as well as decency allowed him; but, as the days went by, he found himself more and more deeply committed. He saw that now, even if he wanted to, he could not get out of it. And this, strangely enough, filled him with a sort of satisfaction. He was in it, up to the neck. How it would turn out was another matter.

By this time the whole arrangement of the *safari* rested on his shoulders. He and Rawley had sat for hours over the imperfect maps that were available, and the route of their tour had been thought out in detail. They were to start, on the first of the next month, from Voi; to cross the spurs of the Bura hills and the Serengeti plains, working toward Taveta and the foothills of Kilima N'jaro. From Moshi, just over the German border, they would turn eastward, doubling the flank of the great mountain,

and trek on toward the southern end of the Victoria Nyanza through the German province of Mwanza.

All that part of their journey that lay west of Kilima N'jaro would carry them through country at that time very imperfectly known and thus satisfy the craving for the unexplored which Rawley had expressed and Antrim, in reality, felt as strongly.

The task once undertaken, Antrim set about it like a soldier planning a staff-ride. It was a job that suited him, for it involved the handling of men, the control of transport, the provision of supplies of ammunition and food. It kept him so busy that he escaped most of the attentions of Mrs. Kilgour, who still hoped to save him from his folly, and the curiosity of the island in general. By the end of ten days he had worked out the whole *bandabast* to his own satisfaction while Rawley was plodding steadily in the rear.

It was Antrim's way to carry plans and figures in his head. Rawley, on the other hand, had a passion for note-taking: the legacy, perhaps, of his business apprenticeship. He could not see things unless they were recorded in black and white, and the table of his room at the hotel was piled with the diary notebooks that his firm supplied to the users of their dip. He must have carried nearly a dozen of them about with him: private diaries, records of cash expenditure balanced to the last penny, lists of equipment and porters' wages, records of photographic exposures; lists of photographic tackle, a book mysteriously labelled "Geology," and a sort of general log in which the contents of all the others were to be summarised. At first Antrim had often wondered what the man would do with himself out in the wild at times when a normal traveller would be kept busy with sport; but when he saw this library of Rawley's Chemical Notebooks he wondered no longer.

In all these preparations one of his chief despairs was Rawley's inability to read a map: a deficiency common in women but rare among men. Rawley would wrestle with them for hours, turning them this way and that in futile attempts at finding his orientation that drove Antrim to distraction. And here, curiously enough, Mrs. Rawley was completely at home. Her mind was as quick as Antrim's own; her sense of position and direction so faultless as to astonish him. Yet, when he came to think of it, he saw that this quality was in keeping with his first estimate of her as a creature boyish rather than feminine. The quick, practical nature of her mind encouraged him, in sudden glimpses, amid Rawley's methodical blunderings.

She rarely spoke; but when she did speak, he felt that she understood things that with Rawley he must explain at length. Her mind gave him the same impression of clean efficiency as her body. Compared with her husband she was a creature of another world. And that world, Antrim quickly realised, was his own. Not that she

ever admitted, or even indirectly implied it. When Antrim and her husband sat steaming hour after hour in the hotel lounge over the plans and the Chemical Notebooks; when Antrim's sense of decency was being outraged, and she knew it; when Rawley was obviously, for the moment, odd man out, she never gave him one word or look that might have been interpreted as the foundation of a natural alliance. He liked her for this; for he had no great opinion of loyalty in women. She was a sportsman and was sticking to the rules of the game in a manner of which an inferior spirit would not have been capable. It cheered him to realise that there was to be one efficient, reliable person with the instincts of his own kind in this mad adventure.

One day Rawley asked him to choose her a rifle.

"You know my own views on the subject," he said, "but if it gives her pleasure to shoot there's no reason why she shouldn't, and I shall not prevent her. You will have to do a certain amount of shooting for the pot. As a matter of fact I believe that at home she was considered quite a good shot." It was curious to see how pride in his wife's accomplishment was mingled with his distaste for its character. Antrim was delighted.

"She'd better come along with me to the African Trading Company's," he said, "and we'll fix it up."

"I don't think that's necessary," said Rawley quickly. "We can rely entirely on your judgment."

Antrim turned to her for confirmation. All the time she had been sitting near them without speaking a word. Nor did she speak to him now. He couldn't understand it. It wasn't natural, nor even, exactly, polite. Probably she had taken a dislike to him. If that were so it was a misfortune for both of them, seeing that for the next three months they must rub shoulders pretty closely. But, if she didn't like him, why had she asked him to go with them? The answer to this question was that she hadn't; and yet he couldn't accept it, for the fact remained that she had been responsible, in a manner however indirect, for his resolution to stay.

Perhaps she was merely afraid of her husband; but this Antrim refused to believe. He had seen enough of her that afternoon in the stranded *ricksha* to be certain that she wasn't lacking in courage. He gave it up. Next day he bought her a rifle, a .257 Mannlicher, and a little sixteen-bore shot gun by Purdey, a gem of a weapon that was going cheap, second-hand. These he duly delivered at the hotel, and heard no more about them. She didn't even say "Thank you."

This incident, and a dozen others of the same kind, put him out of heart. He liked people to be simple and direct, without reservations, and in this particular Rawley, with whom he knew he had far less in common, was more satisfactory than his wife.

Rawley, at least, appreciated his labours. Even if he had been a paid servant instead of a friend who, on the slenderest acquaintance, was doing all the donkey-work for nothing, he would have been entitled to a little recognition.

Indeed, there were times when the cumulative effect of Mrs. Kilgour's protests began to weigh with him. He felt that the whole expedition was a piece of madness and God knew how he had let himself in for it. By this time Mrs. Kilgour was beginning to leave him alone, having given him up as a bad job. This unsympathetic silence troubled him more than her reproaches. It invited confession. It made him want to go to her frankly and say: "Look here. I've made an ass of myself. Get me out of it!"

But she couldn't get him out of it, and he knew it. To begin with, his pride wouldn't allow the whole island to say: "I told you so!" any more than his sense of honour could permit him to leave the Rawleys stranded after making himself necessary to their plans. Rawley, in his blundering way, was obviously grateful. If only this woman would acknowledge his existence . . .

He told himself that this was a small matter and that it was a sign of pettiness to be disturbed by it; and in any case he was now so deeply committed that there was nothing for him but to go through to the end. Perhaps it was the amused curiosity that the island showed in his affairs that had made him touchy. Well, the sooner he was out of it the better!

Everything connected with the *safari* had now been arranged but the engagement of the headman, the gun-bearers and the cook. In another week they would be setting out for Voi. Once away from these artificial conditions of life and from the prejudices of a limited society, matters would solve themselves. All through he had been anxious to find an excuse for Mrs. Rawley's attitude, and, as he thrashed it out for the hundredth time, a new explanation occurred to him. It was not a very good one, but it put him in a better humour with himself. It presumed that she was aware that she had been responsible for his change of plans; that she appreciated all that he had done for them, but feared, naturally enough, that he might be disappointed in the result; that she was anxious, in other words, but too diffident, to tell him of her anxiety, and shy to feel that through her he had been committed to such a doubtful adventure. With this explanation he was determined to be satisfied, and, by its aid, persuaded himself that he was. "Some day," he told himself, "she will let me know exactly what she felt, and then we shall both laugh at ourselves."

So he forgot his grievance and set to work at the last, and, as it seemed to him, the easiest of his labours: the choice of servants and gunbearers for the *safari*. The news of Rawley's expedition had by this time filtered downward from the dinner tables of Mombasa to the last alley of the native locations, and Antrim found that cooks and headmen were waiting for him in droves; that they knew not only the number of the party but the exact date that had been fixed for starting and the route to be taken: matters that had only been discussed within the closed circle of the Rawleys and himself.

This discovery annoyed him. Later, when he thought about it, it also made him a little uneasy. It gave him a new vision of Mombasa. Up to this point he had always taken the place for granted, seeing only the life of the club and the little society over which Mrs. Kilgour, in the absence of the Governor's lady, presided: clear figures, picked out against the dark indefinite background of native life. Now, suddenly, he realised that what he had taken for a background, passive and inert, was, in fact, an active and acutely conscious environment in which he and his fellows moved as in a dark wood, seeing nothing, but watched in their every movement and heard in their least whisper. The thought of this dark omniscience came to him as a revelation; for he saw that this speck of an island was a microcosm of all Africa. Perhaps this explained the mystery and terror with which the continent had always inspired strangers. It was uncanny to find that he knew nothing of all this multitude that knew everything of him; that perhaps already men in the swampy villages of the Wataveta knew that he and the Rawleys would pass their way. It put him at a disadvantage and aroused his instincts of self-protection to a degree that made him laugh at himself. It wasn't like him to consider such things; it was part of the unhealthy sensitiveness that his mind seemed to have acquired on the way down from Nairobi; nerves; altitude—it didn't matter what you called it. The proper word was fear; and that was an emotion which he was ashamed to experience. He put it resolutely behind him.

Among the applicants that swarmed about him he found a headman well experienced in the German country, a Zanzibari named Asmani who would serve them for 40 rupees a month; a cook at 25, Somali gunbearers with sheaves of hunting references, and a personal servant who took his fancy more than any. This was a sturdy, thick-set fellow of Zulu race. How he had been cast up on this northern coast Antrim could not guess, though men of every Bantu tribe may be found in Mombasa or Zanzibar.

His name was that of the great conqueror Dingaan, son of Chaka, and Antrim saw that he was full of a pride of race that would make him a valuable ally, isolating

him from the other servants, who belonged to coastal tribes, and throwing him, in case of trouble, on the white man's side. In another way he would be useful, for having lived in the Transvaal, he spoke English, and this would save him from the kind of misunderstanding of which Rawley was so dangerously capable. Antrim was delighted with this discovery. To Asmani, the Zanzibari, he entrusted the engagement of porters and two so-called *askaris* to act as watchmen and put the fear of God into them. When he had made this arrangement he called in at the Rawleys' hotel to report progress.

They were in, the porter told him, but not to be seen. On this point the lady had left implicit orders. Antrim was disappointed; for he was pleased with his morning's work and had looked forward to telling them; but since they were not visible he sent up a message to say that he would call again in the evening. A hundred yards down the road a servant from the hotel overtook his *ricksha* with a note. Mrs. Rawley would be glad if he could postpone his visit till next morning. A strange message. No reason, no apologies.

He guessed that there was trouble. Rawley, of course. If Rawley had turned awkward he felt he ought to be there; but since the message had been so explicit he could do nothing. He didn't like the look of things, not only because of their present significance, but as an augury of the future.

"This is a devil of a job," he told himself. "I wish I could help her." And all that afternoon, as he lay sweating under a mosquito net that kept off the flies, his mind kept returning to the difficulties with which she was surrounded. He saw her fighting the loneliest of battles. "If only she'd sink her pride," he thought, "and give me her confidence! She might know that I'd do my damndest. She's bound to come to it some day."

The prospects of their journey had never seemed to him more gloomy. It was now exactly a fortnight since Rawley's last outburst. Once a fortnight meant six times in three months. "I must make a point," he thought, "of taking no store of liquor on this trip. One sundowner a day. I shall have to ration it." And yet it was curious that where before he had thought, from time to time, of backing out of the expedition, he now felt thankful that he was committed to it. "Suppose she had had to deal with this sort of thing alone!" he thought. "Now at any rate she'll have me to fall back on; if only she won't play the fool and try to keep me out of it."

That evening, when he was sitting at dinner with the Kilgours, a servant came in

with a message. Mrs. Rawley to see him. "Let her wait," said Mrs. Kilgour. "It's most inconsiderate. Surely the woman must know that you're in the middle of a meal like every other civilised person."

"No, I'll see her at once," said Antrim, and left them in a most uncomfortable silence.

He found her in the Kilgours' formal drawing-room, that seemed to have been transported bodily to Africa from an Irish country house of the last century. She heard him coming and turned to meet him.

"Oh, here you are!" she said.

They were the words in which she might have greeted, a man who was late for an assignation rather than one who had been snatched away from the middle of his dinner to meet her, and they gave Antrim something of a shock. He had been expecting at the least a confession of weakness, at the best an appeal for help. But he got neither. The touching scene, which he had imagined, wouldn't materialise. Never had Mrs. Rawley appeared more composed than at this moment, nor less dependent on the consolations that he was prepared to offer. She didn't even seem relieved to see him. He could do nothing more brilliant than ask her to sit down.

"No," she said. "Let's stand. Have I dragged you away from your dinner? Of course. . . . I'm sorry. I wanted to let you know at once that our plans are changed."

"Changed?" Antrim caught at the word. It meant, he supposed, that for some reason that had its origin in Rawley the trip was off. During the last fortnight he had wished a hundred times that it might be; but when he contemplated the fulfilment of these wishes, he felt as though all purpose had gone out of his life.

"Changed?" he repeated. "I don't quite know what you mean."

"No," she said, "Of course you don't. It's rather sudden, I admit. My husband has had another unpleasant experience. He's very much disturbed. He feels that he can't stay in this country. We are sorry to upset your plans."

Sorry, indeed! It was pretty cool to talk like that to a man who had cancelled his passage, changed his plans, let down his friends, and generally made a mess of the leave that he had earned by a couple of years of slogging hard work. For the moment his sense of justice made him angry and anxious to teach these people manners; but in the end his disappointment asserted itself above his anger.

"So the trip's off?" he said despondently.

"Off? Not at all, if you're game to go on with it. We can start from another point. As it was we were going to spend most of our time in German territory. Why shouldn't we start there instead of from Voi?"

The idea bewildered him. His mind was accustomed to processes of routine; it

couldn't adapt itself easily to these dizzy jumps from point to point; and yet, in spite of the bewilderment, it clutched at the least hope of holding to this detestable business.

"But my dear Mrs. Rawley," he said, "that means scrapping my staff-work and beginning all over again. It will take another week at least, and by that time we shall be out of the country. I've got everything settled. I fixed up this morning with a headman, a gunbearer and a cook, and these fellows have been authorised to collect the porters. Probably they've done so by now."

"Yes, that's a pity," she admitted. "You'd better stop them collecting porters. The others we can take with us."

"Where . . . when?" He laughed at her. "You're talking as if by wishing things you could make them happen. You can't, you know. If you could I should be delighted."

"You mean that you still want to come?" she asked.

"You needn't ask me that," he said, "for you know the answer. Do you think I'm the kind of fellow that backs out of an undertaking?"

"No," she answered. "But this is your chance. You may not get another."

He laughed. "Well, you want me to start the job all over again?"

"You must do as you think best. Study your own convenience."

"Convenience!" That wasn't exactly the word. "Is this a polite—no, I won't say that—a convenient way of getting rid of me? I wish you'd tell me that?"

"Of course it isn't, Captain Antrim."

"Then, to put it plainly, you still want me to come with you?"

She would not answer. "As a matter of fact," she said, "it isn't quite as difficult as you imagine. I've been doing a little 'staff-work' on my own. There's a small German steamer lying down at Kilindini. She's going along the coast: Tanga, Pangani, Bagamoyo, Dar-es-Salaam, and starting to-morrow morning. We have plenty of time to get aboard her. You might collect the people that you've engaged as well."

"But are you sure they'll take us?"

"I've arranged for my husband and myself already. Whether you come with us is entirely your own affair."

"You're very anxious to make me responsible?"

"Yes, I am."

He felt that he could say no more of this. "Your staff-work is a little too rapid for me," he said. "Where have you decided to disembark?"

"I don't know," she said, "and really it doesn't matter. Anywhere in German

East. I'd thought of Pangani. All I want to do is to leave Mombasa. I don't think the people here would press us to stay, do you? We're *going* to leave it in any case."

For a moment Antrim was silent. It hurt him to think that even now, when she was pushed to an extremity, the woman wouldn't confide in him. Pride was an admirable thing in its way: but this was not so much pride as secretiveness, and secretiveness in this case amounted to obstruction. It was all very well for her to stand there with her pale, composed face and treat him as if he were a paid servant who had been offered the opportunity of cancelling his contract. These people were under a definite obligation to him, and though he didn't want to rub it in, he felt that this should be recognised.

"Look here, Mrs. Rawley," he said, "it's better that we should understand one another. I don't pretend to understand your husband; but I think I can understand you if you'll let me. It's obvious in any case that we're in for a difficult time. I'm most awfully anxious to spare your feelings."

"I know," she said, "and I appreciate your kindness."

"Thank you," he replied. "So far you haven't shown me that you do."

"No," she said, "I don't show things. I don't want to. Let it be understood."

"It shall be," said Antrim, "and we'll say no more about it. But I think you owe it to me to tell me why you want to leave Mombasa in such a frantic hurry. Tell me what the trouble is. I don't ask out of curiosity, but because it will show me how I can help you."

"It wouldn't in the least," she said, "and in any case I can't. We did not press you to come with us. My husband had made up his mind that you wouldn't when you came back and said that you would."

"Yes, that is true," said Antrim, though he felt that it misrepresented the truth.

"And now," she said, "if you wish to, you are at liberty to desert us."

"Desertion? Is it as bad as that?"

"No . . . you pick me up so quickly! I mean that you can stay behind. I wish to goodness you wouldn't keep on trying to be intense as if we were mysterious or romantic. We're not in the least, so it's no good pretending. Let us leave it at that."

"But if I refuse to leave it at that?"

"Then you'll stay behind, I hope. But you won't refuse."

"No. You're quite right. I shan't," he said, surveying her seriously, a little hurt by her refusal to accept him in the *rôle* of knight-errant which had flattered his fancy. He was sore to think that she had misjudged his motives, but shrank from explaining himself for fear of another misjudgment. She had cleverly put him in the wrong, and now, anything that he said would only look like an attempt to establish sentimental

relations. That, he told himself, was the last thing he had intended. At this point he caught her eyes. In the dim light of the Kilgours' drawing-room he couldn't see the tawny iris. They seemed very large and black, and he felt that they were seeing more than he wished to show of his thoughts.

"Well, what is the arrangement?" he said at last.

"The boat is called the *Köln*. We shall have to get our things on board this evening. You will have plenty of time to let the men you have engaged know about it. If they won't come we can find others when we get there."

"When we get there!" he repeated. "You can say what you like about it, but you *are* romantic. *Safaris* aren't usually arranged like this, you know. If you aren't romantic, well, you're capricious."

"It isn't caprice," she told him, "it's necessity."

"Very well," he said, "I'll meet you on board the *Köln*. Let me see you to the door."

"No," she said, "don't bother. Go and finish your dinner."

Without another word she left him.

"Your dinner is cold, Jimmy," said Mrs. Kilgour when he returned. The reproach was intended not for him but for Mrs. Rawley; but of this wretched woman she couldn't trust herself to speak. By this time she knew that in any case it was a waste of breath. Antrim could see that she was aflame with curiosity but was too proud to ask him the questions that crowded to her tongue.

"Yes, I'm sorry," he said, "and I'm afraid I shall have to make a bolt for it when I've finished."

"Oh!" Nothing could have surpassed the expressiveness of this monosyllable.

"We're leaving to-night."

"My dear old fellow," said Kilgour, "don't talk rot! There's no train till to-morrow."

"We're not going by train," said Antrim.

"Not going by train!" Mrs. Kilgour exclaimed, as though such a proceeding were a violation of all the laws of God and man. "Then where *are* you going?"

"God knows," said Antrim, in perfect honesty.

Mrs. Kilgour stared at him, not wholly convinced that he wasn't making fun of her. She decided that he was serious.

"Well," she sighed, "we've only one consolation, and that's the special providence that is supposed to look after fools . . . And drunkards," she added. When she began her sentence she hadn't suspected that it would present her with such a triumphantly accurate description of the Rawleys' party. She beamed with

satisfaction of having been witty in spite of herself. But Antrim didn't smile.

"Let's hope so," he said, as he hurried on with his dinner.

CHAPTER IV

1

It was after midnight when Antrim reached the wharf at Kilindini. He had spent the rest of the evening unearthing his new servants from the warren in which they lived and breaking to them the news that the line of the expedition had been shifted southward by some hundreds of miles.

Only the Goanese cook and the Somali gunbearers failed him. The others took the change well; for none but Asmani was a city-dweller, anchored to one spot by the weight of stone and mortar, and even Asmani was a Zanzibari, of a race that is restless and adventurous, having the blood of Arab and Sabaeen in its veins. They told him they would meet him at the landing-stage and Antrim knew that all three would be there.

When he reached the place, half an hour in front of his time, they were waiting for him; Asmani, tall and ghostly in his white *kanzu*, the new cook stretched lengthwise with folded arms upon a pile of timber, and Dingaan squatted in the dust. They received him in silence, taking heed of his impatience but saying nothing. How much Antrim owed to his up-country reputation it would be difficult to say. It is probable that his nick-name, Chui, and even his nature were known in that cunning place; for in the years that he had spent at Nairobi many soldiers had learned that he was a good man to serve. Be this as it may, the sight of his three chosen cheered him, and showed him that all his plans had not fallen to pieces as he had half expected.

It was very quiet. Not a ripple on the sea; not a breath of wind; a hot air charged with the smell of copra that some ship had been loading. He walked back to the gates of the Customs House. The sentry saluted. Antrim saw it was a man whom he had known in the K.A.R. up-country. And this, too, cheered him. Then, in the distance, he heard a creaking of wheels and the sudden crack of a whip. He knew that his gear was coming, and walked back to the water-side.

He hailed a boat, and from the cluster that swung from the wharf with their sterns outward, one detached itself. In the bottom of each of these shells a boatman was lying. All awoke together. In a second there was competition for his fare. He chose two, and these were pushed in broadside to the wharf. Neither Asmani, nor Dingaan, nor the cook, stirred. This was not their business. Then from far away came the thin antiphonal chant of porters that were off-loading his boxes. All his luggage and stores had been split up into loads of sixty pounds that a man might

carry on his head. Out of the darkness they came softly with their bare feet, moving at a run, as though they enjoyed it; lowering their loads to the hands of the boatmen and retiring. In a quarter of an hour, twenty loads were packed in the bottom of the boat.

“*Basi* . . . enough,” the boatman whispered, “I do not want to be drowned.”

“There are no more,” Antrim told him.

“*Haya!* We will go.”

Antrim stepped into the first boat; the ghost of Asmani followed him and disposed himself with the Somali and Dingaan in the bows. With them, last of all, a small child of ten or twelve years clambered in like a cat, slim and underfed. Antrim stopped the boatman as he was pushing off.

“Hello . . . is this *mtoto* yours?” he asked.

The boatman disowned him. “He is mine, *bwana*,” said Dingaan. “He is coming with us.”

“The devil he is!” said Antrim. “I didn’t bargain for your family. Any others?”

The Zulu laughed. “No, there are no others. But this one goes with me. He is the child of a friend. He can cook, and will be useful to the missis. And he will cost you nothing. That kind can live on what others leave. In a little while he will be worth the wages of a man.”

Antrim did not argue. In every *safari* voluntary accretions of this kind come and are accepted.

“Very well,” he said. “Remember, you are responsible.”

The small creature nestled down into the bows like an animal till Antrim could see nothing but its eyes. “Push off,” he said.

Over the jetty water they pushed off, hearing nothing but the splash of their own or following oars. Not a star reflected; not a glimmer to be seen but that of the *Köln*’s riding light shining against the cocoanut fringes of the further shore. The *Köln* lay heavy like a log floating in a pool, like a sleeping crocodile. It was difficult to believe that any living soul was aboard her; but when Antrim scrambled on to the deck he found that it was scattered with sleepers like that of a pilgrim ship; low-caste Hindus and small traders of the type that cling and multiply like limpets on the African shore. The well-deck was thick with them and their pitiable livestock. They crouched there, prematurely resigned to sea-sickness, sitting on their heels, watching him with big eyes, uttering no sound. No animals would have accepted strange conditions so readily. In the darkness he heard the distressful bleating of a goat.

No deck hands appeared to receive him, so he and his party got the stuff aboard between them, clearing a space among the sleepers where Asmani, Dingaan and the

cook established themselves as a guard, while Antrim left the well-deck and groped his way up the companion forward in search of the Rawleys.

Here there were no Asiatics. If the ship had been derelict it could not have seemed more empty. The deck gave out clanging echoes under his feet. It smelt of oil, stale water and rusty iron. Every door of the deck-house was closed; that of the saloon locked, as against thieves; though the Lord knows, he thought, what any one could find to steal on a packet like this! Even in the fo'c'sle no light showed. It seemed impossible that the Rawleys should be aboard in the midst of such a desolation.

"At any rate," he thought, "I shall find some sort of a watchman." In pursuit of this idea he hauled himself up the perpendicular ladder that led to the bridge by a rail that was cold and covered with a fine sweat of dew. Reaching the top he stumbled over a figure wrapped in a blanket who rose and cursed him in German. He apologised.

"I'm looking for my friends," he said.

The figure was by this time on his feet and his dignity.

"Friends?" he shouted. "Am I your friends? This is the navigating bridge of the ship, is it not? And I am the Captain. The Captain! This is my bridge and no one else sets foot on it. You are forbidden here . . . forbidden!" He stood there waving his blanket, a paunchy little man in striped pyjamas.

"I'm sorry," said Antrim mildly; "I had understood that Mr. Rawley had engaged a cabin for me. All the deck-house doors were closed. You understand? I didn't want to butt in on some unfortunate lady . . ."

"Forbidden," roared the Captain; "I say forbidden . . ."

"Can you tell me if Mr. Rawley has come aboard?"

A pale young quartermaster, roused by the shouting, appeared and was cursed for his pains. He melted away into the darkness from which he had come.

"Mr. Rawley . . . Mr. Rawley? I know nothing of passengers. That is the steward's business. Understand, I am the Captain." Without his uniform the poor man was at a disadvantage.

"Then where can I find the steward?" Antrim suggested.

"You cannot find him. He has gone below. Would you have him wait up all night for you? A man must sleep."

"That was what I proposed doing myself," Antrim reassured him.

If he could have said that this, also, was forbidden, the Captain would surely have done so. "You are a passenger," he said. "Understand that we do not take saloon passengers except as a favour. The steward is my personal servant. Others

bring their own.”

“Certainly,” said Antrim, “that is quite understood. All that I want is to find my cabin.”

“At daylight that will be possible. Before . . . no. We sail at three o’clock. Besides,” he continued, “it is much cooler on deck. I, as you see, was sleeping on the bridge before you disturbed me.”

Antrim laughed to himself. Probably the little man was right. In any case, he didn’t mind roughing it. He turned away. If the deck had been less filthy, he would have wrapped himself in a blanket and lain there. As an alternative, he found what comfort he could in the bottom of a boat that felt clean but stank of bilge-water. And here, strangely enough, he fell asleep.

2

The rattle of the anchor-cable awakened him to a state of agreeable drowsiness in which he heard thin cries from for’ard and aft and, a little later, the clang of the telegraph and the dull churn of the screw. The *Köln* had begun to move at her appointed time. It was still dark, being more than two hours before dawn, but, while he slept, the sky had cleared to a faint starlight, and when he propped himself above the gunwale of his boat, he saw the giant baobabs on the Mombasa shore of the channel stealing past like grotesque figures with arms outstretched. The breeze that the *Köln* made for herself moved gently aft, blowing away the odour of stale water. It was a strange and beautiful moment. Gradually the ship began to rise upon a languid swell. They had met the open sea.

He knew that he could sleep no more, for by now his limbs were cold. He climbed out of the boat to stretch them and, descending, began to walk up and down the narrow deck, charmed by the swish of dark water from the ship’s sides, watching the shapes of Africa recede.

So the adventure had really begun! It gave him a feeling of relief to know that he was actually on his way. Dark seas widened between him and all his old life.

“That is finished,” he thought. “Now, even if I wanted to, I couldn’t turn back. But the uncertainty also is over.”

The *Köln*, losing the protection of the land, rose to a greater wave, neatly, deftly, as though she enjoyed it; and it seemed as if Antrim shared something of the ship’s exultation, identifying himself with her riding of the waves, turning his back on the gulf behind him. For that was what it was; a definite gulf of blackness, something empty and mysterious that he had crossed. “My Rubicon,” he said. And this sense of

a complete separation from all that was friendly and familiar gave him a certain fierce satisfaction. Fond of her as he was, Mrs. Kilgour had lately been getting on his nerves. He had been rather ashamed of it; for the Kilgours were not only his countrymen, but old and trusted friends; but to be told, day after day, that he was making a fool of himself had irritated him; it had almost forced him to brazen it out.

"They think I'm a fool," he told himself, "simply because I'm cutting adrift from their sort of people and their sort of life . . . *my* sort of life, they'd call it. But I'm not at all sure that it is my sort of life. It's the life I've been living for years, that's all; the life to which I've accustomed myself. A fellow who goes straight from Wellington to Sandhurst hasn't much chance of any other. They caught me young; that's the truth of the matter. Now I've broken loose and we shall see!"

What he would see was, indeed, appallingly indefinite. If one stage of uncertainty was over, another had begun. Uncertainty, after all, was the spice of life; and his own life, so hedged by routine and moulded by discipline, had been singularly lacking in savour. A new aspect of his uncertainty suddenly assailed him. Supposing that the Rawleys weren't on board. . . . In that case he would be even a greater fool than Mrs. Kilgour had imagined. But what did it matter? He was free, and freer, as a matter of fact, if they weren't. A queer business, anyhow! He laughed and lit a cigarette.

Standing amidships in front of the saloon and looking outward to the bow of the horizon over which the sun, already parching Indian plains that he knew, would soon be lifted, he became aware of some one at his elbow. No doubt the steward had at last discovered his presence. He turned, and found that it was Mrs. Rawley, wrapped from neck to ankles in a long white cloak. Their eyes met in the dusk, and she smiled.

"Hello," she said, "so you've come?"

"You didn't think I'd funk it?"

"No, but if you had it couldn't have been helped, it would have made no difference."

This was not flattering. To put it in a better light he asked: "To your going?"

"Yes," she replied, "to our going. Have we lost the land?"

"Everything but the light of Mombasa," he told her. "No, that's gone now. If it were light we should still see the coast. It rises steeply behind."

"But we can't see it," she said, "and that's better still. I don't want to. I like the feeling of violent separations . . . clean cuts . . . being through with things. And it's jolly to feel alone."

"You aren't alone," he reminded her.

"Ah, but *you* don't count. That's the best of it."

This hurt him a little and he showed it.

"But why should I put it nicely?" she asked. "You're the first person that I've seen for years with whom I feel like that. Isn't it a compliment?"

"A back-handed one."

"We're at cross-purposes, then. You see, I'm not as sentimental as you expect me to be. It thrills you to go sailing on through the dark with a strange woman beside you because it's romantic. It thrills me because it's a relief."

No doubt it was. Antrim thought of Rawley. And yet her attitude shocked him. It didn't accord with his preconceptions to imagine her hard.

"You're very young to talk like that," he said. "You're a child." All the Nairobi women liked to be told that they were children. She laughed.

"Am I? I'm nearly thirty. And what are you? Thirty-five, I suppose. There's not much in it. Please don't begin to feel protective."

"You think it's a presumption . . .?"

"Well, isn't it, rather?"

The clearness of his conscience made him feel that she had no right to snub him like this. "You're very awkward," he said. "You make things difficult."

"Of course I do. It would be a poor look out for everybody if I didn't!"

"There again you put me in the wrong. If I feel protective it only means that I'm ready . . ." he finished lamely: "to protect you if you should need it."

"Yes, I quite understand," she said. "It's very kind of you . . . and quite unnecessary."

"Perhaps. We've a long way to go. If it should be necessary. . . ."

"I'll ask you," she said. "Is that good enough?"

"If you mean it?"

"Oh, I *mean* it. . . . For goodness' sake let's stop talking about ourselves. You haven't asked me how my husband is."

It was quite true; but the attack came from such an unexpected quarter that Antrim's politeness could rise neither to apology nor excuse.

"Well, how is he?" he asked, in a tone that betrayed his boredom.

"Better, thank you," she said. "He's asleep . . . or was, at the point when I could stand the cabin no longer. The harbour was sweltering. I'll tell him that you inquired."

She left Antrim abruptly. While they had stood talking a faint greyness had been stealing toward them from the East, revealing a sea of the colour of antimony, too lustreless and cold for that burning zone. In this light she had seemed to him very pathetic and slender—the more so for the white cloak that she wore pulled close

about her with her arms inside. "Dressed for sympathy," he told himself. "It's all very well for her to talk; but that woman's suffered and is still suffering. Really she might have the decency to give me credit for behaving. And as for playing off her husband like that. . . ." His memory still preserved the faint mockery of her tone; but even so it was a shabby trick. "Funny how she disturbs me," he thought, "making everything feel uncomfortable and uncertain." He disliked the idea of her returning to the frowsy cabin in which Rawley still lay sleeping. It occurred to him that she must have known what he would think and that she had thrown in Rawley's name maliciously. "The truth of the matter is that she was coquetting in rather an original way. Well, one can deal with that." He grew angry. "I'll take her at her word. Damned if I'll raise a finger until she asks me. See how she likes it!"

But in spite of these resolutions his thoughts returned to Rawley's cabin. "Whisky," he thought, "Pretty beastly when you come to think of it." And indeed if it were anything like the rest of the ship as he saw it in that unflattering light, pretty beastly it must have been. He surveyed the unkept decks, the rusty hawse-pipe, the sun-blistered paint and tarnished brass of the deck-house with disgust; and, as he did so, the sun rose on the port beam, drenching the whole scene with light, touching the dull crests of the waves with fire, casting intense clear shadows in the troughs between them, so that the whole sea was a dazzling miracle of light and shade. "She might have waited to see this," he thought.

From its first ray the sun was warm and powerful, promising tremendous heat. It threw a cheerful light on everything. Even the dingy Köln seemed to take heart from it, riding the waves almost with sprightliness. On the bridge above him he heard the captain strutting to and fro, whistling a hymn-tune that seemed familiar. In point of fact it was *Deutschland über alles*. A sailor ran swinging by on bare feet as though he enjoyed it, hurrying to swab the decks. The missing steward, in white duck trousers and a singlet, appeared at Antrim's elbow with a propitiatory cup of coffee.

"Sorry to miss you last night, sir," he said. "Your cabin was all ready. Where can I find your baggage?"

"First class waiters, these German fellows," Antrim thought.

Water began to swish over the deck. They walked through it together. Round his heap of baggage the three servants lay like watchdogs, and all about them such of the Asiatics as were not hopelessly sea-sick were making their first toilet with a horrible sniffing and clearing of throats.

"Schwine," said the steward, "Damned schwine!"

"There is all my stuff," said Antrim. "Those three fellows with the *mtoto*. Which is my cabin?"

“Number three, sir.”

“Then I’ll go and shave. You might haul along that black-japanned uniform case.”

“Very good. Hot water in a moment, sir.” The steward bustled down the companion.

3

At breakfast, two hours later, both the Rawleys appeared, as did also the captain, now dignified by a brass-bound uniform. He treated Antrim with the distance appropriate to a man who had seen him in the scantiest form of mufti; but with Mrs. Rawley he was graciousness itself, talking an incomprehensible jargon that Antrim supposed was German. This accomplishment impressed Antrim, for he himself had no languages but Urdu, Swahili, and a schoolboy’s French. “Clever girl!” he thought. “A bit too clever for me!” He rather resented this new display of brilliance. “Another dodge to put me in my place. As if *I* wanted to learn the fellow’s rotten language.”

But Rawley, apparently, was delighted by this display. Always he listened to her and looked at her. That was one thing in his favour, Antrim thought, he *did* appreciate his wife. Antrim also looked at her. Certainly, at this moment, she seemed less of a subject for compassion than in the haggard light of dawn. She was fresh as paint and full of gaiety, making no secret of a hearty appetite. “A sort of hard brightness,” he told himself, “like a precious stone. I’m not at all sure that I don’t prefer women softer and more sympathetic.”

He didn’t realise that this was a complete reversal of his former opinion; that he was suiting his tastes, in fact, to the protective *rôle* which he had allotted himself and after which he still hankered. He found it necessary to explain this aspect of Mrs. Rawley away.

“Poor soul,” he thought, “she isn’t really like this at all. It’s just part of her astounding pluck. She’s trying to put on a brave face . . . but I know better.” It came to this: if he didn’t know better he had thoroughly deceived himself and had no business on this trip at all: he had come there on false pretences, even if the false pretences were his own. So he decided not to admit it.

It was all very mysterious. Even Rawley didn’t turn up to pattern. For the last twelve hours, even since the appearance in the Kilgours’ drawing-room, he had been picturing Rawley as a monster, gross, ill-bred, drunken and morose. He had expected him to show signs of all these failings, and, because of them, an

appropriate shame. He showed nothing of the sort. Indeed, he had improved immensely on his Mombasa appearance. Possibly the original street-row had put him, so to speak, in the wrong, and made him live up to an unpleasant reputation. Now, at the *Köln*'s breakfast table, he seemed, even physically, to have changed for the better. He carried his head well; there was nothing shifty about his eyes; he was clothed, almost sprucely, in clean white ducks. He smiled often and, as Antrim had noticed before, hung upon his wife's words; but happily, without jealousy. The experience of the last few days had certainly improved him. It was as if something had cleared the air. Even with Antrim the man was more natural. Indeed, his new friendliness was something of an embarrassment; for Antrim couldn't get it out of his head that, somehow or other, he was on the opposite side, so that this attempt at a sudden *rapprochement* was hardly playing the game. He found it difficult to remember that he and Rawley were supposed to be friends, so deeply had his thoughts of Mrs. Rawley's wrongs coloured his mind.

After breakfast she left them together. They sat on deck smoking their pipes under an awning that flapped languidly while the sea grew warm and sparkled, flying fish scattering like animate spray from the *Köln*'s bows, and the sky, that had once been blue, paling to a tropical whiteness. Rawley was still communicative. He talked of his own business—the Chemical Dip—with a certain pride; and Antrim, though he wasn't interested in figures that meant nothing to him, felt it was better that Rawley should be enthusiastic than ashamed. The man didn't pretend to be anything that he wasn't, and this counted for virtue. He talked of the great laboratories that the company had lately erected at Hayes, on the Great Western main line, and from these he passed easily to his own interest in science generally and photographic chemistry in particular.

"But that's rather technical," he admitted. "What I want you to see is some of my own studies: the things I did up in the Northern Transvaal a few months ago. Did I tell you that I got a white rhinoceros? Rare beast in these days!"

They began to talk about the habits of game, a subject in which Rawley was well-read if not experienced; the geology of Africa, of which Antrim knew nothing; diamonds; gold. "Gold's a fascinating thing," Rawley said. "When I was down there I went into it pretty thoroughly. Prospecting's a queer game."

But Antrim knew, all the time, that Rawley didn't want to talk about any of these things. His newly acquired fluency disguised the nervousness of a man manœuvring for position. Sooner or later he would see his opening and then out would come the real thing . . . probably something unpleasant. If he could have escaped politely Antrim would have done so; but the *Köln* was too small to allow a dignified retreat

and Rawley gave him no loophole. At last the expected moment came.

“Our change of plans must have puzzled you,” Rawley began.

“Not a bit,” said Antrim. “All in the day’s work.”

“It’s jolly nice of you to put it that way; but I know better. I wish you’d tell me if my wife explained.”

If she had explained, the question would have been awkward. Luckily he wasn’t faced with this difficulty.

“Indeed she hasn’t,” he said.

“What? Do you mean that? Do you mean to say that you came without an explanation?” Antrim did not answer. For a moment Rawley was silent. Evidently he wasn’t satisfied.

“Early this morning . . . just before dawn . . . when you stood over there talking . . . Didn’t she tell you then?”

This was really unpleasant. It implied that Rawley had been spying on his wife, and Antrim flushed with annoyance. “Swine!” he thought.

“If you don’t believe me,” he said, “you’d better ask her.”

“No, no,” said Rawley, “I couldn’t. Not for the world. Of course I believe you. But isn’t that amazing in her? Did you ever hear of such extraordinary loyalty?”

These questions, too, were unanswerable. Luckily Rawley didn’t wait for an answer. He went on hurriedly, as though he were anxious to get the words off his chest.

“I’m a damned brute,” he said. “Nobody but Janet and myself know how bad it is; sooner or later you’ll see for yourself; but I do want you to realise that it isn’t entirely my fault. The scales were always weighted against me. It’s pretty beastly that you should have to listen to all this,” he went on, “but I want you to know. My childhood was hell, and my father a devil. I mean it. I mean that he was an incarnation of evil and cruelty; so much that I hate even to remember him. I’m not making up a yarn to excuse myself; it’s the plain truth. Good God! How I hated that man! He killed my mother. Isn’t that enough? And he killed me . . . he killed my spirit when I was just a kid. Crushed me, you know. Made me hate and suspect the whole of my species; made me think that the whole world was against me. If you could imagine the relief it was to me when he died! I was a man then and free; but my freedom was no use to me: I couldn’t realise it or use it; I was branded. Nobody but Janet had ever seen anything decent in me. We were neighbours, you know. She’s wonderful. . .”

His voice cracked. Pathetic tears stood in his eyes. Antrim felt that he would begin to set up a howl. It was indecent; but he couldn’t stop him.

"If he'd killed me literally as he killed my mother it would have been better," Rawley went on. "That's the trouble: I survived. I'm not like her. I'm like him. Even physically I'm like him. And, like him, I'm possessed by the devil . . . a legion of devils. You understand?" he asked eagerly.

"This isn't indecency," thought Antrim, "it's madness. The poor fellow's off his head." He found himself replying in Rawley's own set phrase: "Yes, yes, quite so." "Now, if I can only get away," he thought.

But Rawley hadn't finished:

"Why did he leave me his damned money?" he said. "If I could have escaped the other legacy I'd have chucked away every penny. I'm powerless against it. I can't resist. I'm not myself. You remember seeing me with that wretched fellow in the *ricksha*? Well, if you hadn't come, I might easily have killed him. I'm always within sight of murder. And it's been like that all my life. As a boy in Cornwall. In the regiment. That was why I had to resign. Then I met her and fell in love with her. I tried to show her the decent part of me. There *is* a decent part. And I suppose she was sorry for me. Then there was Withiel. The Carlyons could never bear the idea that it had gone out of the family. When she listened to me I felt that my chance had come. I believed that I'd found salvation. Of course I told her everything. We thought, both of us, that it would be all right. She was very wise about it. We decided to let Withiel . . . it was full of memories of him . . . and took a place in Surrey.

"For a year we were very happy. I felt that I had escaped. Then it began again. I couldn't help it . . . I tell you, by God, I couldn't. I'd have killed myself rather than let the disgrace fall on her. I suppose that was my mistake: that is what I ought to have done. But, you see, I was in love with her. I couldn't face losing her." Rawley's voice began to waver again. "I won't tell you what happened: there's nothing to be gained by it," he went on. "It meant that we couldn't stay in Surrey. For her sake, you know. I'd made it quite impossible. And she stuck to me like the brick that she is!" he paused. "That's the first part of my trouble," he said, "but there's another. After these eruptions, when I come round, you know, I get frightened. You can't have any idea of what I mean; it isn't just physical funk; it's terror . . . panic terror. If I gave way to it it would drive me mad. There's only one way of escaping it . . . by drink. Even that's an inheritance: the old man drank like a fish. That was the way he killed himself, and I can tell you it took some doing; he was as strong as a horse, just like me. *I have* to do it. There's no other way. No possible way. Do you see?"

He waited for Antrim's answer, and Antrim was forced to speak. He said: "My dear fellow, this is a case for a doctor."

Rawley laughed dismally. "A doctor? I've seen every damned neurologist in London. I've been to Paris and Berlin. Nice and sympathetic they were, too. Interesting hobbies, sea-voyages, change of scene, massage: that's the kind of thing they told me. Massage! Think of it! But they can't heal the wounds that my soul suffered as a child. Of course they can't: it's asking too much. Still, I try to take their advice and that's why we came here. First we went to South Africa; it's an important country to me from a business point of view. But there was trouble in Johannesburg." He always called it "trouble."

"So we decided that the best thing to do was to get right away from civilisation to some place where these things aren't noticed. I never felt more confident in my life than when we were coming up on the *Vandal*; but when we reached Mombasa and settled down in that atrocious hotel I began to get uneasy. Then the other day—but you saw what happened for yourself. And the night before last at the Club I put my foot in it again. A man named Wells, District Commissioner or something. I couldn't stay there another day. She knew that, and fixed this up. You see how wonderful she is? You see how she helps me, poor darling! But I'm beaten every time and she can't keep it up for ever. It's only loyalty, just the splendid fineness of her, that keeps her to it. She doesn't love me. She thinks I can't see that, but I can. If she had loved me I believe it might have saved me. Pity's no use to me! I'll tell you a secret. She hates me . . . she hates me!" He made a gesture of utter futility with his hands. Then he clutched at Antrim's arm. "Antrim," he said, "if only you knew how I love that woman!"

There followed an uncomfortable silence. This was not a matter on which Antrim could be expected to comment. Rawley sat there with averted eyes, a picture of utter, hopeless misery; but when he next turned to Antrim he seemed to have recovered himself.

"It's very good of you to have listened to me like this," he said. "They say that confession is good for the soul, and I certainly feel more helpless when I brood on things. You've done me a lot of good without knowing it. Now, just at this moment, I feel almost hopeful. It's the change. I suppose the doctors are right—that and the idea that we're getting right away from everything: all the old associations, all the memories of Withiel. I'm as hopeful as a consumptive, and with just about as much reason. And I feel an extraordinary confidence in having you with us. If you don't mind my saying so, you're so sane, such a steady sort of chap. The other day at Mombasa . . . the way you handled *that* . . . I don't know: it sort of brought me to my bearings sooner than usual. And my wife likes you: that's another point.

"I want to be quite candid with you. When I asked you to come with us I didn't

suppose for one moment that you would; but as soon as you'd said 'yes' I felt that I'd got a new lease of life. You see, I was half frightened about this trip. It might be all right; I couldn't tell—and yet, if trouble *did* come, right out in the blue, you know, it might be worse than usual; particularly if Janet and I were all alone. There's one thing that has always haunted me: the idea that some day, in one of these fits, I might lay violent hands on her. The fact that I worship everything about her would make no difference. I'm unaccountable. So, before we start, I want you to promise me one thing. If you do so it will take a weight off my mind."

He waited for Antrim to speak; but there was nothing for Antrim to say but "Yes?"

"If ever that happens . . . if ever I touch her . . . I want you to shoot me like a dog. Will you promise that?"

Antrim laughed uncomfortably. "My dear fellow, you're talking rot. You won't do anything of the sort."

"Ah, it's easy to talk like that," said Rawley, shaking his head. "But if I do?"

"Oh, we shall manage somehow. Don't you worry about it."

"So you won't! You think I'm talking like a lunatic, and that's where you make a mistake. I was never saner or more sober in my life. You see. . . ."

All further arguments in favour of this invitation to murder were cut short by the arrival of the captain, who came toward them full of importance and addressed Rawley by name.

"In three hours' time," he said, "we shall arrive at Tanga. If you wish to disembark there you should make yourselves ready. We shall not stay there long. In the evening we shall be off again."

Rawley stared at him blankly. He needed an effort to adjust himself to the practical conditions of life.

"I must consult my wife," he said, and shambled off towards the door of the saloon, leaving Antrim and the little man in uniform face to face. The captain did not speak. His dignity had not yet recovered from the shock of his midnight encounter with Antrim, and before Rawley returned he had spat contemptuously into the Indian Ocean and turned his back on him. She came, as calm as ever, with an unfinished letter in her hand.

"We have to make a decision," she said, "and we should like to consult you. The captain wants to know . . ." But the captain had returned in disgust to his bridge.

They settled down on the deck together, and began to discuss the possibilities of Tanga.

"I'm entirely in your hands," said Antrim. He teased her gently: "You've

arranged everything so far, why not carry on?"

She took it so seriously that he wondered if her sense of humour were defective.

"I've had a good go at the maps," she said, without smiling, "and I'm not attracted by Tanga. It looks like a settled country. There are lots of farms and plantations up in the hills behind . . . mission stations, too. Then, of course, the boat calls at Pangani and Bagamoyo; but there's another place in between them called Pembeni . . . not Pemba; that's the island."

"Pembe means ivory," said Antrim.

The idea took her fancy. "Does it? How splendid! It must be a strange place. The captain says he's never been there before. He's going to put off some of his Indians and pick up some copra for Dar-es-Salaam. There must be some sort of station. Suppose we try it?"

"I'm game," said Antrim. "Just as you wish. But if we can't pick up porters we shall be rather landed."

She hesitated for a moment. "Well, what does it matter?" she said.

"It matters rather a lot. But as I tell you, I'm game. It's your adventure."

"Then Pembeni let it be!" she said.

CHAPTER V

1

Steaming slowly southward through the night, they reached the mouth of the Pembe river before dawn and hung there, heaving on a smooth swell, to wait for the light. When day came the coast revealed itself as a thin line dividing the two immensities of sea and sky, for sea and sky were of the same hue, pale and luminous as the surface of a pearl, and the land seemed more like a bar from which the tide had ebbed than the edge of a continent. All night through the wind was blowing toward them the hot scents of the land, and a sound of breakers that could not be seen; but at dawn it swung round suddenly to eastward; the land scents were lost, the film that bore them was puffed away. Within an hour the atmosphere became dazzlingly clear. The line of the land split into two: one of white sand, fringed with whiter foam, and another of cocoanut palms etched in an inky green. Midway between the horns of the horizon this line was broken by a gap—the river's mouth.

In a moment the decks of the *Köln* became lively, for, though she drew little water enough, the bar at Pembe was shallow and shifted with every season of high river. The harbour, too, was unlighted and unapproachable at night, so that the loss of a single hour might spin itself into twenty-four. Antrim and the Rawleys were already dressed and on deck when she began to move. They hung together, a little group in front of the saloon amidships, while the *Köln* felt her way warily forward. Two leadsmen, one on either side of the bridge, kept up a monotonous calling as she advanced. She crept forward more slowly even than the following wind. They could hear the measured impact as each blade of her screw slapped the smooth water.

"Five deep!" called the starboard leadsmen.

The cocoanut palms that backed the beach were becoming so distinct that they could mark each waving plume. The quartermaster had left the wheel; the captain was standing squarely to it himself.

"I wonder if he'll do it?" Antrim thought. A cable in front of them on either hand he saw the surface of the water rippled as by the emergence of a shoal of flying-fish: two lines of ripples with a smoother gap between. The captain had seen it before them. The up-river wind had revealed the conformation of the shoals as clearly as if the channel had been buoyed.

But it scarcely mattered. They were through. The bell of the telegraph clanged. The screw began to churn.

"We're over," said Rawley. "The beggar's a seaman, after all."

And Antrim echoed his thought, for each of them, being English, had been a little distrustful of a foreigner's seamanship. Yet neither he nor Mrs. Rawley answered him. Beyond the bar, where the white sand swept inward to the river mouth, a hill appeared—a round topped hill, smooth, and of a piercing, unreal green. On the crown of it stood a whitewashed conical pillar, the only evidence of human life to be seen, and yet so old as to emphasise the place's desolation rather than the fact that men had lived there.

"As green as Ireland," Antrim thought, and his mind went back to the round towers of another coast. Far back into the distance on either hand the green hills stretched fold on fold, so vivid and fresh that they seemed to belong to some distant period of life when the world was younger, green hills making a cup for a gigantic lake in which life should begin, the dawn of life, Eden. . . . Very gently, as if she were a creature sensitive to beauty and to awe, the *Köln* advanced. The first hill fell behind them, revealing a valley of silvery brushwood and grey baobabs, tufted with brilliant green; and down at the water's edge, clogging the mouth of the creek in which the valley ended, swarmed the black roots of mangroves. Such stillness. . . .

And yet there was life. Beneath the surface of the turbid water on either side of them huge shapes were playing and plunging; a shoal of sharks that had followed the pollutions of the *Köln*, pale, smooth as seals, with a tinge of purple on their vast bellies, they rose and plunged, shearing the surface with sharp fins. It seemed strange that such huge creatures should move so silently. They followed the ship as though some instinct had told them that it was their appointed victim. And in the air above creatures of prey appeared: kites that called harshly as they swooped downward with forked tails and ragged wings, sweeping so close that one could hear the air rush through their spread feathers and see the mottled olive of their bodies and their beady eyes.

Rawley ran for his camera. "I should like to catch them," he said, "but the brutes go such a lick!" He moved anxiously up and down the deck, cursing the light and the uncertainty of their swift wheelings.

"Got him!" he cried. "I think I got him that time." He turned eagerly to his wife for applause.

But she did not hear him, or, perhaps, would not answer. She and Antrim were standing together and apart, speaking no word to each other. And Antrim wished that she would speak, not to him but to Rawley. He felt, for the first time definitely, that Rawley was odd man out; that their party was splitting along lines of natural cleavage as every party of three must. And this troubled him, for Rawley's confession of the day before had shown him that he was a man to be pitied, and that

this woman was the only link that bound him to sanity and life.

"She's cruel," he thought. "By Jove, she's cruel! If she treats him like this she'll put him up against me." He felt bound to help Rawley. "He thinks he's got one," he said; and she turned and stared at Antrim coldly as though she knew that he had spoken but resented it and had not heard what he said. It was embarrassing.

"I wonder if she *does* help him," he thought, "or whether it's just the poor devil's imagination?" He felt it his duty to supply Rawley with the sympathy which she had denied him, and left her. She turned for one second when she saw that he had gone.

And the *Köln* stole onward. Another hill appeared. It was greener than any, but on its crown was a circle of red earth like a frayed patch on a carpet, and in the midst of it a collection of hay-cock huts within a palisade of reeds. On the roof of the central hut a strip of white calico fluttered from the end of a pole. Black shapes were swarming over the bald patch like ants, streaming over its edge into the long grass, downhill, toward the shore—children of the village, no doubt, running and crying. The channel swerved northward round the base of the hill, and these were left behind.

The hill robbed them of the wind. The water through which the *Köln* now passed was stagnant as that of a pool and tawny with suspended particles of earth: an eddy, a backwater of the flood, in which there floated, like vast amphibians, islands of grass and reeds matted about the boles of trees that had been uprooted by some savage inland spate.

The captain on the bridge pulled at a cord, and in a hiss of unpent steam the *Köln* filled the air with hootings that set the kites soaring and crying and echoed among the hills.

On the edge of the lake, beyond a line of stranded *dhow*s, stood a low whitewashed building and many thatched huts with pointed gables. From these also many black forms emerged. A German flag was run up on a pole in front of the house and dipped to the colours on the *Köln*. Out from the shore, like quick water spiders, came a fleet of outriggered dug-outs of the kind that the Zanzibaris call *galawas*, moving swiftly and jerkily over the filmed sea. A whistle from the bridge and the *Köln's* anchor went down with a rattle. The screw held her astern. The whole ship trembled. The engines were still.

All around the *Köln*, like settling seabirds, the *galawas* came to rest, and their rowers stared at the steamer as though it were a stranded whale that they would

presently attack. An antiphonal chanting floated over from the shore, where naked men were running out of one of the *dhow*s into the water. Modified by distance, it came to Antrim as a shrill falsetto; a tune in four time with a syncopated opening and words of which he did not know the meaning. "*A 'gòan 'gòà,*" sang one of the party, and the other filled in the last beat of the bar with a quick triplet: "*A-á-á!*" So, with the ungainly lifelessness of a twig pulled by ants, the *dhow* took the water, and to the sound of another work-song her square sail went up.

Hypnotised by this savage rhythm, dull with a lethargy that seemed to descend upon him from the hot sky, Antrim had not noticed the approach of another boat with four rowers, from whose course the *galawas* scattered like small fish before a bonito. The man who steered it was clothed in white ducks; a topee like a mushroom hid his face; but evidently he was a person of consequence, for, when he ran his craft to the foot of the gangway and jumped off, the captain was there to meet him and hands were shaken. They came along the deck together speaking German. The stranger lifted his head, showing a dark ill-favoured face, and Antrim felt that it was of himself that they were talking. No doubt he had guessed rightly, for when they came abreast of him they separated, the captain rolling off into the saloon, the stranger accosting Antrim with a limp hand outstretched. Antrim took him for a Portuguese.

"Frangoulis," he said. "My name is Frangoulis. I am in charge of this station. You land here? You are the courier of Mr. Rawley?"

Such no doubt was the captain's account of it. Antrim disabused him, and his insolence became a little tempered with servility. His English was uncertain and difficult to understand. Antrim helped him out with Swahili, and they managed better. It appeared that he was a Greek—a Greek of Smyrna, he called himself—and that he had been born in Zanzibar. Antrim suspected that a good half of him was Arab, though it would be difficult to say what other mixture of blood had gone to his making. Also, as he had said, he was in charge of the station of Pembeni. Zahn, he said, was unfortunately away in the country collecting hut-tax with a party of *askaris*.

Antrim asked if Zahn were the officer in charge. Not exactly an officer, said Frangoulis. An under-officer. But a man among thousands! An old colonial who understood the handling of natives. In other days he had been a servant of the Anti-Slavery Society. Even with this assurance Herr Zahn sounded a little sinister. No doubt he was "handling natives" on this expedition.

"If only we had known that you were coming," said Frangoulis, "Zahn would have brought you back as many porters as you wanted. You must understand that

the natives in this part of the world are suspicious. The question of porters is one that troubles us."

"You mean," said Antrim, "that it's going to hang us up?"

Frangoulis put out his hand in deprecation. It would certainly have been easier if they had known. But something should be done. It was all a matter of money. Of course, if the *safari* were to be equipped from his store. . . .

"I have everything but porters," said Antrim, cutting him short.

Frangoulis sighed. "A pity . . . a great pity. Still, they will need food and blankets. You will buy those from me?"

"If your price suits me," said Antrim.

"I am told that Mr. Rawley is rich. No doubt we can arrange the matter. Do not be afraid of your commission. We will talk."

If he had been travelling alone Antrim would have kicked the fellow down the gangway; but Frangoulis did not even give him time to protest.

"At any rate," he said, "you will like me to undertake the landing of your gear?"

"When I want you I'll tell you," said Antrim.

Mrs. Rawley came up softly behind him and touched his arm. "I want to speak to you for a moment." They moved aside and the bow of Frangoulis was lost. "The captain has just been talking to me," she said. "He's been really rather offensive."

Antrim flushed. His temper was already ruffled. "What, to *you*?"

She smiled. "No, generally. It appears that you got on the wrong side of him last night, and now he wants to take it out of *us*. He says he must catch the next tide. We have an hour to get our stuff off. Can we do it?"

"Of course we must do it. Would you like me to tackle him?"

"No, no. Don't do that!" she said. "For Heaven's sake let's *start* quietly!"

He knew what was in the back of her mind. It was almost pathetic.

"Very well," he said, "leave it to me."

He called Frangoulis, who stood waiting.

"Can you get our boxes ashore at once?"

"Yes. The *dhow* is coming."

"How much will it cost?"

"The gentleman will leave that to me."

"Not if he knows it! How much?"

"Two hundred rupees. Labour is scarce. The natives are very independent."

"Rubbish. I'll give you fifty."

Frangoulis raised his head in dissent, his hands in horror. "There is no one else to do it for you," he said.

“Isn’t there? I’ll go and see.”

Frangoulis bowed. “There is no boat for you to go ashore in but mine. I am sorry. Two hundred is the price.”

“Then we shan’t land here at all,” said Antrim. “We shall go on to Bagamoyo. You are losing a valuable piece of trade.”

Frangoulis smiled but said nothing. Antrim turned to Mrs. Rawley, who had stood and watched the bargaining gravely. “Will you tell the captain that we are going on to Bagamoyo?” he said.

“I will land the gentleman’s baggage for seventy rupees,” said Frangoulis humbly, “for the sake of the trade,” he added.

“Our baggage, ourselves and our servants?”

He bowed. Antrim turned again to Mrs. Rawley. “Perhaps your husband will help me?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” she said.

“But do you know your own stuff . . . how many pieces?”

“Yes,” she said. “It is all here in this notebook.”

He took it from her. On the cover he read: *Rowley’s Chemical Dip*. “Splendid woman!” he said.

The *dhow* bore slowly down upon them. Heaven knew where in that sultry anchorage she had found a breeze to fill her matting sail. She was a lumbering *M’tepe* of the build that the Persians left to Lamu with a sharp stern and a camel’s head at the prow. Aft she was roofed with a shelter of galvanised iron and reeds: for’ard a cluster of savages clothed in loin-cloths of cotton printed with red-eyed ovals of black were teasing a monkey that was tied by the hind leg with a rope. The *dhow* heaved through the water creaking like a basket, and came to rest at the foot of the gangway.

Asmani came forward to Antrim’s side. “It is here that we go ashore?” he said.

“Yes, it is here. Do you know this place?”

“I have never been here,” he said. “But it is a bad place. The Wagwana (coastmen) are a poor people, and these Germans are bad men, so the Wanyamwezi say. *Wa-daki*, they call them. *Daki* is like *kali*. It means ‘Men of Anger.’ But this is a *safari*!”

Such things, in other words, were all in the day’s work. Antrim showed him Mrs. Rawley’s list. It was written in the bold and rather sprawly hand that he had seen already in her note at Mombasa. “You know our own cases,” he said. “Besides those there are forty-seven belonging to Bwana Rawley. They are all marked with an ‘R.’ like this. Forty-seven. Do you understand?”

Asmani understood. "And send Dingaan to look after the things that are in the cabins. He'd better bring his *mtoto*, too."

So began a day of futility and irritation. The captain's message, it seemed, had been nothing but an attempt to assert his petty authority. For hours on end Antrim and the Rawleys stood ready on deck, Rawley surrounded by the black tin cases in which he kept his mysterious apparatus, Mrs. Rawley patient at his side, Antrim fuming impotently between them and the saloon, in which Frangoulis and the captain were working through a bottle of brandy. The question of tides had lapsed into the background. Even the great *dhow* swung there unheeded. Its crew sprawled flat on the cargo asleep, pestered the monkey, or slouched aft to scoop a drink in their hands from a cask of fresh water. The pungent smell of copra filled the air. When Antrim protested the captain fixed him with a blue and bleary eye, while Frangoulis made excuses in a variety of languages.

"In a few minutes," he said, "when the cargo is loaded. . . ."

"But they haven't begun to load the cargo."

"First I must settle the business with this gentleman."

The gentleman was the captain, and the business a dirty sheaf of bills-of-lading.

"I tell you that I shall be only a few minutes. Can I do more?" And the minutes became hours.

3

It was well toward sunset in an afternoon of amazing beauty that softened the fierce greens of the shore and made the distant skylines blue like heaths of conifers, before the stevedores began to work. Then indeed they worked well. Frangoulis, staggering to the side, surveyed them. The air was full of dust and cries and of the odour of black sweat. When the bottom of the *dhow* was empty Frangoulis returned to the saloon, where the captain now lay extended on a locker, and the dusty space was occupied by three patient Indians with mournful faces, who continued to wait with their goods about them as they had waited all through the night on the after deck of the *Köln*.

Emerging refreshed and seeing them, Frangoulis became newly drunk with rage. He ran down the ladder and drove them for'ard with slashings of the whip of hippo-hide that he carried. A stevedore, avoiding him, fell over the gunwale into filthy water, and the others, laughing at his misfortune, ran up the gangway and began the unloading of the Rawleys' luggage.

Frangoulis's rage evaporated. He came back on deck and stood very near to

them, leering at Mrs. Rawley, talking indistinctly about his gift of managing natives. It was well that Antrim did not see this; but Rawley did. He edged in between the Greek and his wife; and Frangoulis, seeing what was intended, laughed in his face.

“Ah, you take care of your wife?” he said. “That is what I advise you. And I tell you another thing. Keep your eye on him!” He pointed convulsively at Antrim, who was saving case after case from immersion. Mrs. Rawley pulled at her husband’s arm. “Come away,” she whispered. “Let’s go to the other side.” And Rawley followed her like a lamb. Evidently he had not heard, or, at least, not understood what the Greek had said.

There, half an hour later, Antrim found them.

“Ready at last,” he panted. “All aboard!”

They clambered down the gangway together into the evil-smelling hull of the *dhow*. Nobody seemed interested in them but the monkey that stared at them wisely in the intervals of digging its thumb into a hunk of bread that some one had thrown it from the deck. For’ard, under the tin roof, the stevedores were loading their stomachs with masses of mealie pap that clogged a tin bucket. The tide was coming in; the *dhow* swayed to and fro with a sickly motion; the faces of the Indians, sitting apart on their heels, looked sadder and more yellow. Rawley became querulous and childish, and Antrim had a hard job to keep his temper with him. The fellow hadn’t attempted to help things all day. Probably he thought that money could do everything. Well, it wouldn’t; and it was time he learned the lesson. At the most difficult moment Antrim caught Mrs. Rawley’s eye, and she smiled. “Plucky kid!” he thought to himself. Really she was admirable, looking so cool and clean and composed amidst the heat, the filth, and the confusion.

“Suppose you find the little brute?” she said. And Antrim, having toiled once more up the gangway, found Frangoulis settling down to sleep on a locker opposite the captain, his face full of a silly exaltation. This time Antrim wouldn’t leave him. If he had been forced to fetch him out by the scruff of the neck he would have done so. He pulled him to his feet and edged him out of the saloon.

“My papers . . .” Frangoulis gasped. And Antrim found them for him, stained and smudged with the circles of wet glasses. He was profuse in thanks; but Antrim wasn’t out for politeness. “Come along!” he said, and two minutes later had him on board.

The cool air roused him, and he soon set the sailors to work. With the singsong that they had already heard from shore the sail went up. Again, miraculously, it filled. So gently that they hardly seemed to be moving they left the *Köln* behind. By the time that they reached the shore the sun was lighting the whole sky to westward as

redly as though it had set the forests on fire. Rawley carried his wife ashore. It was the first job of work that he had done that day. They landed on the white sands of Pembeni. But their troubles had scarcely begun.

Night fell before a fourth of the *safari's* equipment had been unloaded from the *dhow*. The landed cases lay scattered in utter confusion on the sand. Antrim stood among them, shouting himself hoarse, examining the marks by the light of a hurricane camp that was part of Asmani's personal luggage.

To find food for the evening was a fairly easy matter, for the porters' loads had been packed in such a way that each was complete in itself; but the tent in which Mrs. Rawley must sleep was missing. Probably it lay buried beneath a ton of boxes at the bottom of the *dhow*.

He wished that he had another man to help him, for though Asmani was as efficient as he had foreseen, the authority of another white man was needed and Rawley's ignorance of Swahili made him useless. Perhaps, in any case, he would have been a nuisance, and yet it was an irritation to see him mooning and helpless upon the edge of this confused scene. All through the day he had avoided Antrim, probably because he was ashamed of the confession that he had made. Perhaps he felt that he had lowered himself in Antrim's eyes and now wished to assert his dignity as head of the party.

All these explanations troubled Antrim and made his temper uncertain. He felt that if the fellow were to do nothing he had better clear out, and sent a box of food to them by Dingaan, suggesting that they should eat it on the fenced strip of sand in front of Frangoulis's house, the white building that they had already seen from the deck of the *Köln*.

After this their shadowy figures disappeared, and a little later Dingaan's *mtoto*, who was already beginning to attach himself to Mrs. Rawley, appeared with a cup of coffee and a handful of biscuits. For this Antrim was grateful; it was better to have them out of the way, and the coffee showed him that they had begun to fend for themselves.

Then, of a sudden, up came Frangoulis. The Greek must have been an old hand at liquor, for though he had been soaking all day he now spoke with coherence. A good opportunity, thought Antrim, to tell him what I think of him. He did so, not choosing his words. Frangoulis, who had approached him oozing half-tipsy benevolence, was taken off his feet.

"What!" he shouted. "The *dhow* is not empty yet?" He whipped himself up into a passion. "I will teach them," he cried. "Trust me: I will teach them. They know me!"

And before Antrim realised what he was up to he had plunged into the sweating rabble of porters, shouting abuse and hitting out blindly with his *kiboko*. In every direction they ran like rabbits. In two seconds he had cleared the beach; not a man remained there but Asmani and Antrim's gun-bearer. "Well, that finishes it!" said Antrim.

"Finishes? That is where you are mistaken. That is only the beginning. Wait till Zahn comes home! Zahn knows how to handle natives." The thought of Zahn's sinister efficiency aroused Frangoulis again. He took out a revolver and started blazing away into the darkness which had hidden the fugitives.

Antrim caught him by the arm. "Good God, you'll hit some one!" he cried. His thoughts had run like a flash to Mrs. Rawley. Suppose that she were over there. It was evident that he had to deal with a dangerous madman. Not a bit of it! Frangoulis turned to him with a disarming smile.

"No harm is done," he said. "In the absence of Zahn I am in charge of this station. I was annoyed that you should have been received like this. And if I had hit one it would have been a lesson. I am very angry. During my absence on the ship two pounds of beads have been stolen. . . ." He became excited once more. "Stolen from my house. Two pounds! All these people are thieves. That is what I was telling them. And you should not have stopped me," he complained. "It is necessary in such a country that we white men should stick together. *Nicht wahr?*"

Antrim laughed. This was no time in which to complain of Frangoulis's ideas of racial affinity. "You've finished our work for to-night," he said. "It's no use trying to unload any more in the dark. You must help me. The lady is tired out and has nowhere to sleep."

With the prospect of a deal Frangoulis pulled himself together.

"Of course," he said; "I will find her a *banda*." He laid his hand on Antrim's arm. Antrim could feel the heat of it through his sleeve. "Come with me."

They walked together, ankle-deep in yielding sand, to one of the huts at the back of the compound. Frangoulis dragged open a door of reeds and Antrim entered, holding his lantern high to see what was within.

"Look!" said Frangoulis, waving his hand as though he were displaying a suite at the Ritz. "Twenty rupees," he added. "That is the price of this *banda*."

Antrim stared at him. It would have been dear as a gift. An old hut made of reeds that had gone rotten and floored with live ant-heap. Inside, the air was thick and heavy with the sickening odour of black flesh. Clearly it had been occupied, and recently, by natives. In one corner stood a *charpoy* made of rough wood with a criss-cross strapping of hide. On the floor lay the littered *debris* of its last occupants:

a ragged scrap of calico, a strand of copper wire, a heap of stripped mealie-cobs. When Antrim disturbed these with his foot, a pink scorpion scurried across the floor with angry uplifted tail. His eyes and nose were equally offended. He turned on Frangoulis angrily.

“Do you really mean to suggest that a lady could sleep here?”

The Greek threw his hands wide in a gesture of impotence: “Eh! this is not Mombasa. There is nothing else. I will take fifteen rupees.”

“Not a cent,” said Antrim. “What’s more, you’ll find me a decent sleeping-place.”

“That is impossible,” Frangoulis admitted.

“There is a house. I must see inside it.”

“But the house is Zahn’s. Zahn would never forgive me; there is only one bedroom, and that is occupied by Zahn himself.”

This sounded better. “I’ll have a look at it,” said Antrim, and Frangoulis meekly followed. On the other side of the house Dingaan had lighted two fires. Round one of them the servants were sitting. By the light of the other he caught sight of Mrs. Rawley’s patient face and the broad back of her husband. As Antrim passed she smiled and waved her hand, and he swung his lantern in reply.

“The door on the right,” said Frangoulis, as they entered the house in a fume of liquor that made Antrim feel sick.

Materially, even by European standards, the room of Zahn was clean. Spiritually it was a cess-pit. Its whitewashed walls were covered with pictures of nude females, among which were photographs of the grossest indecency; the things that touts produce from their pockets in the streets of Port Said. And amidst these, with an effect of the maddest incongruity, hung a framed portrait of two old people, a decent German workman and his wife, seated on either side of a table with an aspidistra between them. By the light of his lantern Antrim saw that it had been taken in Oberhausen. On the opposite wall hung a photograph of a German under-officer in the uniform of the colonial army, thick-set and dark with a twisted, Kaiserly moustache.

“Zahn?” Antrim asked.

“Yes, that is Zahn,” said Frangoulis.

If Antrim knew anything of human physiognomy the Greek was right: Zahn could handle natives.

“But, as I told you,” Frangoulis protested, “this is impossible.”

“You’re right,” said Antrim, with a laugh. “Let’s get this muck out of the way.” And he began to strip the horrors from the wall. The enormity of this proceeding

dawned slowly on Frangoulis. "But this is an outrage!" he cried. "An outrage! Zahn will never forgive me!"

"You can refer Zahn to me," said Antrim. "The swine!" he muttered to himself. In five minutes he had cleansed the walls, leaving nothing but the photographs of the two old people, who beamed across the room at their son, and an aggressive oleograph of Wilhelm the Second that threw a challenge in the direction of the door. Frangoulis could do no more. He hovered piteously in the rear, imploring Antrim to make it clear to Zahn that he had protested against this violation.

"Don't worry," said Antrim, "I'll tell him. You can leave Zahn to me."

Frangoulis grudgingly assented. "Now I go to find the beads," he said.

4

Antrim stepped out into the dark and made straight for the Rawleys' fire.

"For heaven's sake sit down," she implored him. "You must be fagged to death." It was true, but he denied it. "What about you?" he asked.

"Me?" she said. "Why, I'm as happy as can be. The night is wonderful. Look at the light the fire throws on the water. And Dingaan's *mtoto* is a little treasure!"

"I have been thinking," said Rawley slowly, "about finding some place for my wife to sleep in."

Antrim stared at him in amusement. "So have I," he said.

"Don't you think we had better ask the fellow who brought us ashore?" Rawley suggested. He hauled himself on to his feet. "I'll go and find him."

"Don't worry," said Antrim, smiling in spite of himself. "It's all fixed up."

"How splendid of you!" said Mrs. Rawley.

Rawley hedged. "Are you quite sure it's clean?"

"Yes, it's clean now," said Antrim.

"Then if there are not two beds," said Rawley, "I'll get the boy to rig up something for me on the floor." He moved heavily to the other fire.

"Why did you laugh?" said Mrs. Rawley solemnly.

Antrim shook his head. The thought of Mrs. Rawley sleeping in Zahn's room offended him. In some ways the man was extraordinarily simple, and simpler in none than in his attitude towards women. Superficially he allowed himself to seem cynical, but in his heart he was even more romantic and more devoted to the mediæval ideal than most men of his class. Now he was making for himself a pretty story of how he had saved the eyes of Mrs. Rawley from offence and her spirit from contact with the bestial Zahn; but if she had known the pains he had taken it is probable that she

would have smiled, even if she were flattered, at his exalted idea of her innocence. In comparison with her, Antrim was very young, and youth, however much we envy it, is always a little pitiful if only by reason of its seriousness and its assurance. Antrim, indeed, was very serious. It even offended him that Rawley should share Zahn's room with her. And this, he solemnly assured himself, was unreasonable. The Rawleys had been married for years. That was the worst of it.

They went, and Antrim made himself a sleeping-place on the ground to windward of the fire. He was used to lying rough, and the confused activities of the day had left him dog-tired. He lay down; the weary muscles gratefully relaxed; the huge restfulness of the sky fell upon him, and in ten minutes he had fallen asleep, or, rather, into a state of vivid and active dreaming in which he struggled continuously with Zahn, Frangoulis, and the captain of the *Köln*. It was blazing daylight; a cruel African noon; his mouth was parched and sticky with dust, but they wouldn't let him be. Mrs. Rawley stood and watched him with calm, innocent eyes. She never spoke one word of encouragement and yet he felt she knew it was for her that he was fighting. She looked so cool and white in the burning sunshine. And then Rawley appeared, glancing from one to the other with jealous eyes. He took her by the arm and led her away unprotesting. Why did Rawley lead her away, and why did she not protest? He wanted an answer to both these questions and would have followed them; but Zahn blocked the way, roughly demanding payment for the use of his room and the damage to his pictures. He stretched out his hand and caught at Antrim's sleeve. It was no use dealing with the fellow as if he were a *sahib*. There was only one kind of argument that he could be expected to understand. He would give the swine the hiding of his life. He swung round and faced him. Then, suddenly, it grew dark.

The change was sinister and confusing. The scene that had quivered in a blaze of sunshine was now contracted to a single zone of firelight on which the surrounding darkness pressed like a heavy weight, like the darkness of all Africa. For a moment he lost Zahn, and, as he sought for him, he heard a sound of blows, of cruel blows descending on human flesh, with every blow a scream, and in between them a bitter wailing. His thoughts rushed back to Rawley and his wife: "*If ever I touch her I want you to shoot me like a dog.*"

Of course . . . but he had no rifle; he hadn't even a revolver. The awful moment had come, and now Zahn was pressing him. They were locked in each other's arms, straining this way and that; and though Antrim was taller, the other held steady as a rock. He looked into Zahn's small red eyes. In his nostrils was a breath of stale brandy, like the stink of Zahn's house. And the blows and the wailing still tormented

his ears. Why should he waste his time on this brute if he were wanted there? He pulled his strength together to the last ounce; Zahn and he rolled over, and lay panting on the ground. Then he got hold of Zahn's head and pressed it backward, further and further backward so that he knew that in a moment the thick neck must break with a snap. And woke . . . panting still, with the sweat pouring down his cheeks. Zahn was gone; but Antrim's heart still raced with that deadly, ghostly struggle. And the setting was the same. A wood fire burning in the midst of heavy darkness. Yes, it was a dream. He rubbed his eyes, but the dream returned in another sound of blows and of wailing. "Good God!" he thought, "it's true."

He struggled to his feet. His own fire was low. The other had gone out, and round it the servants were stretched, their faces covered, like corpses; but beyond the angle of the house from which the sounds came, was another, larger blaze that threw a ruddy reflex on the whitewashed walls and lit the tops of the cocoanut palms. He ran there full pelt, stumbling as he went, and when he had cleared the corner, saw a sight that brought back all the horror of his dream.

On a camp-chair, with a rifle across his knees, sat Frangoulis. Within the edge of the firelight huddled a group of women that hid their faces in fear. Their legs and arms were joined by heavy iron shackles. On the ground, between Frangoulis and the fire, another woman lay prostrate: and above her, his lash of hippo-hide raised to strike, stood a tall, bearded figure in a white robe that Antrim took for an Arab. Down came the *kiboko* with a sickening slash. The woman screamed shrilly, and Frangoulis smiled. "Twenty," he cried in Swahili. "Five more, give her five more. Harder! The brute has awakened our guest." For he had just seen Antrim standing dumb with horror on the edge of the light.

He said no more; for, in a moment, Antrim had him by the scruff of his shirt, and hauled him out of his chair so that he lost his rifle.

"Stop this!" he shouted. "Stop it!"

"I will stop it," Frangoulis spluttered. "Let her go! Let her go! Tell her to get up."

The Arab obeyed, throwing his *kiboko* aside, and giving the woman a push with his foot. Now she neither moved nor wailed. She lay there, a lump of quivering flesh.

"Take the chains off the others," said Antrim. His fingers were still clasped on Frangoulis's shirt so that the brute could scarcely breathe.

"Give me air," he gasped. "I'm dying . . . I'm dying. . . ."

Antrim let him go. He ran to help the Arab with the chains of the other women. In a moment they were gone, darting away into the pool of darkness like fish.

"Now look at the other," said Antrim. But she, too, had crawled away.

"To-morrow I send a report to the governor," said Antrim.

Frangoulis laughed uneasily. "You don't understand," he said. "You are new to the country. In the absence of Zahn I act as magistrate. This is perfectly legal." He rubbed his neck. "These Wagwana are devils. Two pounds of beads were stolen in my absence. My men found them in this woman's hut. The others were merely witnesses. I was performing an act of justice."

Antrim answered nothing. The whole business made him sick, but he had done all that could be done for the present. He turned away. But Frangoulis, who now appeared to be quite sober, was not satisfied.

"A good night's work," he said. "Look!" He held up a tin and shook it. It was full of flat glass beads, red and blue. "These are the very best," he said. "They like them transparent. Now let us go into the house and have a drink. It is only ten o'clock."

Again he laid his hand caressingly on Antrim's arm. Antrim couldn't bear to be touched by him; but he was too angry to speak. He snatched his arm away and went back to the embers of his fire. He rolled himself up again in his blanket; but he could not sleep. The fantastic spirit of his dreams, of which the last brutal scene had been nothing but a startling affirmation on another plane, still possessed his mind. This he resented, for it was not usual for him to dream at all, and he felt that a nightmare so vivid as this must surely mean something. "Means that I'm going off my head," he told himself. But that was no comfort even if he had believed it.

"After all," he thought, "a fellow dreams of the things that are uppermost in his mind." And that wasn't true, either. The things that a fellow dreamt of were usually the undermost. A man in the I.M.S. had told him that, an eccentric little chap named Barkly West, who could talk his head off on dreams if you gave him the chance, and from what he now remembered, little as it was, it seemed to him that dreams were an unusually ugly business. Already from this particular nightmare the most vivid colours were fading, like the hues of a glancing dragon-fly that has been beaten to earth, all that now remained to distress him and to perplex was the vision of Mrs. Rawley looking at him with her calm, serious eyes. When the other fantastic vapours of his dream fell away, her image remained undimmed and even clearer than in life.

"Of course, I had been thinking a good deal about her," he told himself. He remembered the curious, the almost passionate feeling of jealousy with which he had watched her depart to the newly cleansed room of Zahn. "And that was ridiculous," he thought, "for when all's said and done, her husband was with her." A futile argument, since he had actually resented the presence of Rawley. At the time he had thought nothing of this; but now the memory made him uneasy; for if, indeed, he were jealous of Rawley, there could be only one explanation: that he was in love

with Rawley's wife.

Of course that was rubbish. As he had told Mrs. Kilgour a few days . . . a few years . . . before, he scarcely knew Mrs. Rawley, and since that time he had hardly spoken to her. So far there had been no points of contact between them except on the most ordinary plane, and in the future . . . For the future it was presumptuous to speak, and yet he knew that he could trust himself. Up till the time when he left Nairobi he could have trusted himself anywhere, and even though he had changed since then . . . He *hadn't* changed. If once he admitted that he had changed he could no longer be certain of his own reactions.

The point had been raised, and it was better that it should now be faced and finally disposed of. "I am not in love with Mrs. Rawley," he told himself, "and I don't suppose I ever shall be; but, if ever this disaster should happen, I want to see where I stand and what I must do."

"Must" was the word that he used to himself; in matters of conduct there could be no room for speculation. The issue was clear. If ever he fell in love with Mrs. Rawley he must leave their party. It was obvious . . . and ridiculous—he knew he could do nothing of the sort. They depended on him; how much he hadn't realised until after this fantastic landing at Pembeni. That he should leave them stranded in the middle of a savage continent was unthinkable, for they would never get out of it alive. If he were to leave them at all he must leave them now.

And that, too, was ridiculous. He couldn't, for instance, approach Mrs. Rawley next morning and say to her: "Look here, there is a remote prospect of my falling in love with you at some future date, and so I think I'd better cry off." She would think he was mad, for such an idea had surely never entered her head. And, what was more, they would go on. Of that he had not the slightest doubt. He knew her pluck and her determination. So, in his imaginings, he saw them moving off into the blue and himself, left with Frangoulis on the beach at Pembeni, waiting for the next boat bound northwards to Mombasa, where Mrs. Kilgour would say: "I told you so!" He saw them disappear, and as the distance engulfed them, he remembered his talk with Rawley. By his own confession Rawley was a danger to her. "*There's one thing that has always haunted me; the idea that some day in one of these fits I may lay violent hands on her. I'm unaccountable.*" He recalled the dread and the despair in Rawley's voice.

Again and again he turned the problem over and thrashed it out; and, whichever way he turned, it came back to the same conclusion: that, whatever might happen, he must go through with the thing he had undertaken. He owed it equally to Rawley, to Mrs. Rawley, and to himself. And then he thought of the *Vandal*. By this time she

must be clear of Port Said, somewhere in the shallow seas to southward of Crete. In another few days he should have been landing at Marseilles, whirling northwards to Paris and to London, to a country where life moved with a steady certainty along the stable ways of civilisation. And here he was, lying rough upon a sandy shore at Pembeni, with a dead fire at his feet and overhead the dark night.

CHAPTER VI

1

As Rawley blew out the light in Zahn's bedroom, he put something into his wife's hand mysteriously.

"What is it?" she asked, half frightened, as though she suspected some schoolboy trick.

"Smell it."

"Mint!" she whispered. "How curious. Where did you find it?"

Rawley yawned in the darkness. "They've been burning the bush on the edge of the road through that cocoanut *shamba*," he said. "This stuff was growing at the bottom of a ditch, just like it does at home. Queer, isn't it? Makes you think . . . Good-night!"

He huddled himself, limp with tiredness, on the mattress beside her bed, and she knew no more of him but a hand that groped for hers beneath the net and the sound of his heavy body turning over to sleep.

For herself she was too tired to think of sleeping. She lay there with the sprig of mint still in her fingers, seduced by the suggestion of its hot aroma to think of Withiel.

It was not often that she thought of Withiel now. Early in her married life she had compelled herself to blot out of her mind the memory of all things that had passed, to think only of the present. It was a measure of self protection that had become a habit; but on this night her mind was too languid to resist.

It was winter. The Withiel of her memory had always a wintry setting. Sombre woods, from which the frosty air caught odours of leaves that were settling into mould, shadowed the track along which her pony, Starlight, ambled with a loose rein. Even in actuality the woods of Withiel in winter were not less dreamlike. With Autumn the death of millions of leaves spread over them an enchantment that had power to make unreal not only the sounds of life but the consciousness of living creatures. She and her pony ambled in a dream until her reverie brought her to the point at which the drive crossed Withiel brook. Here the woods ended. A basin of park-land, pallid with dewy grasses that took their colour from the sky, lay shallow before her, and, in the midst of it, stood Withiel House itself.

She had only to close her eyes to see its ponderous mass of Georgian stucco, its façade of square-paned windows that might have been said to stare if one could have admitted the existence of any life or intelligence behind them. But, even when she dreamed, Janet Rawley knew well that Withiel was neither alive nor sentient. Its

ugly bulk was the outward sign of an ambition that had crashed to earth a hundred years before, in the distresses of the Napoleonic wars. Her grandfather, Huish Carlyon, had scattered his money on the bonfires of the regency, returning in middle age to finish his life in one constricted corner of the great house that his father had built. Four-fifths of the windows of Withiel opened on bare rooms given over to dust and emptiness; behind the heavy curtains of the rest three generations of Carlyons had lived, each poorer and less contented than the last, nursing, in self-protection, a sort of sacrificial religion whose only tenets were the traditional beauty of their inheritance and the sacrosanct authority of the member of the family who bore the title.

A stubborn, long-lived, but not prolific race; isolated, centripetal, one had almost said contented, but only with the self-deceiving content of devotees. Year after year they persisted, these Carlyons, suffering every degradation of need and restriction in order that their light might shine reflected in the glitter of the one person who carried their name into the world—the existing Lord St. Pinnock. Such was the doctrine of salvation that, from their earliest years, had been hammered into the heads of the young Carlyons, that all their life must be subservient to the preservation of one name and of one place. So it had been in the time of Janet's grandfather. Always, in one dim bedroom at the back of Withiel, there persisted some aged spinster of the last generation, a priestess ready to instruct her youngers in the cult. Always, in early summer, when the woods were flooded with lakes of bluebells, the Lord St. Pinnock of the day set out for London to grace the season with his presence and to record an automatic vote against any liberal measure in the House of Lords. Always, in his absence, the ways of Withiel became more straitened and austere, its inhabitants waiting on the late arrival of the *Morning Post* to tell them in what brilliant circumstances they had shone by proxy.

So it had been, again, in Janet's childhood; but when she was fourteen, her only brother, a subaltern in the Guards, had come of age, and her father went more rarely to London, for Withiel could not supply the energy to support a divided brilliance, and he knew his duty. When Janet was sixteen her father died. All down the wooded drive of Withiel six tenants carried his coffin, shoulder high, to the vault under the chancel of the church at St. Cleer. Her uncle, Canon Carlyon, read the burial service, and Janet cried her heart out, for her father, although she scarcely knew him, was a dear. But Aunt Georgiana did not cry. There, as chief mourner, stood Charles Huish Carlyon, fourth Baron St. Pinnock. The sacred fire still burned.

And even if she had not been taught to revere him, Janet would have been fond of Charlie. She couldn't treat him like Aunt Georgiana, as if at the ceremony of her

father's funeral he had been anointed with a mysterious essence. She and Charlie had always been pals, and no change in his name could change his nature. Every one liked him. There wasn't a farmer or labourer on the estate who didn't welcome his succession. Indeed, the promiscuity of his acquaintance appalled Aunt Georgiana. He was even on friendly terms with the impossible Rawleys, the makers of a chemical dip that was advertised on every railway station, who had built an Italianate villa, five miles south of Withiel on a hill overlooking the estuary. In that mansion, as the country people named it, every bedroom was fitted with hot and cold water and a bath: a "dip," as Aunt Georgiana bitterly proclaimed it. At Withiel folk bathed, like Christians, in their bedrooms.

Indeed, nothing less than the divinity of their living Buddha, could have reconciled Aunt Georgiana and her echo, Aunt Elizabeth, to such an acquaintance. They tackled their sister-in-law, Janet's mother, on the subject and begged her to reason with her son; but poor Lady St. Pinnock had foresworn reason for so many years that she was now incapable of exercising that faculty. Much bitterness, unspoken, followed. The only thing that tempered it was the old ladies' consciousness that the dowager, after all, was only a Traherne, member of a race from whom little could be expected. More might be demanded, and was demanded, of Janet.

Yet Janet, though a Carlyon, was equally incapable of reason. She had been so well educated by her aunts that, in her eyes, Charlie could do no wrong; and, quite apart from this, she adored him. She liked riding down the valley with her brother to old Rawley's house, if only for the contrast it offered to Withiel, so superbly innocent of bathrooms. She was ready to take Charlie's word that the old ruffian wasn't as black as he was painted; that his cellar alone showed him to be a man of taste; that his financial shrewdness had helped Charlie to turn an honest penny on the stock-exchange. She even achieved a certain interest in Jack Rawley, the old man's only son, who had followed Charlie to Sandhurst and would soon take a commission in the Cavalry. Jack Rawley, according to Charlie, was a good fellow and a sportsman in spite of his shyness; and since his father was something of a tyrant, young Rawley should be pitied as well as liked. Of course, if you tried for ever, you couldn't make a soldier of him. . . .

At the end of his special leave Charlie returned to the regimental dépôt. Step by step Aunt Georgiana and Aunt Elizabeth resumed their power. Withiel relapsed into its routine of resignation.

A month later Mr. Armstrong arrived, a Scotsman, trained as a land-agent, who had been engaged by old Mr. Rawley and controlled the finances of the two estates.

At first Mr. Armstrong had been a joke. His lanky legs and their extreme thinness just below the knee, where his cord breeches were bound with doeskin, gave him the appearance of a sporting caricature. His head was long, with a close crop of black hair, pale blue eyes, an undistinguished nose, and a lower jaw that was slightly underhung. He had the art of accentuating this unnatural feature by setting it with a click whenever he had to deal with a serious question, just as if he must first immobilise it with his teeth. A dogged creature, with some sardonic sense of humour and a slow smile, stronger in every way than Charlie, awfully efficient, and, withal, a gentleman. Even Aunt Georgiana admitted that.

When Charlie St. Pinnock shipped off to India, as aide-de-camp to a friendly governor, Withiel had already begun to feel the benefit of Armstrong's efficiency; the estate office ran on well oiled bearings; the tangled, melancholy woods began to suffer the terrors of modern forestry; unprofitable tenants were scared into a sense of their obligations or discarded; in effect, St. Pinnock was able to pay every penny he lost on that year's Calcutta Cup without sacrifice of an acre. By the sheer capability with which he ministered to the central idea of their lives the agent had reduced the Withiel females to a state of complete complaisance. All of them except Janet. . . .

For, from the first, she and Charlie had looked upon Armstrong with amusement. His clipped Scots accent, so obviously contrasted with the soft western drawl, gave them a chance of competitive mimicry on their rides together. They called him Mr. Arrumstrong, explosively. Janet herself acquired, with infinite pains, the trick of setting a pugnacious under-jaw; and though he was thankful for the benefits that Armstrong gave him, Charlie was definitely ranged with Janet in a small camp, of which Jack Rawley was sometimes made a member, that refused to accept the agent seriously apart from his work.

With her brother Charlie five thousand miles away, it irritated Janet to see the complete subjection of her aunts to the fetish of Armstrong's wisdom. She and Charlie used to exchange irrelevant letters on the subject; she often thought of the fun it would give them when his chief's term of office was over and Charlie returned to Withiel. For the present it gave her the chance, when wickedness inclined her, to pull Aunt Georgiana's very decorous leg. And this was nearly the only amusement Withiel afforded her; for, with St. Pinnock's departure all relations with the Rawley family had been severed, and Jack Rawley, in any case, had now joined his regiment, and was inaccessible. Her aunts, and, as a corollary, her mother, still disapproved of everything in the Rawley mansion from the bathrooms downward. Old Rawley, the county said, was drinking. Up from the servants' hall came ugly stories of his violence. Of course St. Pinnock, by divine right, could chose his own

acquaintance. Mr. Armstrong, besides being the Rawley's paid servant, was a man and could protect himself from influences of which, beyond doubt, he disapproved. But women-folk must be more circumspect. Even Jack Rawley, that stiff and awkward creature, was included in the general ostracism; and this, Janet thought, was a shame, since he had made one of a very happy trio.

With a thrill Withiel realised that Charlie had volunteered, and been released from his duties for the Chitral campaign. Three days after the letter which announced this bold decision came a wire from the India Office. It arrived in the afternoon. Her mother was out ceremoniously "calling," and Janet received it herself in a moment made so vivid by emotion that her brain carried the image of it as complete in detail as though it had been fixed upon a photographic plate.

She had come in from a ride through the woods; the velvety muzzle of Starlight was kissing her flat palm above two lumps of sugar when she saw, far down the curved distance of the drive, the figure of a woman on a bicycle pedalling towards her as though a bull were in pursuit. As Andrews, the groom, hobbled round on bandy legs to lead the pony away, the cyclist dismounted at a run and hurried toward her. She was a ludicrous figure in a black sateen blouse with a stiff sailor hat skewered on to the back of her head, in whom Janet recognised the post-mistress of St. Cleer. Recklessly she thrust the telegram into Janet's hand.

"A wire, your ladyship!" Miss Worden was always profuse in her "ladyships." Janet saw that it was addressed to Lady St. Pinnock, and thanked her; but Miss Worden, who knew the contents, was not to be done out of her sensation. "You'd better read it, Miss Janet. I'm afraid it's bad news."

"Bad news? It's addressed to mother."

"Better open it, miss. It's about his lordship."

Janet tore open the envelope. *Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India regrets to inform you . . . died of wounds. . . .* It couldn't be true! The words must have some other meaning! Charlie. . . .

She forgot all about Miss Worden; she did not even thank her, but walked straight into the house. The hall was dim and gloomy. A portrait of her grandfather stared at her curiously, hard, without sympathy. In the drawing-room Aunt Georgiana sat bolt upright on a low chair, waiting for her tea.

"Has the newspaper come?" she asked, "I thought I saw Miss Worden."

Janet handed her the telegram. Aunt Georgiana fidgeted for the glasses which were hung by a black ribbon from her neck. She sat there, stiff as a backboard, silently forming the words with thin, compressed lips: *Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India regrets. . . .* She blinked, restiffening her shoulders like a zealot

facing a firing-party. Janet could stand no more. She ran up the bare oak staircase to her room and cried her heart out.

2

Two years later, with the death of her mother, the name of St. Pinnock finally disappeared from Debrett. Of all its mediocre glories there remained nothing but Withiel, mortgaged beyond redemption and falling to decay, still sheltering, and barely sustaining, Janet Carlyon and her two aunts, who were now subject more than ever to the domination of Mr. Armstrong.

After the death of Lady St. Pinnock the agent had become an incubus against which Janet struggled in a hopeless minority, for on his side was ranged the tight-lipped devotion of Aunt Georgiana and her sister. The last Lord St. Pinnock had made hay while the sun shone, and in India the sun had shone with a vengeance. The estate was virtually bankrupt; and Mr. Armstrong, who saved it by a timely composition and by his influence with the principal creditor, now revealed as old Mr. Rawley, became, for Aunt Georgiana, the only instrument that could save the relics of her idol.

It sickened Janet to see the flatteries with which the old lady loaded this man whom, in her heart, she surely despised. She hated, in her own turn, the formal deference of Armstrong, who, knowing all that he knew, must have realised the hollowness of her inheritance. She could no longer treat him as a joke; for no joke is worth while if it cannot be shared, and her loneliness was now complete. She hated the way his words were quoted to her as though they carried the authority of Holy Writ; but she knew that she could not fight against him and his bewildering figures, since he alone possessed the knowledge that could save them. In the end she was forced to a partial surrender, listening to him, granting him the interviews that he demanded, signing, mechanically and without interest, documents that he carried up daily in his leather satchel.

Through all this time the central peace of Withiel remained undisturbed; its blank windows stared out placidly over the open park-land like the eyes of a man who is too old to think or feel; but, month by month, the place was slowly and surely dying, shedding its outer branches like a stricken tree. Farm after farm was sold to meet the mortgages that matured; daily the valleys echoed to the sound of the axe; wood after wood was felled; the trees lay in rows, as though some gigantic mowing machine had passed through them.

This figure took possession of Janet's mind. Withiel was like a hay-field ready

for harvest, narrowed in every circuit by the clattering scythes; she and her two old aunts were like small animals, rabbits or field-mice, driven inward, and always inward, by the machines. A time would come when the last swathes must fall and the fugitives be set running for their lives. She had seen such moments often, curiously, without consciousness of pity. Now, as the reaper circled clumsily round the outskirts of Withiel, narrowing their refuge month by month, she knew what the rabbits had felt. In her picture of the pitiless machine she had always imagined a driver, a man who sat on a concave metal seat with thin legs outspread; and to this driver, unjustly, perhaps, her fancy gave the face of Armstrong.

By this time her dislike of the indispensable agent was based on a reason more personal than any prejudice. Armstrong had begun to make love to her. This, of itself, was not surprising; for Armstrong's standard of propriety would not allow him to exploit his opportunities among the tenants' daughters, while Withiel and the Rawley mansion were the only houses of consequence in the district and Janet Carlyon the only eligible girl. She could even have forgiven Armstrong the physical peculiarities of which she had joked with her brother, if he had not shown, at the same time, an amazing spiritual obtuseness. For some months, in a mixture of boredom and fatalism, she had allowed him to do what he liked with the property, accepting his proposals as those of an expert who was paid to protect her interests.

Probably Armstrong had not expected such easy compliance in a girl with so much spirit. Certainly the fact that she deferred to him turned his head, making him imagine that his influence over her affairs extended also to her private life. The Withiel property, in spite of its present desperate condition, had not passed beyond the possibility of recovery in the hands of a hard man, in the hands, say, of such a man as himself. If he could turn an administrative authority into a possessive!

The idea was not so wild as it might appear. Armstrong himself was reasonably well connected, and Janet's isolation provided her with no other suitors. He had a little money of his own which he had increased by prudent speculation. His power in the district had gained a new accession in the death of old Mr. Rawley, who had lately burst a blood vessel in his brain and was now safely underground. As a final argument, he was by no means insensitive to Janet's beauty.

Unfortunately for himself, he was entirely insensitive to her real nature. The ease with which the downright certainty of his manner impressed itself on the guardian Georgiana and her sister, who were far too well-bred to behave with anything but consideration and politeness to an efficient servant, together with Janet's complaisance in all matters of business, made him imagine that the heiress would be as diffident in the disposal of her person as in that of her property. In their business

relations she allowed him to treat her as a child. He imagined that he could treat her in the same way when he began to make love to her.

He never made a greater mistake in his life. At first his advances bewildered and half-amused her by the very insolence or stupidity with which he took her subjection for granted. She didn't quite realise what he was driving at with his assumption of a sort of paternal familiarity. But when his familiarity, with its clumsiness of an automaton, began to pass the bounds of the paternal, her dignity, of which before she had scarcely been conscious, took immediate offence. It seemed to her monstrous and shameful that a man of his kind should touch her. Indignantly, she asked herself what Charlie would have thought of it. The answer was beyond doubt. Whatever it might have cost him, St. Pinnock would have sent the agent packing. By all family tradition Aunt Georgiana should have done the same; but the shame of her position made it difficult for Janet to tell the old lady the real reasons for her dislike. Instead, she urged, on general grounds, that it was time that she began to take a greater part in the management of her inheritance; that Withiel, in its present state, could not, in fact, support the expense of an agent, and that the Rawley properties were sufficient in themselves to absorb the energies of Armstrong.

It was only when she expounded to them that she became aware of the weakness of her arguments. Once more she found herself treated like a child, confronted with the veto of distant and disinterested trustees. Whatever might be the disadvantages of Mr. Armstrong's person—and, though Aunt Georgiana knew that Janet and poor St. Pinnock had done so, it was never "good form" to laugh at faithful subordinates—his activities represented the force that had already saved Withiel from complete disintegration: and what was she, Janet Carlyon, compared with Withiel?

"I dislike his manner," said Janet, "He is too familiar."

"Never with *me*!" Aunt Georgiana bridled. "Remember, always, that it takes two to make familiarity." And she went on to explain that in dealing with inferiors—"though Mr. Armstrong is undoubtedly a gentleman"—it was often necessary to unbend. Nothing was ever lost by politeness. That was a thing that Janet had to learn. Dignity and politeness were never incompatible.

It was beneath her dignity, Janet knew, to flatter Mr. Armstrong. She decided to take her own line. First of all, it seemed necessary to convince the agent that she was not the child that he took her for. His suggestions, which had lately taken the shape of instructions, were no longer accepted without question. She determined to master the theory of estate-management for herself, and, since she was by no means stupid, Armstrong's annoyance at an attention to detail which, on the part of any other

person than himself, seemed to him a waste of time, was mingled with an admiration for her unsuspected capacity. Her strength and persistence pleased him, her opposition intrigued him; to give him credit, the man was now quite definitely in love.

3

It was about this time, when the problem of Armstrong's encroachments was straining Janet's nerves to an intolerable pitch, that Jack Rawley returned to his estate. He had resigned his commission in the Grenadiers as the result of a perfectly intelligible "ragging scandal" of which he had been a victim. The whole of his service had been an extended purgatory, for nature had never intended him to be a soldier, and the terrors of his childhood had made him as unfit for a military environment as a solitary and inoffensive animal that menagerie keepers will sometimes thrust into a cage filled with another species to demonstrate the phenomenon of "Happy Families." For, apart from the uncertainty of temper that his father had bequeathed to him, Jack Rawley was inoffensive. He came down West with his experience of soldiering as nothing but an unhappy memory; and news travels so slowly in those remote countries that no one had heard of them.

There, in possession, he found Armstrong, already irritated by his decreasing hold on Withiel and his failure to make an impression on its mistress. The men disliked each other at sight. From the first young Rawley showed his intention of controlling his own affairs; and Armstrong, sure of the indisputable rightness of his own management, fought him inch by inch.

One evening, as she was riding in pursuit of the knowledge that she desired along the sadly frayed edge of the Withiel estate, Janet and Rawley met. For him it was a breathless meeting. In the days of his jolly companionship with her and young St. Pinnock he had hardly realised her beauty. Now he was older; his experience with the regiment had made him think more of women. They rode together along the verge of those pitiful woods, talking of old things that they had in common; and in a little while they discovered a new one, a grievance that, for the moment, preoccupied both: Mr. Armstrong.

At last Janet saw that she had discovered a confidant; more than a confidant, an ally. They spoke long together, and in the end Janet, feeling that she had found some one with whom she could talk on equal terms, and terms that had been approved by her dead idol, St. Pinnock, told him of Armstrong's clumsy love-making. It thrilled her to watch the colour rise to his eyes, to see that he felt the wrong as passionately as she did. He was so indignant that she almost felt as if Armstrong needed her

protection; she was almost sorry she had told him. "It may have been only stupidity," she said.

"Stupidity?" Rawley looked at her curiously; his lips trembled as he spoke. "One has to remember how lovely you are!"

"I . . .?" She laughed. "My dear Jack, don't be silly!"

But if, before, she had failed to realise her own loveliness Rawley's compliment made her wiser. Beautiful, in the classic sense of the word, she was not; but though her features lacked perfection of form, her body was full of youth and flexibility, her skin so definitely clean and clear, her eyes so straight. Even in those early days her mouth had that firm sweetness which was to impress Antrim at their first meeting many years afterward.

As she rode home that evening Jack Rawley occupied her thoughts. There was every reason why he should do so. To begin with, he was her only link with the past happiness which she and her brother had shared. Again, he was the only creature of her own age and culture whom she had any chance of knowing. Their circumstances, so curiously dissimilar, had many points of contact, and none more vital than their common dislike of Armstrong's officiousness.

At parting they had agreed to meet again. They met, and each meeting became the central part of Janet's day. That Rawley should have fallen in love with her was not surprising and, though she did not return his feelings, his adoration flattered her and gave her the sense of security that she wanted. He was her only friend.

But for the zeal of Mr. Armstrong it is impossible that Rawley would never have been anything more. For two years the agent had managed both estates without question; he knew, and knew rightly, that he had served them well. When, at last, on a question of general policy, he differed from Rawley, he backed his opinion with an offer of resignation. Incredibly, it was accepted. With a single blow the greater part of Armstrong's income had disappeared, for the diminished Withiel was a job for a lesser man. Even as he smarted under the unreasonableness of his defeat, he became aware of the growing intimacy between Rawley and Janet, and, seeing it, his suspicion told him that this was the reason of his dismissal. Janet had confided to Rawley the secret of her agent's attentions, and Rawley, who was not such a fool as he looked, had proceeded to queer his pitch. Well, two could play at that game!

Fortune was favourable. By this time the story of Rawley's regimental scandal had filtered down into the West and thrust a sharpened weapon into Armstrong's hands. With Aunt Georgiana, whose interest he still commanded, a hint should be enough. He rode straight over to Withiel and told the old lady all that he knew of Janet's meetings with this undesirable. The interview was strange beyond his

calculations. Never before had he presented so triumphant a case: yet never before had he been made to look so small, for, to the politeness with which the old lady always received him was added a dignity that froze him and made him feel like an under-footman retailing the scandals of the servants' hall. It was true that she listened to him and that her face grew grimmer as he told his story; and yet he could never be certain, from first to last, whether her obvious indignation was meant for the tale that he told or for the fact that he dared to tell it. All through his story she did not vouchsafe him the encouragement of a single comment; even when he left she did not thank him. With the triumph which he felt in having put a spoke in Rawley's wheel was mingled a dread lest he should have done the same thing for his own. Never, he decided, was an honest man so badly used by circumstances!

When he had gone, Aunt Georgiana sat on in the faded drawing-room like a graven image, as though, in this state of passive immobility, she might better absorb the fortifying atmosphere of her surroundings. The whole history of the Carlyon family had been chequered with crises of this kind, financial or passionate; she knew the stories of every one of them, and realised that it was her function, as the ruling priestess of the family cult, to teach the younger generation its duty. The dowager, poor thing, could not have done it even if she had lived; it had been her misfortune to be merely a Traherne.

In the evening Aunt Georgiana sent for Janet and tackled her. "I hear," she said, "that young Mr. Rawley has returned."

Janet blushed; but the room was too dim for her blushes to be seen. Yes, Jack Rawley had been at home for more than six weeks.

"Six weeks? And you have seen him?"

"I met him out riding the day after he came."

"I suppose you have seen him since then?"

"Often. He usually rides this way in the evening."

"I don't remember hearing that he has called."

"There's no one here for him to call on. You and Aunt Elizabeth scarcely know him."

"That makes no difference. Still, one can hardly expect politeness in that quarter."

"If you like I'll ask him to call. I'm sure he'd be delighted."

"You will do no such thing, Janet. I've not the least wish to know him."

"He was Charlie's friend," Janet flashed back.

"That is a different matter. A man can make friends without damaging his reputation, and poor St. Pinnock was too young to be prudent. Besides, at the time

of which you are speaking Mr. Rawley's own reputation was not what it is now."

"Please tell me what you mean by that?" Janet asked intensely.

And out came Armstrong's version of the story, which lost nothing in the telling. "I won't go further into details," Aunt Georgiana sighed, as she finished, "but that, I imagine, is enough to show you that Mr. Rawley is no fit acquaintance for a lady."

For a moment Janet was speechless.

"Who told you all this?" she said at last.

"I don't wish to go into details, Janet."

"It was Mr. Armstrong."

The old lady stiffened her shoulders. In all her life she had been physically incapable of telling a lie.

"You have no right to ask me," she said. "In any case that is neither here nor there."

"It's very much here!" Janet blazed. "There's no one else who could have told you: there's no one else mean enough to have done it. I'm surprised that you should listen to the stories of a discharged servant."

"A discharged servant? Do you mean to say that Mr. Rawley is getting rid of Mr. Armstrong?"

"Ah, he didn't tell you that!"

"Then the man must be mad as well as . . . undesirable."

"Aunt Georgiana, you're not going to speak of one of my friends like that!" Her burning loyalty was in question. The old woman realised that Janet had grown up. For the moment she could say nothing better than: "You mustn't raise your voice like that. People may hear you."

"I don't care who hears me, Aunt Georgiana! Until Jack Rawley tells me his own version of this libel I shan't believe a word of it."

"The whole thing is very unsavoury," said the old lady. "We have no business to be mixed up with these people. If you haven't enough pride to make a decision for yourself, we must make it for you. I forbid you to see Mr. Rawley again."

"Forbid?" Janet laughed. "My dear auntie, I don't think you know what you're talking about!"

"I forbid you," the old lady repeated, as though the formula had some mystical power.

"You can forbid me till you're blue in the face," said Janet, relapsing into the vulgar idiom of her generation as she left the room.

It was dark; but even so she ordered her pony to be saddled and rode straight over to the Rawley mansion: an atrocity of behaviour that the older Carlyons could

not even have imagined. She found Jack Rawley eating his solitary dinner under the shrewd, malicious eyes of his father's portrait.

"Janet! Good Lord! What are you doing here?" he cried.

"I want to talk to you, Jack. Now . . . at once. Come out into the garden."

He followed her, bewildered, still carrying his napkin under his arm like a waiter. There, under the heavy ilex-shadows, she asked her questions; and he, moved almost to tears by the memory of his trouble, told her the truth.

"And now, I suppose, you'll give me the chuck," he said.

Janet herself was too overwrought for many words. "No, no . . ." she said, "I think I understand."

"If you chucked me," he said, "I don't think I should have a friend in the world."

"I know," she said. "I know that."

"But God in heaven only knows how I love you!"

4

Eight years . . . it was now eight years since these words had first been spoken. At that time they had seemed to her the prelude of a rare adventure; they had crystallised in her the loyalty which she already felt toward her only friend. Touched by them, and flattered at the same time, she had taken courage to fight her own battle in the conviction that Rawley's cause was essentially the same as hers.

Six months after his avowal they were married by special licence in Plymouth, and over all the years that stretched between that musty vestry and the mud-walled bedroom of Zahn upon the verge of Africa, no week had passed without her hearing again and again the words in which he had first declared his love. Always, even in the moments when she felt most bitterly the strange embarrassments into which that love had taken her, those words had power to move her if only by reason of their transparent truth. He did love her. He loved her desperately. Always she felt that if he had not loved her so desperately her life would have been easier, for then she might have been able to disclaim the obligations that his love imposed on the loyalty which was in the core of her nature. When Rawley, in a moment of hysteria, had told Antrim that she hated him he had been talking extravagantly. Perhaps he had done so on purpose, knowing that as soon as he recovered himself the pendulum of his hope might swing in the opposite direction—but if he had said that she did not love him he would have spoken as truly as if he had said that she was devoted to him and to his interests. He must have known, from experience, that in any case she would play the game.

In a way it was not surprising that Rawley found her difficult to understand. For him she was the product of an alien race and of an alien tradition, and this, of itself, was enough to make him feel doubtful of her motives and think them more complicated than they were. In all those years her silences had troubled him, suggesting to his imagination subtleties that did not exist. Upon Antrim they had produced the same effect of mystification. Neither he nor Rawley was sufficiently acute to perceive the woman's essential, almost childish simplicity, to guess that her silence was nothing, in effect, but the cloak which her instinct had chosen to hide the losing game that she set herself to play with so much courage. If Antrim had found her puzzling, provocative, and, perhaps, a little inhuman, the reason for these things might easily have been found in the efforts at self-protection which absorbed her subconscious life. It was this instinct of preservation, active and wakeful beneath her apparent listlessness, that had compelled her, by means more urgent than thought, to attach Antrim to their party. It did not mean, as Antrim's romantic speculations had half suggested, that she was attracted to him personally. It only meant that in him her instincts had found an instrument of protection ready to hand in the shape of a man of action who definitely belonged to her own caste. It is possible that somewhere beneath her consciousness she was warned of things that were going to happen; that she was gifted with a sort of indefinite second sight. "A sensitive," Rawley himself had called her. And, after all, she was Cornish.

It was curious, under these circumstances, that the surface of her life should have seemed, even to herself, so calm. Through all that first night at Pembeni she lay thinking not only of Withiel but of common things, conscious, without the least offence, of the heavy breathing of her husband, who lay on a mattress beside her bed, listening to the shrill anger of bats that quarrelled in the dry leaves of the cocoanut palms and to the tinkling of a cricket that filled the darkness with a sound of silver bells. Once, when she had fallen half asleep, she was wakened by the thin horn of a mosquito whining in her ear. For a moment the thought of fever entered her mind; but then she remembered how Antrim had told her that the deadly *Anopheles* does its work in silence, and with this assurance she gave no more thought to the sound.

This confidence in Antrim was a strange thing, complete, and entirely unemotional. She had accepted him and attached him without question or hesitation, and, now that she came to think of it, she couldn't say why . . . unless, indeed, it were because in his speech, his physique, and the cut of his mind he faintly resembled her brother Charlie. Perhaps this resemblance provided the reason for many things that she had not taken the trouble to explain to herself.

She resolved to communicate this discovery to Rawley when he should wake. In the moonlight that was reflected from the white walls of Zahn's bedroom she could see the line of a bare arm that he had flung out in the restlessness of his sleep. Seeing it, her careful mind remembered the whining Rawley became aware that what she had mistaken for silence was, in fact, a monotone of shrill and quivering insect sounds so universal that they seemed to belong not to the earth but to the air. It was just as though she heard the air itself simmering in a heat that had already made the skin beneath the rim of her topee prick and tingle. She began to wish that she had stayed with her husband; but her feet would not move. It seemed that all power of initiative had left her; that unless she were rescued by some power from outside she must stand there and frizzle till she died.

Then, in the distance, she saw Antrim approaching. He came toward her with long strides, Frangoulis toiling behind him, his face oily with sweat. Antrim was dressed in a civilian version of the uniform of his corps; his sun-blackened sinewy knees showing between puttees and khaki shorts, and, above, a loose tunic with pockets at the breast. She noticed that on the hip he carried a holster with an automatic pistol inside it. From the distance he waved her a salute so gaily that she took courage at once and moved slowly to meet him.

"So you're out at last?" he said, with a smile.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she told him.

"You must have been dead tired. How was Mr. Zahn's bed?"

Without thinking, she told him that she had slept well.

"Good for you," he said. "This gentleman kept me busy. If you don't mind I'll get rid of him."

He turned to Frangoulis, and there began at once an unintelligible dispute in which the Greek contorted himself into paroxysms of violent gesture. She watched its progress gravely, and not without concern, the small dark man seemed so pregnant with potential evil. Spluttering, curved to strike like an angry snake, he shook his half-clenched fingers in Antrim's face. It filled her with a curious pride of race to see that Antrim didn't move a muscle. She became thrillingly infected with his confident calm. The mere influence of his unconcern was sufficient in itself to free her from the terror of silence and sun and strangeness that had begun to get hold of her. "But I might have known it," she told herself proudly.

At last the Greek went away, still muttering and gesticulating. With a composure that flattered herself, she asked Antrim what was the matter. "I can see that you're having trouble," she said.

He smiled quickly; "Nothing to worry about!" and his smile hurt her; it said so

implicitly that she was only a woman.

“What was he talking about?” she demanded, and when Antrim would have passed the matter over, pique made her persist.

“I think you should tell me, Captain Antrim,” she said seriously. “To begin with, I’m not quite a fool. And it isn’t only that. . . . You made it very clear to us the other day that a trip of this kind was full of—dangers isn’t exactly the word, but you know what I mean. There are only three of us, and I want you to understand that if there are any difficulties I must take my share of them. You may possibly feel that I’m asking more than a woman has any right to do.” She paused, becoming involved in the meshes of her own eagerness and anxious not to establish herself as a nuisance. He did not help her out. “What I mean,” she said, at last, “is that I don’t want you to think of me as a woman.”

At this he laughed, and she covered the confusion of a possible misunderstanding by protesting that ever since her childhood she had always seen more of men than women and that she understood them better.

“I’m not a child,” she told him, “and I’m not merely curious. I want to take my share.”

He believed her, and yet he hesitated to take her at her word. It was not the first time in his life that he had met women who assumed an air of good-fellowship. It seemed all very jolly and safe while it lasted; but, in his experience, it never did last. The attitude was a pose that could be discarded as easily as a pair of riding-tights. Sooner or later, according to convenience, offensive or defensive, the good fellow would vanish and the complete woman appear. A dangerous relation! It was not for the reason that she suggested to him, not because she would have had him disregard her sex, but simply because her sex in itself made it seem unfair to withhold his confidence, that he determined to tell her of his difficulties, such as they were. Even as he did so he felt that he was probably making a mistake, that his association with her might weaken him. This confidence, he told himself, must be an exception. He would make it without prejudice. She waited on his words.

“I’ve had trouble with this fellow Frangoulis,” he said. “When I say ‘trouble,’ I only mean that I can’t get rid of him. He’s rushed us already over the landing: you see for yourself that there was no hurry: the ship is still there. Now he wants to rush me about stores and porters, and I’ve no intention of obliging him till I’ve seen how things are for myself. It looks to me as if he were most anxious to save his face with Zahn. Probably they trade together: a sort of limited liability company, which means, no doubt, limitation for Zahn and liability for Frangoulis. I should prefer to do without either of them; so I propose making a reconnaissance in the village, if there is one.

Would you like to come along?"

Of course she would. She had listened to him gravely, feeling all the time that he had made the matter seem easier than it really was. She wanted to see and judge for herself; and yet, when they set off together in silence over the burning foreshore, the deep trust with which Antrim's company always inspired her made her feel that his defensive attitude was just; that she was, perhaps, no more than an inquisitive woman intruding her trivial self on a man who had his own job in hand and didn't need her help. Her conscience pricked her. She felt that she was under the necessity of explaining.

"Captain Antrim," she said, "if you'd rather I didn't come with you I'll go back."

He laughed. "Why should you go back? I'm honoured by your company."

"But you'd rather be without it," she said. "You don't even realise that I am with you."

"I rather gathered that that was what you wanted," he told her. "Not to think of you as a woman. Wasn't that the idea?"

"But even now you don't understand me," she said. "You're taking me on sufferance, simply because you're too polite to get rid of me. If I'd been a man you'd have told me straight out to go to the devil. I simply can't bear that we shouldn't be candid with each other from the beginning. We've got to rub along together for the next four months. Whether we like it or not we shall have to be intimate. I want to define, from the beginning, just where we stand."

"You can't do that," he said, shaking his head. "We don't know each other."

"That's true," she admitted, "and that's what I mean. We ought to put all our cards on the table."

"You're talking," he said, "as if we were opponents in a game!"

"We are, at present."

The admission thrilled him, and, at the same time, made him wary. The thrill warned him that, however natural and open she pretended to be, she was already complicating their relation with the intriguing mystery of her sex. It was her intention, she implied, to clear up this mystery; but her implication emphasised the mystery's existence and with it the possibility of emotional complications. This position he would not be tempted to encourage. He felt that if he were to protect her, as well as himself, he must be brutal rather than candid. On the deck of the *Köln* she had felt no scruples in playing off Rawley against him. He would take a leaf out of her book.

"When matters straighten out a bit," he said, "I'll consult your husband."

She smiled to herself at what she thought was his guilelessness.

"My husband . . ." she began, but before she could go further he cut her short:

"If you don't mind, we won't discuss him."

At this she flushed with anger, for he had put her so completely in the wrong that she could not escape from it without excuses that would accuse her. She was forced into a consenting and uncomfortable silence, and at this moment, to the surprise of both, they found themselves on the edge of the dwindling remnants of what must once have been an Arab settlement: a line of scabrous plastered houses each with a warped door deeply carved with the Arabesques of Zanzibar. Before one of these, a meagre store of dried fish stank in the sun. In its gloomy interior an elderly Indian was sitting cross-legged, like a lethargic spider, facing another whom Antrim recognised as one of the unhappy crew who had resigned themselves to sea-sickness on the deck of the *Köln*. The elder gravely returned Antrim's salutation. Some trait of nobility of the fellow's degenerate features suggested that he might once have been an Afridi or Mahaud. "*Te Pakhtan ye?*" Antrim asked quickly.

A gleam came into the old man's sleepy eyes as he responded to the stimulus of a forgotten tongue. Yes, he was indeed a Pathan; but he had come to Africa as a ganger in the first days of the railway, and, his *Pakhtu* being almost forgotten in mists of opium and sleep, he preferred to mingle with it a kind of Babu English. Mrs. Rawley was glad of this. If they had talked in any Eastern dialect she would have felt at a greater disadvantage than ever.

Antrim asked him about the possibility of securing porters. The old man raised his hands in helplessness. Had Antrim asked Frangoulis?

"Let us understand each other," said Antrim. "I have spoken with this Frangoulis and I do not trust him. With you, a Pathan, I know that I have found a friend. I know your people and they know me. From you I expect to hear the truth."

With modifications of Oriental prudence he heard it. Frangoulis was nothing in himself; but Zahn, whom Frangoulis now represented, was everything. Without Zahn nothing could be done within fifty miles of that isolated strip of coast. Even to a Sahib, and, as Antrim had generously proclaimed himself, a brother, the Pathan could not speak of Zahn, for on the favour of Zahn his own miserable existence as a *banyan* depended. With Zahn's help the country would be open to them; without it they could not move a mile.

Surely, Antrim suggested, there must be some Arab trader in Pembeni with whom he could make a deal? There were Arabs, the old man replied contemptuously, but how should an Arab accomplish what a Pathan could not do?

"It seems that we are driven back on Frangoulis," Antrim told her when he had exhausted his arguments. "In that case we shall have to pay through the nose."

"It looks like it," she assented. "If it's merely a matter of payment we need not

worry. It's a pity that this man Zahn is not here."

"Perhaps . . ."

He could say no more. In that moment there came into his mind the idea of abandoning the plan of trekking inland with porters. Before their eyes lay the river.

With canoes and good rowers they might work their way up-stream beyond the limits of this uncomfortable influence. He must think it over. Whichever way he turned, his mind held to its obstinate determination to avoid all contact with the author of the vileness that he had removed from the walls of the room in which the Rawleys had slept, the sinister, blear-eyed figure with whom he had struggled in his dream; and yet, the more he thought of it, the more convinced he became that no native in Pembeni or its immediate district would dare to raise a finger without the permission of Zahn's lieutenant.

Frangoulis knew this. As Antrim walked back toward the beach with Mrs. Rawley moving in silence at his side, he was conscious of the Greek's malignant interest in his movements, and, when they reached the point round which the river curled, Frangoulis himself sat waiting for them on a chair of green canvas which had evidently been carried there for his convenience. He rose and bowed with excessive politeness. Clothed in gleaming ducks and newly-shaved he was almost presentable. He asked in English how Mrs. Rawley had slept. Even though he had a right to do so Antrim felt his question was insolent. "Let us get to business," he said.

Frangoulis was delighted. With the flicker of a triumphant smile he commented on their fruitless visit to the *banyan*'s store; his words implied that he knew already everything that had been said, but that polite usage forbade him to enlarge on the humiliating fact that as far as porters were concerned the party was in his hands. He offered his chair to Mrs. Rawley, who refused it, and so the three stood talking together in a heat that welled up from beneath them as though nothing but a thin crust separated them from the burning core of the earth. As they talked, the face of Mrs. Rawley grew paler and paler, like a sick flower in the sun. "You had better go back to the house," Antrim told her. "No," she said, "If you don't mind I'll stay." But no persuasion could induce her to use the chair that Frangoulis had offered.

"I want you to supply us with porters," Antrim began abruptly.

Frangoulis bowed with the humility of conscious triumph.

"So I anticipated. I gave orders last night that they should be collected. You shall have sixty by this evening. It has been difficult to find men willing to serve. In Zahn's absence you are lucky to get them at all. I have also found you twenty donkeys that will be useful for the loads of *posho*, and another, a white one, on which the lady might very well ride. For *Mahindi* there will be no difficulty. Two hundred sacks of

meal are being landed from the *Köln*. In that, too, you are lucky.”

It was scarcely time to talk of luck, as Antrim soon found, until the terms had been settled. With bows and diffident gestures Frangoulis evaded their discussion until Antrim pinned him down. Then, with the air of conferring favours, he announced that each porter would cost twenty rupees a month, and each load of mealie-meal, the porter's *posho* for six weeks, another seven. The price was ridiculous, and Antrim told him so.

“In Nairobi,” he said, “I can get my porters for nine rupees, and good ones at that.”

Frangoulis shrugged his shoulders. Nairobi was not Pembeni. At Pembeni, whatever that might have to do with it, there was no railway.

“I'll pay you half,” said Antrim, “and not another cent!”

Frangoulis smiled wanly, assuring them that he was not a free agent, that the circumstances were exceptional, and that he had done his best. “Perhaps,” he suggested, “if you could wait for Zahn the porters might be persuaded to accept less. As it is . . .” The circumstances could only be expressed by a gesture.

“No, no,” said Antrim, “I can't wait for Zahn. I'm willing to pay a fair price, and I know that you can make it.” He felt that at all costs he must make an effort to escape from Pembeni, for the atmosphere of oppression and misery which enveloped the place, and, above all, its intolerable heat, which seemed already to be evaporating the springs of his will and making his purpose wilt like the face of Mrs. Rawley standing pale at his side, filled him with a dread of inactivity and warned him that unless he forced himself to act their adventure must end where it had begun on that lifeless torrid foreshore. And, though she did not speak, he felt that the same thought, unexpressed, was in the mind of Mrs. Rawley. He began once more his bargaining and persuasions. Frangoulis, polite as ever, remained unmoved. Suddenly Antrim remembered that one of the first words he had heard on Frangoulis' lips was “commission.” That, perhaps, was the key of the situation.

“In no case,” he began again, “am I going to pay you double the fair price. But I'll do this: If you can get me porters on reasonable terms I'll see that you yourself do well out of the bargain.”

For a moment Frangoulis' eyes brightened as Antrim had expected. Then, as quickly, a shadow fell on them: the shadow of Zahn. Antrim saw that the man was torn between cupidity and fear, and fear had its way with him, disguising itself under the pretence of an offended virtue.

“You have made a mistake,” he said. “I am an honest man. I am a Greek gentleman. If you cannot accept my terms you had better make arrangements to

leave Pembeni in the *Köln*. She will sail with the next tide.”

That was sufficiently heroic! Mrs. Rawley touched Antrim’s arm. “We *can’t* turn back,” she whispered quickly. “We can’t possibly turn back. You must accept his terms. Money doesn’t matter as long as we can go on. Settle with him at once.”

The urgency of her whisper had a curious effect on Antrim. If she had said: “The man is a shark: have nothing more to do with him,” or: “There’s a curse on this place, for God’s sake let’s get away from it!” he could have understood her better. He found her eagerness, her sudden revivification, disconcerting and even sinister. He felt that it was for no ordinary reason that she wanted so passionately to go on at a point where ordinary prudence suggested that they had made a false start and should retire. He felt also a little ruffled by her impetuosity. His mind was that of a competent, though not very brilliant soldier; once already, in Mombasa, this woman had carelessly scattered plans which a week of what he called “staff-work” had matured to the last detail; and now, when they had begun to suffer for her freakishness, she was trying to “rush” him again, covering her caprice with the assurance that money didn’t matter. Rawley, no doubt, had taught her that money could do anything. A little experience of Africa would soon show her that she was now entering a country where wealth, deprived of the protection of a recognised law, was impotent and even dangerous: a country that you couldn’t treat cavalierly just because your husband happened to be a millionaire.

As he hesitated she grew impatient with him.

“It’s obvious,” she said, “that we can do nothing else. Please settle with him at once.”

“Why are you in such a hurry?” he asked almost sharply. “You must give me time to think what is best. This isn’t a river-picnic, it’s a *safari*. I’m not sure that I want his porters or anything about him. We should probably do better if we went on to Dar-es-salaam.”

“Turned tail, in other words,” she mocked. Frangoulis watched them slyly.

“In that case I’d better ask my husband to settle the matter,” she said.

Antrim flushed. “You can’t drive me, you know. This is a business in which neither you nor he is competent to judge. You know nothing of the risks. It’s just like war. I’m thinking of our communications and all sorts of other emergencies. You’ve asked me to advise you as an expert; then you want to decide everything for yourself; and that’s silly when it’s only your own safety that I’m thinking of.”

“We *must* go on,” she said, obstinate, yet evidently a little ashamed.

“Why must you go on?” he asked impatiently.

“I don’t know . . . but we must. I’m certain of that. I feel it instinctively.”

He could not help smiling at her intensity, and yet, in a way, it impressed him, for he had been brought up on legends of the unerring instincts of women, and even with the most sceptical, the vagueness of a legend carries weight in times of stress. It happened also that in this matter his pride was involved. He was so anxious to appear a hero in her eyes that he couldn't help feeling that his caution made him cut an unheroic figure. If they accepted the terms of Frangoulis they were making an inauspicious start and taking risks that were none the less genuine for being indefinite. It was up to him to meet and counter these if he were to retain the reputation he already held in her eyes. Her determination, in fact, had taken the shape of a challenge. What would she think of him if he refused to accept it?

"Very well," he said, "as long as you realise that I don't approve, I'm ready to go on with this villain's terms."

"You'll always," she told him with faint mockery, "be able to say: 'I told you so!'"

"I shall never do that," he said.

"No," she answered in quick contrition: "I don't think you will."

He turned to Frangoulis, whose eyes already showed that he knew the tide had set in his favour.

"Your prices are scandalous," he said, "but we shall accept them on the condition that you don't merely provide the porters but help us in other ways. You must send messages to all the villages in your district that we are starting and that we shall pay honestly for any fresh food that is to be sold. We shall expect to be treated as friends and provided with good guides wherever we want to go. You understand?"

Frangoulis bowed. Everything that was in his power should be done. He was sure that Zahn, who would be desolated to have missed making their acquaintance, would do the same. It was a pleasure to have dealings with a sportsman and a gentleman. He held out his hand to clinch the infamous bargain, and Antrim, with a sense of indecency, took it. When he repeated the formula with Mrs. Rawley, Antrim felt an overwhelming impulse to protest. It vexed him to see that she accepted the damp and skinny fingers of the Greek without a tremor, and even with a smile. Evidently, whatever other instincts she might have, she was deficient in one that he expected of her. Bewildering duplicity of women! She was like the rest of them: ready to shake hands and smile with the scum of the earth to get her ends! Why had he ever imagined that she was different?

They left Frangoulis. Antrim was still brooding on the distaste which her affability had left in his mouth; but Mrs. Rawley, her victory achieved, had become another woman. The tiredness which had made her wilt in the heat like a thirsty flower had gone. Her steps were light and full of vigour; her dark eyes sparkled in swift glances; even her cheeks were flushed. She talked brightly, naturally, as though she were determined by a new, gay intimacy to draw him out of his ruffled mood. Suspicious and inwardly protesting, he surrendered to her guile, and Nature, as it seemed, conspired with her; for as they passed the last headland that separated them from their night's encampment, the up-stream breeze came sweeping on behind them, cool and fragrant, filling the grey-green plumes of cassuarina with a sound of the sea, tossing the feathery crowns of the cocoanut plantations, waking the dead anchorage with flaws and ripples of scattered light.

In a moment the whole estuary of the Pembe came to life. On the beach below them human figures moved with energy, launching the stranded dug-outs; with creaking blocks and cordage and a high antiphonal song the sails of a *dhow* went up and bellied to the wind; another, in mid-stream, came dancing toward the shore; from the thin funnel of the *Köln* a sooty feather of smoke was blown inland; and the flat line of the coastal hills that, in the heaviness of dawn, had seemed like a leaden barrier, awoke to a shimmering silver life, inviting to a thinner, purer air. Even the heavy spirits of Antrim felt their invitation to leave the river valley, to climb their escarpment, to escape into the promise of wide open spaces beyond them. There, his hopes told him, he would find the Africa that he knew and understood. Here, at Pembeni, he must have perished of stagnation. For once the doubtful instincts of Janet Rawley had been justified.

As they walked she plied him with questions like an inquisitive child. Things which he had long ago accepted as part of his African environment and about which his eyes were no longer curious, were new and strange to her. The shabby half-toned flowers of the scrub, from which her swinging skirt disturbed an aromatic scent, delighted her. It was an uncomfortable compliment to his wisdom that she should expect him to know their names. Low-flying butterflies that fluttered among them, dusky in flight, but rich, when they settled, with bars of orange and eyes of velvety purple, kept her loitering beside them; and one that swept across their vision on the wind with a gleam of halcyon blue, brought a cry to her lips.

"You think I'm naïve," she said when he smiled at her; "but soldiers never notice anything. I've spent most of my life in the country, and little things like this are my excitement. My brother used to laugh at me, too. In some ways, do you know, you remind me of him."

"I think I must have met him," said Antrim, vaguely remembering what the Judge had told him at the Kilgours'.

At once she became animated. Where? when? how? She stopped walking as if she felt it important for them both that he should fix the exact memory of this encounter.

"I think I remember him on Lord Hagley's staff. He was Lord St. Pinnock, wasn't he?"

"Yes, you are quite right; but how did you know I was his sister?"

"Why are you so curious? I heard it in Mombasa."

"Ah, I see . . ." she said, "we were discussed." She hesitated: "In that case I am more surprised than ever that you came with us. Why did you do it, Captain Antrim?"

"I don't know," he told her candidly. "But here I am."

"Yes. . . ." She spoke the word so slowly, so solemnly that he realised that he had lost the delightful companion whom he had found a few minutes earlier. He was unwilling to lose her, not only because the directness of his nature found it difficult to cope with feminine moods and mysteries, but because her eager, childish interest offered such a refreshing contrast to the women that he had known, women whose emotional appetites the idleness of tropical service had so jaded that they could only be stirred by the stimulus of social excitements or flirtation. To a tropical palate there is no drink that can compare with spring water. It had amazed and delighted him to find that this woman could provide him with such spiritual refreshment. He cursed the moment when he had reminded her of Mombasa and its scandals; he tried to pick up the thread of their conversation where it had been broken; but her mind was still too clouded for her to respond to him.

Another incident sealed his loss. Simultaneously, at the last turn of the path, they became aware of a white, ungainly figure moving rapidly toward them over the sand. It was Rawley, ponderous and inco-ordinate, his cheeks flushed and traversed by runnels of sweat that were like tears, his lips trembling.

"Thank God!" he panted as he reached them; "Thank God!" He took his wife's arm and began to fondle her hand.

"What is the matter?" she asked calmly.

"The matter?" he cried. "You disappeared. . . . I had lost you . . . I've been looking everywhere: round and round. Where have you been?"

"I went with Captain Antrim to the village. We have been settling about porters."

"Why didn't you tell me? I assure you it's no joke!"

"You might have known that I'd be safe with Captain Antrim," she said, calming

him with a smile.

"Yes, yes . . . quite so," he muttered; but the swift glance which his eyes turned on Antrim seemed full of jealousy and distrust. "At any rate, I've got you now," he said, laughing nervously. Then, with a sudden impulse, he caught her up in his arms and kissed her.

Antrim flushed with painful embarrassment. Such things, to begin with, were simply not done; and, quite apart from the social impropriety of this violent embrace, he saw in it an assertion of the rights of property that was designed to teach him a lesson that he had no need to learn. The gesture, in all its vulgarity, was provocative, challenging, and totally unnecessary. Rawley, in effect, was "showing off." But what distressed Antrim far more than Rawley's demonstration, was the way in which his wife received it; for though she did not shrink from Rawley's arms, he saw in her averted eyes a pain that would have made him compassionate for any living creature that suffered it.

And then, almost as if she knew that Antrim had taken her by surprise and wished, at all costs, to give the lie to the truth in her own eyes, she drew away from him, putting her husband between them, treating Antrim with a studied disregard or, at the most, as a formal acquaintance, deliberately demolishing every memory of the intimacy which they had shared, shattering the pitiful and protective emotions that her glance had aroused in him, convincing him so thoroughly that she was as unscrupulous as all other women that his sympathies swung over, abruptly and passionately, to Rawley's side; for Rawley, at least, was of a transparent honesty, and, even if he did not like him, he could trust him. At any rate it simplified matters. It enabled him to treat her pointed attentions to Rawley and the distance of her manner toward himself for what they were worth. Neither, being assumed, had the power to move him. In a little while, he told himself, it will probably suit her book to flatter me again; and then, thank heaven, I shall be prepared for her. In the meantime, if she thinks that her monkeying has any effect on me she's mistaken.

A busy day relieved him of the necessity of defining his position. After the *tiffin* which they ate together on Zahn's wired verandah the Rawleys retired for a siesta. And yet, when Antrim himself turned in under the double-fly tent which Ali had erected, the problem of the Rawleys kept him company, so that he lay hot and fretful until the time when the sun's heat diminished. Emerging, he was delighted to find that they still slept. Together with his Mombasa staff he busied himself with sorting the baggage that had been thrown out in confusion on the beach. They worked well and cheerfully, and when, at last, some order had appeared, he took his gun and wandered out in search of guinea fowl through the bush, or rather the cocoanut

groves at the back of the village, only to find that he might just as well have left it behind, for devil a feather did he see.

The cocoanut *shambas* were old ones, planted by coastal Arabs, and later abandoned to their own straggling way of growth. Some trees had been felled, others hung helpless uprooted by flicks of a hurricane's tail; on the landward edge a wide belt had been blackened by recent fire. Over all hung that desolation of neglect and frustration which seemed to be the mark of Pembeni, neither the evening's renewal of bird-song nor the beauty with which the tawny sun glowed between the straight pillars of the cocoanuts and turned their grey hides to hues of molten copper could gloss the features of a country so dejected.

6

Night fell. As Antrim approached the beach with his empty bag he saw that they had lighted a fire before the verandah of Zahn's house. The cook crouched on his haunches beside it; Dingaan's *mtoto*, stripped to a loin-cloth, ran to and fro like a black thin-legged insect solemnly balancing his enormous head; from the fire itself the land-breeze carried down-stream a trail of flame-lit wood-smoke, while yellow flickers played on the walls of the house and on the white clothes of the Rawleys sitting together in typical domesticity before it.

When they saw him coming Rawley, who had noticed that he was carrying a gun, called out cheerfully to ask what luck he had found. Antrim signalled his emptiness, then, calling Asmani to his side, gave orders that the chop box in which he kept the materials for a "sundowner" should be brought to them on the verandah. There he squatted down beside them, thankful to stretch his tired legs. From Mrs. Rawley there came not a word; she lay back in her folding chair with eyes closed, her hands listless on her lap, as detached as though her spirit were a thousand miles away; but Rawley, who seemed to have recovered completely from the attack of nerves, was more talkative than usual. If he had not been convinced that it was impossible Antrim would have supposed that he had been drinking; he was so full of plans and speculations, so naïvely and inappropriately pleased with his surroundings. He ran on chattering like a schoolboy in the first hours of a holiday, enlarging on the strangeness and beauty and solitude of that damnable spot. It was the first time, he said, for years that he had felt really free from the chains of civilised conventions. For that reason he was glad that they had come to German East, an undeveloped colony where game-wardens and district commissioners were not in evidence. Nowhere in South Africa could one feel the same sense of freedom. It was like reaching

backward thousands of years into the infancy of man. Sentimental tosh, Antrim thought. He felt that the somnolence and silence of Mrs. Rawley endorsed his opinion.

Asmani, white-robed, white-capped, stole toward them with a sparklet siphon, glasses, and Antrim's bottle of whisky. He poured a peg for Mrs. Rawley, who refused it, until Antrim, speaking seriously of fever and the custom of the country, persuaded her. Rawley did not refuse. The contents of his glass had vanished before Antrim's had touched his lips. Thus inspired he began to talk Geology. In the hour before sunset he had made a rapid survey of Pembeni, and now that his tongue and his imagination were loosened, he had confidence to speak with a communicable awe of how that huge shelf of red alluvium had been formed. Decidedly, in his own subject, the fellow was no fool. Antrim, with his deep respect for technical knowledge to which he couldn't pretend, was impressed by the breadth of the geological picture that Rawley imagined: the vast steaming delta, black creeks slowly choked with silt and vegetation until the tides could no longer invade them and the sun caked their mud into firm land.

"There's a creek, a kind of backwater, three hundred yards up-stream," Rawley murmured. "Janet and I went to it this evening. Black as night; the air so damp that you could hardly breathe it. When the light began to go you could imagine shapes that didn't exist: cycads, ferns, you know—that you only see in coal: a green scum on the water: life creeping under it: life crawling out of it on to the land. The scum on the surface was like the spawn of the great reptiles: it was the birth-place of the Brontosaurus: the very beginning, before man was dreamed of. Never saw anything like it in my life!"

He gave a laugh and a shudder. Antrim, the spell of speech once broken, was aware of a furtive movement of Rawley's left hand. Watching this curiously, he saw that Rawley's groping fingers had found the whisky-bottle. Then Antrim's drugged mind became alert. He saw quickly that while he had been listening, half-hypnotised, to the drone of Rawley's voice and the crackle of the fire, the bottle had become half empty. Now Rawley had begun to pour out another glass.

In a moment Antrim was on his feet. "No you don't!" he said quickly, snatching the bottle from Rawley's hand.

Rawley also had risen. He clutched at the bottle again, splashing Antrim with whisky. His quiet eyes blazed at Antrim. "What's this? What are you doing?" he spluttered.

"Give it to me!"

"I'm damned if I will! It's an insult!" He appealed to his wife: "Janet. . . ."

But Mrs. Rawley did not move a finger. She lay back in her chair, white, motionless, her wide eyes staring out into the darkness where the fire flickered, as though the violent scene were outside her consciousness. The two men faced one another, each ludicrously clutching at the whisky-bottle. Beyond them the natives stood and stared.

"Give it to me!" Antrim repeated quietly. "No nonsense now! I'm not joking. One of us has got to be the head of this party. I happen to know something about the country, and I'm going to make my own rules. One of them is that I have charge of this stuff. It's got to be used as a medicine, not as an amusement."

"That's all very well," said Rawley, his anger modified by Antrim's determination, "but that's no reason why I should be insulted, treated like a child or an inebriate, before my own wife and my own servants. What's more"—his voice rose to a scream—"I won't have it! I won't have it!"

He gave a sudden tug at the bottle; between their two hands it slipped and was shattered on the cement floor of the verandah at Mrs. Rawley's feet. Still she did not move.

"Now, look what you've done!" cried Rawley petulantly.

Antrim laughed. "Well, that's finished it anyway!" he said.

"By God, Antrim . . ." Rawley began. But he got no further; he sank back awkwardly in his chair and began to drum with his fingers on its wooden arms. Neither he nor Antrim uttered another word. All three of them sat in a silence that was poignant with unspoken bitterness until the shade of Asmani called them to dinner by the fire.

Through that uncomfortable meal the silence held, its surface broken only by the impersonal requests of Mrs. Rawley, whose clear-cut words fell on it with the eerie effect of pebbles tossed gently into a dark pond. It was a relief to Antrim when Frangoulis appeared bowing on the edge of the firelight and approached them. Possibly he was aware of what had happened; for the darkness that encircled that scene of drama was, like the darkness of all Africa, packed with eager listeners. Some such mischievous knowledge must have been in his brain; for he addressed himself directly to Rawley in his own abominable English, treating him as the acknowledged head of the party. No doubt, he hoped to get back a little of his own and exaggerate the breach of which he had been informed.

In this case he was disappointed; for Rawley waved him sulkily aside and told him that Antrim would deal with anything he had to say. Frangoulis was nothing if not adaptable, and Antrim only too eager to escape from a position which seemed to be on the nerves of every one except Mrs. Rawley, who evidently hadn't any, and was

the more irritating for that. They moved off into the darkness together towards a clearing at the back of the house in which a hollow square of grass *bandas* had been erected, probably to make barracks for *askaris*. In the middle of this quadrangle a fire was burning, and around it, listless and abandoned as refugees from a burnt city, sprawled the company of porters whom Frangoulis had collected. There they lay or crouched with arms akimbo, suffocating the narrow space with the odour of vegetable oils with which their bodies and skin cloaks were smeared. To Antrim, accustomed to the cleanliness and discipline of his regiment, they seemed a miserable crowd. Even more than their filthiness the degradation of their features and the pooriness of their physique made his heart sink. But Frangoulis displayed them with a swagger, as though he were proud of them.

"This," he said blandly, "is the result of discipline. Where else in the colony could you have collected porters in less than twenty-four hours?"

"Rather a *shenzi* lot," Antrim commented gloomily.

They were raw, Frangoulis admitted, but, for that very reason, the more amenable. These people, he said, had not been corrupted by contact with low-class Europeans: they had no ideas of independence. They must be regarded not as human beings but as beasts of burden. "Here," he added proudly, "you see a tribute to the efficiency of my friend Zahn. Properly treated they will give no trouble." And Antrim remembered the proper treatment of which he had seen an example the night before.

"Now that I have done my part," Frangoulis continued, "we had better go to the house and talk business."

Antrim consented. In his own hut, mud-walled, mud-floored, at the back of Zahn's white cabin, Frangoulis bowed him to a seat, offering him a peg of what purported to be brandy from a beer-bottle. The Greek took up his position on a *charpoy* and began to shuffle a file of grubby papers, carefully licking his brown thumb between.

"We agreed," he said softly, "that three months' wages should be paid in advance."

"We agreed nothing of the sort," said Antrim.

"What?" Frangoulis rose to his feet in a passion of offended innocence. His hands flickered to and fro in paroxysmal gestures, protesting, explaining. Antrim sat through it like a log. He felt that once already, thanks to Mrs. Rawley's presence, Frangoulis had got the better of him; through all the day the thought of this defeat had rankled; but the encounter with Rawley had determined him to put up with no more nonsense. He placed the Greek's vile spirit beside him on the floor and prepared

himself to sit the business out. For a good hour he sat there while Frangoulis passed from reproaches to entreaties and from entreaties to indefinite threats associated with the name of Zahn.

“And who the devil is Zahn?” Antrim asked at last.

Frangoulis threw wide his arms at this unanswerable question. If Antrim chose to wait he would soon enough know who Zahn was! Surely, the Greek suggested shrewdly, Karim Baksh, the old Pathan, had told him? A bad enemy and a good friend. Let that suffice!

Antrim smiled at the fellow’s acuteness.

“As far as I’m concerned,” he told him, “Mr. Zahn can go to hell.”

After this enormity there was no more to be said. By midnight it had been settled that Antrim should pay for the stores and one month’s wages in advance.

“But if I pay the money,” Antrim added, “I must be sure that the porters get it.”

“Naturally!” Frangoulis assured him. “They shall be paid as soon as Zahn’s commission is deducted. In any case I will give you a receipt.”

Five minutes later, having paid the scandalous total in notes of the Bank of India, Antrim was bowed away from the door.

“If the *mnyapara* get to work at once,” Frangoulis suggested, “there is no reason why your *safari* shouldn’t start at dawn. Allow me to wish you the very best of luck. I—or rather my friend Zahn—may be able to help you more effectively if you let me know the route you are going to follow and your objective.”

The suggestion was put so smoothly that Antrim suspected it. At the same time it bore in on him, with a whimsical force, the fact that he had no idea, except in the most general terms, where they were going. In any case, the less Frangoulis knew of their movements the better. As though a secret could be kept in Africa!

“I’m afraid you can’t help us in that,” he said. “Our plan is to work inland. To tell you the truth we have no definite objective.”

“No objective?” Frangoulis was incredulous but polite. The word “ivory” was almost visible in his eyes. “I see,” he said. “You are like other Englishmen. You voyage for pleasure.”

“For pleasure,” Antrim agreed. The word had an unpleasant sound.

And yet, as he walked back under the dark rustling plumes of the cocoanuts, he could not repress a sensation of triumph in the fact that something had been accomplished at last. The business of the *safari* was in hand. There was no reason why they should not escape from that hot prison, whose ghostly admonitions of things old and terrible Rawley’s imagination had so acutely realised, on to the free, clean uplands whose invitation the sea-breeze had unfolded. How right Rawley had

been, poor devil! People might say what they liked about him, but in some ways the fellow was lovable. Now that the last fumes of his resentment had evaporated Antrim began to think of Rawley as a big, awkward child. A nuisance, of course, but then, he was made that way; a madman possibly, but therefore the more entitled to sympathy. And, once again, a child. For a moment, too, the woman had revealed herself in childish mood; but that was only one of the stock accomplishments of her sex, flattering but untrustworthy. It was wiser to remember another of her aspects; to think of her cold eyes at the moment when the whisky bottle smashed on the terrace at her feet. "By gad, she's as hard as steel," Antrim told himself, "and that's the only thing about her I can understand or want to!" he added.

He went straight to the servants' encampment and roused Asmani, giving him instructions to worry the porters into some sort of order before dawn. Then, hardly realising how late it was, he returned to the front of Zahn's house in the hope of sharing his news with the Rawleys. The verandah was in darkness. The doors were shut. Through the wire-cased window he could hear a noise that was like the croaking of a bull-frog. Rawley was snoring in his sleep.

CHAPTER VII

1

Although he had put the preparations for leaving in hand Antrim knew very well that an early start was out of the question. Soon after dawn he was to be seen hot and cursing in the middle of a welter of porters who scurried to and fro with loads on their heads as devoid of purpose as the members of a disturbed ants' nest. All through that morning Antrim saw nothing of the Rawleys. He and Asmani and Dingaana struggled together in the broiling heat, so intent on putting order into confusion that even when the up-stream breeze began they did not notice it. Frangoulis, cigarette in mouth, watched them, with the detachment of an outsider, through a pair of field-glasses. His chair had been placed in the shadow of a mango tree on the top of the rise, and round him, like flea-bitten puppies, played two sallow, woolly-haired children who were only too obviously his own contribution to the population of the Pembe delta.

By noon the porters seemed to have lost what energy they ever possessed; and that, in all conscience, had been little enough. Round their camp-fire, on the night before, Antrim had thought them a poor, unsavoury crowd; but the picture which daylight revealed was unbelievable, reminding him of the photographs, ghastly in their anatomical details, that come from famine zones in India. It was difficult to believe that these scarred and wasted bodies with limbs like sticks and great lolling heads could support the burden of life, much less the sixty pounds that are a porter's load. All their movements were languid and, as it were, delayed; they moved slowly and with the detachment of a dream, their brown eyes gazing about them with a curious dispassionate interest as though they had been newly awakened into a strange world. Asmani, whom Antrim consulted, was pessimistic but resigned. These people were animals, *Wagwana*, half-starved, riddled with the fevers of their swampy villages. It would be different when they were fed. At any rate, Antrim thought, there wasn't enough spirit in the lot of them to raise a mutiny.

Perhaps, as Asmani suggested, starvation was at the root of the matter. Antrim could well believe it when he watched them at their first meal. On open ground, in full sunlight, the cooks chosen by the *mnyapara* had lighted a wood fire on the embers of which were set a dozen petrol tins filled with *mahindi*-pap. At midday, when the back of the work had been broken, a signal was given that the food was ready, and there began a stampede which was like nothing so much as that of a pigsty at feeding-time. Now there was no more languor. The whole herd of them

rushed blindly with their thin legs flying toward the smell of food, fighting, pushing, tearing with their scraggy fingers. The cooks, who had already helped themselves, retired and let the others scramble. The tins were overturned, and in the midst of a mass, black as swarming bees, the porters fought for the spilled food, swallowing it in handfuls, thrusting their fingers into the scalding meal, shouting, screaming as their bare feet trampled the scattered embers, yet laughing, as though pain, beside such hunger, were a negligible thing. And from all around, from the broken village over the hill, from the darkness of the silent bush, others came streaming, grey men, women, children, the whole mysterious population of those shades, like a tribe of vultures swooping out of the invisible to the scent of carrion. An awful and a bestial sight at which Frangoulis, his eyes glued to his binoculars, must have been amused. Antrim, fascinated and disgusted, watched it to the end, when the tins were empty and children, like small black pigs, routed among the trampled soil for fragments plastered with earth. And at last, when not a grain remained, he turned away, leaving the shore scattered with those who had eaten and sprawled face downwards with their arms clutched above their heads as a protection from the sun.

In all ill humour he joined the Rawleys for lunch. He was too hot and tired to make conversation, and Mrs. Rawley's mood seemed consonant with his own. She sat there disinterested, with wide sullen eyes; but Rawley was full of talk and anxious, as it seemed, to atone for the unpleasantness of the night before.

"My wife and I have been saying that you're magnificent," he said, and then, convinced that his flattery had made the way more easy, he began to make anxious inquiries for certain packages that his eye had missed.

"I don't want to worry you," he said. "Indeed, I only wish that I could be of more use. Janet and I feel awfully out of it, I can tell you. But these boxes are important. They're all marked with a red diamond and it'd be a tragedy if they were smashed. If you don't mind I want you to be particularly careful with them—set aside porters to carry them whom I can recognise and keep my eye on. They contain all my photographic material, glass plates and solutions and that . . . things we can't replace, you see. I'd be much obliged if you . . ."

Antrim reassured him shortly that he'd keep his eyes open.

"And we can start to-morrow . . . perhaps to-night?"

"To-night's out of the question. To-morrow's just possible."

"Well, there's no hurry. We've months in front of us."

To Antrim this reflection was not cheering. Two days had been enough to go on with. He felt that if he were to keep his temper he must get away from the sound of Rawley's voice. He didn't want to talk or listen. He wanted to sleep like the porters

who were lying in the sun on their faces, gorged with *mahindi*. Rawley could never understand that. But Mrs. Rawley did. Suddenly she found her speech, and the reassurance of her quiet voice had a curious effect on Antrim's jangled nerves. At first he grudged the answering politeness that was demanded of him; but little by little, with an art that was too subtle to be perceived, she soothed him out of his irritable mood and made him feel that there was more in life than heat and swelter and stench and the cruelty of an unclouded sun. They began to talk lazily, familiarly, of small things; and Rawley, rejoicing, perhaps, that she had emerged from an uncomfortable mood, sat placidly smiling beside them, so quiet that in a little while Antrim forgot his presence. Mercifully, after its manner of those latitudes, the sky clouded to a soft whiteness. Rawley nodded asleep in his chair. His wife and Antrim spoke less and less. Gradually, in the singing silence, they, too, dropped asleep.

2

They did not start that night nor yet in the following dawn. Whether any of the sum of rupees which Antrim had paid Frangoulis in advance ever reached the porters was doubtful; but there was no doubt but that they received its equivalent in liquor. That very night, within the square of the old *askaris*' barracks, began a debauch that lasted for forty-eight hours, in which it appeared that the whole population of the delta as well as the chosen sixty was being entertained at the Rawleys' expense. Frangoulis, consulted, could suggest no remedy: on the eve of a *safari* it was the usual thing. Rawley, characteristically, was shocked: his wife, though she would not admit it, a little nervous. And this was not to be wondered at; for though the edge of the bush concealed the centre of excitement from her eyes the sounds of the cries and the drumming were never still and the reflex of fires leapt and flickered in the tree-tops like a graphic index of the passion that could not be seen.

On the first evening of this orgy they had watched an innocent young moon sinking airily beyond the inland hills, and in its light they had seen spare prophetic figures that stumbled over the shore, with hands uplifted in strange contortions, to dip their bodies in the river water as though, in a state of ecstasy, they were performing some lustral rite. The erratic, involuntary movements of these wretched creatures, spinning and staggering as they went, seemed merely humorous to Rawley; but Antrim, watching the tense lips of Mrs. Rawley in the moonlight, guessed at her misgivings. Therefore, he abandoned his tent on the lower slope and instructed Dingaan to make up his camp-bed on the verandah of Zahn's house, a few feet from the window of the room in which the Rawleys slept.

“So you’re joining us?” said Rawley obtusely. “Well, the more the merrier!” Mrs. Rawley said nothing; but Antrim could see that she was relieved.

By the third evening the fires had flickered out like a pool of spilt spirit. Pembeni lay in a white and ghostly silence under the moon. On the level ground in front of Zahn’s house the porters’ loads were laid out in order. Antrim’s tent had been packed. Rolled in his blankets he slept solidly on the verandah, knowing that an hour before dawn Dingaana would rouse him with a cup of hot coffee.

At four o’clock, when the dank land-breeze began to falter into absolute stillness, doves in the bush awoke, uttering their timid hollow notes. Still half asleep, Antrim heard the voice of Asmani, summoning the dazed porters in the darkness. In the distance one of the pack-donkeys set up a melancholy braying. The *mtoto* padded on to the verandah with his naked feet and thrust a cup into Antrim’s hands. He rose and tapped at the Rawleys’ window. Mrs. Rawley was already awake. “One moment,” she whispered quickly; and, in another, she was by his side, unspeakably slim and shadowy in riding-breeches and a skirted tussore coat.

“Start in half an hour,” he said. “Will you be ready?”

“Yes,” she answered. “I’ve been awake for hours. I’ve just roused my husband. How awfully quiet it is!”

They stood together for a moment listening. It was too dark for Antrim to catch the expression of her face, and, for this reason, as well as for her silence, it seemed to have lost the shadows of uneasy thought and the reservations that often repelled him. The subduedness of dawn, that hour in which the forms of everyday life have not had time to impress themselves on the waking consciousness, seemed to reveal her to him in a new aspect: tender and fragile, still innocent with the bloom of sleep. Why, he wondered, was she not always like that? But if she were always like that, he decided, life would become too complicated. Perhaps things were better as they were. And yet, in spite of these misgivings, he felt that the moment would have been wasted and regretted if he had not expressed in it the feeling of protective tenderness that inspired him and shown her that the stubbornness with which their wills had clashed in little things was nothing compared with their underlying confidence in each other. The delicacy of the situation could only have been marred by any direct expression in words. Once again he was bound to an evasion. That did not matter as long as he made himself understandable.

“Well,” he said at last. “So this is the beginning.” And as he spoke he laid his hand upon her arm.

She did not answer. But she did not start from him, and this, of itself, was an assurance that she had understood the emotion, scarcely intelligible to himself, that

his words concealed and his gesture timidly defined. He felt in his bones that he had made a fool of himself by lapsing into sentimentality; and yet he was proud of it, fortified and encouraged as if he had achieved something heroic. He could scarcely trust his voice when he added: "In half an hour, then?" and left her.

Two minutes later he was letting off steam in the thick of the mustering caravan, cursing the calm Asmani for a confusion that he hadn't created, tugging at the straps of the donkey's packs, marshalling, with his hippo-hide *kiboko*, the ragged ranks of the porters who were still somnolent and stupid from the fumes of their two days' debauch. As yet the Eastern sky was dark; the moon had long since set; only the line of the river was distinguishable from the thickened darkness of the land. On the foreshore light blinked feebly from the Rawleys' window and the embers of the fire round which the servants had slept. In that darkness he moved not by sight but by scent and by the remnants of some lost instinct that without sight can guess the nearness of other solid bodies. At last Dingaan appeared, swinging his hurricane lamp, and in an instant the confusion became fantastically clear. For forty yards, outstretched like a dead python, the line of loads revealed itself, beside each, squatting or languidly standing on one leg, a savage whose curious distrustful eyes caught the lamplight in their moony sclerotics. In front of them the train of donkeys stood patiently, their front legs thrust forward to take the weight of their packs, their heads drooping as though they were asleep.

Asmani, incredibly tall and slim, approached him.

"*Tayari, Bwana!*"

All was ready. Antrim looked at his watch. Five o'clock to a minute. The headman had done his work well. Nothing now remained but for the Rawleys to complicate the start with their amateur unpunctuality. He had misjudged them. Already they were standing at his elbow. Rawley was murmuring something about the politeness of kings. Unexpectedly he put out his hand and grasped Antrim's: heaven knew why. They passed forward to the head of the procession, where the white donkey that Frangoulis had promised Mrs. Rawley stood ready saddled.

"Your husband and I will walk in front . . . less dust," Antrim said.

"I'd rather walk with you two at first," she replied.

"Very well."

Antrim sang out to the *mtoto*, who hurried forward like a black rabbit to take the donkey's rein. Then he called back to Asmani that all was ready.

"*Chukua! Up!*" the *mnyapara* cried, waving his arms.

The porters scrambled to their feet; the loads were lifted; the caravan began to move.

“Well, well,” said Rawley with a laugh; “this is the beginning!”

The very words that Antrim had used himself an hour before; and yet, on Rawley’s lips, how different their significance!

3

They were moving. No one who had not suffered the frustration and paralysis of those four days in Pembeni could realise what this meant to Antrim, striding along at the head of his caravan, with the rustle of naked feet, the clinking of harness and the creaking of packs behind him, and, in front, the diminishing darkness of their tree-shadowed track. He was not even aware of his companion’s presence. His mind was possessed by Africa, numbed by her gusty odours, swayed by the uncertainty of her dark promise, awed and courageous. This, he told himself, was the moment for which he had been waiting. Its flavour assured him that he wasn’t such a fool as he and other people had imagined. All the petty preoccupations of the journey—his struggle with Frangoulis, the hints of discomfort in his relation with the Rawleys, even the imponderable threat of Zahn—were forgotten. For the moment his spiritual world was bounded by the road that climbed before him out of vision and the shadows of the trees on either hand.

Something of the same abstraction must have held the others in the sufficiency of their own thoughts, for half an hour must have passed before he heard the voice of Mrs. Rawley whispering to her husband and a grunted reply.

“I don’t know where I am,” she said. “The shapes of the trees are so queer in the dark. Sometimes it feels like England: you expect meadow-sweet and cuckoos, and then you get a puff of scent that makes you think of lions.”

“Lions? Nonsense! Are you frightened?” Rawley grunted.

“No . . . not frightened. Not a bit. And yet . . .”

She was silent. But the sound of her voice had shattered Antrim’s mood, and the grey light which now came welling in a silent flood out of the East, drowned the last figments of illusion in its increasing clarity, proclaiming Africa, and nothing but Africa, in the black cotton-soil of their path, in the dead, ashen silver of the thorn-trees and the ungainly baobabs that seemed like grey-hided monsters that some enchantment had turned into trees. Deep in the bush, with inexpressible melancholy, a hornbill began its complaint; all other birds were silent or subdued.

The sun leapt up behind. It caught them suddenly in an open space with the woods falling away, and, on either hand, a meadow of heavy-headed grasses; and with its coming, behold, a miracle: the ashen woods, the black track, the grasses,

their own bodies, everything, drenched in incredible amber! It was a flood so piercing in its light, so transforming in its warmth, that it seemed to carry the breath of life in its vibrations, bringing to birth in the grey air myriads of luminous specks that were, in fact, the tremulous wings of living creatures, and, in the blood of Antrim and his companions, waking the smoulder of consciousness to a quick flame. They could dream no longer. It was just as if the influence that quenched the shy life of the bush, the respirations of trees and movements of nocturnal creatures, had also power to unloose the activities of man, to give over the world to his enjoyment during the reign of light.

A shiver of awakening shook the whole caravan. The donkeys tossed their bridles. The sullen *Wagwana* porters chuckled like linnets. The scrape of a match was followed by the cheery fumes of Rawley's pipe. Antrim, who had been walking three paces ahead, turned and joined them. He was no longer alone. Day had begun.

It was the first of many such days in their passage of the coastal belt; for the beckoning hills had been too near to fulfil their promise, and the land rose slowly from the margin of the sea. Each, in essentials, was so little different from the last that in a short time a kind of routine was established.

It began an hour before dawn, when Antrim was roused by the arrival of Dingaan's *mtoto* with his coffee. Supping it, he heard the sounds of a subdued activity: the mustering of men and donkeys in the dark. His own rising was a simple process, for he preferred to sleep on a stretcher bed in the open with nothing but a mosquito net between him and the stars. That of the Rawleys was lengthier, for it implied the complications of a woman's toilet and the striking of the tent in which they slept.

At a quarter past five the caravan was ready for Antrim's signal to start. He marched in front of the Rawleys, carrying a tapered switch of hippo-hide. Close behind him, with a shotgun slung over his shoulder, came Dingaan, his personal attendant, who also carried his rifle. The *mtoto* walked as softly as a cat by the side of Mrs. Rawley, to whom he had definitely attached himself, leading the white donkey with a slack rein. There followed the odorous files of porters, treading warily, with bent knees, beneath the burden of their sixty-pound loads; and, after them, the train of pack-donkeys, scarred, shaggy creatures that plodded slowly and obstinately along the trodden track as though the whole proceeding bored them to desperation. The armed *askaris* whom Antrim had engaged in Mombasa brought up the rear, while Asmani, in his irreproachable slim whiteness, moved swiftly from end to end of the procession, enforcing the fear of Allah with his thick *kiboko*.

In this order they set forth, through the awakening bush, and even if Antrim

never renewed the glamour of that first morning, the hour was always one of mystery and of promise, for he did not know what strangeness the coming of the sun might reveal. It was essential to the life of their beasts and porters that they should keep in touch with the Pembe or its tributaries as long as they could; and this necessity, as luck would have it, favoured their indefinite plans of a direct trek inland toward the high plateau, for in the last fifty miles of its course the river ran due East. For this reason they kept its company for many days on end; and, though they rarely saw it, its presence often declared itself with a surprising reassurance in the line of high, flat-topped acacias, still and preternaturally green, which shadowed its course and rose, like the dense edge of a forest, above the surrounding bush. Sometimes, beneath the high trilling of crickets, their ears became aware of the roar of unseen rapids, a sound that was terrible in its suggestion of the river's dark and solitary strength, yet grateful, as any noise of water must have been, beneath the white-hot bowl of noon.

For the most part the Pembe's banks were edged by defences of thorned undergrowth, impenetrable but for the slashing of the porters' iron *pangas*. Within this rampart grew stunted palms, with expanded leaves that were like the fans that shadow kings in Assyrian frescoes, and these the *Wagwana* would haul back in triumph to make green arbours in the heat of their bivouac. But, as they travelled inland, the approaches of the river always grew more difficult; and tributaries that came winding out of folded hills threw across their path dense screens of striped bamboo and forests of fifteen-foot elephant grass sprouting so densely that a bare hand's-breadth separated their stems.

The penetration of these thickets was a severe test of nerves, for in them the protection of vision was denied. The whole *safari* weakened into single file, thrusting its head, like a timid snake, into a tunnel that was never more than eighteen inches wide, roofed by the meeting leaves and floored with a yellow mat of rotten fibre. Entering these, they felt that they were surrendering themselves to chance; for, in the confusion of backward springing stalks, no rifle could be handled, and a charging rhino, cleaving the grass as if it were butter, could have had its way with them. It was not only the feeling of helplessness and oppression which drenched the miasmic air that made their passage seem like a challenge to Providence: even more disconcerting than this was the silence that muffled their movement. No one spoke as they went; yet the tensivity of apprehension in the minds of all seemed only more tangible because it was not expressed. Each, in his own mind, was thinking: "How long will it last?" silently noting the huge wallows and cleavages that were like the track of a tornado where monsters had lain or charged across the path. For himself, Antrim could have taken the matter lightly; but the responsibility of the woman's

safety weighed upon him so heavily that when, at last, they emerged, through brightening gloom, into a sunlight that was, for this reason, unbearably dazzling, his relief expressed itself in a gaiety as exaggerated and unreal as the sunshine itself. A halt would be called. They would all sit down in the open, talking and laughing together to reassure themselves until their eyes grew used to the light and the tensity of their spirits was relaxed.

Starting before dawn, it was their custom to march steadily until nine or ten o'clock, when Antrim left the others, scouting ahead or on the flanks in search of shade and water for the midday halt. Sometimes when, at the hour of dawn, they chanced on open country, he would break away, skirting the edges of the high scrub where the guinea-fowl roosted or feathery papyrus swamps where wild-fowl lay, in search of a shot. Of guinea-fowl there were plenty. On every side in the early morning they could hear their harsh whistling and the rush of their wings as they whirled downward through the air like driven pheasants.

At halting-time, in the distance, they would hear the shrill of Antrim's whistle, and the watchful Asmani would shift the *safari's* course toward the spot which he had chosen. "*Chini!*" he cried in his high sing-song. Down went the loads; off came the donkeys' packs, and there, beside them, the porters sprawled as though relief had come to them at their last gasp. Even so their labours were not over, for the eye of Asmani had already picked out a dozen of them to lead the donkeys to the river and bring in store of firewood and water for the camp: a scene that always began with grumbles and ended with the persuasions of his *kiboko* . . . persuasions only, for the Zanzibari knew his men and they knew him. When once they were on their feet again, their tiredness disappeared. Laughing and gesticulating in queer angular postures, they took their hacking-knives in hand and trailed away to cut a passage to the water. With them went the three *askaris*, their rifles loaded in readiness to put a bullet in any crocodile that the water-party might offend.

In the distance their shouts died away. Antrim and the Rawleys stretched themselves on their ground-sheets in the shade. As the sky whitened and lowered toward the oppression of noon, there descended on them a drowsiness in which they lay half conscious, feeling that the work of the day was done, hearing, with disinterested content, the voices of the returning porters and then the crackle of lighted brushwood, their appetites quickened by the faint acidity of woodsmoke and the odour of cooking, until the cook, who had hitherto obliterated himself in some obscure corner of the caravan, sent Dingaan's *mtoto* to tell them that the meal was ready.

When lunch was over, Antrim, without a word of explanation, would set out with

his gun and Dingaan in attendance. The man was untiring. He had none of the respect for the sun which he preached to others. Through the early afternoon the Rawleys would doze together; but after a cup of tea, which the *mtoto* brought them, Rawley also became restless and pushed off into the bush with his camera.

Neither of them ever asked Janet to accompany him. With her husband she could understand this, for he knew that she was not really interested in his hobbies, and when she compelled herself to pretend an interest, he grew impatient with her ignorance. But with Antrim it was different. They had so much in common, if only he would admit it. She could walk like a man, and was a first-rate shot. When they had bought the little Purdey in Mombasa he had promised her some shooting. Perhaps he avoided her out of deference for her husband's feelings; but that was stupid, since Rawley obviously didn't want her.

She amused herself languidly by practising her Swahili on Dingaan's *mtoto*, who was so old and shrewd in his childishness, and was shaping into such a perfect personal servant.

"How you can let that black insect come near you beats me!" Rawley would say. But she only laughed at him. It became part of her duty to protect the *mtoto*, whose name was Jumaa, from her husband's dislike.

This idle life, so varied in its mild alternations of movement and well-earned rest that it might well go on for ever without staleness, only achieved intensity when the sun began to fail, when loads and packs were lifted, and the trek began again. At this time Mrs. Rawley usually mounted her white donkey, Antrim and her husband walked ahead of her. All their hearts were lightened by the lifting of the heat. Their tongues were loosened, like the voices of the birds. It seemed like a beginning rather than the end of the trek. It led them, through beauties tenderer than those of dawn, toward the crown of their day: the complete relaxation of bath and dinner, when the swift twilights paled beneath the dominion of the moon and a circle of firelight isolated them from the uncertainties of night. Dazed with fatigue and physical repletion, the three of them sat talking on the edge of the fire until drowsiness compelled them all to silence; and then they would listen to the laughter of the *Wagwana* porters, who shared with the creatures of the bush a strange nocturnal life, their endless modal songs and the twanging of a stringed gourd to the rhythm of which they swayed and clapped their hands. Usually, before nine o'clock, Rawley had shepherded his wife to bed.

It was only when they had left him alone that Antrim had time for his own thoughts, lying upon his stretcher-bed and gazing through the film of mosquito netting at the moonlight or at the fugitive flares and shadows which the dying fire cast upward on the trees. In spite of their seeming calm, those days gave him more to think about than the Rawleys could ever have imagined.

To begin with, they had already passed through eighty or ninety miles of populous country: all that wide valley of the Pembe was scattered with the villages of the coastal tribes that clung, as near as the river's deadly influence would permit them, to the low hillsides that bounded its course: often, gazing northward up one of the wide slades of grass that swept downward to its banks, he had sighted their clusters of reed roofs; and yet, in the ten days of their penetration, he had not seen or spoken with a single native. He and his caravan had been as isolated as if it had been known that they carried the seeds of a plague.

And this was not natural; for, apart from the assurance which Frangoulis had given him that their bargain included a passport to benevolent interest and willing trade through all the area of Zahn's administration, he knew that native curiosity would not have allowed them to pass without eager notice unless some higher power had not marked them with a taboo. This sense of segregation now began to get on Antrim's nerves. At first he had put it down to the kind of shyness one might expect in a native area controlled—"handled" was the word—by such a man as Zahn; but, as day followed day, he began to find it a little sinister. For the present it mattered little. Their supply of provisions was sufficient to carry them for a month or more without drawing on the resources of the country; but when he had made his plans, he had hoped to save these for later emergencies, supplementing them, as the *safari* advanced, by the meal and eggs and fruit that the villages would be ready and eager to trade for his bales of Amerikani. It was possible for the caravan to live on its own substance until it had passed the limits of the apparent boycott; but he was anxious, like a prudent soldier, for his communications, thinking not of the outward journey but of the return. In Africa, as in war, nothing could be left to chance.

Puzzled and apprehensive, he had consulted Asmani, who, in his turn, confessed that he had been troubled. It was strange, the Zanzibari admitted, that on a track which had been frequented for centuries by traders, the natives should be shy. True enough, they had followed one of the old slave routes, paths of sinister memory; but slavery was a terror of old days, and the new generation of villagers might know that they had nothing to fear. It was extraordinary that they should never have been followed by curious crowds; but what seemed still more strange was the fact that even at night-time, in places where the drums of distant villages could be heard, no

natives had visited the porters' camp to gossip on the news of the outer world. At least they might have been sure of visits from the women.

"What do the *Wagwana* say about it?" Antrim asked.

"Nothing. They are *washenzi* savages, as I have told you, Bwana. If we had taken our own porters from Mombasa . . ."

"It's no use talking like that," said Antrim shortly. "You must make the best of what you've got."

Two days later Asmani solemnly informed him that five of the porters were missing. Antrim, by this time irritable, lost his temper.

"You call yourself a *Zanzibari*, and yet you can't even hold your own *wapagazi* in hand! What are the *askaris* doing? If they can't keep awake, you must do so yourself!"

The loss was not quite as desperate as it seemed; for on every day that the *safari* advanced it consumed the equivalent of a load and a-half in food; but this was only the beginning of a series of desertions which the sleepy *askaris*, who took turns to guard the camp at night, seemed unable to check. Among the porters who disappeared with their loads, was one of those who carried the cases of photographic chemicals, marked with a red triangle, on which Rawley had set such store. Antrim didn't give a damn for Rawley's treasure; but the defection of a single porter was now becoming a serious matter. He was getting sick of keeping these annoyances to himself. The comfortable way in which Rawley continued to pass his days, wandering about with his camera and his ridiculous geological hammer, entirely unconscious of the anxieties by which Antrim contributed to his comforts, never stirring a finger or contriving a thought which might make things easier, throwing the day-long entertainment of his wife on to Antrim's hands and appropriating her like a piece of furniture at night—all the selfish devices which Antrim had once considered humorous, but which time had exasperated, made him take a malicious pleasure in telling Rawley of his loss.

But, when he heard him, Rawley became agitated. "The case? Which case? You don't mean it is broken?"

"Not broken. Gone. The beggar made away with it. It was partly your own fault for insisting on their value and making such a fuss about them!"

"Ah! it wasn't broken," said Rawley with evident relief. He burst out into loud, inappropriate laughter. "Think of when he opens it! Chloride of Gold . . . Hydroquinone! I hope he won't drink them." He went on rumbling with childish laughter. "Talking of drink, what about that sundowner, Antrim?"

Since their first scene at Pembeni he had accepted his allowance of spirit

submissively. As Antrim poured out the pangs, he heard the voice of Mrs. Rawley, speaking quietly behind him:

"I have been counting the porters, Captain Antrim. This morning there were fourteen missing."

"Good for you, Memsahib," he answered grimly. "And this one makes fifteen. Quite correct."

"You haven't told us about this?"

"No," said Antrim, "I haven't."

A pause . . .

"It wouldn't be pleasant to be stranded without any, would it?" she asked mildly.

Rawley became alarmed. "What's this . . . what's this? You don't mean to say that there's any possibility . . .?"

"In Africa," Antrim told him, "all things are possible. That's the fun of it. Cheerio!" He raised his glass.

"But this is serious," said Rawley, going red in a fluster.

"Quite right. There are more things in heaven and earth . . . how does it go on? For the moment we're up against it. But that's what one expects."

Mrs. Rawley watched him for a moment in silence. For many days she had been aware of Antrim's irritation. He had shown it in his brusqueness toward Asmani, in the evident difficulty which he found in being polite to herself. That he should put himself out to be polite to her husband she hadn't even expected: the virtues of Rawley, whatever they might be, were scarcely apparent to an outsider, and the two men were so completely different that neither was likely to take the trouble to appreciate the qualities of the other. She, in the curious, fatalistic calm with which she had embarked on the expedition, had been able to watch them, contrasting the untiring, sinewy efficiency of Antrim with Rawley's dreamy incompetence, frankly admiring the one while she protected the other with the almost maternal solicitude which had become habitual. She knew them both so well: Rawley from the uneven experience of years; Antrim because his nature bore so clearly the imprint of the caste to which she herself belonged, that in guessing at his feelings she had only to examine the reactions of her own mind.

Some day, under the stresses of solicitude and hardship, she knew that a clash must come. She had thought it all out beforehand, deciding that though her natural sympathies would fly instinctively to Antrim's side, the claims of pity, her own passionate substitute for love, must compel her to protect the man whose motives she had learnt to understand. In the meantime she had determined to hold herself in a watchful and subdued neutrality, trusting to avert the threat of collision by her skill in

identifying herself with both of the colliding forces.

Now, with a tact that surprised herself, she coaxed Antrim and her husband away from the dangerous subject by an affectation of innocent gaiety. Rawley succumbed without a moment's suspicion—it was pathetic to perceive his naïve dependence on her smiles—while Antrim, still ruffled and cynically aware of her stratagem, constrained himself to accept it at its face value, thinking to himself what a sly little devil the woman was and giving her cleverness a grudging admiration. He wondered if she knew how easily he had seen through her.

But though she had smoothed a dangerous situation and continued to talk of trivial things as though it had never existed, the threat of danger out of which it had arisen still occupied Mrs. Rawley's mind. It did not trouble her to think that Antrim was in difficulties; she knew him well enough to realise that he was built to bear them: that, in effect, was what he was for; but she did feel, and deeply, that he had hardly played the game, according to the rules which they had settled together, in concealing his difficulties from her, his ally. Her pride would not allow her to pass the matter over; and when, after dinner, Rawley began to fidget with drowsiness, and finally suggested that they should retire to their tent, she told him, with calm eyes, that she was not sleepy.

"If you're tired," she said, "you had better go by yourself. I'd like to stay here for a little. Isn't it awfully early?"

"Quarter to nine," said Rawley, looking at his watch. "I think you'd better come along, Janet."

She shook her head. "I couldn't possibly sleep. Don't take any notice of me. I won't disturb you when I come."

Still Rawley lingered. Such a thing had never happened before. He went very red, as though he were struggling for words; but the words wouldn't come. Antrim saw him gripped by throes of jealousy that could not be mistaken. If the man were made like that, his wife had no business to play with him. It seemed to him that it was up to himself to give the poor devil a lead. He rose to his feet.

"Well, I'm off anyway, Mrs. Rawley," he said, amused by the annoyance that came into her eyes.

"Please don't go for a moment, Captain Antrim," she said. "I want to talk to you." Then, as Rawley still hesitated, a little encouraged by the support which Antrim had unexpectedly given him, she added: "My dear Jack, I wish you wouldn't stand there yawning like that. Do go to bed. I won't keep you waiting for more than ten minutes."

"Well, in that case . . ." Rawley began.

"No, no . . . don't wait for me. I've told you I want to talk to Captain Antrim."

Antrim felt himself compelled to be brutal. "Well, you'll have to be quick about it," he said.

"I shall be. Good-night, Jack dear!"

The final word was added as a too-obvious sop to Rawley's feelings; but, taking from it what encouragement he could find, he went. Antrim, still smarting under the gratuitous cruelty of this dismissal, was in no mood for courtesies. All his sympathy was for Rawley, who, strange bird though he might be, had always shown himself inoffensive. The woman had wilfully placed him in the very position that he wanted to avoid. You could never trust them . . . not even the quietest.

"Well?" he said brusquely, as soon as they were alone.

"Put another branch on the fire, please," was all that she said in reply.

He did so, feeling that he was a fool to obey her.

"I suppose you realise," he said, "that you've put me in a deucedly awkward position?"

"Why?" she answered, with a simplicity that should have been engaging.

"That doesn't need explaining. You know why. You've made your husband jealous, and I don't blame him."

"I wanted to talk to you."

"You've had the whole evening to talk in."

"I said: you . . . not him. Do you think I don't know my business after eight years of married life? Do sit down. I can't talk to you if you prowl round the fire like a tiger."

And again he obeyed her.

"It's about these porters," she said. "You kept me in the dark about them; but I'm not quite such a fool as you imagine. Why do you think I'm a fool, Captain Antrim?"

"I don't. Far from it. I think you're an extremely clever woman. A little too clever on occasion!"

"Then why don't you treat me like one? You admit that the signs are dangerous. I thought so myself. It wouldn't be any fun to be stranded here, would it? Why don't you tell me everything as we agreed?"

"After the false position you've put me in to-night I'm not inclined to tell you anything."

"I shall stay here till you do," she said quietly, "and that'll take a lot more explaining than if you're quick about it."

He was forced to laugh at her schoolgirl reasoning. It made her seem so much

less subtle and mysterious that he could almost forgive the way in which she had played him off against Rawley. Besides this, it pleased him to think that she had kept her eyes sufficiently open to notice the numbers of the desertions. He must give her credit for that. Perhaps his anxiety to be correct and to give Rawley no cause for disquietude had made him a little less than fair to her. He sat down beside her and told her exactly how matters stood. She listened in silence.

"But surely," she said, "if we've passed villages you might have gone and seen for yourself what was wrong?"

He laughed. "If I've been once I've been a dozen times. It's curious. They must get wind of my coming. Always the same picture: the whole show deserted; not a soul to be seen but some hag that's too old to do anything but die. Last evening I thought I'd got one. I could hear the *plunk, plunk* of the pestles with which they pound their *mahindi*, and see smoke rising; but when I got there, there was nothing to be seen: only the fire still burning and the hens pecking round at the corn. Not a dog! Of course, it's easy enough for them. They just fade away into the bush."

"I wish you had told me all this before," she said, when he had finished. "What I don't understand is *why* they should avoid us. Is there any possible explanation?"

"None," he told her, "unless they've had orders to do so."

"Orders from whom? Frangoulis?"

"Possibly from Zahn."

"But why from Zahn? We've never seen the man."

Antrim laughed to himself. The story of how he had cleansed Zahn's bed-chamber was embarrassing. He got over it as best he could, saying that Zahn's scheme of decoration was not in the best of taste, and that he had thought best to remove it for her sake.

She smiled slowly. "Did you think that my innocence would be offended, Captain Antrim?" she asked.

"After all, you're a lady," he replied.

"And therefore . . ." she began, a little scornfully, then stopped. "No, it was very charming of you to consider me. So I, it appears, am at the bottom of all our troubles? That's the worst of being a woman. And what a confirmation of all your theories!"

Her tone hurt him. "You're far too clever, as I've told you already," he said; "but the fact remains that you don't understand me in the very least."

"Yes, yes, quite so," she murmured, in what might well have been an elfish imitation of her husband's formula. "We agreed on that a fortnight ago. In any case the thing that matters is what we're going to do. Suppose these desertions go on?"

"Then we come to a standstill. We shall have to feed ourselves."

"But can't we get beyond the limit of Zahn's influence . . . if it *is* Zahn's influence that is troubling us?"

"That's what I hope to do. When we go back we must try some other way. For the present we must go on and on."

"On and on," she repeated. "What fun!"

"Fun?" Now she was beyond his comprehension. "You speak as if nothing mattered."

"Well, does it?" she softly replied, and then, seeing that Antrim could hardly decide whether she were mad or sane, she went on: "You mustn't take me too seriously, Captain Antrim. I'm by way of being a fatalist. What's going to come will come; isn't that so?"

The question came so wistfully, so pathetically, and her face, in the firelight, seemed to him so tender and childlike that Antrim forgot in a flash his suspicions of the game that she had been playing with him, guessing, of a sudden, at the desperate unhappiness which her silences and the disillusionment that showed itself in her infrequent words concealed. He was in danger of lapsing into the sentimental attitude which from the first he had foresworn, and knew it. He could not trust himself to continue the interview; nor could he break it without abruptness.

"Well, that is all," he said. "I hope you're satisfied."

Even his brusque dismissal could not break her mood.

"Satisfied?" she echoed, smiling faintly, as she held out her hand. And on that word they parted.

Still troubled by this dangerous parting, Antrim crawled beneath his mosquito-net. Now that Mrs. Rawley was no longer near him his uneasiness diminished, and in its place he found himself thinking not of her but of her husband. Toward Rawley he now experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling. In effect she had set them at each other's throats like a couple of terriers; a spectacle that might well be amusing to a woman without a heart, but was equally offensive to two men who had neither cause nor inclination for quarrel. He had seen a dark jealousy in the eyes of the departing Rawley, and could not blame him for it. Even if he had been irritated by Rawley, he had no intention of quarrelling with him. Nobody who had listened to the story which Rawley had told him on the *Köln* could have any feeling toward him that was not over-mastered by pity.

In the midst of his irritation at the fellow's uselessness as a partner on *safari* he had always calmed himself with the reflection that Rawley was a creature of a different breed from himself, cramped and twisted by a hellish environment into

shapes that no stranger could hope to modify; and this idea was so firmly fixed in Antrim's head that the way in which the wife differed from the husband seemed only to add to the pathetic side of Rawley's life. In comparison with her dark subtlety Rawley's simplicity became almost engaging. Apart from his inherited peculiarities the man was so inoffensive, never asserting himself—as his wife had done—in matters which he wasn't competent to decide; content to leave the decision to those who knew better; going about his own dreamy business without interfering with anyone.

Nor, in his own line was Rawley a fool. The photographs which he had taken on trek, as well as the flashlights of game that he had brought up from the Sabi reserve, showed that he was a master of his own craft; and technical efficiency of any kind was a quality that appealed to Antrim. What was more, even if he couldn't read a map, Rawley's hammer enabled him to teach Antrim things that opened his eyes to the underlying structure of the country and particularly to the vital question of its waterways. Little by little he had begun to command respect, if not liking. "And that," Antrim told himself, "is what she can't stand. She may be a good wife and all the rest of it; but, like every other woman, she's jealous and can't be contented until she's made him jealous, too, poor devil!"

Endorsing the many points in Rawley's favour, Antrim also realised that apart from the incident of the whisky bottle, which he had almost forgotten, Rawley had shown no inclination toward loss of control which he had led him to expect. All through the trek Rawley had behaved like a lamb, and since this could hardly be natural to him, Antrim was prepared to give him credit for it. He wondered if, in some curious way, Rawley's temperament had not changed for the better. It was possible . . .

To encourage this speculation he remembered a strange incident. On the fourth day out from Pembeni Asmani had had trouble with two of the *Wagwana* who had managed to secrete some bottles of Frangoulis's spirit in their loads. At the morning rally they had been found incapable of work and all through the day they had been driven, like sheep dazed with tiredness, at the donkeys' tails. In the evening Asmani had hauled them, completely sobered, into Antrim's presence, and Antrim, thinking of the future and the encouragement of the others, had decreed that Dingaan, whose shoulders and alien race fitted him for the job, should give them ten strokes of the *kiboko* apiece. All through the inquiry Rawley, whose knowledge of Swahili was still in the stage at which Antrim had found it at Mombasa, listened blandly. But when, a few moments later, he heard the whining of the lash and the porter's cries, he had jumped to his feet in violent agitation. "What is it?" he cried. "What is it? Good God!

What are they doing?"

Antrim explained that the sentence was a matter of discipline; but Rawley could not be reassured.

"What?" he cried. "In cold blood?"

The distinction was intriguing, for all the time that Antrim tried to calm his agitation he could see nothing but the picture of Rawley standing flushed above the *ricksha*-boy at Mombasa with the stump of his broken stick in his hand. By this time the punishment was over; but all through that evening Rawley had sat sullen on the verge of the fire, with fingers clasped nervously and eyes frightened as though, for the first time they had gazed dispassionately into the blackness of his own passionate experience. That evening Mrs. Rawley had been unusually tender with him, and Antrim had liked her for it. Also the incident had thrown a new light on Rawley's character. It shows, Antrim thought, that the fellow is really sensitive—damned sight more sensitive than I am! One has no right to cut him out as if he were a savage. The poor chap's not responsible, and there it is!

And here was Mrs. Rawley, he told himself, a woman who must necessarily know more about her husband than he did, deliberately tempting providence by setting himself and Rawley by the ears. Deliberately . . . for if she had wanted to discuss the porters' desertions she might just as well have done so in Rawley's presence, unless, indeed, she had felt that a knowledge of the whole truth would upset him and wanted to save him from hearing it. That, of course, was the charitable way of looking at it; but, in his present mood, Antrim was not inclined to be charitable. After all, she must be aware of the man's flaming jealousy: he had showed signs of it even toward Dingaan's *mtoto*, to whom she permitted a natural, if injudicious, familiarity; and if Rawley were capable of being jealous of that small rabbit. . . .

No. . . . Whichever way he turned Antrim came back to his original opinion that Mrs. Rawley had acted out of sheer wilfulness, throwing the two men together with the curiosity of a chemist who compounds a mixture of innocent substances in the hope that their reaction will produce a fulminant. A dangerous game, as more than one chemist had found out to his cost! If an explosion followed, she would have only herself to blame. As far as he was concerned Antrim determined that her curiosity should be disappointed.

CHAPTER VIII

1

The impulse by which Janet Rawley had been driven to demand her interview with Antrim was far simpler than either of the motives which his suspicions or his charity had imagined. She had forced him to meet her, careless of any consequences, because, in the disquieting knowledge of the porters' desertions which had preyed on her for several days, she had felt that she was losing touch with the one stable person on whom she had pinned her faith. However cavalierly Antrim might treat her—and the politeness with which he had disregarded her was more galling than any discourtesy—she was determined not to be offended by him; for if she took offence she would defeat the ends of her own necessity. It was humiliating; but had she not been humiliated before: in Mombasa, on the deck of the *Köln*, in Pembeni? In each of these interviews she had been forced, in face of his tolerant cynicism, to define the relation in which her loneliness made it necessary that she must stand to him; they formed a chain of confidences forged, link by link, at the expense of her modesty. That night she had felt that the chain was broken. She had taken fright at an isolation which only a human relationship could abate, and tried, with her usual directness, to recapture the imperfect contact that she had lost. It was dangerous; but the danger was nothing in comparison with her urgent need. When she returned to her tent she felt that she had succeeded.

At what cost she was soon to realise. While Antrim, consumed with resentment against herself and pity for her husband, lay staring at the stars, Janet Rawley was being subjected to a form of torture which familiarity had not made easier to bear. Rawley was waiting for her. He had not undressed. She found him prowling up and down the narrow fairway of the tent with the look of a wounded animal in his eyes. He received her with a silence that was more devastating to her in her present mood than any violence could have been. He could be violent enough on occasion with others: how often had she wished to God that he would be violent with her! Then she could have met him on equal terms and justified herself. Instead of this he merely presented to her an image of injured despair.

She knew that it was useless to calm him with excuses. So, with a heart already made tremulous by apprehension, she disregarded him, beginning to undress, unbraiding her dark hair that drought had made brittle so that it crackled with electricity when her brush swished through it. And still Rawley, standing with his clenched, moist hands, was silent. At last, in a choking voice, he spoke one word:

“Janet. . . .”

It had begun. She laid down her brush with resignation and faced him.

“Yes?”

“Why do you do it? My God! Why do you do it?” he began.

She shook her head wearily. “What have I done? Nothing. You know I’ve done nothing!”

“That man!”

“What man?” she echoed mechanically. She was gaining time, though there was nothing to be gained by time.

“Antrim. But you’re only playing with me. You know as well as I do. Why did you send me away?”

“Why did you go,” she answered, “if you feel like that?”

“Because I love you.” The words which she had awaited and detested, for all the injustice that they implied, were out, and there followed the spate of humiliation and self-pity that she knew so well. “Because I love you too much to stand in the way of anything you want to do. I know the sacrifices you’ve made for me. Don’t think I don’t realise them: they’re never out of my wretched mind. I want to be just. God knows how anxious I am to be just. You’ve a right—a perfect right: I don’t dispute it—to do anything that you like without my complaining. I know what you’ve suffered. Through me—not through my fault . . . through things I couldn’t help. You’ve a right to your liberty. And yet . . .”

“Why do you talk about such things? You know that there’s no need to do so. As for poor Captain Antrim, you know that I’m interested in things that would only bore you. You can live entirely to yourself. It isn’t my fault that I can’t. But why should you work yourself up into this ridiculous state when there’s nothing . . .”

He caught up her word: “Nothing? Nothing? Janet, do you think I’m blind as well as a bore? Do you think I haven’t seen the fellow’s eyes on you? I never look at a woman like that! And the looks that pass between you: smiles, when you think I’m not looking! Isn’t my life enough of a tragedy—apart from you—without your driving me to utter distraction?” He clasped his hands: “I tell you,” he cried, his mouth working piteously, “you’ll drive me mad . . . mad!”

His last words were so shrill that she felt sure that Antrim must hear them. She imagined an awful scene staged in the narrow compass of the tent with black night outside. She took his arm, and he, in his turn, clutched her hand with shaking fingers. She tried to calm him. “Jack, Jack, for heaven’s sake don’t shout like that! You’re behaving like a madman already.”

“And whose fault is that?” he cried, his voice breaking into tears.

He clutched her tightly to him. For a moment he was quieter, as though the mere fact that her body was now in his power steadied him, while she, fragile in his hot embrace, descended into an awful dumb neutrality, only wondering how long it would last. Then his complaints began again; he caught back at the word “nothing” that had stung him before.

“Nothing. . . . You know what I am as well as I do, broken and blasted in my childhood, with nothing but my dreams and you. And Antrim. . . . Isn’t the contrast obvious? Can you pretend that you haven’t seen it and brooded on it? Do you think I haven’t seen it in your eyes? Janet, my darling, don’t pretend. Tell me the truth . . . tell me!”

“There’s nothing to tell you,” she answered wearily, “except that I’m dying for sleep.”

He kissed her wildly. “Ah, if that were true! But it isn’t true . . . it isn’t! You’re like a dead woman in my arms. You shiver when I kiss you; your heart doesn’t beat; it goes dead . . . dead . . . dead! And that’s the awful thing that you can communicate to me. My own heart goes dead inside me. It’s unnatural and ghastly that I should be alive. I have no right to live, no wish to live. You don’t love me!”

The second challenge for which she had been waiting had come. How could she answer it? He scarcely gave her time:

“Yes, you don’t answer. And you’re right. Why should you lie to me? Why should you waste a lie on a poor devil like me, even if it could take him out of hell?” His voice became hoarse and unreal; he pressed his lips greedily on hers. Whisky! she thought, with a sudden chill of reminiscence in her heart, already cold, and then remembered the peg that Antrim had given him.

“Tell me the truth,” he whispered; “you’re too lovely to tell a lie. If you ever love me we’ll forget it . . . only one of my hallucinations. Let’s get it over once and for all. Tell me that you hate me!”

Even if it had been true, her brain was too numbed to command her lips to move, and it was not true. Her soul was too heavily bruised by pity and distress for hate and love. Rawley clutched as eagerly at her moment of pitiful silence as if it were the only thing between him and annihilation. His whole body trembled like that of a man who has suddenly escaped death that seemed certain and dares not look behind him. His shaking hands followed the familiar lines and contours of her body as though nothing but touch would convince him that she existed and had not been changed; his lips caressed her lips, her eyes, her neck, her shoulders. In this reaction of consuming passion nothing less than complete possession could reassure him or make him blind to the more real horror of doubt. She submitted. Why should she not

submit, if by so passionless a sacrifice she could assuage the pain that had shattered him?

And Rawley, forgetting everything that had gone before, began to speak to her in phrases of baby-talk with which they had tricked out their modesty in the first days of marriage. While her body lay there listless under the suffocating night in Rawley's arms, her soul escaped him, transported by a phrase to the cool woods of Withiel and the innocence of an irrecoverable childhood, so that the sudden clutching of his fingers that tried to retain her even on the verge of unconsciousness had no more power to disturb her vision than if she had been sound asleep. And yet she was not only awake but so completely mistress of herself that when, at last, she was sure that her husband slumbered, she disentangled his fingers from hers like those of a sleeping child and walked barefooted to her own camp-bed. As she did so she remembered that Antrim had warned her against doing this for fear of jiggers, the burrowing fleas that swarm in African sands. In the darkness she smiled, for what did Antrim know of her necessities? But this was all the thought she gave to him that night.

2

When Antrim woke in the early morning his plans, agitated by the intrusion of Mrs. Rawley, had crystallised. He sent Dingaan at once for Asmani. There, by the lantern light, he took the head man into his confidence, telling him his suspicions of Zahn's malignant influence and his anxiety for their line of retreat.

"To begin with," he said, "we must put an end to these desertions. It's clear that our methods have been too mild. These fellows have been brought up under the rules of the Germani. Because we treat them decently they think they can laugh at us. In future, if we have any nonsense, it's the *kiboko*. You've got to ride 'em on the curb and keep your whip handy. Understand?"

Asmani understood and agreed.

"Next," Antrim told him, "we've got to go easy with the rations and keep a big reserve in hand. I shall have to do a lot more shooting for the pot; and that means shorter marches, which can't be helped. We've been moving at a good pace with the idea of getting on to higher ground and making a straight line for Lake Tanganyika; but now I'm not sure that we can get so far. On our way back we must avoid the district of Bwana M'bogo (Zahn), who is no friend to us: in other words, we must go South or North instead of West. Northward we shall be getting nearer to Kilima N'jaro and the country of our own people. Southward I know nothing:

you must find out from the *Wagwana* what sort of country that is.”

“Southward,” Asmani told him, “I have heard of a *washenzi* people called the Waluguru of whom there are strange stories. There is a white man in those parts more powerful than Bwana M’bogo. He is called Sakharani. All the *Wagwana* are afraid of him, for he is a great medicine-man. If you go through his country not one of them will follow you.”

“In that case,” Antrim said, “we shall have to go North, and that will probably please you better, for it will take us home to Mombasa instead of to Dar-es-Salaam.”

Asmani smiled negligently. The lines which Europeans had ruled on a map meant nothing to him. His home was the whole coast of Africa from the Juba to Mozambique. It was true that he had a wife in Mombasa; but it was also true that he had another in Zanzibar. For the present, so long as he were paid and fed, it did not matter where he went. The phrase: “It is a *safari*!” and a shrug of the shoulders summed up his philosophy and his attitude toward life.

Meanwhile the caravan mustered. In the darkness Antrim heard the voice of Rawley fussing in kitchen-Swahili over his damned boxes. Ten minutes later they started, and Antrim was relieved to find that the incident of the night before had not upset Rawley’s temper as he had anticipated. On the contrary, Rawley seemed to be in particularly good form, forsaking his usual early morning moroseness to chatter gaily of their prospects. It seemed to Antrim that he was unusually attentive to his wife, frequently touching her hand as they walked together, pressing her to save her strength by mounting the white donkey. It also struck him that Mrs. Rawley was even more unresponsive than usual, and this seemed to him so ungracious and perverse in face of the mildness with which her husband had taken her provocation that he felt it his duty to make amends to Rawley on his own.

“Did the Memsahib tell you,” he asked, “the result of our mysterious conference?”

Rawley gave a low chuckle. “No, I didn’t ask her.”

“Then it’s up to me to explain,” Antrim said. “You remember we were talking of the porter who had made away with one of your cases and that she’d been sharp enough to notice that we were fourteen short? Well, it’s my opinion that we have to thank our friend Zahn for this and other little compliments; so we’ve decided to cut up North after another few days’ march.”

“Yes, yes, quite so!” said Rawley. “We’re in your hands, my dear Antrim. So far it’s been a delightful experience. We’re absolutely in your hands. You must do what you think best.”

Mrs. Rawley walked with lowered eyes between them. Her silence amused Antrim, for his "we've decided" had been a deliberate challenge, seeing that the decision was wholly his own. This, together with his attempt to make Rawley a partner in their consultation, should teach her a lesson.

"Do you know," Rawley went on, waving his arm clumsily to emphasise his inadequate words, "I begin to feel as if we'd made a new start. It's difficult to express. I mean that I feel as if we were entering on a new stage: new country: new thoughts: new everything. How much Zahn had to do with it I don't know; but there's something in the air that suggests that we've left an unpleasant thing behind. Don't you feel that yourself, Janet?"

"No," she answered quietly, and, as Antrim thought, brutally, "I don't in the least."

Rawley gazed at her with puzzled devotion. "I think you will," he said slowly.

"Well, there may be something in it," Antrim encouraged him. "Look at that!"

Their measured progress had brought them to the bald crown of a hill where nothing flourished but the barest brushwood, a couple of twisted thorn-trees and one lonely baobab. Their hilltop was already in sun; the nude patches of earth between the bushes glowed with an intense orange that was sprinkled with angular crystalline pebbles, some blotched blood-red, some glassy with the radiance of pure silica. From the brow of this knoll the land swept downward smooth as the trough of a wave; and beyond this shallow basin, shagged with low forest, rose a chain of mountains, running North and South, so high that their summits were lost in one level band of cloud. Their vastness was a sight soothing beyond words to eyes that had grown accustomed to the low hills of the coast-land where the earth seemed too numbed and crushed by heat ever to rise in mountainous aspirations.

"By Jove!" said Rawley, drawing in his breath like an astonished child. "Look at them, Janet! I wonder what they're made of." He picked up a fragment of crystalline debris and examined it closely. "Quartzite," he said. "Who knows. . . . Up there you might find gold."

He handed the fragment solicitously to his wife. She took it from him, but did not look at it. Her eyes were set dreamily upon the sculptured slopes with their bold slashing shadows of kloof and forest that thinned above into the uniform soft whiteness of cloud. Perhaps her mind had travelled back to Withiel, for when the mist hangs over them at dawn the foothills of all mountains seem curiously alike. So, in a hundred mornings, she had seen the knees of Bryn Ghelli, naked in the sun.

"I think," said Antrim, breaking the silence, "that this must be the edge of what they call the Masai Steppe. At any rate it means high land: plenty of grass and game:

cool nights, too. But you may bet they're not so near as they look."

He was right. All through that morning they jogged downward into the trough of the wave through a kind of sloping park-land, scattered with flat-topped gaunt acacias too tall for shade or for the pasturage of any animal but the giraffe. Sometimes, in evidence of hidden fountains, the thornbush thickened to patches, grey and impenetrable, set with spears of wild sisal that were like the stakes of chevaux-de-frise. The grass between, and all the expanse of park-land were thick with game that warmed Antrim's heart; vast herds of zebra, "like the peppermint balls that stick to the vases of village shops," said Mrs. Rawley, thinking still of Withiel—tribes of hartebeest, each sentinelled by a bull, an anxious silhouette, watching and turning with their every movement: multitude on multitude of slender gazelles, miracles of grace and fleetness, whose beauty made the cheeks of Mrs. Rawley flush with delight. Rawley became so excited that he must needs stalk them with his camera, returning red and drenched with sweat, but always hopeful.

"Where there are so many buck," he said, "there must be lions. Old mountain lions coming down out of the kloofs. I should like to sit up over a kill and get some flashlights. At the same time Janet could gratify her thirst for blood by shooting one."

He spoke teasingly; but beneath his banter there was always the truth of a deep grudge whenever he talked of Mrs. Rawley's shooting. Of course Rawley had a right to his own cranky opinions on the subject of taking life; if he preferred to take photographs, well and good; what Antrim objected to was the fact that while he definitely encouraged her to shoot, his encouragement always resembled a complaint. He couldn't have it both ways. And in any case Mrs. Rawley was a deuced good shot, handling her little Mannlicher as though she had been born to it.

"Would you like to get a lion?" asked Antrim, to cover Rawley's sneer.

She shook her head. "No . . . I'd like to get on," she said.

"Besides," continued Rawley dreamily, "I'd like to know where that quartzite comes from. Interesting country from every point of view."

"But none too healthy," Antrim told him. Even at this time of day, when the sun was well up, swarms of tsetse flies flicked at them persistently whenever they passed into the shadow of trees. The thick coats of the donkeys, he went on to explain, made them fairly safe from trypanosome, but nobody with any sense or experience would halt his cattle in the middle of an obvious fly-belt.

"Yes, yes, quite so," Rawley agreed. "But it seems a pity that you and Janet should miss the chance of so much game. You'd better have a look round when we make a halt, eh, Janet?" He took her hand and fondled it with an unabashed intimacy that was embarrassing.

Yet Antrim took him at his word. However awkward Mrs. Rawley might make things for him, he didn't want to quarrel with her. In a party of three such divisions could not be allowed; and Rawley, unless he were guilty of an incredible duplicity, did not seem to have taken up the challenge which she had offered to his jealousy. After a hurried lunch Rawley strapped on the camera and wandered away down the valley with his hammer. Before Antrim had finished his pipe Mrs. Rawley appeared with her shot-gun. "Ready?" she asked.

"Quite ready," he told her. He himself picked up his Mannlicher, a light weapon of high velocity which he could use if a shot presented itself. Together they passed, in a silence that seemed likely to last for ever, up the valley in the opposite direction to that which Rawley had taken.

For a mile or more they pushed upward through thin thorn-bush, scorched ashen under the midday sun and full of harsh imprisoned odours; a dry wilderness dominated by the skeletons of euphorbias that thrust their fingers upward as in a frustrated desire to reach a clearer air. So late in the day they might just as well have left their guns behind. In all that silence there was not a rustle of life: no sound, indeed, but the crackle of their progress, and the calling of one melancholy distant bird that played on them the tricks of a ventriloquist. Through the oppressive melancholy of the African noon they continued their purposeless exploration, coming at length to a belt of green weeds from which a heron rose languidly.

"Water," said Antrim. "Shall we have a look at it?"

He made a way for her through the reeds, crossing many furrows of caked mud that were like the channels of a South-country water-meadow, until they found themselves, of a sudden, staring through tangles of vines, at the surface of a narrow river, running southward to the Pembe. Here they both stood fascinated; for the stream, darkened by shadows of meeting acacias, was so silent in its smooth-skinned swiftness of flood and boiling eddies that it seemed to Janet Rawley a secret creature into whose terrible strength all the life of the dead thorn-bush had drained; reptilian, malignant. She shivered. "I don't like this," she said, clutching Antrim's arm.

Her sudden words surprised him; for while she stood entranced Antrim's eyes had noticed, up-stream on the farther bank, the dome of a native hut thatched with ragged grasses. The discovery set him thinking so quickly that he hardly realised the admission that her touch on his arm implied.

"It's a village," he said. "I'm jolly glad we came. If you don't mind I should like

to have a look at it.”

“But the river?”

“Where there’s a village there’s a bridge. We must find it.”

She followed him submissively, so intent on taking advantage of the way he made for her, thrusting his body through the tangles of the bank, that she had no time for terror, and at last they came to a spot where a great red tree had been felled by fire in such a way that its upper branches rested securely on the farther shore.

“Well, what about it?” He smiled at her; and even as he spoke she was startled by a sudden plop, as some animal or reptile that had been basking on the trunk dived into the current and was lost.

“If you go first I’ll follow,” she smiled back, with a show of courage.

He hesitated. “There’s no reason why you shouldn’t stay on this side if I cross.”

She remembered the plopping sound. She was frightened to be left alone or to advance; but in any case she did not need to assure herself that she trusted him.

“No, I’ll come,” she said steadily, holding out her hand.

He glowed with pride in her courage, knowing what the decision must have cost her. “Splendid woman!” he said, as he took her hand.

When she came to think of it afterwards she could not remember the details of that crossing: no memory remained with her but that of the dark glancing water that streamed beneath in a dizzy swiftness; the firm, hot clasp of Antrim’s hand; the calm staccato of his voice: “Take care. . . . Steady. . . . That’s right. . . . Now two steps more!”

It was over. They stood together smiling on the bank. Then, without pausing, she followed him over a twilight path of black alluvial soil. On either side deep pits of mire had been sunk in which fleshy clumps of bananas were planted. Gradually the gloom lightened: the charred stumps told them that trees had been felled; and suddenly they came to the clearing of a mealie-patch, trampled and stripped of all grain, stalks bleached and broken rustling dryly in a breeze too gentle for relief, and beyond the mealies the palisade of the island village, torn, blackened by fire, enclosing within its circle other circles of pitiful ashes and charred timber that had once been huts. The only standing roof was that which had encouraged Antrim from beyond the river. In the midst of this desolation the only living thing was a serval kitten, a starved, spitting fury, that arched its spotted back and swore at the first creatures of their colour it had seen. Antrim put his hand to it. It snarled and darted away. He laughed and turned to Mrs. Rawley.

“Afraid we’ve drawn a blank.”

“What does it mean?”

But that was not easily answered. Antrim picked his way between the smoking heaps toward the hut that remained. She stood waiting for him in the scorched, acrid air. Presently he emerged and answered the question in her eyes.

"Germans," he said. "The gentleman, whoever he was, must have taken his siesta there. He left a beer-bottle—Dar-es-Salaam Pilsener—with dregs of brandy in it, an old newspaper and some letters torn in half. I don't advise you to go inside: the stench is pretty awful; but here are the letters, if you can make anything of them. I believe you understand German."

"Yes, Jack and I spent four months in Homburg. Shall I read them?"

"You'd better," he said, "though I can't answer for the contents. You may be shocked."

"We'll risk it," she said, and took the torn letters from him.

"Better come into the shade to read them," he suggested.

The wafts of fire from below, the burning sun above, made the place like a furnace, and she was grateful for his solicitude. She sat down on the trunk of a tree and began to examine the fragments.

"It's rather primitive German," she said at last. "This is a letter written in Oberhausen, wherever that may be.

"My dear Otto, it was a great pleasure to hear from you after so many months. Your father is very weak. . . . Bronchitis all the winter. . . . But now that the Spring has come and the cherry-trees are in blossom he is able to sit out nearly all day. If you could see the old cherry-trees! They make one feel young again even when one is seventy. In three weeks' time our Max is to be married to Elsa Schumacher. Krupps have now made him foreman. On Sundays he comes over from Essen, but Elsa sees more of him than his old parents, as you may suppose. . . ." Need I go on? It's rather heart-breakingly domestic, isn't it? I feel as if I were spying on them."

"Yes. Just look at the signature."

"Anna Zahn."

"Ah, I thought so. His mother, of course. What's the other?"

"It looks like the hand of a schoolboy . . . half the words misspelt. Oh, but this is interesting." She turned over the pages quickly. "Frangoulis!"

"Let's have it!"

"It's an account of ourselves, and particularly of you. Evidently Frangoulis didn't love you. What did you do to Zahn's room?"

"I merely cleared some disgusting rubbish off his walls to make the place fit for you to sleep in. I've told you that already."

“Yes. But from what Frangoulis says, one would imagine that you had committed sacrilege. He is evidently frightened of the result.”

“You’d better read me what he says.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d rather not go into details.”

Antrim was acutely embarrassed. “I’m sorry. I wish I could get hold of the swine!”

“Poor Captain Antrim!” she smiled, half mockingly. “Still, this is more to the point: *‘After this interference with me in the discharge of my duties’*—apparently you’d been busy without our knowing it—*‘I considered it best to send runners on ahead of them to see that they got no supplies from any of the villages on the way. I also gave hints to the porters, so I think their courier—that must be you—will have reason to regret his . . . his behaviour when supplies run short. The man is the worst type of Englishman, and that speaks for itself! Of course, if you wish to do so, you can see for yourself. The woman . . .’*”

“I’m sorry I asked you to read it,” Antrim broke in hurriedly.

“Oh, it’s quite flattering,” she replied. “Still, the point of view isn’t exactly civilised. He says you’re in love with me, Captain Antrim!”

“Damn him!” Antrim blazed.

“Yes, yes, quite so.”

Was it intentional, or had she merely caught a habit? Most of us are unconscious mimics, and this mimicry might well be unconscious.

“But you aren’t, you know: so really it doesn’t matter, does it? Then he goes on: *‘You may prefer to leave them alone. In that case we shall certainly have them on our hands again and anxious, no doubt, to oblige us.’* That’s all that matters. A few tender inquiries about Zahn’s health and nothing else.” She paused. “So now we know where we are!”

“Exactly. . . .”

“In a way it’s a pity that you were so anxious for my innocence.”

“My dear Mrs. Rawley!”

“No, I’m only teasing you. It doesn’t really alter our plans. The sooner we get on the better. Let’s go back to the camp.”

They did so, and this time it seemed to her as if the passage of the tree-trunk bridge were a small matter. Little by little Antrim’s indignation subsided and with it the awkwardness that he had felt on hearing Frangoulis’s assertion that he was in love with her. When he came to think of it, she might just as well have kept that to herself. A modest woman would have done so. And yet the fact that she hadn’t

concealed it was somehow in keeping with her general directness. That was the quality in which she differed from the rest of women as he cynically imagined them; he would be unreasonable if he didn't give her credit for it and admire it. His own inconsistency puzzled him. After all, it *was* rather brazen. . . .

"The thing that impresses me," he said, as they approached the camp, "is that Zahn should have been 'managing' his natives within a couple of miles of us, and us none the wiser. That's Africa all over: the danger and the fascination of it! We're like characters in a classical play with a packed audience that knows the plot looking at us, following all our actions and our words. You know what I mean? It's uncanny. You get a feeling that they're in a position to laugh at everything we do and say, because we're ignorant and they know exactly what's going to happen."

"No, no," she said, shaking her head. "Nobody knows what's going to happen. That's the beauty of it!"

He laughed. "Perhaps you're right. But you know what I mean, about Africa generally? You understand?"

"Oh, perfectly!" she replied.

"I'd better tell your husband at once."

She was silent.

4

An hour later Janet Rawley sat listening to her husband. The news of Frangoulis's letter to Zahn and of Zahn's unsuspected nearness seemed to him far less important than the results of his own exploration. She had never known him so excited. At his feet lay a basket full of geological specimens.

"Quartzite . . ." he was saying. "Janet, do you remember that place of the Drakensburg where we halted going to Sabie. Eland's Drift it was called? There was a regular reef of white quartzite cropping out at an angle, miles on end, just as if some one had laid the foundation of a wall. The fellow told us there was no gold in it, or rather just a trace; not payable, you know. Well, it's just the same formation here. Look at it! . . . Do you see that sparkle? It's not pyrites. It's gold . . . visible gold!"

He handed her a crystalline fragment that he had chipped with his hammer. She examined it with seeming care, but her eyes were negligent, her ears strained to catch the voice of Antrim, who was haranguing the porters in the Swahili that Rawley wouldn't take the trouble to understand. "In future," Antrim was saying, "if I catch sight of a porter that lags behind or strays from the fire at night I shall treat him as if he were a thief and put a bullet in him. At Pembeni you take your orders from

Bwana M'bogo. Here I am your master, and if you don't do what you're paid for you'll find that I can treat you as hardly as the Wadaki. Understand that!"

"If you're not interested, Janet," said Rawley, suddenly flushing, "you may as well give the specimen back to me. It's an important discovery. Every probability of gold."

She pulled herself together. "But we don't want gold," she protested.

"Don't want gold? The world's hungry for gold. The man who discovers a new goldfield is justifying his existence." His voice became irritable: "If Antrim had shown you a thing like this, you'd have been all over him: don't tell me you wouldn't!"

"My dear Jack, I thought we'd finished with that."

Jumaa, the *mtoto*, approached them, grinning, with two cups of tea. Rawley greeted him with a scowl. "If this black insect," he grumbled, "began to talk his gibberish to you you'd pay more attention to him than you do to me." He snatched the cup from the child's hand and upset the scalding tea over his own fingers. Suddenly losing control, he threw the rest in the *mtoto*'s face.

"Blast you, you little monkey!" he cried. The child scampered away, screaming, and dashed blindly into the legs of Antrim, who had approached.

"Hello . . . hello! What's this?" Antrim said.

"Nothing," Mrs. Rawley replied, with lowered eyes.

Antrim looked from her to Rawley, who stood speechless, the great vein bulging in his forehead. "At it again!" he thought. "Why can't the woman leave him alone?"

"Sit down, Jack," Mrs. Rawley placidly commanded; and Rawley sat down, still holding his empty tea-cup.

"Not for long, though," Antrim said. "We must make an early start. I've just been putting the fear of God into the *Wagwana*. Are you ready, *Bwana*?"

His words recalled Rawley from his confusion. "Starting already? I'd hoped to have another look at this reef. I've made an amazing collection of specimens. Gold, my dear Antrim, visible gold! It looks to me like a big thing. I'm not joking. I know what I'm talking about. The whole place should be thoroughly explored, specimens taken and assays made." He grew more excited. "I've been talking to Asmani about it. One of the porters comes from this district. He says there are plenty of villages; and that means labour on the spot. There isn't a German settlement within forty miles . . . I've made notes of everything," he went on. He pulled out the Chemical Notebook and began to read. "Yes. . . . This river is called N'dalo. Asmani says that means Sleeping Place. Then there are villages called Muhesa, Musasi and M'doe. The people hate the Germans like the devil. That's all to the good. Down the river there's another village called Sijui."

"Sijui," Antrim interrupted, "is Swahili for 'I don't know.' I expect the rest of the porter's information is equally valuable."

"That makes no difference to the gold," Rawley protested. "Look here, Antrim, I could do the whole job in a week. What's a week? We have months in front of us. The thing may be worth millions."

"Can't be done," said Antrim firmly. "Too much fly and too many Germans to be healthy. You may think Mr. Zahn's a joke, but I assure you he isn't."

"You'd better leave me behind with some porters."

"No, no, that's impossible. Against your probability of gold you have to set the safety of your wife."

"Well, I suppose you know," Rawley admitted reluctantly. "Perhaps we may get another opportunity. . . ."

"Perhaps," Antrim agreed.

In half an hour they were off. Asmani had already found the ford where the dark river expanding itself in beds of papyrus broken here and there by the wallows of hippo. The muddy track was pitted with the imprints of their huge feet and with the finer spoor of innumerable light hoofs which Antrim's hunter's instinct made him reluctant to leave. The *askaris* had collected huge brushes of palm-leaves, with which they beat the water of the ford to scare the crocodiles. The shallow itself was opaque and whitish-green, like waters stained with china clay.

"Cornwall again," Janet whispered to her husband.

"The same formation," Rawley grunted. "Everything points to gold."

She crossed the river on her white donkey. Jumaa held the rein. The child was still scared and very quiet, squinting at Rawley out of brown-blotched eyes; but he had nothing to fear, for Rawley was too full of his own grievances to notice him. He plodded along with a sullen, suffused face, until they had left the swamp behind and the track began to climb.

Then, with the stimulus of drier air and a sense of relief that always comes with evening, the spirits of the whole caravan lightened. They began to feel as if indeed they had escaped from the valley that was stale and sinister. In front of them the slope of the mountain swept down from shoulder to knee, and what, in the distance, had seemed a dense forest revealed itself as a smooth park-land, with open glades checkered by the moving shadows of game that melted away as they advanced. The whole slope thrilled with a gentle awakening of bird song; each low acacia was slung with the wicker bottles of the weavers, or misted with the opaline tissues of some caterpillar that made its cocoons in the manner of the silk worm. The birds were bold, and sang as if to welcome them; but for the insatiable flicking malice of the

tsetses their whole progress was golden and triumphant. Only the game were shy. It was with difficulty that Antrim, creeping forward, managed to get a shot at a zebra. From the brow above them he signalled his success; and when they heard him the *Wagwana*, who seemed to have benefited from his oration and even to have caught a little of that sublime evening's infection, threw down their loads, in spite of Asmani's protests, and stampeded toward the kill, laughing and shouting: "*Nyama . . . nyama!*" as they ran. A load was detached from one of the donkey's packs and distributed; in its place they slung the piteous striped carcass that they had already disembowelled.

Rawley, eager with his camera, was interested.

"I wonder what it tastes like," he said.

"Better try," Antrim laughed. "Once in a lifetime's enough. It tastes just like the smell of a stable; but that makes no difference to them."

On they went. For a moment the trees that scattered their horizon were bitten out in inky purple against a fiery orange sky.

"Like molten gold," Mrs. Rawley murmured, and was sorry a little later, for gold was still a tender subject.

"You know perfectly well, Janet," Rawley irritably corrected her, "that molten gold isn't that colour at all. It's green. Don't you remember?"

"He shouldn't snap at her like that," Antrim thought, "even if she deserves it." Then he was angry with himself at having been disturbed by such a trifle. After all, it was no business of his.

But by this time, as though it were weary of its own heat and swiftness, the sun had plunged downward, and the flaming sky had cooled to a quiet green that truly resembled the oily shimmer of liquid gold; and a little later the trees, that were a kind of spindly croton, seemed to grow taller and the dominant mountains to subside into a vague darkness, chill and mysterious. That evening they could go no further. The porters scattered, trampling, and hacking at the undergrowth with their *pangas* till the still air was full of a green and woody odour; and there, in a cleared circle that was like a stage woodland, they lit their fires and pitched their tents.

CHAPTER IX

1

So for two days. The whole *safari* was in need of rest; but Rawley set to work at once with his hammer and his pans, crushing the rock he had collected at N'dalo and making rough assays. Whenever he left his work he was absorbed and excited. "You've no idea how big a thing we've missed," he said. "I shall never be happy until I get back to that river. Supposing some other prospector came along while we were away."

In the bitter small hours of the third night Antrim was awakened to the sense of danger by a touch on his shoulder. He knew better than to make any sudden movement, since the cause of his awakening might be some snaky bed-fellow; he lay still and frozen, cautiously opening his eyes, and saw not a snake but the figure of Janet Rawley bending over him.

"Hello," he said quietly, "what is it?"

"Jack," she replied. Usually she spoke of Rawley as "my husband." "He's ill. I'm rather frightened."

"I won't be a minute," said Antrim. "You'd better go back to him."

But she took no heed of his advice, standing by while he wriggled out of his dew-drenched sleeping bag and pulled on the mosquito boots that were tucked away under his pillow. The hump-backed moon had risen, a remnant, tarnished and fatigued, of the shining crescent at Pembeni. It showed him Mrs. Rawley, herself as unsubstantial as moonlight, with a pale green shantung kimono wrapped round her, the still silvery trees that seemed to watch them, the undergrowth hoary with dew as with rime. At a glance one would have said that frost had stolen upon them unawares.

They walked without a word toward the tent. Rawley was lying on his back, his hands clasped to his forehead, the blankets trailing on the floor. The lantern was flaring at his elbow, filling the tent with an odour of petroleum; but he had not noticed it. He lay blinking at Antrim, taking his presence as a matter of course.

"My God, the heat!" he muttered. Janet bent to lift the blankets from the earth, and this seemed to rouse him. "What are you doing?" he cried. "Leave it alone! Can't you see I'm suffocating? Do you want to kill me?" Without a word she folded the blanket on her own bed.

"Have you a thermometer?" Antrim asked.

She found one and gave it to him, quickly, silently.

"Put this under your tongue," Antrim commanded.

Rawley stared at him obstinately. Antrim had seen that look of sullen grudging once before in the eyes of a buffalo bull so wounded that it had only strength for hate. "And that's how he really thinks of me," he thought. For a moment it seemed as if Rawley were going to make himself awkward. Then, suddenly, he laughed. "Doctor, too, eh? It seems to me, Antrim, you're an Admirable Crichton!" He took the thermometer and plunged it in his mouth, watching Antrim anxiously when he removed it and held it to the light.

"What is it?" he asked quietly. "Why don't you tell me what it is? I'm not a child. I've a right to know."

"Hundred and two," Antrim told him. "Nothing to shout about. Just a go of fever."

"Malaria?" Rawley grunted.

"That's it. More or less what we all have to expect."

For a moment Rawley lay silent, contemplating his state with a kind of morbid satisfaction as though he had achieved something uniquely romantic. Then he became voluble, describing his symptoms in order and detail. What impressed him most of all was the violence of the shivering fits with which he had wakened.

"I thought I'd shake the bed down," he said; "but Janet slept through it all like a top. That's the result of a quiet conscience!" As he spoke he glanced at her significantly and then at Antrim.

She only sighed. "What are we to do?" she asked.

"Keep him well covered. No nonsense about suffocation: it's a cold night, and the warmer he's kept the better. And quinine. Give him twenty grains at once."

"I've been cramming in quinine for the last month," Rawley protested, "and a lot of good it's done me. I don't believe in quinine. A man in Mombasa told me that the only thing for fever is whisky."

Antrim laughed in spite of himself. "You shall have a double ration when you're convalescent," he said. "For the present quinine's the thing;" and then, as he saw Rawley's lips preparing to grumble: "My dear man, you needn't think I know nothing about it. I've had some! I wish I hadn't. Twenty grains to begin with."

"These are five grain tabloids," said Mrs. Rawley.

"Very good, Memsahib. Carry on! If you want anything else you can call me. You'll promise? In any case it's nearly four o'clock; in another two hours it will be light."

She promised, and he left them, stepping out of the tent which Rawley's fever seemed to have heated, into the frosty moonlight. It was so late that he was tempted

to rouse Dingaana and scout along the edge of the forest on the chance of a shot; but though he knew that no emergency was likely to arrive, Rawley was unaccountable, and the thought of the woman's loneliness swept the idea out of his mind. "She's in for a thin time, poor kid!" he thought as he crawled back into his bag.

Of course, if any one were going to have fever, Rawley would be the first; and the devil of it was that if the attack were severe, as it might be in virgin blood, it would hold them static on the edge of the high plateau for a week or more.

So far they had only reached the belt of forest that clung to the seaward front of the escarpment. Mercifully they had left the choking coastland behind; the chilly night told him that they had at last reached highland air; but whether, with the vapours of the plain, they had also shaken off the spiritual miasma of Zahn and Frangoulis was another matter. This, the new day that was so long in coming would prove to him; meanwhile, still shadowed by an indefinite anxiety, he made plans for a more permanent camp on the summit.

Rather than that the *Wagwana* should remain idle with time on their hands to think of Zahn's instructions, he determined to set them to work at daylight in building a grass-roofed *banda* in which Rawley might finish his attack with reasonable comfort. He himself, as soon as the more urgent symptoms abated, would explore the country for game. The anxieties of this uneasy *safari* had so far prevented him from getting the shooting to which he had looked forward. It had sounded like a picnic at first . . . but never again!

Dawn came, and soon the edge of the woodland echoed with the sound of *pangas* felling the uprights for the new huts. At breakfast time Mrs. Rawley, large-eyed and pale, appeared, telling him that her husband was certainly better. After much grumbling he had taken his quinine and fallen asleep. She seemed so deeply concerned that Antrim was more sorry for her than ever.

"You really needn't worry, you know," he told her. "It's just a matter of a few days. He may be restless, just because people won't understand that they've got to go through with it. In any case I shall stay here, so that you can call me if you want me."

"No, no," she protested swiftly, "don't do that. I'm used to . . . difficulties. If you had thought of leaving the camp you must go. The *mtoto* will look after me."

She was so urgent that he admitted he would like to see where they were, leaving Asmani in charge of the builders. "You are taking quinine yourself?" he asked her.

"Religiously."

Grave and courageous, she left him, and when he had given his last orders to the

mnyapara he whistled for Dingaan and set out to see into what strange place the night had received them. The wood on the edge of which they had encamped was now full of level sunlight that dissolved the crowns of the crotons into a soft aerial haze and dazzled the clearings with crossing bars of shadow. Soon the trees thinned, and Antrim pushed forward to the edge of the new country. He saw beneath him a huge plain, a steppe so wide and so quiet that it seemed like the basin of some inland sea or the muddy estuary of a monstrous river flawed by shadows of cloud. But in that sky there were no clouds, and the dapplings of the yellow sea's surface were patches of bush that varied between a filmy greyness and a density greater than that of any shadow. On every side this plain faded into the bases of hills that were like low, level cliffs; dark, flat-topped hills, range beyond range monotonously repeating the same horizontal formula until the last of them was lost in the hot blurr of the horizon. It was a landscape overcharged with the sadness that is in all great spaces; but Antrim warmed to its familiarity. The unfriendly coastlands lay behind him; this was the African highland as men know it and love it from the Limpopo to the Nile. He was at home again in its smells, in its sense of freedom, in the delight of its dry, thin air.

The ground dipped to a *nullah* where water tricked over flat boulders to thicken in a series of pools. He heard voices; the cackle of women, water-carriers with great gourds on their heads and babies strapped behind them. He called to them. Suddenly, like cicalas, with one accord they stopped their shrilling and looked; but the fact that they did not stampede in fear told him that he had overshot the track of Zahn. He approached, and then they grew more timid, moving quietly away like a herd of kongoni that is only half alarmed, moving and turning and looking. Antrim followed steadily. He came so near that he could catch the breeze of pungent vegetable oils in which their skin aprons were sodden and see the watch-spring ornaments of copper wire that loaded their necks and ankles. His pursuit became a pastime to them, for when they had reached a safe distance they would stop and form a circle, clapping their hands, stamping and dancing; but as soon as he neared them they picked up their gourds and ran.

So, on the edge of a thicket, in the greyness of which their contours were blurred and lost, he came upon a village of beehive huts surrounded by a dry-grass palisade. Dingaan went forward as ambassador, and in a moment an old man appeared carrying an enormous spear too heavy for his wasted sinews. With him came two naked boys, each armed with bow and arrows. The old man was dignified and friendly. Taking their cue from his attitude, others clustered round; young men, each armed with a spear made in rude imitation of those that the Masai use; the women

water-carriers, no longer shy; a swarm of naked children. All seemed well-fed, healthy, contented; among them Antrim saw nothing of the despair and degradation that had shocked him at Pembeni. The old man was willing to trade.

“But by the next moon,” he said, “you would not have found us here. Our young men are out in the country keeping watch. This is the season when the Masai come South with their herds; and then it is time for us to take to the woods. The Masai are like locusts. They eat up all the land till there is not a blade of grass left. The game warn us; they know as well as we do when they are coming. Then when the Masai have passed, we come back here again and wait for their return.”

They were a small tribe, Antrim found, perhaps twelve villages in all, scattered along the edge of the escarpment woods. He left them well contented with their harmless friendliness, arranging that messengers should be sent to the camp to trade their mealies and milk and poultry for his bales of calico. On that highland even the heat of noon was unoppressive. For the first time since they had left Pembeni he breathed freely. Even the weight of Rawley’s fever lay lightly on him. “Now,” he thought, “we shall begin to live.”

2

It was easy and natural for Antrim to feel elated by the sudden cessation of strain; but for Janet Rawley life was not so easy. Rawley’s attack of malaria was a heavy one; the subtertian parasite provokes a violent reaction in the blood of men who are fair and robust. What she suffered during the four days in which the fever held him, when he lay flushed and shivering with a head that ached to splitting, deaf and dizzy with quinine, Antrim could never have imagined. In the few moments that Rawley’s jealousy spared her for rest she found a certain relief in taking things lightly; Antrim had never found her more composed or more natural; but once in the shadow of the little *banda* to which, in spite of his protests, Rawley had been carried, she knew nothing but distress.

Not that she rebelled against her imprisonment; her standard of duty compelled her to accept it without question. Even if she did not love him she was shocked and moved by the spectacle of this big man, who had never been ill before, suddenly overwhelmed and delivered into her hands like a sick child. It was a new experience; and if, before, his emotional weakness had roused in her instincts of pity and of protection, this new, physical helplessness, this absolute dependence, awoke in her an instinct, half maternal, that would have touched her even if she had not felt that she was bound to be generous.

All through the day he lay with eyes closed against the faint yellow light of the *banda*, with eyes closed and hands groping for hers. He was so quiet and pitiful. Sometimes, if she moved her hand away from him to relax the strain of an unnatural position he would take alarm, thinking that she had gone. Then he would call her name loudly and open his eyes, staring round in apprehension until he discovered that she had not left his side, and her hand would clasp his again with a pressure that was wrong from her by some emotion deeper than consciousness.

Her mind became so acutely sensitive to the discomfort of others that, even when Rawley should have exhausted it, she had tenderness to spare, and Antrim received the benefit of her surplus. She was sorry for him because he was now left so much alone; and the habit of self-sacrifice had become so automatic that it seemed to him almost as if she must think that he, too, were sick and needed her attention. Her solicitude for his comfort pricked his conscience, making him feel that he had misjudged her. Rawley's illness had revealed the real beauty of her nature.

But when, at night, she left Antrim sitting alone by the fire, she knew that her trials would begin. At night Rawley infallibly awakened. The mind that, in the heat of the day, was content to drowse, lulled into confidence by the touch of her hand and the sound of her voice, became active and excited. His eyes brightened; he talked incessantly; his imagination flushed and darkened with quick successions of exaltation and dread. The exaltation made her frightened for his reason, the fears infected her with their own terror; for the fumes of fever inspired him with the communicable emotions of a great actor; and through all his talk, whether it were darkly rational or fever-flushed, ran, like a thread of fire, now smouldering, now white-hot, his bitter jealousy of Antrim, his resentment against herself, the woman he adored but could never possess.

He showed it in paroxysms of intolerable self-pity. It was as though he thought that by abasing himself he could move her most deeply. And perhaps he was right: for the chords of her pity were strung to a pitch of extreme sensitiveness. If it gave him any satisfaction to make her suffer, he certainly succeeded.

One night he started up suddenly, clutching at the air in the grip of a suffocating dream. "Janet, I'm dying . . . I'm dying!"

She, too, had dropped off for a moment to sleep. Her dazed mind accepted his words as literally true. She made straight for the door of the *banda*, thinking to call Antrim. "Janet . . . where are you going? Don't leave me!" he cried.

She returned and took his dank hand. "A nightmare," he said; "I thought I was gone!" He began a feeble chuckle that was like a sob. "A nightmare . . . yes. I thought you'd left me . . . Where were you going?"

“To call Captain Antrim.”

“Antrim, Antrim, Antrim! Always Antrim! All the time that you’re with me here . . . even when you’re holding my hand . . . it’s Antrim you’re thinking of. Isn’t that true? Isn’t it?”

“You know it isn’t true.”

“And if I’d been really dying,” he went on, “you’d have run to him like that. I suppose that’s what you’re waiting for, the two of you?” He pressed her to answer. “You can’t deny it!”

“My dear boy, don’t talk nonsense!”

“*My dear boy!* Why do you use that word? Why do you call me ‘dear?’ D’you think you can deceive me by a word like that? Surely you don’t imagine I’m quite such a fool?”

She could not answer him without giving him another opening, and so he went on talking to himself.

“If I’d really died there’d have been some sense in it. I’ve nothing to live for; nothing. I’m finished. Death would be a mercy, it’s only prolonging an agony to go on. Even if I get better now, what can I do? I’ve no purpose in life; nothing I care a damn for but you. Then I shall see you together; you and Antrim. Why were you ever cruel enough to marry me? Cruel? Criminal! It’s a crime to marry a man you don’t love: do you realise that?”

She did not answer, and for a little while he was silent. Then he went on dreamily, dispassionately:

“I’ve just remembered what that man said in Mombasa. What was his name? You must remember his name. Help me! My wretched brain’s no use. Why don’t you answer?”

She shook her head. How should she know the name he wanted.

“Kilgour!” he cried suddenly, triumphantly. “Of course. His name was Kilgour: another of these Irishmen. If I were superstitious I’d think he knew what was coming. ‘Africa’s the easiest place in the world in which to get rid of a wife.’ That’s what he said: and what’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Easy . . . easy isn’t the word! Well, well, I can oblige you. What could be simpler? All I need do when it’s too much . . . too much to bear, is just to walk away into the bush and lose myself where nobody could find me except the vultures. It wouldn’t take long in this damned wilderness. One can only die once, and thirst’s as good as any other way. Think how touchingly Antrim could console you! And you, I suppose, would pretend that you needed consolation. By the way, my will’s at Baring’s. All in order. You get everything without conditions.”

She could stand it no longer. "Don't Jack!" she cried, and then, unable any longer to contain herself, she hurried from the tent into a night that was pitch dark but for the milky incandescence of Magellan's clouds. In the distance a hyæna howled. The camp fires had gone out; the porters slept. Antrim slept. But if he had been awake it would have made no difference. Standing there in darkness she felt the highland cold penetrating her body; for she had left Rawley's side with no cover but her silk kimono; and yet she could not move; knowing that she had no refuge except in Rawley's presence. She grew colder and colder; the pressure of cold air closed like a vice about her throbbing temples. She began to cry quietly to herself, suppressing the sounds of the sobs that gripped and shook her until they seemed distant and unreal, like the sound of a baby wailing in the next room.

Then of a sudden, an icy shiver quivered down her spine; her limbs began to shake against her will. She thought: How funny that they should behave like that! What can it be? Why, of course it's fever. Just like Jack! How stupid! As she went shivering back to the tent she felt a curious, light-headed impulse to laugh.

It was providential that Rawley, exhausted by his efforts of self-pity, had fallen asleep. She moved about on tiptoe for fear of waking him, taking her temperature, which proved to be one hundred and three, and swallowing five tablets of quinine. Antrim had given Rawley only four; but she could take no risks. It was unthinkable that she should be really ill; for in that case there would be no one but Antrim to look after them both, and that would be too humiliating. She pictured herself lying helpless on the stretcher bed, she and her husband with the tent-pole between them, and Rawley following Antrim with his jealous eyes whenever he came near her. Hour after hour she might lie there unable to escape from Rawley's unending querulousness: and poor Captain Antrim—it was in these words that she always thought of him—overcome with embarrassment. Heaven knew what might happen; for in his present mood Rawley was capable of saying any enormous thing that came into his mind.

She could not afford to be ill. "I won't be ill," she told herself. "Besides, I never *am* ill. I'm the strongest person in the world. Even if I really have an attack of fever I can fight against it so that nobody need know."

Her teeth began to chatter. She clenched her jaw to stop them. "Mr. Arrumstrong!" she thought! "That's what he used to do!" and was overcome again with that weak impulse to laughter. A disordered vision of Withiel flickered through her brain. Withiel. . . . Where was Armstrong now, and what would have happened if she had married him? There lay Withiel, close-huddled in its woods beneath misty constellations that she could not even see: northward, over the curve

of the spinning globe. And here was she, shaken with fever on the crown of Africa! Mysterious world. “*What is this singing in my ears now that I come to die?*” Quinine, of course!

So, in swift alternations of fire and ice, or drugged sleep and tempestuous vision, the night wore on. About dawn the voice of Rawley roused her, calling her name. The air swam as she crawled out of bed.

“I’m better,” he whispered. “I feel better. Not myself, but better. May I have a drink?”

She poured him water from a canvas *chagghal* slung from the tent pole. Its chill condensed the heat of her hands on the outer surface of the glass. He drank it. “Ah, that’s good,” he sighed. He was mild and biddable like a sick child.

“Don’t go!” he entreated, as she took the glass from his lips. “Don’t go: I feel as if I’d lost you—just as if I hadn’t seen you for weeks.”

He put out his arms and drew her downwards to him, pressing her body to his breast, pricking her cheek with his unshaven beard.

“Janet, my child, how you burn! It’s as if you were on fire!”

She took fright.

“No, no, it’s you who are cold. There must almost have been frost in the night. The water in the *chagghal*’s like ice. Look how the air has condensed on the side of the glass.”

This gave her a chance to escape from him which she took eagerly. With trembling hands and legs that quivered under her she dressed, secretly swallowing another dose of quinine. Rawley’s eyes, in their newly awakened mildness, watched all her movements so closely that she had to swallow the tabloids without water under cover of brushing her hair. Their bitterness nearly made her choke. Then she threw open the fly of the tent and began Rawley’s toilet. It was a delicious luxury to feel the coolness of water again on her burning finger joints; but when she had finished with him it seemed as if she had no strength left to carry her to breakfast with Antrim. Somehow or other it must be done; for if she suddenly departed from her custom he would become suspicious; so she pulled herself together and, walking on air, managed to reach the new *banda* in which they took their meals.

All through a breakfast that seemed interminable, she was praying that she wouldn’t faint at his side; but Antrim, in spite of his customary politeness and his tender inquiries for Rawley, was less observant than usual. “Perhaps he, too, has fever,” she thought, “and is trying to conceal it from me. What a ludicrous couple we are!” Anything was good enough to distract his attention from herself, so she asked him pointblank what was the matter.

It gave her a little thrill of satisfaction when he answered her directly. A week before, he would have put her off with a joke.

"It's fly, Memsahib," he told her.

"Fly?" she asked him, genuinely puzzled.

"Tsetse fly. *Glossina morsitans*, your husband would call it. Don't you remember those persistent little devils that followed us down in the valleys? It's another debt we owe to Master Frangoulis. He must have known perfectly well that we were going through a fly-belt. That's why he provided us with donkeys' transport. The donkey is usually pretty resistant: got a thick skin, you know; but our poor brutes have had a pretty heavy dose of the poison. I expect the tsetse gets them on the nose and lips. At any rate they're showing signs of *trypanosoma* already. Perhaps they were infected when we bought them."

"And what does that mean?"

"They'll be dead in a fortnight; so you'd better give your husband my compliments and ask him to hurry up."

"But if we've been bitten. . . . Isn't there some connection between tsetse and sleeping sickness?"

"Don't worry your head about sleeping-sickness," Antrim laughed. "That's another kind. So you can cheer up!"

"So if we don't start soon . . ." she began.

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Hurry up and get him better. You don't look any too wonderful yourself." He laid his hand on her arm. "You're hot, too . . ."

She took her arm away from him quickly. "No, no," she said vehemently, "I'm perfectly fit. The coffee was scalding, you know."

She escaped; but Antrim's hand still burned with the heat of her arm, and though he had a wholesome dread of the mysterious ailments of women, he didn't accept her excuses. For once he found dissimulation admirable. "Plucky little devil!" he thought, and determined, at the same time, to keep an eye on her lest her courage should end in collapse.

Between the fever and the two of them Janet Rawley had a thin time. It was easy, though not politic, to keep at a distance from Antrim's keen eyes; but her husband was always with her. Luckily, even in his convalescence, his mind was so carefully concentrated on his own symptoms that he had no eyes for hers. Nothing that he noticed about him was important except in its relation to his own state, and the languor which compelled Janet to lie for hours on her stretcher bed with eyes closed was to him no more than the commendable result of the strain she had suffered in nursing him. So she went on doggedly, smiling at both of them, stuffing

herself with secret doses of quinine that made her deaf, and hoping for the best, dreading the day when the effort of starting might reveal her real weakness.

During that week of unnatural activity and harassed relaxation her chief comfort was the faithfulness of Dingaan's *mtoto*—Jumaa—"Man Friday," as she literally translated him—whose eager service relieved her tottering feet. The child was tireless. All through the day he sat on his heels at the door of the *banda* listening for her voice; she had only to whisper, and he was at her side; and at night he would slip inside, unnoticed as a shadow, and curl himself up at the foot of her bed in a place where Rawley couldn't see him. There he would sleep like a dog with one eye open waiting for the whispered: "Jumaa!" to rouse him. The devotion of this slip of blackness, so completely personal, supplied her with the human relationship which in her husband's case she could not, and in Antrim's she dared not seek.

Rawley, whose egocentric soul could not tolerate anything that divided her interest in himself, was stirred to fury whenever he saw the *mtoto*. She found herself involved in shamefaced schemes to protect Jumaa from his violence. One morning he discovered that the child had slept inside the *banda*, and worked himself into a fury.

"I will not have this stench of nigger inside the *banda*," he cried. "Understand that, Janet, once and for all. Outside you can do what you like with him. This is your bedroom. Have you no sense of decency?"

"Do you think Jumaa also is in love with me?" she asked, succumbing for one moment to bitterness.

"If you want to avoid trouble," Rawley told her darkly, "you'd better keep him away."

She knew what that meant. She would have warned the *mtoto* to keep himself well out of Rawley's reach; but this was unnecessary; ever since the incident of the scalding tea the child had taken care to protect himself. But it seemed to her all wrong and humiliating to herself that she should have to think of such a thing: Rawley was so huge and malignant, Jumaa so inoffensive and small. "Jack has the nature of a bully," she thought; and then, remembering old Mr. Rawley, was suddenly sorry for him.

To these anxieties another was soon added, this time by Antrim. Day by day he inquired more eagerly about Rawley's condition. "He really must pull himself together," he said. "We can't stay here for ever. It's time we were making a start."

She listened to him languidly. "And what about me?" she thought. And, then, suddenly, he began to tell her that the donkeys were dying. "Like flies," he said; and when she was tempted to joke with his words and say she wished to goodness the flies *would* die; but even as she opened her lips she heard the cries of the porters

driving out the donkeys to graze and saw the wretched remnant stumble past with pitiful hung heads and listless limbs. And suddenly the expanse of plain that their camp commanded lost all its promise of freedom and movement and took on the likeness of a huge prison. She felt the weight of Africa closing in on them, not darkly, but in a doubly pitiless mockery of light. She dared not think of it.

"The porters are all right?" she asked.

"The porters are all right . . . at present," he replied.

"And my husband is much better. Yesterday he sat out a little in the *banda*: to-night he may dine with us in the open."

"That's good. And, by the way, your own donkey seems all right so far."

A consolation: for in her present state no power on earth could compel her to walk.

3

Suddenly, to her relief, Rawley took it into his head that he had recovered. His steps were still as uncertain as his temper; but obstinacy compelled him to pretend that there was nothing the matter with either outside the imagination of his companions. He became restless and impatient of their delay, which he attributed to Antrim's caprice rather than to his own illness.

"There's no reason," he said, "why we shouldn't start to-morrow."

"There's every reason," the immovable Antrim replied. "You couldn't stick four hours of marching, my dear fellow."

"I could ride one of the donkeys," Rawley maintained.

"The donkey wouldn't thank you. There's not one strong enough to carry you." Antrim explained that the beasts were fly-stricken and Rawley clutched at a new grievance, suggesting that this was the result of Antrim's own negligence; trotting out his book-learned knowledge in support.

"The tsetse," he said, "only bites in the day time. At night it sleeps on the underside of leaves. Obviously we made a mistake. We should have marched at night."

"And tied the donkeys up in our mosquito nets to feed when we halted," Antrim suggested. He was determined not to lose his temper at any cost.

"Why don't you buy new donkeys from the village?" Rawley persisted. "The expense doesn't matter."

Antrim flushed under the irritation of the phrase, but controlled himself.

"Donkeys don't grow like bananas," he replied. "These aren't any to be bought,

—so that's that."

So, for three days, Rawley consumed his restless weakness, sitting out in a long chair under the crotons smoking and playing with his notebooks, staring with resentful eyes at the sun-drenched plains, watching Janet and Antrim like a cat at a mouse-hole whenever they were together.

She was thankful, in a way, that his convalescence was so prolonged, for this gave her a chance of recovering her own strength. Day by day her natural suppleness returned, until she, too, began to grow restive. What puzzled her more than anything was the contradiction in Rawley's attitude towards herself and Antrim. It was true that he watched them jealously and yet, at the same time, he seemed to use all his ingenuity to throw them into each other's company. It was almost as if he were deliberately trying an experiment with their emotions, fearful, yet eager for a confirmation of what he suspected.

"There's no reason why you should hang round me like this, Janet," he said. "I'm perfectly capable of looking after myself now. It seems to me that the money we spent on your gun in Mombasa was wasted. Why don't you get Antrim to take you out shooting in the evening?"

She looked at him curiously. He knew at least one of the reasons why she had not done so; but his dishonesty nettled her and forced her to accept the challenge, though she would much rather have rested. She turned to Antrim.

"Will you take me?" she asked.

"Of course I will, Memsahib."

"This evening?"

"I'm at your service."

Rawley watched them go with a queer smile on his face. Leaving the camp they walked quietly along the edge of the forest. The air was heavier than usual, the breeze loaded with a peculiar odour which made her think they had crossed the track of a colony of stink ants. The smell was so persistent that she complained of it and asked him what it was.

"Our poor donkeys," he told her. "I had them dragged as far from the camp as possible. I thought you'd have heard the lions last night."

"Can't we get to windward of them?" she asked.

"That's what I'm doing as fast as I can. In a week the vultures will have finished with them. Do you know the South African saying: 'One horse suffices to move a whole camp . . . provided he be dead enough?'"

They heard a harsh call and flapping of wings. On their right a number of enormous birds arose with lazy creaking pinions. She had never seen such huge

winged creatures in her life, so black and shabby, with necks tucked backward, pink, like those of half-plucked fowls.

"There's a shot for you!" Antrim laughed.

She fired. It almost gave her pleasure to slaughter a creature so obscene. It crumpled up in the air and fell heavily with a rustle. They went forward to inspect the kill. She stood shivering with distaste while Antrim examined it. For a moment he looked puzzled.

"Don't touch it," she cried. "It's horrible!"

He lifted the huge black tail and disclosed a nest of downy feathers.

"Look," he said. "That was a lucky shot. It isn't a vulture at all; it's a marabout stork. Heaven knows what it's doing away from the swamps. You can keep these white feathers and put them in a hat."

She shook her head. "No, leave them where they are. I couldn't."

He looked at her queerly.

"No, no," she repeated, "I can't explain."

She could easily have explained, but her thoughts made her shy. In that moment, shaken by the vision of that obscene flock, she had become acutely aware of the cruelty of that smiling land, the incessant slaughter to which she had contributed by her careless shot, and she did not feel that Antrim, so innured to the cruelty of sport, would understand her. She was almost as ashamed of her attitude as of the act that provoked it; and, in her shame, she suddenly remembered that she had been converted to one of Rawley's fads. That was the reason, Rawley had often told her, why he could not shoot. He was right. In this he had shown himself more sensitive than herself, more sensitive than Antrim. And yet, she told herself, Rawley was capable of cruelties of which Antrim could never be guilty. That wretched *mtoto*. . . . The paradox bewildered her.

They left the marabout where it lay.

"In future," she said seriously, expressing the compromise at which she had arrived, "I shall only shoot for the pot. I feel as if I'd committed a murder."

He smiled at her seriousness. She was so moved that he felt it his duty to pass the matter over with a joke.

"I hope you'll make an exception of charging lions," he said.

They returned, empty, to the camp. He could get nothing out of her, neither words nor smiles. He didn't realise that their walk had exhausted her so much that she could have cried for tiredness, and that tiredness rather than pride prevented her from telling him this, and so he was forced to imagine that either he or Rawley had offended her. With these women you never knew where you were, bad cess to

them! They had reached the edge of the camp.

Suddenly they heard a squeal: the voice of Rawley shouting violent curses: and then a throttled roar like that of a dying bull.

“Run . . . run!” Mrs. Rawley gasped.

Antrim rushed forward and she followed him. The camp was like a boiling ants’ nest, the porters swarming in from their encampment toward the space in front of the big *banda*. Antrim fought his way through the thick of them. There, on the ground, his fingers locked about the throat of Rawley, who roared and heaved and struggled, lay his favourite Dingaan. Antrim shouted to him: “Let go! Let go!” but the man was mad with a rage that meant murder. In a moment Antrim had leapt for him. His own hands closed round Dingaan’s throat like steel. The three men lay locked in a struggle. Rawley’s eyes were glassy and bulging; his face swollen with bursting veins. The *Wagwana* only jabbered and grinned. “Another second,” Antrim thought, “and he’s gone.” Then, as by a miracle, Mrs. Rawley and Asmani had joined in the fight, tearing at the black hands that throttled Rawley. Dingaan gave a gasp and rolled over on Antrim. Rawley lay blue, dusky, unconscious, his wife bending over him, shaking him, whispering in his ear.

As Antrim extricated himself the Zulu was shaken by a shuddering sigh. He scrambled to his feet and turned with a sob that was like a groan toward an object that Antrim had not seen, the body of the *mtoto* Jumaa, that lay limp in the mouth of the tent like that of a dead rat. He picked up the child in his arms and began to talk rapidly in his own tongue, pointing and shaking his fist at Rawley, who had now opened his eyes and stared back stupidly like a drunken man.

Antrim, fearing further trouble, placed himself between them. He shouted to Asmani to drive the porters away. Asmani’s *kiboko* swished through the air; they vanished chattering and smiling like a crowd of street children.

“The child is dead . . . dead!” moaned Dingaan. “The big *baas* has killed him. Why did you stop me, B’wana?” he cried, hugging the *mtoto* to his chest.

Antrim tried to calm him. “Perhaps the *mtoto* is not dead,” he said. “Put him on the ground. Throw water over him.”

Mrs. Rawley had left her husband. In a moment she was beside them with the *chagghal* of cool water that hung inside the *banda*. Antrim dashed it over the child’s face. Dingaan, his mouth still working, his hands atremble, would not release the small body from his grasp. When Mrs. Rawley bent over them he clutched it tighter, as if he could not trust her.

“Let me listen, Dingaan,” she said quietly. “I shan’t do any harm.”

She put her white cheek to the child’s chest. The tenderness of her face and its

contrasting paleness smote on Antrim's heart. He knew what she suffered.

"There's a little flutter," she said. "I think he's only stunned."

Dingaan, who did not understand, looked eagerly from her to Antrim. Antrim translated. "You hear? The missis says that he's alive."

The Zulu was sullen, incredulous. He spoke quickly in Swahili. "Understand: if the child dies I shall kill the big *baas*. Another time you will not stop me."

"The child will not die," Antrim told him. "But even if he dies you'll do nothing of the sort. I am master here, and I shall shoot you."

The Zulu stared him full in the face. Antrim's eyes were hard. It was obvious that he meant what he said.

"You are my friend, *Bwana Chui*. I thought you would be just. If you are not just to me I shall go away."

"No, you will stay with us," said Antrim. "When your anger is over you will realise that the big *baas* is a madman."

"Madmen should be killed."

"I promise you that it shall not happen again. I give you my word for it."

"Again? Again?"

The fingers of the child's right hand suddenly and slowly clenched, like the groping claws of a crab.

"He's living," Mrs. Rawley breathed. "Give him to me, Dingaan, I will look after him. Tell him," she repeated to Antrim, "that I'll look after him."

Reluctantly the Zulu consented. Mrs. Rawley picked up the child like a baby in her arms and carried him into the shade, followed by Dingaan's jealous eyes.

"Now," said Antrim, "you shall tell me what happened."

There was little enough to tell. Dingaan had been sitting in the shade against the wall of the servants' *banda* when he had heard the child squealing. "And I knew at once it was the big *baas*," he said, "for Jumaa lives in terror of him. So I jumped up and ran. There was the big *baas* trumpeting like an angry elephant and the *mtoto* running before him out of the missis's *banda*. The *mtoto* went fast, but the big *baas* caught him over the ear with his fist and he went down like a shot guinea-fowl. Then I saw no more, for I knew I had to kill him." The pupils of Dingaan's eyes dilated. "And surely I shall kill him if the *mtoto* dies."

Antrim laid his hand on the Zulu's arm. "The *mtoto* will not die, Dingaan," he said. "And you have my promise. If anything happens the big *baas* shall answer for it to the magistrate in Mombasa. That is my word. You can trust me. Now you can go back to your work. It is better to leave the *mtoto* with the missis. This is the time for a woman. You can see she is like a mother to him. Her also you can trust."

"I take your word, *baas*," said the Zulu, and went.

Antrim, strangely moved, for he felt that he had been speaking with a man, compelled himself to approach Rawley; but while they had been talking Rawley had disappeared. "Perhaps," he thought, "he has taken to his bed again;" but, as he moved toward the *banda*, Janet Rawley beckoned him and he turned to her instead.

She sat there in the shade like a white madonna with the black child in her arms.

"He has opened his eyes," she said gravely. "They were awful. Have you ever seen the eyes of a wounded rabbit?"

He nodded. "Yes, once, when I was out shooting as a boy. I know what you mean . . . Dreadful . . ."

Her eyes were full of pain, and as he answered her, they brimmed with tears. For a few seconds they were silent.

"I suppose this was bound to happen," he said at last.

"Yes . . . inevitably. Sooner or later."

"Of course, one can understand," he began. "The fever . . ."

"Fever?" She shook her head sorrowfully. "No, no, that makes no difference."

"It's only you that I'm thinking of. I'm so sorry . . ." He hesitated, unable to express the compassion that overwhelmed him.

"Don't be sorry for me, Captain Antrim," she said hardly. "I couldn't bear it. Besides, it's no good. If you don't mind . . ."

She could not complete her sentence; but Antrim knew that he was not wanted and turned away. She hid her emotion bending her face over the child's body, and the gesture seemed to him so natural that through his mind there flashed the thought: This is a woman who should have had children of her own, and the quick question, "Children of Rawley's!" which brought its own answer of horror.

"I must go and talk to him," he said.

"No, no," she cried. "Don't do that! You've no idea. He'll insult you. I assure you he's not responsible. Later on I can deal with him. I know what to do."

"Very well," he said, and left her.

He wandered round the camp in the evening light, carefully keeping himself within earshot. Strangely enough, the thing that appalled him most, in all this tangle of distress, was the position of Janet Rawley. It was toward her, he felt, that his first duty lay, and mainly for the reason that in the past few weeks he had misjudged her, suspecting her of selfish motives and feminine chicaneries at a time when her life must surely have been consumed with dread of the inevitable disaster and hopeless schemes to avert it. The smarting sense of his own injustice was aggravated by the courage and the beauty which she had newly revealed to him. "I have never met a

woman to touch her,” he thought, “and here have I been treating her as if she were a barrack hack. That shows how damned little I know about them.”

His mind went back to her last words: “Later on I can deal with him. I know what to do.” He pictured her, solitary and determined, entering the madman’s *banda*. It was unfair that she should go alone. He couldn’t stand the thought of it. Somehow he must prevent it. How could one be sure that Rawley had recovered from his paroxysm. Rawley himself had confided to him that he couldn’t trust himself, that he dreaded the possibility of laying violent hands on her some day. Antrim walked to and fro with clenched fists. “I can’t allow it,” he thought. “She mustn’t risk it.” He turned sharply and walked back toward the camp, determined that the first person to deal with Rawley must be himself.

Half way back he heard his own name called behind him. The voice was Rawley’s. Luck had helped him out. Rawley came plodding after him breathlessly, waving his hand, smiling like a sheepish schoolboy. Antrim stopped and waited for him. Rawley held out his hand, but Antrim took no notice of it.

“You don’t want to shake hands?” said Rawley thickly. “Ah well, that can’t be helped. I want to apologise . . . most humbly apologise.”

“You can’t apologise for a murder,” said Antrim.

“Murder,” Rawley gasped. “Murder? You don’t mean to tell me the little brute is dead? I can’t believe it. You’re joking . . . tell me you’re joking? I only lost my temper for a moment and the next thing I knew that savage was at my throat. A dog like that should be shot!”

He began to work himself up, explaining his hatred of Africa and everything African, just as in other days, no doubt, he had talked of England and everything English. His speech was full of repetitions and rhetorical questions that he solemnly answered for himself.

“As for that damned blackbeetle—that’s what I always call him to my wife, Antrim, you understand? Of course you understand as well as I do. As for that . . .” He broke off. “How many times have I told her that I won’t have the stink of black flesh in my *banda*? Dozens of times. You know, Antrim, when it comes to obstinacy you can’t match a woman! And when I saw the little brute slinking in, carrying a pair of her boots, if you please . . . not fit to touch them . . . I . . . I put a stop to it.”

“Pretty nearly put a stop to him, too. If the Zulu had scuppered you, you’d have deserved it.”

“One moment. *One* moment. I’m just on the point of explaining . . .”

“You have explained,” said Antrim. It was about time the fellow was brought to his bearings. “I want you to understand this,” he went on. “If anything happens to the

mtoto I shall report the case to the first magistrate we meet. I've told the Zulu that I'll do so. One must give these people a square deal. You needn't make the mistake of thinking that just because you're a few hundred miles from anywhere you can indulge your fancy for manslaughter without any interference."

"Manslaughter?" Rawley gasped at him. It suddenly became clear to Antrim that all his lecture had been wasted. The man had not understood him. He took Rawley by the arm and shook him, as one might shake the arm of a man emerging from a nightmare.

"Manslaughter?" Rawley muttered again.

Still leading him by the arm, Antrim directed his course toward their *banda* and deposited Rawley on his bed. Rawley thanked him with tears in his eyes. It was pathetic . . . until the moment when his thoughts turned to Janet.

4

Asmani approached with his usual grave salutation, asking Antrim to come and look at the remaining donkeys which had just been driven in from grazing for fear of the lions. They were a sorry sight, wasted and tremulous; their yellow teeth snatched at the grass as though they were greedy for the last drags of physical pleasure that remained to them. They still went on feeding while Antrim examined their eyes, which were dull and bloodless, and felt under their bodies for the swelling that is a sure sign of the disease. He shook his head.

"A week?" he asked Asmani.

"Five days," Asmani answered.

It seemed a waste of energy to drive the poor beasts inside their thorn *boma* that night. Why should they not go on feeding in the darkness and take their chance? The only one of all the lot that had any chance of living was the white beast that Mrs. Rawley had ridden, whose coat Jumaa had diligently smeared each day with paraffin to keep off flies and ticks. Better to cut their losses. And yet . . .

"Keep them in the *boma* to-night," he told Asmani, "and give them corn."

Corn! The *bwana* was clearly mad; but orders must be obeyed.

Night had fallen. Walking back toward the fire where dinner was cooking Antrim heard the air shaken by an enormous vibration, a kind of hideous purring. "Lion," he thought. "They've begun already. Now's the time for a man who wants specimens!" But he had never felt less like shooting in his life. Apart from Rawley's outburst nothing had happened since the morning to affect their prospects, and yet he fancied that he was on the brink of the crisis which must determine the whole end

of the expedition. It was a fancy that amounted to a conviction. He felt as one feels in war time at the moment when one awaits the signal for an attack or the explosion of a mine. As a good soldier the situation should not have troubled him. It was against such moments that all his training had been directed. They gave him his chance.

In the darkness Mrs. Rawley met him. They walked together toward the fire.

"The *mtoto* is sleeping," she told him, "and so I've handed him over to Dingaan. I really believe he was more terrified than hurt. Such terror! I've never seen anything quite like the look when he opened his eyes. I wonder if he can get over it. Horror like that must leave a scar on the soul."

"We must keep him out of your husband's way. That won't be difficult. By the way, have you seen him?"

"Who?"

"Your husband?"

"Yes. He is lying drunk on the bed."

She made the humiliating confession so simply that Antrim could hardly realise her words. They surprised him into a tame "Oh, really?" which was the last thing in the world he wanted to say. Then, in a flash, his scattered wits returned to him.

"You must be mistaken," he said. "It's impossible. The whisky's locked away in my own box. It may be a relapse . . . cerebral malaria. You never know. I'd better see him."

"Of course you can see him," she said wearily. "But there's no doubt about it. It's the usual thing. I ought to know."

Antrim shouted for Dingaan to bring him the box. It was locked, as he had anticipated. "Wait here," he said, and went alone to the *banda* where Rawley was lying.

The place stank so heavily of whisky that the reason of Rawley's stupor was obvious. No wonder he had been incoherent when Antrim met him outside the camp. But where could he have found the stuff? While Rawley lay there snoring Antrim turned the contents of the *banda* upside down. One side of it was full of Mrs. Rawley's effects, but this was no time for delicacy. In one corner since the first days of his convalescence Rawley had collected his photographic gear. A faint odour of chemicals clung to it. Bottles, measure glasses and the famous chemical notebooks were ranged methodically on the top of one of the packing cases marked with a red triangle about which the fellow had shown so much anxiety. Now that anxiety became significant. Antrim swept the bottles aside and turned the packing case over. In it he found a dozen whisky bottles, nine of them empty. He picked up

the case and carried it to Mrs. Rawley in the firelight.

“Here you are!” he said triumphantly, holding up a bottle to the light. He smelt it. “My God, what muck!”

He showed her that the spirit was of an inferior quality, stuff that Rawley had picked up at some Goanese store in the bazaar.

“You know nothing of this?” he asked her.

“Nothing at all,” she replied.

That at any rate, was a relief. She had taken his discovery with a calm that was almost sinister.

“Look at it,” he said, “it’s poison. No wonder he’s off his head. I think I’d better deal with the rest of it.”

He whistled for Asmani, and in a few minutes four porters trotted up, each carrying one of the red-marked cases. Antrim wrenched them open one by one. Each, as he had anticipated, was full of spirit. He took out the unlabelled bottles and smashed them on a stone. The air was drenched with the odour of bad liquor. In this destruction of splintering glass he found an outlet for his indefinite emotion: a certain fierce satisfaction.

“That’s the lot,” he said with a laugh, as he surveyed the havoc he had made.

Mrs. Rawley said nothing. She watched him, apparently unmoved, through half-closed eyelids. Then she rose and walked slowly towards the *banda*, without a word. Antrim followed her.

“If you have any need of me, you’ll call me?” he said. “Promise?”

She nodded gravely. “But there will be no need,” she said.

CHAPTER X

1

There followed, for Antrim, a stormy, sleepless night. It was not that he had any further doubts about what he should do; through the palpable darkness that surrounded them the path of his urgent duty shone like a trail of fire. Eastward, over the lip of the plateau Zahn barred their way, and, even more than Zahn, the blindness of that tree-clogged lowland. Westward, cresting wave beyond wave of desolate steppe, ran the tenuous slip of the old slave-road to the lake: a series of thirsty struggles from water-hole to water-hole. He was taking no risks: he had had enough of Mrs. Rawley's romantic aspirations to push on and on toward God knew what! Southward, indeed lay more promise of civilisation: the country of the Waluguru, from which issued the sinister stories of the German called Sakharani; but this man might easily prove as hostile as Zahn. Obviously they must move northward, and, at the greatest possible speed, towards the basin of the Pangani and the frontier of British East. There lay his only chance of slipping the responsibility with which his own folly and the incalculable influence of Janet Rawley had saddled him; there he would leave the Rawleys to work out their own salvation—the word was a mockery—and return to Nairobi to sustain the ridicule of his adventure and make the best of his spoilt leave.

"I shall never see them again," he thought, "perhaps never hear of them!" But the immediate satisfaction of this thought was challenged by the pathetic image of Janet Rawley. To-night he couldn't get the woman out of his mind. He felt that even when he had said good-bye to them her unconscious influence must trouble him. She had entered his life uninvited and established herself so subtly and so securely that no amount of thinking could expel her. If he had loved her the problem might have been different, the issue more straightforward, but he didn't love her; he had taken the greatest pains to put any passionate relation out of the question: this was a case of possession—demoniacal possession; like a homeless spirit she had slipped into his soul so that he could no longer call it his own.

He resented this intrusion: he wouldn't have it; he must make an end of it; he had quite enough to think about without the complication of ghostly interference. He fretted against the delay that had now been forced on him. If it hadn't been for Rawley's damned whisky they could have struck their camp to-morrow. As it was, a couple of days must pass before Rawley recovered his senses or his strength. And every day counted in his race to escape the threat of sheer abandonment and the

obsession of the nightmare that he feared. Supposing that Rawley did not recover: supposing that between alcohol and malaria he died. . . .

The web of his thoughts was broken by a shrill scream, a scurry of hoofs, shouts, and a shattering rifle shot. The smell of a lion had thrown the miserable donkeys into a stampede. They had broken their *boma* and scattered in darkness. The *askari* on guard had fired wildly. The night became full of chatter and confusion and winking lights. He jumped up and gave two sharp whistles for Dingaan, who came running towards him with Asmani and the man who had fired the shot. The donkeys were gone: probably they would never be seen again. The *askari* had caught the shape of the lion in the darkness; he thought he had wounded it. Asmani had been doing his best to reassure the porters, who were frightened out of their lives and must needs light a fire to keep the lions away.

"If we had taken our porters from Mombasa, Bwana . . ." Asmani began.

Antrim lost his temper and told him to go to hell with his complaints.

"How is the *mtoto*?" he asked Dingaan. Dingaan was the man for him.

"He is sleeping," the Zulu replied, "but sometimes he wakes and then he cries out in terror. He thinks the big *baas* is coming after him."

"The big *baas* will not come after any one," Antrim told him. "The big *baas* is lying in the *banda* drunk. Now you know why this happened. The big *baas* was mad. He didn't know what he was doing. Don't forget what you have promised me."

"I have spoken my word," said Dingaan.

He was going, but Antrim detained him. "You hear what Asmani has told me about these *washenzi Wagwana*? They have been ordered by that *Mzungu* at the coast to desert us. I want men that I can count on, and you are one of them. To-morrow you shall take the elephant gun and five cartridges. Let it be known that if the *Wagwana* give any trouble you will shoot. Any man that deserts now will be shot like a pig. You need think no more about the *Jumaa*; I will answer for him. You understand?"

He understood. The camp was now silent but for the vast crackling of the new fire. Antrim lay down once more and began to consider what loads he could sacrifice in the event of more desertions. Rawley's whisky had gone. A good riddance, that accounted for four. To-morrow he would get rid of all the bales of Amerikani in the village in exchange for food. The natives should have the bargain of their lives. Everything must be sacrificed to weight. To-morrow . . .

To-morrow came. A grey and ghostly dawn showed him the trees of the forest hung with a lichen of mist; the *Wagwana* scattered like dazed revellers about the

ashes of their fire; the Rawleys' low *banda*, small, colourless, silent. He made an early and solitary breakfast, then stood above the unwilling porters, rifle in hand, while Asmani directed them to separate the loads of trading stuff from the heap in which everything had been piled when they halted. It seemed that the presence of the wounded lion still troubled them, so he took his Mannlicher, leaving the .405 with Dingaan, and set off in search of its *spoor*. Leaving the camp he passed close under the walls of the Rawleys' *banda*. He had an impulse to call to Janet and tell her where he was going lest she should be anxious to find him gone; but the silence of the hut deterred him. "If Rawley is still drugged," he thought, "I have no right to disturb them. Perhaps she, poor soul, is sleeping, too."

He passed on. In the entrance of a wigwam of branches, now withered, which Dingaan had built for himself the *mtoto* was sitting on his heels, like a rabbit at the mouth of its hole, licking mealie-pap from his fingers. Antrim called to the child softly. The creature gave a sudden jump into the air like a shot buck and disappeared. Antrim could not see inside; but he felt that frightened eyes were watching him. His gorge rose against Rawley. "The damned bully!" he said. "If Dingaan had broken his neck he'd have deserved it!"

In a patch of sand to windward of the *boma*, he found the spoor of the lion, a full-grown beast, he judged—but no trace of blood. Of course the *askari* had missed him. In an emergency no native could ever shoot straight except the trained men of the K.A.R. The spoor was so clear that the zest of following it took hold of him. It led him a freakish track through thick thorn, in which his senses were all strained with apprehension: a fascinating trail, for the sand between the thorn-trees had been settled by the last rains into a fine crust that had crumbled away beneath the feet of game, leaving clear imprints of the lion's pads, showing the spaces where the beast had broken into an amble of long cat-like strides and others where it had turned, looking backward to sniff the air. At the edge of a rocky nullah, strewn with pink boulders arrested in the midst of some forgotten spate, he lost the track. Between the rocks rose great spikes of aloe and tall ashen euphorbias. Fifty feet below the bottom of the nullah was clogged black with acacia-scrub; the very retreat that a lion would choose to drowse in through the heat of the day, and one that gave the beast too many advantages to make it worth while tracking him further.

"But while I'm here," Antrim thought, "I may as well try to shoot something to put courage into the *Wagwana*. I'm glad I brought the Mannlicher instead of that blunderbuss."

He crossed the head of the nullah cautiously and crawled among the rocks to the edge of the plain. Its wideness and beauty had never failed to move him since first

they had pitched their camp above it. It represented to him his ideal Africa, the happy hunting-ground. In his first year he had outgrown the fever of the collector; apart from one or two rarities that had never come his way he possessed all the trophies that he wanted; but he liked the feel of a country where game abounded; he liked to see them and track them and feel that they were grazing and moving about him in the night. This country was just such another as the plains at the foot of Donyo Sabuk. A pity that he must leave it.

Looking out over the steppe while these thoughts wandered through his mind, he suddenly became conscious of something unusual. In the open spaces between the patches of bush many herds of game were feeding; but first his naked eyes and then his glasses assured him that the plain had suffered an invasion of new species. This in itself demanded an explanation; and, while he was seeking for one, he began to notice a certain restlessness among them. At that time of day the herds would usually keep their stations, rarely changing pasture unless they got wind of an enemy or were frightened by the sound of a shot; but now it seemed to him that all the game were on the move, trickling steadily southward through the patches of grassland like grains of sand that are carried down from puddle to puddle after a thunderstorm. They did not move as though they were frightened. It was just as if some gentle pressure from behind urged them reluctantly onward and prevented them from taking rest. For a long time he could not understand this orderly retreat. Then, of a sudden, he remembered what the headman of the village had told him. The Masai were coming South with their herds; the game were melting away before them.

To realise this gave him the pleasure that one feels in seeing for the first time a natural phenomenon of which one has heard or read; but this emotion was quickly succeeded by an anxiety as to how the coming of the Masai might affect his plans of escape. Not very much, he decided; for it was quite possible that they would never even see these warlike neighbours; and in any case there was no need for fear. Kilgour and his wife had camped among the hide huts of the Masai for months on end and admired them above all other East African races. In German territory, it was true, the white man might be less welcome; for the German sense of order abhorred all nomad ways. The Germans, he had heard, would shoot a Masai on sight. But that was no great matter. The only thing that troubled him was a fear that the panic of the neighbouring villages might spread among his wretched *Wagwana*. Asmani must guard against that; and, for this reason, Asmani must be warned.

More than a hundred yards away a herd of hartebeest moved into sight. The leader, a fine bull, stood sniffing the air in front of them, already half aware of Antrim's presence.

"A chance shot," he thought. "I may as well try it."

He aimed, fired, missed and cursed his crooked shooting. The herd stampeded in a cloud of dust.

After this he abandoned his plan of stalking a buck for the porters, and made his way back toward the camp through the shadow of the forest edge. It was as quiet under the noon as if there were no life in it. The scream and chatter of an olive monkey that slung itself away in fear of him among the treetops startled him by its suddenness. In another moment his eyelids contracted to a white blaze of sunlight as he emerged into a long clearing that was like a moving meadow where grass grew shoulder high.

Fifty paces in front of him his dazzled eyes discerned something dark moving towards him. He thought "My God! The lion!" and dropped to his knee, his rifle ready to fire. Still the shadow advanced hurriedly. The creature had not seen him, unless, indeed, it were advancing on him with the courage of despair. He raised his rifle and waited coolly for a broadside shot. "The shoulder for preference," he thought. But the grass was so thick that even at twenty paces he could not see to take aim. "Twenty paces . . . two springs!" he thought. His fingers caressed the trigger. Then, of a sudden he dropped his rifle and ran forward. He had been aiming at Janet Rawley.

2

He ran to meet her. "What are you doing here?" he cried. "I nearly fired."

"Why didn't you?" she said quickly. "It'd have saved trouble."

"Where were you going?"

"I don't know."

"Without a hat . . . at midday! It's madness!"

"Madness. Yes, that's it," she agreed with a strange laugh.

"But what has happened? Tell me."

"I can't tell you. I won't. Nothing has happened."

"You'd better come back with me now," Antrim said. That mad laugh of hers had pierced his brain like a shaft of storm-light, filling it with distorted shadows, twisting the shape of his thoughts so that he didn't know them. The words that he uttered were not his own. They were distant; they didn't belong to him; a stranger had spoken them; he could no longer count on himself. This madness was infectious. He laid his hand on her arm. "We'll go back now," he repeated. "Come along. We'll go together."

With a gentle pressure he drew her onward, and for a short moment it seemed as though she would submit to his guidance. Then, starting out of her trance, she strained away from him.

"No, no, I can't," she whispered. "I can't. Let me go. Why did you stop me?"

"Lucky that I did!"

"Lucky? . . . You?" She stared at him, beyond, with a dreadful wildness in her eyes, piercing, unearthly. They frightened him, they made him tremble with an emotion that was not fear; he felt his reason waver in their dark flame.

"No," she muttered, "I'm going. You can't stop me. I *must* go. You've no right . . ."

But this time he had caught her and held her in his arms. Mad or sane, it was his duty to save her. She struggled.

"You?" she cried. "Oh, don't . . . don't!"

He felt her heart beating, fluttering against him like the heart of a squirrel that he had captured when he was a boy: he felt his own pulses throbbing violently as though they were in pursuit.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she cried again, struggling weakly away from him, but for answer he only held her closer, as though, by physical contact, he could impose upon her the stability of his own will. Suddenly her rebellious muscles relaxed. He felt the tension give; as though she had died, and a glow of pride and conquest transfigured his mind.

"Tell me what happened," he whispered. "You'd better tell me. I've a right. . . . You know that there's nothing I wouldn't do for you."

He was anxious to hear the words he dreaded, but he waited for them in vain. She stood in his arms, mute and tranquil, as though the life had ebbed away from her, unable to think or speak.

"I shouldn't have left you alone with him," he said. "I was a fool to take you at your word. You should have called me when he came round." Still she was silent. "You'll be happier," he said, "if you tell me. When did he wake? This morning?"

"Last night," she murmured, "all night. . . . Then there came a moment of panic. My strength went. I was frightened. . . . Oh, I couldn't bear it. I wanted to go away and die. I couldn't! I couldn't!"

The last word ended in a cry as though the memory tore at her heart. A murderous gust of anger swept through Antrim's mind, shrivelling all consciousness as it passed, and when he fought his way back to sanity he realised that she was crying in his arms, her body shaken like a tree tossed and buffeted by rushes of wind, still, for a moment, and then, again, mercilessly gripped and shaken. She

pressed her body against his as though its firmness could absorb and soften the violence of her sobbing; she clung to him for safety like a creature caught in a tornado of crashing trees. In that bland, sun-drenched stillness Antrim had the feeling that a whirlwind passed which blew his thoughts away. He heard in the distance his own voice speaking words that his will had not imagined. He was calling her by her name, the name that his most secret soul had never uttered. His fingers were in her dark hair; her head lay listless between his two hands as he kissed her wet eyelids.

"Janet, my little one, my child," he was saying. "I can't bear that you should suffer. You mustn't cry like this. Janet, my darling!"

The words stabbed her to consciousness. Her sobs ceased. She shuddered and drew away from him. She stared at him as though he were a stranger, her face white, her pupils contracted with sunlight. The wildness died out of her eyes, her lips were firm.

"I am going back to the camp," she said.

"Then I'll come with you."

"No, I don't want you. You mustn't come. Please don't. I mean it. I'm going back."

Antrim hesitated. "I shan't allow you," he began.

"You must," she said, "you must. I don't want you. Not before the evening: promise me . . . promise!"

The words were childish, but their intensity was too much for him.

"Very well," he said, "I'll do as you wish. I suppose you're right; but if anything goes wrong I shall never forgive myself."

She shook her head. "Forgive? Oh, dear. . . ."

She left Antrim standing dazed in the sun. Within a few paces the long grass swallowed her. She became a secret, moving shadow that passed away from him till not a ripple was seen.

He stood undecided, tempted to follow her, then turned back along the track which still showed where he had thrust the grass aside. He followed it mechanically, rigidly, as though one part of his brain, freed from the control of volition, rejoiced in the performance of an automatic task. The conscious Antrim, rapt in the glory of his avowal, saw nothing, heard nothing, had no relation with time or place; and so it was that his numbed senses failed to perceive that another shape was pushing through the grass behind him on a track closely parallel with his.

It was Rawley, bareheaded, panting, his pale hair plastered dark over his forehead and the sweat trickling down into his eyes. The break-down of Janet and her sudden flight from the *banda* had cleared his brain. Shaken with fear, he had

followed and, in the belt of woodland, had lost her until, emerging, he had heard Antrim's voice speaking her name, and, creeping nearer, had seen her in Antrim's arms. There he had crouched in the grass, breathing heavily, stunned by the realisation of a scene with which his imagination had often taunted him, unable to think or act. He had seen them separate, and still he could not move; but when Antrim turned his back on him he had been seized with a passion to kill. He was unarmed and shaking with fever; but that meant nothing to him. There was no plan in his pursuit; only the impulse of a dull, consuming hatred, the desire to fall upon his enemy from behind and crush out life with his naked hands.

Like some uncouth monster Rawley crawled through the grasses. When he saw Antrim reach the edge of the wood he was thirty yards behind. A cunning instinct told him that he must not be seen; that his blow would be futile unless it fell by surprise. Dismayed by the heaviness of his own breathing, he crawled from tree to tree.

Antrim halted. He lowered himself on the ground. He took off his *topee* and laid his rifle beside it. Then he put his hands to his eyes and sat with his head between them, thinking.

Rawley knew that his moment had come. He noticed eagerly Antrim's defenceless position and the fact that he had abandoned his weapon. He moistened his lips with his tongue. His heart began to beat faster and faster, pumping the blood into his head so violently that there was a roaring in his ears. He felt as though in another moment some blood-vessel in his brain must burst. Now or never! He stretched out his right hand in front of him to take the weight off his body; he lifted his left knee; the right knee gave a crack as the balance shifted. Antrim did not move. Up above him in the tree-tops an olive-coloured monkey gave a sudden half-human scream of derision that made his heart leap and brought a cry to his lips. The cry he stifled; but the shock had broken the continuity of his purpose. His limbs grew heavy and cold; the murderous glow that was throbbing in his brain faded. His eyes were still fixed on the motionless figure of Antrim, but he no longer hated him.

"I'm a coward," he told himself, trying once more to whip himself into a fury. But it wouldn't answer. He was cold, cold. There was nothing in his heart but misery, humiliation, despair. He had lost everything and lost it so irrevocably that he could find no comfort in revenge. He wanted to sit down and howl like a lost child, but the shame of Antrim's presence restrained him. If he discovered himself Antrim would come up to him and lead him back to the camp. Then the old agony would begin all over again. Antrim and Janet would put their heads together, trying to save him. They could not save him. He was lost . . . lost! If once again he saw them together

he thought he would go mad. Perhaps he was mad already. In that case all the more reason.

Cautiously he turned. He crept away into the thick of the wood like a whipped dog until he felt sure that he was out of Antrim's hearing. Then he rose to his feet and began to blubber to himself. Tears trickled down his cheeks; he could hear his own voice rising in a thin, strangled wail. He went blundering on and on through the undergrowth, fighting his way, heedless of thorns and thickets, on and on and on, muttering to himself the name of Janet . . . Janet. . . .

"Not wanted," he said, "I'm not wanted. Truth at last! Love . . . why did she lie to me? She never loved me. Eight years of lies!" He chuckled to himself. "No wonder! Antrim's a man and I'm not. A man would have killed him, and I couldn't . . . couldn't. I'm not a bad sort, though: not as bad as she thinks. I can play the game." He licked his lips. "Fade away . . . that's the idea . . . fade away. What does it matter?"

He stumbled on. Often he paused in fright; for the little pans and the hammer in his pockets set up a mysterious metallic clashing. Sometimes in sudden clearings the sun burst down and dazzled him; sometimes the forest was so dark that it seemed as if night had come; but he took no heed of light or darkness; through either he was driven onward by the same blind instinct of flight. His limbs grew numb and leaden, his tongue cried out for water; but still the force that drove him had no pity. At sunset he staggered to the face of the Eastern escarpment. Below, the golden coastland faded away towards the sea. He laughed harshly, voicelessly, at the thought of the gold that lay hidden beneath it. If, in that moment, he had held in his power all the gold of Africa it would have been useless to him.

"Everything . . . everything . . ." he muttered, "Lost . . . lost!"

He pulled his strength together for another effort. He went down and down into the growing shadow.

3

Leaving Antrim, Janet Rawley returned without pausing to the camp. The horror of her experience with Rawley still made a monstrous background to her mind. When she passed the *banda* in which she imagined that he was lying exhausted by his pitiful violence, and to which her conscience had urged her to return, her courage left her and she found that she could not face him. Shamed by her own cowardice, she stole past and hid herself in the hut where she and Antrim usually took their meals. There, huddled in a chair of green Indian canvas, she tried to collect her

devastated mind, and to compel herself to the duty that she dreaded.

The task was hopeless. The very thought of Rawley as she had left him made her shudder. In that *banda*, half an hour before, she had reached the breaking point of her studied endurance. All the props and stays, the repeated suggestions and moral scruples, with which she sustained it had given way beyond repair. That was enough in itself; but now the encounter with Antrim had swept away the last of the ruins. It was as though the kisses that he had pressed upon her wet eyelids had restored her faculty of seeing things as they were. For how many years had she been blind!

The thought of meeting Rawley left her, and suddenly she saw herself again sobbing in Antrim's arms; she felt his strength sustaining her own shaken body, his hands that clasped her head, his lips. She shuddered at the memory of these things. That was the greatest disaster of all. She knew that she could love him; perhaps she loved him already; but this, of all others, was the end against which she had set her whole will. Even in the Kilgours' drawing-room at Mombasa, when, on the day of their first meeting, they had stood for one moment alone, the possibility of some such treachery in her nature had flashed through her mind. Then she had dismissed it as ridiculous. If she had not been sure of herself she would never have allowed him to join them. God knew that she was innocent of encouraging it! When Rawley had asked him she had effaced herself; she had left everything to him. Antrim would bear her witness. She had gone on board the *Köln* without being certain that he would follow them. On that first night she had tried to make it plain to him that no sentimental relationship was possible between them. That, perhaps, had been a mistaken policy; yet she had embarked on it seriously, innocently. And now the thing she dreaded had come to pass.

For the present her shame was her own secret. That did not mend matters. She seriously debated if it were not her duty to let Rawley know what had happened: not at the present moment, when his nerves were exhausted by fever, but a little later when they had left this hateful camp behind and the stress of the adventure was over. There was nothing she couldn't tell him with a quiet conscience; and when once the confession were made there would be nothing left in her mind with which she could reproach herself.

As for Antrim: he also must be confronted. She must explain to him that her weakness had betrayed her; that nothing but the absolute collapse of her will had allowed her to submit to his kisses; that they had left her as cold and uninterested as though they had come to her in a dream. She could see herself struggling in the midst of such an explanation. Antrim would not believe her. If he loved her he could not believe. To challenge an interview with such emotional possibilities was tempting

providence. No, she would offer him no explanation. She would never speak of what had happened. She could show him by her withdrawal, by her complete denial of all intimacy, that she had put the incident out of her mind and thought no more about it. That was the easier way: the way that flattered her weakness. But supposing that Antrim did not or would not understand her!

"Somewhere," she told herself, "I must find strength to meet him and speak the whole truth to him. He wouldn't be satisfied with less. Yet how the truth must wound him! It is not his fault any more than it is mine. It is wrong, brutally wrong, that he should suffer. I'm a coward. I think I have no courage left."

Searching for a renewal of strength, it occurred to her that she might find it in prayer. Somehow, since the day of her marriage with Rawley, she had ceased to pray; not so much because she had lost faith in the religion of her childhood as because she saw Rawley could live without it, because she had determined from the first to adapt herself to his standards. This, surely, was a trouble in which the neglected Deity might help her. Was she not fighting to preserve the vows which she had made before Him?

With an emotion that was nearer to superstition than faith she knelt down on the earth floor of the *banda* and began to pray; but even as she did so her words dissolved in emptiness; for if God were omniscient, she thought, He must surely realise that her prayer was nothing but a sop of flattery, a last resource of fear rather than an act of faith. But however He judges me, she reflected, the fact remains that I have intended no real wrong: it is only that I am not strong enough, and even if I am weak He must know how I have suffered.

Trying to banish all doubts and reservations from her mind, she waited, like a neurasthenic, to recognise the result of the drug she had swallowed. It thrilled her to find that her mind was actually easier, and this made her more than ever ashamed of her scepticism. "God has heard me," she thought, "He has pitied me: now I must prove myself worthy of His pity. I must forget that Captain Antrim exists. I must go back to Jack just as if nothing had happened."

In her present state of mild religious exaltation it was easy to resolve what she would do: but when she rose from her knees her heart failed her once more. In her loneliness her thoughts returned against her will to Antrim. It was not his love that she needed so much as the support of his strength, which seemed to her the one thing stable and permanent in that phantasmal world. The fear that pressed upon her now was not her particular dread of Rawley but that of the vast silences that hemmed her in, that sadness of wide spaces that makes all human endeavour seem futile and pitiful. She was afraid of Africa.

"But I cannot be beaten now," she assured herself, "I am going straight to the *banda*. I am going to make a new start. I am going now. If I hesitate I shall never go."

She pressed her hands to her throbbing eyes and stepped to the door of the hut. Then she heard a voice calling her, "Missis! Missis!" and saw that Dingaan was running toward her. The wildness of his eyes and his shouting filled her with a new terror. "What next?" she thought, "What next?"

Trembling, she waited for him. Forcing her voice to calmness, she asked what was the matter.

Dingaan was beside himself. It was terrible to see the smiling creature she knew suddenly transformed into a savage with murderous eyes and a weapon in his hand.

"Missis . . . he is here . . . he has come to you?" Dingaan cried. He pushed past her into the hut, crying—"Where is he? Where is he? The *mtoto*. You have seen him? Where is he?"

"I don't know," she said. "I haven't seen him."

"He is gone. An hour ago he was in my hut. Now he is gone. Where is he?"

She tried to calm him. "He'll come back, Dingaan. You mustn't worry yourself. Of course he'll come back. Stay here quietly and I'll go and look for him myself."

She laid her hand on his arm, but the Zulu wrenched himself away from her. "No, he has gone," he said, "he will not come back. He has been driven out by fear of the big *baas*. He has gone into the bush. He is lost. He will die. Now I go to kill the big *baas*."

"No, no," she cried. "You'll wait here till *Bwana Chui* comes back. Remember that you promised him."

Dingaan stared at her dully with his terrible eyes. She thought, for one moment, that the memory of Antrim persuaded him; but in the next his madness flamed up again.

"*Bwana Chui* make a fool of me," he cried. "Now I kill him."

In a flash of fear she saw a vision of Rawley lying exhausted and sullen on his stretcher bed. With no thought for herself she caught again at Dingaan's arm. He pushed her aside. She fell, and in the next instant they were running together toward Rawley's *banda*. She was crying, "Jack! . . . Jack! Get away! It's Dingaan . . . he'll murder you!"

They reached the door of the hut together. She flung herself at the Zulu's neck. Cursing in his own language, he tossed her aside and she fell heavily against the wall of the *banda*, her weight crushing through the grass of which it was made. Dingaan staggered away from her toward Rawley's bed, his clubbed rifle uplifted. The scene

spun round as she screamed a last warning.

The lifted rifle did not fall. Rawley's bed was empty. Dingaan, muttering unintelligible words, rushed from the *banda*. She crawled on to her knees, giddy and trembling. She knew that she was laughing. She couldn't stop laughing. And in between the gasps of laughter she was muttering like a parrot: "Thank God . . . Thank God . . . Thank God!"

She was kneeling by Rawley's empty bed. It still bore the imprint of his body in the place where he had been sitting when panic had driven her away from him. Suddenly she came to her senses. He had really gone. He had taken with him the khaki coat with the big pockets. An hour before it had been hanging over the head of the bed. She had thought to mend the place where the pocket was torn. But he had left his sun-helmet behind. He was gone. And Dingaan, murderously mad, was after him. Dingaan would follow his *spoor* and kill him in cold blood. And she was helpless . . . helpless.

If only Antrim could be found! Why had she prevented Antrim from coming back with her to the camp? If he had come with her this horror, at least, might have been avoided, for once already he had mastered the passion of Dingaan. She stood cold with terror as she imagined Dingaan tracking the unconscious Rawley, creeping up behind him, like a lion, in the bush.

She ran into the open and called Asmani; but no one answered her, and what, in effect, could the bland Zanzibari have done? Yet it was impossible that she herself should do nothing; if she stood still she felt that she would go mad. With a vagueness of purpose that did not strike her as ridiculous, she found herself running through the woods in the direction of the glade in which she and Antrim had parted, seeing nothing, hearing nothing but her own harassed breath and the thudding of her heart.

Suddenly, in the midst of her running, she heard a shot: two shots in quick succession. It was as though a bullet had pierced her heart; as though, in that moment, she had died.

"It's over," she thought. "He's fired. He's killed him!"

She stood listening in the awful forest silence as though she expected to hear a following cry. There was nothing but a gentle whisper, high, high above, of wind stirring in branches that were out of sight. And then she became aware of another sound and realised that she herself was wailing like a child.

"Why am I crying?" she thought. "It's over. It's no use crying. What am I doing here? I can do no good. It's over. He's dead. I had better go back to the camp. It doesn't matter where I go. My life is over. He's dead. Jack . . . Oh, Jack!"

She went on walking in a dream until she became vaguely aware that some one

was following her, overtaking her. She supposed it was Dingaan. "Now that he's killed him," she thought, "Dingaan is coming back. Perhaps he will kill me. What does it matter."

She did not turn to look till Antrim's hand was on her arm.

4

Between the shock and the relief of this meeting she broke down into sobs and excited words. She had thought she was stronger; but when once the tears began there was no help for it.

"Thank God I've found you! Oh, thank God! Have you seen him? Dingaan . . . he had your rifle. I couldn't hold him. I tried to. He threw me away like a kitten. The *mtoto* had gone: he said that Jack had scared him away into the bush to die. He wasn't like a human being: just a wild beast. Then he said he'd kill Jack. He ran to the *banda*. I screamed to warn Jack that he was coming. When he didn't answer I thought he must be asleep. I ran, too. I *had* to run. I wanted to save him. Silly. . . . Of course I couldn't hold him. I told you, didn't I? Simply threw me off like a kitten. He had his rifle up, and I was waiting for it to come down. But it didn't. Jack wasn't there. He'd gone, too. Dingaan went tearing after him. I think I was dazed by the fall. And then the shots. . . . You heard them? You must have heard them! What can we do? We must do something!"

The steadiness of Antrim began to calm her. He was very haggard and old, his face drawn like a drab membrane blotched with tawny freckles, his eyes cold and very blue. Grasping her arm, he led her gently toward the camp, clarifying her jumbled story with a few short questions. His equanimity, which in the beginning had reassured her, made her impatient. She felt that he hadn't understood the enormity of what had happened. "Don't you see," she cried, "that it's murder! You must go at once. You must find them: both of them. We can't stay here doing nothing like this. Don't you see that every minute counts?"

"You poor child," he said with a breaking voice. "First of all, I'm going to look after you."

"Don't think of me!" she cried. "What's the use of thinking of me? I'm all right. I can look after myself."

He led her toward the *banda*. "It's been too much for you," he said. "I shall do everything that can be done. Leave it to me. You must promise me that you'll lie down and rest."

"Rest?" she repeated. "How can I rest?" And then, suddenly: "The shot, Captain

Antrim; did you hear the shot?"

"Yes, I heard it. Are you going to promise me?"

"A child! I'm not a child. I must take my part. I've a right to do so."

"You've no right to kill yourself. Here we are."

The sight of the *banda* terrified her, recalling the agony of her struggle with Dingaen. She strained away from him and put her hands to her eyes.

"No, I can't, I can't!" she said quickly, in a voice of horror. "Not here. I can never go inside that place again."

"Then you can go to my *banda* instead."

To this she submitted. Antrim, his face agonised by her pain, unlocked his chop-box and forced her to swallow a peg of whisky.

"Now you'll stay here," he said firmly. "You're too distressed to be of use to me or any one else." He put it brutally. "Besides, you may be worrying yourself unnecessarily. There's nothing unusual in your husband going off by himself. Probably he'll come back at sunset, and by that time Dingaen will have worked off his steam. It's ten to one against their meeting in the jungle. You must cheer up, now!"

She shook her head. "No, no. He's killed him. I feel it. Those shots. . . . They went right through my head. You heard them?"

"Don't think any more of it. You can't guess what happened. Perhaps they met the lion that they wanted last night. Now you'll stay here?"

"How can I stay here? What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to hunt round for that little brute Jumaa. Probably he's done a bolt to the nearest village. Your husband can look after himself. I'll deal with Dingaen when he comes back. Now I'm going to send out a search-party. You'll stay here? Promise me?"

It was only out of respect for Antrim that she promised. When she did so she saw a great relief in his eyes. He put out his hand to her, and for an instant she clasped it. She saw an overpowering flood of love and pity rising in his mind, and, fearing that he would speak words that she dreaded, she dropped his hand and turned away. Antrim, seeing what her gesture meant, propped his rifle up against the wall of the *banda* and left her. No sooner had he gone than she felt that she had misused him, making new difficulties when his mind was already full. She was tempted to call after him and tell him that she was sorry; but by that time he had passed beyond the sound of her voice.

She lay down on Antrim's stretcher and closed her eyes; but horror so soon filled the blank which this created that she was forced to open them. Then she

became aware of the simple furnishings of Antrim's hut; his canvas bath, his spare clothes, which Dingaana had hung on one of the undressed poles, an upturned packing case that served him for dressing table. Everything was clean and simple without any attempt at concealment. "So awfully like him," she thought. "With a man like that you know exactly where you are." One corner was filled with a pyramid of unopened boxes. On the dressing-table, over which Dingaana had spread a towel, lay a case of razors, a folding mirror, a pair of brushes with coarse bristles and ebony backs, and a leather photograph frame in which she saw the portrait of a woman. The discovery of this portrait gave her a shock of curiosity and surprise. Was it possible that this was another woman whom he loved? She stepped over cautiously to the table and examined it. A charming face, and young. Younger than herself. It was signed plainly "Honor." A woman who loved him would not trust herself to more than the bare name. Her eyes strayed from the portrait and she suddenly found herself staring at her own image in the shaving mirror. The face was thin and white with pain; its enormous eyes stared back at her so strangely that they could not be her own.

"Was I really like that," she thought, "when he kissed my eyes?"

She compared her own devastated features with the calm beauty of the woman in the portrait, and was smitten by a sudden gust of jealousy that filled her with shame. In the distance she heard the high shrilling of Antrim's whistle. The sound accused her of eavesdropping. Guiltily she dropped the portrait and returned to the bed.

"I had no right," she thought, "to look at it." But what troubled her more than her curiosity was the emotion that she had felt; for this had surprised her into the admission of a truth which her whole will vehemently denied. "If I could feel like that," she thought, "there is no hope for me. The fact that I was jealous proves that I love him and that all my prayers were useless." She went cold with horror at her own abandonment. "After all these years," she thought: "after all these years. . . ."

And then, to add to the degradation which she felt, she was suddenly tormented by a vision of the man whom she had wronged at the moment when he needed her most.

"If Jack comes back," she told herself passionately, "I will never speak to Captain Antrim again: I swear before God I won't."

"But he won't come back," her obstinate convictions told her. She imagined the figure of Rawley lying with his skull shattered by a bullet in some tangled fastness of the bush. "It's I who have killed him," she said. "It's I who am a murderess."

From this accusation there was no relief. Her mind passed rapidly from one

aspect of her guilt to another. She remembered small things in which she had failed in her duty: hard words that had been wrung from her by overpowering distress: the last that she had spoken: "I'm going. I can't stand it," and the cry that had pursued her: "Janet . . . Janet. Don't leave me!"

The voice of Rawley haunted her, his tender, querulous voice. Suddenly a sentence leapt out as clearly as if it had been spoken in her ear: "I have spoken to Antrim about my trouble. I have told him that if ever I lay hands on you he is to shoot me like a dog."

At that time she had laughed at him for his extravagance and blamed him for giving himself away: now it acquired a deadly significance. She heard once more the shot that had shattered her mind, and to this impression she added the picture of Antrim as she had met him in the bush, his face drawn and white, his eyes staring as though he had looked into hell. Other thoughts came quickly. Whenever she had spoken of that shot he had not answered her directly. When she asked him if he had heard it he had said nothing. She added to this the fact of his curious unconcern as to Rawley's fate. He had assured her too easily that Rawley would return. His whole attitude toward the tragedy had been artificial and evasive. Why should he have concerned himself first with the miserable *mtoto*? Supposing that he, like all the rest of them, had been stricken by this madness of Africa, and, meeting Rawley in the passionate flood of his avowal, had taken him at his word. The shots . . . the shots . . . ! Who had fired them?

Propped against the side of the *banda* where he had left it stood Antrim's rifle. She went toward it, weak with dread, and opened the breach, ejecting a brass cartridge case, empty, blackened with fire. She left it where it lay and threw herself weeping on the bed. Here was her proof. He had lied to her. In her mad, reeling world the stable thing had failed her. Lies, all lies. He had told her that he was aiming at her, thinking that she was a lion. Would Antrim, that practised hunter, aim at a charging lion with an empty cartridge?

She lay stunned and helpless. As soon as she recovered her power of thinking she knew that she could not bear to set eyes again on the man who shared with her the guilt of Rawley's death. It was nothing that her discovery had halved the weight of it. She only felt that she was doubly guilty. She had no right to live. If she could find another cartridge the way out would be easy; but Antrim had gone away still wearing his bandolier, and the box in which he kept ammunition was carefully locked. She thought instantly of her own shot-gun, of Rawley's bottles that were labelled "Poison"; but when it came to visiting the other *banda* in cold blood her courage forsook her. "If I lie here a little longer," she thought, "I shall get over my

cowardice. If only I could pray!”

But she could not pray again. Her soul was too far sunk in guilt for any prayer to be acceptable; and the determination for which she needed strength was one which her religion regarded as a mortal sin, an escape from the suffering that she deserved. It seemed to her that now even God must forsake her.

After an age of torment she heard again the shrilling of Antrim’s whistle, the sound of voices and a scurry of feet. She had an impulse to escape before he came, but even as it formed he stood in the doorway.

“Ah, you’re still here,” he said. “I knew I could rely on you.”

She forced herself to speak. “You have found him?”

“The *mtoto*? No.”

“My husband,” she whispered.

“No. He has not come back. It is still early. You needn’t give up hope.”

The hollowness of his words made her want to cry out against them. She dared not look at him, and yet she knew that his eyes did not avoid her. It seemed to her that he was hardened, shameless, but the accusation that rose tumultuously in her mind was too vast to be compressed into words.

“Dingaan has not come back either,” he continued in a level voice. “I have told the cook to prepare some food for you.”

“No, no,” she cried. “Please don’t. I couldn’t think of it.”

“But, my child, you can’t talk like that.”

He approached her, and she, dreading some tenderness, turned away from him.

“If you won’t eat, you must certainly try to sleep,” he said. “If you’ll let me I’ll carry you over to your own bed.”

But this frightened her more than ever. To touch him could only add to her inexplicable sin.

“Mayn’t I stay here?” she pleaded.

“Of course you can stay here.”

“Then leave me, please.”

He hesitated for a moment. “Very well,” he said. “I’ll let you know as soon as Rawley arrives.”

He went, voluntarily. Night fell. Outside the *banda* a fire was lighted that threw a flickering oblong of orange through the doorway to the pile of boxes in the corner. She heard the sticks crackle, the sound of lowered voices, and, in the near distance of the porters’ camp, the rhythmical banging of an empty petroleum tin that echoed brutally in the emptiness of her brain.

She must have slept; for it was with the suddenness of waking that she discovered at her elbow a chair on which food had been set, and heard the voices of Antrim and Asmani talking together in front of her door. "He has not come back . . . of course he has not come back," was her first thought, and she began to wonder why Antrim was sitting there until she realised that the *banda* was really his. He and Asmani were speaking Swahili. She strained her ears to listen, and though she could not understand every word, she soon gathered that the matter was serious.

"The *askaris* must keep watch all night," Antrim was saying, "so that none of them are able to get away."

"The *askaris*!" Asmani repeated scornfully. "Why are they called *askaris*? They have no more courage than the *washenzi Wagwana*. I hear them talking together: Masai, Masai, nothing but Masai."

"It is a pity that Dingaan isn't here. You and I and Dingaan could have managed them. I shan't hesitate to shoot."

"What can we do? There are forty of them. You cannot drive forty men to carry loads even with a rifle. As soon as they came to the village and found it empty I knew what would happen. They say: 'If these people who know them run away from the Masai, why should we, who know nothing, except that they have long spears and drink blood, stay?' It is like a disease. It runs through the whole camp. If there were a river full of crocodiles in front of them and the Masai behind, they would cross it to hide themselves under the water. We cannot stop them, *Bwana*, they must go."

"I suppose you are right. We can't stop them. You are not afraid, Asmani?"

"I go with you, *Bwana Chui*."

"Very good. I don't think we have much to fear from the Masai."

"Who knows!"

Silence. Some one stirred and threw a green bough on the fire. The orange oblong was flawed with smoke shadow.

"Do you think," said Antrim's voice, "that Dingaan would follow the *bwana mkubwa* like a buffalo until he killed him?"

"The *mtoto* was precious to Dingaan. He was like the pet mongoose that Bwana Tracey had: ugly vermin, but amusing. Dingaan was subject to a madness like the *bwana mkubwa* himself, but as a rule it soon passed. I think he will come back to-night. Whether he has killed the *bwana* no one can say."

"He had the rifle with him," said Antrim, "and the memsahib heard firing."

He is even trying to cover himself with Asmani, she thought. "How carefully he prepares the way!"

"Now I go to the *Wagwana*," said Asmani. "If we went back to the coast it is possible that they would march with us, though even then we could not count on them. But if we go north . . ."

"We go north," said Antrim. "It is decided. We cannot change now."

"*Haya!*" Asmani left him.

Antrim shifted his seat to windward of the fire in such a way that the shadow of his shoulders stole within the *banda* and moved over the pile of packing-cases. She shivered. It was almost as if he had projected a part of his ghostly self into her presence. It made her uneasy. She wished that he would go away.

Suddenly the shadow grew monstrous, blotting out the light. She was terrified lest he should enter, and almost cried out to stop him. Then it disappeared. Asmani, in the distance, was calling "*Bwana . . . bwana!*" and Antrim had risen to see what had happened.

"He has come," Asmani panted.

"*Bwana Rawley?*" Janet's heart fluttered.

"*Dingaan, Bwana.*"

"Send him to me."

"He is coming."

She held her breath in the silence. At last Antrim's voice came to her again, level, dispassionate.

"Well, Dingaan, where have you been?"

"I have been in the bush, *Bwana*."

"That is true. Tell me the truth in other things. You made me a promise and you have broken it. I do not expect a Zulu to break promises. Give me the rifle."

A pause.

"While I was away you tried to kill *Baas Rawley* in his bed."

"I was mad, *Bwana*. Jumaa had gone. The big *baas* had driven him away with fear."

"The missis has told me. Do you know that you laid hands on her, or were you too mad to remember?" Antrim's voice was strained and hard.

"It is true. I remember. I am sorry."

"Sorry? For that I could shoot you as you stand there."

Dingaan was silent.

"So far you have spoken the truth," Antrim continued. "Now tell me truly again: where is the big *Baas*?"

"I do not know."

"You are lying to me, Dinga. The sight of this revolver is on you. Speak the truth. Where is he?"

"I do not know."

"You followed him with the rifle. You wanted to kill him."

"That is true."

"And you tell me that you did not find him? I don't believe you."

"It is true, *Bwana*. There were many *spoors*. If I had found him I would have killed him; but I could not find him. I came to some water, I drank, and then I slept. When I awoke I did not want to kill him any longer . . . I thought perhaps the *mtoto* is hiding near the camp and will come back. In that case I might have killed the big *baas* for nothing."

In the silence that followed Janet heard the click of an opened rifle-breach. Terror seized her. "He is going to shoot," she thought, "and that will be another murder." She rose quickly and staggered toward the doorway, ready to cry out and stop him. Then Antrim's voice, as calm as ever, restrained her.

"You see this," he was saying. "The rifle has been fired. I am not a fool! What do you say to that?"

"It is true, *Bwana*. I saw a shadow in the long grass. I thought it was the lion of last night. I fired."

"A good story, Dinga."

"It is true, *Bwana*. Why should I tell you a lie? You have said that you can kill me with the revolver. I am not afraid. If you think I am lying, you can shoot."

Janet, listening, held her breath.

"No, I shall not shoot," said Antrim quietly.

She breathed again. "He couldn't," she thought, "he couldn't. I know the reason why. It's all a ghastly comedy."

"I expect you to prove your innocence in another way," Antrim went on. "To-night we can do nothing; but to-morrow at daybreak, you will go and find the big *baas*. When you have found him I will believe you. This time I shall not give you the gun. You understand?"

"I will do what you say, *Bwana Chui*."

"In the meantime I will try to find Jumaa. You can be sure that I shall do my best. If you had been a porter from the coast I should not have trusted you. I should have shot you five minutes ago. But I know that you are a man, and I'm treating you as a man. To-morrow you will leave the camp. Until you find the big *baas* you will not come back. Without him I do not wish to see you again."

"I have spoken the truth, *Bwana*, and I will find him."

"That is the only way in which you can prove it. You can go."

Gradually the gleam of the fire died away from the interior of the *banda*. Outside was an unearthly quiet. Listening, Janet Rawley wondered whether Antrim was still sitting there or if he had stolen away. Her mind was still bewildered by the problem of the two shots. As soon as she had discovered the empty cartridge case in Antrim's rifle she had leapt at the ghastly suspicion which it suggested. Now that she knew that another shot had been fired by Dingaan she was ashamed of the terrible charge which she had imagined against Antrim. The new suspicion came to her as an immense relief; she clutched eagerly at any evidence in Antrim's favour; nothing but the panic of her distraught mind and her belief in the overwhelming power of Antrim's passion could have induced her to accuse him. She had wavered for one moment when Antrim, with his revolver levelled, had hesitated to shoot. That weakness had seemed to her a confirmation of his guilt. In this reprieve she now discovered a decree of rough justice. Antrim had given Dingaan his chance. If he succeeded in finding Rawley, he was saved; and a hunter skilled in woodcraft must surely find a man who had been missing for so short a time. If, on the other hand, Dingaan were guilty, if he knew that Rawley was lying in the bush with a bullet in his brain, he would not dare to return; he must wander, without food or weapons, in country from which the fear of the Masai had banished all native life. Even if he struggled down into the low-land, he would find himself at the mercy of alien and hostile tribes. The sentence was terrible, but it was also just. It seemed to her typical of Antrim as she knew him: a strong man wisely adapting himself to the savage country and the people with whom, in the absence of law, he had to deal. She was thrilled with admiration. "If only," she thought tragically, "he did not love me!"

At last, from utter exhaustion, she fell asleep. In the grey before dawn she woke up frightened. Something stirred at the side of her bed. Her sleepy mind leapt at the idea of some savage visitor, a snake, or perhaps a leopard. She lay paralysed with dread, unable to cry for help. Then on the back of her hand she felt something light, cold, smooth, like the skin of a snake. A whisper reached her ear:

"*Bibi! Nataka maji.*"

It was the *mtoto*, begging for water.

She jumped out of bed and caught him in her arms. She could have hugged the little beast for joy. For the moment it seemed as though his return solved all their difficulties.

"Jumaa!" she cried. "What a fright you gave me! We had lost you. Where have you been?"

The child pointed to the pile of boxes in the corner. "I was afraid," he said. "I saw *Bwana Chui* go away, and then I thought: 'The *bwana mkubwa* will never go to that *banda*'—no one goes there but *Bwana Chui*—so I came here and slept. Now I am thirsty. Give me water."

She gave him water to drink, then picked him up in her arms and carried him out into the twilight. From a ground-sheet on the lee of the dead fire, the figure of Antrim arose, gaunt in his pyjamas. "He didn't leave me after all," she thought quickly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Jumaa. He was hiding behind your boxes all the time. Can you call Dingaan?"

"Asmani will be awake," he said.

He blew his whistle and in an instant the Zanzibari was running toward them, ghostly white.

"Where is Dingaan?" Antrim asked.

"Dingaan has gone," said Asmani.

CHAPTER XI

1

All through that day Janet was left alone with Asmani and the *mtoto*. This small animal, having satisfied himself that the big *baas* had mysteriously disappeared, attached himself to her more closely than ever. It was just as well that she found some interest to sober her thoughts, for horror lay in wait to fill the least emptiness. Luckily Jumaa kept her busy, chattering away in Swahili as though to make up for the time of silence he had lost in hiding. Curiously enough, he neither mentioned Dingaan's name nor seemed in the least anxious to know what had happened to his protector.

"How inhuman the creature is," she thought, "and how like Africa! That is the effect this country has on one. There is no pity in it. If I stayed here for long I should become as callous as this child."

This thought rose in her mind again when Antrim paid her a hurried visit in the middle of the day. Ever since dawn he and the porters, whom he had reduced to some semblance of discipline by the threat of the loaded rifle, had been quartering the bush in search of Rawley. He walked right up to the *banda* and asked if he might come in. He found it difficult to address her, and she felt it a duty to help him out of his embarrassment.

"You have found nothing?" she asked.

And when he replied: "Nothing," she saw herself strangely unmoved. She felt that some sympathy was demanded of her, but could not find a word.

"This afternoon we shall work to southward," he said.

"Yes?" was all her reply.

At this moment his eyes lighted on the rifle which she had left on the chair after her enormous discovery on the night before. He picked it up and opened the breach. He saw that the cartridge had been ejected, and turned on her sharply.

"Who has been playing with this?"

"I looked at it last night," she told him.

"Why?" The burning blue of his eyes seared her, and her heart gave a jump. Her old suspicions awakened: "He sees that I have found him out," she thought. And yet, if he were guilty, he couldn't face her in cold blood like that.

"Why?" he repeated.

He was forcing her to lie. "I don't know," she told him.

But he wouldn't be satisfied. His own suspicions had been aroused. It was clear

to him that she had attempted to kill herself.

"Janet," he cried, "for God's sake be honest with me!"

She would not answer.

"I know what this means," he said. "Things are not so hopeless as all that. To some people, at least, your life is precious. Promise me that you won't think of such a ghastly thing again." His voice trembled.

No man, guilty of murder, she thought, could continue to play a part with such intensity. She was forced once more to believe in him.

"No, it wasn't that," she murmured. He shook his head incredulously. The fact that she had wronged him forced her to suggest the humiliating truth.

"You'll hate me, Captain Antrim, but I couldn't help it. The thought of those shots and what went before tortured me. I looked at the rifle for an explanation."

"And found the cartridge with which I nearly shot you," he said with an aggrieved laugh.

"No," she said slowly. "I found an empty cartridge case. There it is, on the floor."

"But that's impossible," he cried.

"There it is."

He picked it up and started at it. "Impossible," he repeated, searching his memory. She remained silent, steadfastly looking at him.

"Yes, I remember," he said at last. "I took a long shot at a *kongoni* and missed him." He shook his head. "But I can't believe that I didn't reload. It's no use trying to remember. The whole thing's a nightmare; I can't pick up the threads. But is it possible," he went on, "that you should ever have imagined. . . ."

"I did imagine," she admitted. "Forgive me!"

"Janet . . . you couldn't!"

"I'm sorry. Mustn't I tell you the truth?"

He was stunned with indignation. "But *that* . . ." he began.

"I know, I know . . ." she cried. "I wish I hadn't told you. Nothing's any good unless we speak the truth. And now I can't bear it. Tell me that you forgive me."

"You, of all people in the world!"

"I know. You can't say anything that I don't deserve. Of course I believe you. I'll believe anything that you tell me. Only forgive me!"

He took her hand and kissed it. Then, without another word, he went away.

"How he must have hated me," she thought, "and how I deserve it!"

The day dragged itself out. Twice, during the afternoon, the *mtoto* brought her food that she could not eat. In this living death her body seemed to need nothing to

support it. Half an hour after sunset Antrim returned, ghastly, from his vain search.

"Not a sign," he told her. "Nothing."

"And Dingaan?"

"No sign of Dingaan either. I'm afraid it's a bad job. To-morrow we will have another try." Then he changed his tone. "Jumaa tells me that you have eaten nothing. That won't do. It's madness, or soon will be, if you don't. Now you must come along with me and take some dinner. Everything is ready."

The idea still revolted her, but shame for the wrong she had done him compelled her to obey. "Besides," she thought, "if I allow myself to appear too pitiful his tenderness will get the better of him; he will be forced to show that he loves me; and that I simply couldn't bear."

So she followed him submissively and sat down in the firelight pretending to eat the food that choked her. All the time she felt that Antrim was only eating to set her an example. The whole atmosphere of their meal was unreal and strange; the surroundings of the camp as unfamiliar as if she had never set eyes on them before. During the last twenty-four hours her memory had become blank as a newly sponged slate. While they sat together she tried to talk of ordinary things. It was a relief to her when suddenly her eyes caught sight of a thin line of fire creeping over the distance of the steppe.

"What is that?" she asked him. "It must be thirty miles away."

They rose together and watched its fine serpiginous course.

"They have fired the bush," he said. "That is what they do when they have passed, so that the young grass will be springing again when they return."

"Who?" she asked.

"The Masai." He was not anxious to explain.

"The Masai," she repeated. "I heard you and Asmani talking about them last night. We have no reason to be frightened of them?"

"Directly, no. Now I must leave you. Promise me that you will go to sleep to-night."

"If you have forgiven me."

"Janet!"

Frightened of his emotion she turned quickly away. When he had gone she stood watching the bush-fire with an empty mind, until she became aware of a great commotion in the porters' camp. It was there that Antrim had gone, and so she became suddenly frightened for him. If there were trouble with the porters he had only Asmani to stand by him, and Asmani was a black man like the rest. She wished that she had gone with him; for she, after all, could wield a rifle like a man if he

would let her.

“But if I went now,” she thought, “he would only be angry with me. I have promised him to go to sleep, and I must play the game.”

Reluctantly she returned to the *banda* and stretched herself on Antrim’s bed without undressing. In the distance she still heard sounds of commotion. She lay tense, listening to them. “If they turn nasty,” she thought, “he will be forced to shoot; and then he could not blame me if I went to help him.” The thought of Antrim’s danger so consumed her that when, for an instant, a vision of Rawley intruded itself, she realised with shame that she had forgotten all about him. She could not think that had happened to her. She had no idea that she was capable of such wickedness. It was her plain duty to think of no one else.

At last, without the summons for which she had been waiting, the tumult ceased. After that the night subsided into an uncanny quiet. Once she heard a lion: often the howling of hyænas and the sharp foxy yelping of jackals.

“They have come for the poor donkeys,” she told herself.

And then the thought of Rawley re-entered her mind.

2

Next morning it was Antrim who awakened her.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said, “and don’t get up. I’m going out at once; toward the East, and I’m taking Asmani with me. I wanted you to know that you’ll be all alone. You and Jumaa, I mean.”

“You are taking every one else?” she asked.

“They’ve taken themselves. They saw the Masai’s fires, and I couldn’t stop them. If you are in any trouble I want you to fire a shot. Here is the Purdey loaded in both barrels. I can trust you with it?”

She knew what he meant. “Of course you can trust me. But if there’s no one here why shouldn’t I come with you and Asmani?”

“I’d rather you didn’t, for your own sake as well as mine. We shall have a gruelling day, and I want you to keep your strength for when it’s needed. Matters are rather complicated just now.”

“I will do exactly as you wish.”

“You’re wonderful,” she heard him say.

It thrilled her; but he shouldn’t have said it.

All through that day she drove herself to an artificial busyness with Jumaa, who was enchanted to do anything in her company. She heard nothing of Antrim or

Asmani. The forest had received them into its silence. She and Jumaa fed the white donkey, by this time the only survivor of the team. They cooked their lunch together, and though the food tasted more of Jumaa than of anything else she found that her appetite had mysteriously returned.

She felt stronger, not only in body but in mind: so much stronger that she even dared to put her strength to the test by re-entering the *banda* that she had shared with Rawley and putting his things in order.

Evening came, and with it the duty of preparing food for Antrim's return. Westward she saw the fires of the Masai creeping over the steppe, but they were distant and, this time, much farther south. They busied themselves with their cooking till Antrim came back, haggard and faint with hunger.

"So nothing happened?" he asked her with a smile.

"Nothing. Have you seen the fires? They have moved quite a lot."

"Yes, I've seen them. One never knows. It's just like a thunderstorm moving with the wind. You can't be sure where it'll break."

He said nothing of his failure to find Rawley or get in touch with Dingaan. There was nothing to be said. The fact that he and Asmani had returned alone was sufficient, and so, out of delicacy, she made no comment. He ate his dinner and then lay down flat on his back, half-dead with fatigue. She sat near him, afraid to look at him. For a time neither spoke. The *mtoto* squatted solemnly on the other side of the fire, as if he were sharing in a ceremony of silence.

At last Antrim spoke.

"We must make a *bandabast* for to-morrow."

The word puzzled her. "Plans," he explained.

"Yes?"

"We can't stay here for ever. Without porters we are rather helpless. To-morrow Asmani and I will continue the search. There's only one patch that we haven't worked through thoroughly. And now the element of time begins to come in. I mean that every day it becomes less likely . . ." He paused.

"That he can be alive," she added softly. "Yes, I understand."

"Without food . . . without knowing where water is to be found. You know what I mean. So that really, if we find nothing to-morrow, I don't think we should be justified in going on and on. With only two of us it's difficult to make a thorough search. It just gives him the chance of hearing us and calling out if any accident has happened. But three days is a long time in this country."

"I'm afraid you're right."

"I only want you to realise that I shall have done everything humanly possible up

to the point when it becomes more important to think of you.”

“As if that mattered!” she thought. “To me neither life nor death means anything now. But he is so good about it that I can’t be unkind to him. It would be cruel to tell him that he’s doing all this for nothing.”

“I’m entirely in your hands,” she said. “Decide what you think best.”

“I shall leave you early to-night,” he said a little later. “It’s important that I should be fit for to-morrow.” He said good-night and left her sitting over the fire, where she remained, for sheer lack of energy to move, until the embers began to fall in.

She began to wonder if, through her excess of delicacy and anxiety to make things easy for him, she hadn’t shown a shocking callousness. “When he spoke of giving up the search for Jack and leaving him to his fate, whatever that may be, any normal woman would have been overcome with horror. I answered him as if he had been proposing plans for a picnic. Heaven knows what he must have thought of me! But I can’t help what he thinks. I did what was natural to me. It isn’t my fault that I’m incapable of feeling. Perhaps it’s even a good thing; for the fact that he has seen my callousness will cure him of the idea that he loves me.”

It occurred to her that she was thinking of the whole subject only in terms of her relation with Antrim; she became aware of the necessity of justifying her own conduct to herself. “I must not pretend,” she told herself. “Self-deception is the one unpardonable sin; but I am not deceiving myself when I say that Jack will be far happier if he is dead. He has told me so a thousand times, and though he did so only to move my sympathy, I believe he spoke the truth. Cornish people are awfully realistic; and just because Captain Antrim is romantic there’s no reason why I should play up to him.”

When she woke the next morning Antrim and Asmani had already disappeared; so, also, had the goats which should have provided the milk for her breakfast. The *mtoto* was upset by this discovery, partly because he enjoyed the privilege of milking them; but Janet took it as a matter of course.

“Perhaps,” she thought, “one of the *Wagwana* returned to drive them off. Perhaps they were picked up by some Masai straggler. In any case nothing matters.”

During the day she conquered her deadly lethargy to the extent of going through the contents of her old *banda*, getting ready for their departure, discarding everything that did not seem essential. On Rawley’s bed she piled a great heap of his accumulated rubbish; his chemicals, his clothes, his Chemical Diaries. “How he would hate,” she thought, “to see me treating them with so little respect!”

During this process of elimination she became acutely conscious of Rawley: it was as though some part of his aura still clung to the material objects to which he

had devoted such care; as if these tenuous remains of him were still powerful enough to resent her interference. She fought against this feeling, but as she went on with her work, it gained on her, gradually increasing, like the pressure of an automatic brake, until she was forced to stop. A sudden fear assailed her. In spite of herself she spoke: "He's alive. He must be alive. He couldn't influence me like this if he were dead. Perhaps they have found him."

After that she dared not touch another of Rawley's things. She left the remainder scattered about and went on selecting her own. Among a tangle of feminine rubbish, —old baby ribbon, thimbles, hairpins—that she had crammed for tidiness into a little box, she found the card which Antrim had sent up to her in the hotel at Mombasa and read the message which he had written on the back of it in his firm schoolboyish hand. It was the only letter he had ever sent her, and as she gazed at it she fell into a dream of those remote unreal days. Mechanically she folded the card and put it in her pocket; but as soon as she had done so her conscience troubled her.

"Why are you so careful to keep a trifle like that?" it suggested; and, for reply, she tore the card in pieces.

This symbolical action had a curious effect on her. The atmosphere of the *banda* lightened. It was almost as if Rawley approved. She set to work again with a strange elation and new vigour, reducing her wardrobe rigorously, determined that when they came to travel again her luggage should not be an embarrassment. By the time that Antrim should have returned in the evening all was finished. She and the *mtoto* lit the fire for supper.

The short twilight faded and still Antrim did not come. Every moment she grew more anxious. "I was right," she thought, "they have found him. They are late because they have to carry him in." And instead of joy and relief there descended on her an irritable melancholy which distressed her the more because it showed her the depth of her own wickedness. Things had been better as they were. She felt that she would rather die than meet Rawley again. "And that is just why I am condemned to live," she thought.

At last they returned. Alone. In answer to her questioning eyes Antrim shook his head. His heart was too full for speech, and she respected his silence.

"Poor thing," she thought, "he suffers more than I do. If only I could help him! He suffers because he thinks that I am suffering; but if I were to tell him that I can feel nothing he would lose his ideal of me, and that would be worse still."

When their meal was over he struggled to speak, his lips tremulous with emotion. "We must start to-morrow morning," he said.

"I am ready," she replied. "I've prepared everything."

He did not seem to hear her. He only stared into the fire. Then, without looking at her, he murmured: "You poor child!"

The words were too much for her. She choked, tears flooded her eyes. She put her hands to her eyes and hurried away from him.

3

Next morning, at dawn, they started. It seemed a strange and ghostly thing to leave that camp, the scene of so many passionate events, littered with all the possessions that they had abandoned. No sooner had they passed away from it than she remembered things which she should not have left behind, and in particular the pearl necklace which Rawley had given her as a wedding present. She checked the impulse to tell Antrim of her loss. He had too much to think of to be worried with feminine negligence. Such things mattered little. This exodus was like the beginning or the end of life. *Naked came I out and naked shall I return . . .*

Antrim walked silently in front of them, a heavy hunting knapsack slung from his shoulders. Janet came next, carrying nothing but her fowling-piece. She had pleaded for a burden, but Antrim feared for her strength. In her right hand she held the rein of the white donkey, which stumbled beneath the weight of their provisions. Last of all came Asmani and Jumaa, each carrying on his head an unwieldy load.

She remembered a picture that used to hang in one of the servant's bedrooms at Withiel; a led donkey and a group of fugitives straining forward in darkness: *The Flight into Egypt*. The servants' bedrooms at Withiel had a smell of their own; a smell of gnawed apple-cores and yellow soap. That smell, which she had believed to be unique, now pervaded the air until another, hot and aromatic, swept upward from the trodden brushwood, and Withiel was forgotten. "And that is the last of Withiel," she thought.

The sun rose, opening a day of the most poignant beauty, and with it there came into her heart a shiver of the old rapture which their departure from Pembeni had been made magical. It was unnatural that she should feel it, and yet she was not alone, for the steps of the others visibly lightened; only the poor donkey seemed incapable of finding any joy in life. The *mtoto* began to sing. She turned and smiled at him: it was good to be young and ignorant.

They were travelling now due northward, on their right the woods of the escarpment still gave them company and a scattered shade. Westward the Masai steppe rolled away interminably, bathed in a clear blaze of sunshine, all its beauty crystalised, motionless, like the beauty of a mirage. An hour after dawn a breeze

awakened, and with it the mirage was shattered, for the bush was troubled by it and ran into waves and ripples of silver. All through the early morning Antrim never spoke, and Janet, so full of swift irrelevant thoughts and fancies, felt that she was like a small child walking solemnly behind a funeral procession, half-awed, half-callous, but wholly unrepentant. His silence shamed her; she felt that she couldn't stand it much longer; but when they came to their first halting place Antrim shed his sombreness. He sat down beside her as though he, too, were a little ashamed, and began to talk of the plans which he had never mentioned on the night before. As she listened to him she was conscious of a superior subtlety.

"Poor dear," she thought, "he's forcing himself to be kind to me. He's afraid of hurting my feelings. I can see everything that he's thinking, and yet he calls me a child."

"I make it sixty miles," he said, "from here to the Pangani River. That means four days' march, if you can stand the pace. In the neighbourhood of the Pangani I know that there are German settlements. From there we can easily cross the border and reach the frontier station at Taveta. A man I used to know is A.D.C. at Taveta, unless they've moved him."

"Four days," she said.

"It mustn't be longer. I've cut down our food to the lowest possible limit; and that's why I want you to save yourself as much as we can when we rest and make the pace when we are marching. The margin's so fine that we can't afford to take any risk. My principal anxiety is water. But I know you understand."

She understood. Through the heat of midday she tried to compel herself to sleep, but the flies that buzzed along the edge of the woodland made sleep impossible. "Four days," she thought. "That's very little. The first day is nearly over."

When they restarted the heat of the sun was terrific and Antrim's pace so sustained that she was thankful that their speed was limited by the weakness of the donkey. The early evening brought no relief. Her limbs, for long disused, began to ache so savagely that she could only keep herself going by an effort of her diminished will. From time to time Antrim looked round at her impatiently. "He must see that I'm nearly done," she thought, "But he's quite right not to say anything, for sympathy would only make me weaker."

They came at last to a patch where the bush thickened. They began to climb. Even though night was approaching there was no coolness in the air. Walking among those thickset trees she felt that she was moving through the exhalations of an uncleanly crowd. Luckily for her strength, their pace slackened, and, as they pressed onward, the bush grew so dense that Antrim had to hack his way with a *panga*,

releasing new oppressive odours of green.

"The trees are determined not to let us pass," she told herself. "They must be killed before we can pass." And she saw the dry acacias oozing a crimson sap, like blood, where Antrim's *panga* had sliced into them. At last the trunks grew stouter and thorned branches stretched so low that all the impetus of their progress was spent. Antrim, his face caked with sweat and red dust, gave up the struggle.

"We must turn back," he said grimly.

Without a word they retreated along the track they had made. Dust rose in clouds from the donkey's hoofs. There was no current of air to blow it away, and so it floated suspended clogging the air that they breathed. By the time they reached the point at which the bush had begun to thicken it was nearly dark.

"Can't we stay here?" she asked him.

"Yes."

He told Asmani to take the pack off the donkey. The brute fell down and rolled, and the dust was thicker than ever.

"I shall leave you here," Antrim said. "Jumaa will light a fire, so you needn't be afraid that I shall lose myself. I'm going to see if there's any sign of water."

She waited patiently for a space of time that seemed to her like hours. Mercifully the air grew cooler. She must have caught a moment's sleep; for when she recovered consciousness she didn't know where she was. She put her fingers up to rub her eyes, the lids were rough with grit.

"What a sight I must look!" she said, and then, obeying an instinct deep-rooted, she rose and went toward a canvas *chagghal* of water that Asmani had hung upon a branch near by. She soaked her handkerchief and sponged her burning eyes. "What a wonderful thing water is," she thought, "the most wonderful in the world. Water and darkness! Why didn't I think of this before!" She soused the handkerchief again.

As she did so Antrim caught her arm. She gave a cry of terror.

"Do you know what you're doing?" he said quickly.

She wondered if he were mad, and her puzzled face softened him.

"No baths allowed Memsahib," he said. "Every drop counts. This water represents our life. One cupful is the ration for to-night. In future no one touches it but myself. See?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "Call me any name you like. You didn't find any?"

"No. I had a dig with the *panga* in what was once a stream, but the trees have had first go. You see how beastly green they are. Better luck to-morrow. Now you'd better take some food and get all the sleep you can. The bush is much thinner down below. Let that comfort you."

She shivered. The night had suddenly gone cold; but even the cold made the dense air no thinner. After they had eaten Antrim unpacked the bundle that the *mtoto* carried and handed her two blankets.

"Is that all?" she asked.

He stared, as if he thought she was exacting.

"Yes, that's all," he said.

"Then you must have one of them."

"No, no. You're under martial law, and that's the equipment that's been ordered you. I can look after myself."

She consented. "When he's asleep," she thought, "I shall be able to creep up and throw one of them over him without his knowing." But as soon as she had lain down sleep overtook her, so that she knew no more until he called her next morning.

"Coffee," he said, "you'd better make the most of it."

They set off quickly. Antrim had been right. On the lower slope of the hill the bush grew thinner. In half an hour they had made more progress than they had achieved in the whole of the evening before. At sunrise they found a real waterhole. At first sight it seemed to be nothing but a depression with a bottom of caked mud; but the reeds that grew beside it and the coarser texture of the grasses encouraged Antrim to dig until water began to ooze from the sides of the pit; black water which Jumaa collected. He and the donkey had first share, and both seemed delighted with it. She thought it a shame to mix this noisome liquid with the clean water in the *changghal*, and the fact that it was filtered through a piece of questionable linen, the property of Asmani, offended her imagination; but Antrim took Asmani's filter as a matter of course, and so she said nothing. His find had elated him; his whole mood was less sombre than that of the day before.

"That was a real bit of luck," he said. "We might just as easily have missed it, and then, by to-night, there'd have been the devil to pay."

So they went on: Antrim straining in front, and she, anxious to keep pace with him, tugging at the donkey's rein. It seemed, indeed, that luck was on their side, for though they could never see far ahead, the bush continued to thin away before them, and going was fairly easy. Sometimes, when they topped a rise, the expanse of the steppe would open out in the mirage-like loveliness that she had seen on the day before; but these glimpses passed quickly, leaving them to the endless monotony of dry bush, its lazy butterflies, its sad, subdued birdsong. When the sun was up only two birds remained; the melancholy hornbill, which haunted them like a ghost, and that bird of delirium whose note climbed up and up till the imagination was strained to despair in following its ascent. Then, towards noon, the clear sky clouded. Their

steps began to drag; the scents of the bush lay low under a white sky; the calling of birds became unutterably weary. Janet began to wonder if Antrim would ever stop.

For three hours only they rested. It seemed to her that they had no sooner halted than they were off again. Her limbs were heavy with a leaden languor, but she could not complain. She prayed to heaven that she was not going to be ill again. For herself it would not matter much, but for the others it would mean a tragedy. "He would never consent to leave me," she thought, "and yet that would be the only sensible thing to do. My life is not important to any one." Standing in the hot, motionless air, she shivered. "I *won't* be ill," she told herself. "I must fight against it."

Asmani and Jumaa lifted their loads. Antrim smiled at her with one word: "Ready?" She gave a gentle tug at the donkey's rein. He would not move. He stood with his front feet splayed. Then he began to move his lowered head from side to side, slowly, rhythmically, as an elephant sways its trunk.

"Come along," she cried, tugging again, "come along! What is the matter with you?"

But the donkey did not hear her. Suddenly, as if a spring had broken, it toppled over on its side and lay dead still, a white froth oozing from mouth and nostrils.

Antrim was on his knees beside it.

"What's the matter?" she whispered.

"I don't know. Just like horse-sickness," he answered. "Anyway, the poor brute's done. We can't stop."

He and Asmani cut away the load from the donkey's back. The *mtoto* watched them, intensely interested. Janet lay down in the bush beside them; she was thankful for the respite that the accident gave her.

"We shall leave it behind for the lions," she thought. "That was just what happened to Jack; just what ought to happen to me. Really there's nothing very terrible in it. One can only die once."

She listened, almost without interest, while Antrim undid the load and agreed with Asmani what things should be kept and what abandoned. The packs that Asmani and the *mtoto* had carried were opened, their contents scattered. Antrim discarded ruthlessly. "If there is anything that you particularly want to keep," he said, "you had better tell me."

There was nothing. Apart from the clothes she wore, she had no interest in anything. He became a little irritable with her inertia.

"Let me know at once," he said. "We can't waste time."

She assured him that in all the bundles there was nothing that mattered, and, for a moment, he looked at her suspiciously. This made her fear lest he saw that she was

ill, and she compelled herself to an unnatural brightness. "You still treat me like a lady," she said.

Within ten minutes they had left the donkey behind. Its muzzle and eyes were already black with flies, and in the white sky she saw the speck of a watchful king-vulture. Among the sacrifices that Antrim had made were his heavy rifle, Janet's shot-gun and one of the two blankets. They moved forward more heavily burdened than ever but at a greater speed, for now their pace was no longer limited by that of the donkey's failing strength.

By this time Janet was sure that she was in for another attack of fever. In her pocket she carried a small store of quinine, a tube of five grain tablets, one of which she had religiously taken at breakfast as a prophylactic. Now she felt that she was in need of a larger dose and a new difficulty arose. She could not swallow without water the four tablets which she had determined to take. The water was in Antrim's charge. She dared not ask him for it; partly because the muddy stuff was more precious than diamonds, partly because the fact that she asked for it would give her away. "And if he discovers that I am ill," she thought, "the poor thing will be devastated. He has quite enough to worry about. What an awful nuisance women are!" She slipped the tablets into her mouth, chewed them up and swallowed them.

All through the afternoon she struggled on in a dream, tormented not only by thirst but by the sickening bitterness of the quinine which she could not get rid of. But she was glad she had taken it, not because she felt any better for the dose, but because she still had hopes that it might cut short the inevitable attack.

At last, mercifully, Antrim called a halt. She flopped down incontinently under a fine acacia. The ground was thick with dry thorns, but she was too weak to mind them. In a moment he had gone, setting out once more on his indefatigable search for water, and when she was left alone she began to suffer a temptation that resembled the classical torments of the damned. There, on the branch above her, he had slung the moist water-*chagghal*. Neither her eyes nor her imagination could leave it alone. The bitterness of her parched mouth called to her again and again. "One little sip," she thought, "only one sip! It would be like heaven." But Antrim had not given her permission to drink. She could take so little, she told herself, that it would never be noticed. No one need see her. Asmani was already busy lighting a fire for which the *mtoto* collected brushwood. It would be so easy, and nobody would be any the worse.

"No," she told herself, "I mustn't. I simply can't. He's trusted me, and if I let him down, even if he didn't know I'd done so, I could never forgive myself."

She lay quiet, with her eyes closed; but that was no good. Her imagination went

on playing with the idea of water: all the water she had ever seen or tasted: even the memory of the muddy hole that they had passed in the morning was a torture to her. She began to feel less sure of herself, hoping desperately that Antrim would soon return. "But even then," she thought, "he may not give me anything to drink till dinner. If I took just a little water now I might quite honestly refuse it when he offered it to me. I have a right to just a little: what does it matter if I take it sooner or later?"

Obedying an impulse stronger than her faltering will, she rose to her knees. A thorn drove into one of them, and a cry of pain escaped her dry lips. It was nearly dark. Through the black branches she saw the glimmer of Asmani's fire and the slim silhouette of Jumaa with his back turned to her. "Thank heaven it's dark!" she thought as she rose, feeling like a thief, to her feet. Then she heard Antrim's voice: "Hello, Memsahib, what about a drink?"

She was saved, and so conscious of her salvation from an act of treachery that her lips trembled and tears came into her eyes when she spoke. And yet the cheeriness of his tone frightened her. She knew it meant that his search for more water had failed. She was careful not to ask him any questions.

"Only one blanket to-night," he told her when their meal was over, "and half rations to-morrow. If you're cold you'd better sing out and you can have my coat. I'm used to this sort of thing and you're not."

She smiled. At that moment her whole body burned like a furnace.

4

A few yards away from the heap of dried grass which Jumaa had collected for Janet's bed Antrim lay down for the night. Above him, like a trail of starlit cloud, the Milky Way blew southward to lose itself in the denser cloud-banks of Magellan pointing the suspended trinket of the Cross. It was a night in which the earth seemed as vast and more lonely than the sky. Janet and the natives slept, or seemed to sleep. The fire had gone out. The only conscious thing in all that darkness was his own brain, and that, in its fiery activity, seemed like a white pulsating flame, inexhaustible, never for a moment still. No sooner had a thought formed itself than the flame leapt up and shrivelled it like paper and another was born.

In moments he saw clearly. He saw in front of him, like a map modelled in relief, the rest of their course over the edge of the steppe; he measured it into hours of marching; the hours contracted into seconds; they had come through; that vivid belt of green was the forest belt nourished by the Pangani, a swift, dark river. Water. . . .

All the water that he could count on oozed and chilled in the canvas *chagghal*, shadowy over Janet Rawley's head. That night he had searched desperately and found none. All through the day his eyes had been searching for the change in the vegetation that foretold it, but had not seen a sign. If this bad luck continued they would never see the Pangani's green. Their eyes would only know the mockery of vivid acacias that thrust their roots into deep hidden channels which he could never reach.

Ridiculous. The sound of water was in his ears, faint and distant, like the seething of the sea within a shell. Forty miles as the crow flies. In the bush he had seen a pair of crows with black glossy feathers and white rings round their necks. Not even a crow could live without water; not even the doves with their liquid amphoric notes. The bush was full of life. No life without water. Over the escarpment there were rivers. If one could fly. . . . The papers said that an American—two American brothers—had learned to fly. Somewhere over there rose the river N'dalo, greeny-white, like a river of china clay. The name stuck in his mind. Rawley had told it him, and when he asked Asmani what it meant, Asmani had told him that it was a dialect word—Hehe, or something like that—meaning the same as Malalo, Sleeping-place. Sleep . . .

Sleep was impossible. And Rawley? Rawley, poor devil! He wondered what had happened to him. No doubt he had found his sleeping place. A happy ending; for he would never have escaped from himself. A happy escape for Janet, too. She must know that as well as he did. Strange and wonderful woman. There was no woman like her, and yet he couldn't understand her. He wished he could. There was nothing in the world that he desired more than to see into her mind. That was how a man always felt when he was in love . . . and never got any further, either!

He remembered the one moment in which he had seemed nearest to this achievement, the sweet and terrible moment when he had held her in his arms. Then she had allowed him to kiss her eyes. Allowed him: that wasn't the word. She had been too dazed to realise what he was doing. As soon as she had come to her senses she had repulsed him. She wasn't that kind of woman, thank God! But he wondered if she realised what those kisses had meant to him. Like water in a thirsty land. Water . . . He must not think of water. Of course she hadn't. On her side there had never been any question of passion. Perhaps she was incapable of it, and that was part of poor old Rawley's trouble. He couldn't believe that; he couldn't believe that there was any quality natural or desirable in a woman that she lacked. But he would never find it; she would never love him. Even if this ghastly tragedy had never overtaken them. That was ridiculous: if the tragedy hadn't overtaken them Rawley

would have been alive and her sense of duty—a sense of duty so perversely admirable . . . Love? Why, only a week ago—five days—four days—she had been ready to suspect him of murdering her husband. That showed how little she knew him!

She had suspected. Now, for the first time, he realised that others might suspect. All the tongues of Mombasa and Nairobi. How they would leap at it! Even an old friend like Kilgour's wife had hinted that he was in love with Janet before he started. He had been indignant at the idea. Perhaps, after all, they had been right. He believed that he had been in love with her from the first moment in which he saw her at the Kilgours' luncheon table. Now they would have something to talk about with a vengeance.

He laughed at the idea; and yet, when he came to think about it, it took on the shape of a definite threat. As soon as he reached the border he would have to make a report on Rawley's death. "Fourteen days ago Mr. Rawley had a quarrel with a boy named Dingaan. Rawley went out for a walk and never returned. We searched for him without success, and ever since I have necessarily been living in intimacy with Rawley's wife." That was all he could say, and it was the truth; but would Mombasa, its taste for scandal already tickled by rumours of a conquest, believe it?

They could take it or leave it and be damned; but, supposing they left it, his situation in B.E.A. would be rather awkward. Things like that were quickly magnified by gossip, and the fact that he hadn't done his duty by the women of Nairobi would go against him. He would have to leave the country unless he were prepared to brazen out the lie with half his leave in front of him.

For himself it didn't matter; but when he came to think of it he saw that the reputation of Janet must suffer as much or more than his. He knew how women loved to kick another woman when she was down, and that he couldn't face. "I must stand by her," he thought. But one couldn't stand by a woman if one wasn't wanted, and he didn't believe that she would ask for his support or accept it if he offered it. He was overcome with his vision of the pitiful isolation she was bound to find in Mombasa. He saw her, a lonely and neglected figure, on a liner homeward bound, surrounded by rumours of an infamous reputation. "But she won't let me do anything for her," he thought. "If it weren't for that cursed lapse of mine, if I'd only had the decency to keep my feelings to myself, she might have allowed it, but she knows that I love her, and for that reason she'll feel bound to punish me if only for the sake of punishing herself. That's the cruelty of it."

"Perhaps we shall never reach the Pangani," he thought; "perhaps we shall finish in the same way as poor Rawley, and in that case. . . ."

“We shall reach the Pangani . . . by God we *must!*”

The thought was so instant that he spoke the words aloud. Janet Rawley awoke from a feverish dream and listened.

“Poor dear, he is talking in his sleep,” she thought.

5

The whole of her next day’s journey was made unreal for Janet by the fantastic light of the fever that throbbed behind her eyes. She walked, but she neither knew nor cared where she was going. Sometimes, without doubt, she forced herself to speak, emerging into the dazzle of consciousness like a diver who breaks surface to find that he has lost his bearings. At such times the effort by which she collected herself brought her to the verge of utter collapse. Only two fears sustained her: the first that delay might lead to the destruction of Antrim; the second that a confession of her true state might precipitate another scene of passion with which, in her present weakness, she would not be able to cope. Her vision, it is true, had stopped short of Antrim’s foresight of what would happen in Mombasa; she had never thought for one moment that strangers might guess at their relation; what troubled her was rather the fact that she had allowed herself to love him in the awful moments that preceded Rawley’s death. This sense of guilt oppressed her so heavily that she began to feel that her momentary surrender had contributed to the disaster. It was what Aunt Georgiana would have called a judgment. Her guilt must lie on her conscience for the rest of her life. Only a rigidity, pitiless to Antrim and herself, could save her. The fault was hers alone: Antrim was blameless.

So her thoughts ran against a background that was always changing yet terribly the same. For an hour at a time she would lose consciousness of everything but her dragging feet; and when she came to herself again it would seem that the hour’s labour had been wasted, for surely the trees that surrounded them were identical with those that she had seen when last her eyes were open. The march continued with the futile repetitions of a nightmare. Thrice, during the day, Antrim put a cup of lukewarm water into her hand. Later, for a moment, the sun hung poised, as though meditating descent and then began to fall like a white-hot plummet. At this point she was aware of a great relief, as though some cruel torture had been taken from her eyes; but she could scarcely believe that another day was ending, for time and distance had by then lost all reality.

Antrim had left them at their last halt, and Asmani had taken his place as leader; yet she was hardly aware of the change before she saw Antrim beckoning them from

the bottom of a shallow valley. He shouted; she could not take the trouble to listen to what he said; but already Jumaa had pushed past her and was running down hill, Asmani following with long strides. Mechanically she quickened her own pace, and soon she, too, was running behind them.

Antrim had found water, this time no muddy pit, but an audible trickle that coiled beneath matted grasses like a snake. It was slightly astringent and stained reddish with roots of acacia; but it was clear and almost cold.

Antrim was beside himself with triumph and delight. His worn face with caked dust in the wrinkles showed an almost boyish gaiety; his black lips smiled. She tried to smile back at him, to whip herself into a semblance of his enthusiasm; but, strangely enough, this vital discovery of his did not move her. She had reached a dispassionate depth of exhaustion in which it seemed to her dangerous to stop even for the sake of water. "If I stop now," she thought, "heaven knows if I shall ever go on."

And yet, when she tasted it, the water revived her, dragging her back, despite herself, to a world of physical needs.

"This is splendid," Antrim told her, "but we mustn't waste time. We can have our debauch later."

Asmani emptied and washed the *chagghal*, then filled not only it but every receptacle for liquid that they possessed, including Antrim's pith helmet, which he carried dripping by its leather strap.

"A good day's work, Memsahib," Antrim told her, as they breasted the rise beyond the valley. "Can you do another hour? Better tell me if you can't."

She said nothing, and he took her silence for compliance. When they came to the brow of the hill a cool wind met them, the first their mouths had tasted since they left the camp. It blew steadily from the north-west over a wide plain drenched with orange. The more distant hills, backed by a tawny cloudbank, seemed to be melting away. They were like the lip of a crucible from which molten gold spilled over into the plain fanned by the moving wind.

"Molten gold," she reflected, "is green. I ought to have remembered what we saw in Johannesburg."

It was as though Rawley had spoken to her. She went suddenly chilly. The breeze was too shrewd. She shivered.

Then Antrim clutched her arm and pointed. "Look!" he cried. "She's coming."

She could not imagine why he was so excited, but she looked in the direction to which he pointed. She would have preferred to close her eyes. The tawny cloudbank was settling downward of its own weight. Above it, high above it, hovered a

tiny cone of cloud, flamingo-pink.

"There she is. What a height!" he murmured; and then she became aware that what she had taken for cloud was the peak of a mountain.

"Kilima N'jaro," he said quietly. "Isn't it a marvel. Ice."

Ice . . . She could think of nothing for the moment but an opaline oblong on a fishmonger's slab in George Street, Plymouth. Upon it she saw a silvery Tavy salmon. Then, swiftly, she heard ice tinkle in a tumbler of whisky on the balcony of the Mombasa Club. Rawley . . .

"Ice!" he repeated. He looked at her eagerly. "And that's the end of our journey."

She could not answer him; she couldn't even smile. It was as much as she could do to clench her teeth to prevent them chattering. Mr. Arrumstrong! He stared at her, waiting for her to speak.

"Janet," he said, "you're not well. What's the matter with you?" He laid his hand on her bare forearm. "My child, you're burning! We'll stop at once. You'd better lie down."

He pulled out the blanket and spread it under a tree; he gave her his arm, and she took it gratefully. She lay back with eyes closed.

"It's nothing," she said.

"Nothing! It's fever. Where's your quinine?"

"I've taken it all."

"You've been like this all day?"

Now there was nothing to hide. "Yes, and yesterday and the night before."

He fell to his knees beside her.

"And never told me? My darling. I'm not fit to look after you. You must take more quinine." He called to Asmani for a cup of water and took four tablets from his pocket. "Swallow these at once," he said.

"Be careful of the water," she murmured.

Now that the end which she dreaded had come, it seemed no longer necessary to pretend. She felt an aching need for the human sympathy which she denied herself. That was more precious than water, and she would get more of it if she told the truth.

"I've been taking them without water," she said childishly. "They were rather bitter."

She could have said nothing more dangerous. Her words bowled him over completely. He took her thin arm in both his hands. "Janet . . ." he began.

"No, no," she said in a panic, "don't touch me. Please don't!" She pulled her

arm away from him. "If you don't mind," she added pathetically.

He released her. "I'm acting like a brute," he told himself. "I must pull myself together. It was bad enough before, but now that Rawley's dead . . ." She put out her hand for the cup and thanked him.

"If you don't really mind," she said weakly, "I'd rather be alone."

A little later he brought her some biscuit sodden in warm water; it was the simplest thing that he could think of, and she took it not because she wanted it but because she would not have offended him for the world. His gentleness, his deference to her wishes, made her ashamed. Between the new shame and the old guilt her heart was torn.

That night, without asking her permission, he covered her with his coat. She pretended to be asleep. If she had thanked him she would have cried. Even with this cover it was bitterly cold. She tried to forget the cold in her determination to be well enough to march on the following morning. Never before had she waited so eagerly for the sun. She dared not move, even when her limbs ached with cramp, for Antrim was sleeping very near her, keeping himself awake in case she should need his attention in the night. When dawn came her whole body was bruised and stiff, and pain crept along her bones. She opened her eyes to find him bending over her.

"Better?" he asked.

She gave him a smile in return. "Yes, I'm better," she lied.

When he was not looking she rose to her knees. Her head swam. She knew that she could not stand. When he reappeared her mind was made up. She beckoned him. He kept his distance.

"No," she said, "come down here. I want to speak to you."

He knelt beside her. She put her hand on his arm.

"I've tried," she said. "I find that I can't stand. I've been thinking what you'd better do. There are three of you and I'm only one. You must go on and leave me. Do you understand?"

"My child, that is ridiculous," he told her. "Of course we shall do nothing of the sort."

"I knew you'd be obstinate," she said, "but it's quite reasonable. You have all your life before you. Mine is really over. I don't want to live. Truly I don't."

"You mustn't . . ." he began, but she would not let him finish.

"No, no," she said, "it's quite true: quite true. You don't realise. It would be kinder. There's no living creature at home in England who wants to see me. Nobody in the world who thinks . . ." She stopped. "My life. . . ."

"Janet," he cried, "how can you speak like that? You know what I think of you.

Be just to me. To me your life is the most precious thing, and you know it.”

She put her hands to her eyes.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said. “I promise you that I won’t say anything more. I was wrong to say as much as I did. You’d better forget it. You rather drove me to it, you know.”

He went away. In the back she heard the hacking of a *panga*. She couldn’t think what it meant; but felt sure that the sound had something to do with herself. “Like prisoners,” she thought, “who hear the sound of their own scaffold being erected.”

His last words had given her a curious confidence. “He is stronger than I am,” she thought, “and I can trust him. It is a wonderful thing to think that I can trust him.”

Antrim and Asmani returned. She did not look at them.

“I want your blanket,” he said shortly. She rolled over and he took it from under her. He and Asmani were talking in low voices.

“Now we’re ready,” he said at last, stopping beside her. “Put your arms round my neck.”

She obeyed him, and he lifted her body as though the weight were nothing to him. “How light I must be,” she thought, “and how awfully bony!”

He laid her gently on the blanket. At either end they had attached it to the pole which he had cut in the bush.

“This is the height of luxury in travelling,” he told her: “a *machila*. Don’t try to think or talk. Just lie there quietly with your eyes closed.”

Antrim and Asmani lifted the pole between them. The hammock swayed; but soon her limbs relaxed to its swaying. They walked out of step, the *mtoto*, amused and excited, ran beside them. She closed her eyes as Antrim had bidden her. The gentle swaying ceased. She seemed to be moving forward on air. She fell asleep.

Sometimes, when they halted to rest, she awakened; but still she did not open her eyes. At midday Antrim gave her food and a long draught of water, which her conscience pricked her to swallow. She gulped it down gratefully. She had determined to trust him blindly, and this gave her an almost religious sense of security. That evening the whole plain was misty. A bronzed cloud-bank hid the summit of the mountain that they were nearing.

Night, once more, was bitterly cold. It would have been better, as Antrim knew, if he could have induced her to share the warmth of his own sleeping place—but the exaggerated delicacy on which he had determined in the promise that he had given made him scrupulous not to offend her. He lay near her, as on the night before, wakeful, but never speaking. All through that evening he had not spoken to her save

in the most formal tones. By next morning her fever had passed. She begged him to let her try her legs. The fact that she was feeling better encouraged him.

“Oh, no, you don’t, Memsahib,” he said. “Not a bit of it.”

It seemed almost as if they had recovered their old normal relation. She passed another dreamy day in the *machila*. Toward sunset she heard a sound that was like the shiver of rain on many leaves. She put out her hand—but no rain fell on it. Curiously, she removed the cover from her eyes, and saw that they were passing through a great reed-bed, full of yellow finches and sun birds coloured like malachite that tossed themselves into a golden air alive with gauzy ephemerids. It was a breeze in the reeds which had made a sound that seemed to her like rain. A deeper shadow closed above her. Now there was no need to cover her eyes. They passed beneath forest trees tangled with ropes of liana like the masts of wrecked ships lying at the bottom of the sea. No sound at all: the silence of great deeps. And then a sound that was like that of wind rushing through a fir-wood. But there was no wind. It was strange. At last they laid her down. The earth was cool beneath her body, not burning like the sand of the bush. The rushing sound that she had heard was one of water. Antrim stood over her.

“The Pangani River,” he said.

“Enough to wash in?” she asked, half playfully.

“Enough to swim in . . . barring crocodiles.”

The *mtoto* was already up to his neck in it, drinking and bathing at the same time. She sat up and watched him smiling. Antrim stood gazing at her solemnly.

“Memsahib,” he said. “We’ve come through. There’s a boat on the further bank, and that means a station. To-night you’ll sleep in a goose-feather bed with the sheet turned down so bravely, oh!”

She did not know whether she were glad or sorry for it. She only knew that it was good to see him happy.

6

For six days they halted close to the Pangani in the house of an Alsatian missionary, and on the seventh advanced by easy stages—and easier by contrast—towards the frontier post of Taveta, which lies between the knees of Kilima N’jaro and the Lumi forest. The journey was a strange one; on the surface, the country through which they passed so closely resembled that of their exodus that Janet was sometimes tricked into believing that the chains of that nightmare had not been broken, that they were still straining against time. Then, of a sudden, she would wake

to realise that all danger was over, that the tension of her nerves was automatic and the turbulence of her spirit like that of waves when the wind that roused them has fallen. Now, at last, she should have been able to look on lovely things without the reservations of dread. She dared not do so; her brain was still so bruised and sensitive that she could not trust herself to expose it to any emotion. She was pathetically anxious that Antrim should understand the real reasons of her unnatural reticence, for she would not, for the world, have given him offence. It relieved her to find that he did so, or, at least, that he did not ask her for explanations of her bewildering mood. He, on his side, seemed to her more natural than ever; watchful, kindly, and so typically reliable, without a hint of more than common tenderness.

"He is playing the game," she thought, and loved him for it.

It was not an easy game. Time after time his scruples were undermined by the sight of Janet's weakness and the conviction that his love might strengthen her; but his respect for her delicacy restrained him. And always, ahead, he saw the moment in which they would have to face the music of Mombasa and explain the circumstances of Rawley's death. For himself he did not greatly care: the tenour of his life had been so completely broken that, in any case, he must make a new start; but for Janet he was full of anxiety. He wondered if she had any idea of the kind of scandal that she would be compelled to hear. She was so isolated, so helpless; and he loved her.

Their arrival at Taveta on the evening of the tenth day brought him face to face with his own problem. The A.D.C. whom Antrim had known had been moved up-country; his successor was a stranger. None the less he made their shattered party welcome. It was not often that a woman invaded his solitude; but Janet, to his disappointment, could hardly play the part that was expected of her. A few moments after their arrival she retired, leaving Antrim and the official together to their meal.

"Your wife looks thoroughly fagged out," said the A.D.C. "Honestly, you know, G.E.A.'s no place for a woman."

"You're mistaken," Antrim told him. "She isn't my wife. She's a Mrs. Rawley." He was glad to find a chance of explaining himself, and the process was less difficult than he had imagined it would be, for the A.D.C. was a man of some human experience and accepted his story without suspicions.

"I suppose," Antrim said at last, "I ought to make an official report to you of Rawley's death?"

"You'd better do nothing of the sort. I'm not responsible, luckily, for anything that may have happened over the German border."

This offered an easy way of evasion; but Antrim felt that he could not take it.

"Kilgour, at Mombasa, is an old friend of mine," he said. "You are in his province?"

"Yes, I'm in his province all right; but Kilgour will tell you the same as I do: it's nothing to do with him."

"I shall try to get him to handle it all the same," said Antrim. "You understand my position. I shouldn't be content if the matter were hushed up in any way. I want to let in all the light on it that's possible. You know how people talk in this country."

The A.D.C. shook his head. "I know; but aren't you being unnecessarily scrupulous? Won't your anxiety to ventilate the affair rather suggest that there may be something in it? You'll excuse me talking like this . . ."

"You may be right," Antrim answered, "but none the less it's got to be done, if only for Mrs. Rawley's sake."

"She has no friends in the country?"

"Not one, apart from myself."

"Well, I suppose you're right. If you did nothing it would give them their opportunity. It's awkward, devilish awkward. You have my sympathy. I wish I could help you. If there's any possible way . . ."

"Thanks. There isn't," Antrim told him. "We've just got to go through with it."

Next day they made a new start, replacing the porters with whom the German missionary had provided them by others supplied by the A.D.C. They passed through a plain scattered with green wooded hills; the great mountain was hidden from them, and yet they were always conscious of its imminence as of something huge and protective. It seemed good, to Antrim, to feel that they were treading British soil; and yet, as the physical anxieties of their journey diminished the trial that awaited them in Mombasa loomed greater and greater in Antrim's mind. He wondered if Janet were equally aware of it, and all the way down the line this speculation troubled him.

At Voi station they parted for the first time, passing the night in compartments separated by half the length of the train, and Antrim, who shared his with a commercial traveller in agricultural machinery from Lincoln, lay wondering all the time how Janet was faring. This separation was the first sign of the conditions which civilised society would impose upon them, and he resented it, not for the reasons that the ladies of Mombasa would have imagined, but because, during the last three weeks, he had made it his duty to watch over Janet at night, for fear that some imagined terror might assail her in her loneliness. It seemed to him monstrously unreasonable that the mere fact of having reached the railway should rob him of this privilege; for as they approached Mombasa, with all its haunting memories of

Rawley, she surely needed more and more his protection and sympathy. Yet, for her sake, he was afraid to offer either. He would risk nothing until he had seen Kilgour and talked over his difficulties.

Next morning they reached the terminus. On the crowded platform, where she stood among her few pitiful belongings, he snatched a few words with her.

"You had better go straight to the same hotel," he said. "If there is any trouble about money . . .?"

"You needn't worry about that. We had joint letters of credit on the Bank of India. But I would rather go somewhere else. . . ."

"There *is* nowhere else, I'm afraid."

"Then it can't be helped."

"I shall come round and see you this afternoon."

"Yes."

She said no more. She was so composed about it that he wondered if she had guessed, without his telling her, the awkwardness of their position and the cruelty of the rumours that lay in wait for them. He hoped that she had. Otherwise the pity of her innocence would have been intolerable. At parting she gave him her hand. He turned away abruptly to hide the overpowering emotion, and left her.

His *ricksha* ran silently through the long avenue toward Kilgour's house, and, as they went, Antrim felt that the whole journey was no more than a ghostly repetition of that which he had made on the same errand only two months before. He remembered the light-hearted mood of that arrival. Then there had been no shadow in his mind but those vague promptings that had troubled him on the night-journey down. He had been like a schoolboy on the first day of holiday, without a care in the world, looking forward to his meeting with Pat Kilgour, completely free in body and mind. The man that had made that journey no longer existed and could never be recalled. He was not that man, but a ghost, returning to visit the haunts of his old happiness. All the things on which he counted had been lost. As a tragic compensation he had found Janet Rawley, and when the next mail steamed northward she would be lost to him.

The *ricksha* swerved round the corner of the drive. There, just as he had left her, in topee and dressing-gown, Mrs. Kilgour stood among her gardeners. He jumped out and approached her. She stared at him, as well she might have done, for Antrim, with his torn clothes and harrowed face, was more like an apparition than a man.

"Jimmy!" she cried. "Jimmy: what have you done to yourself?"

He laughed at her wide eyes. She left her gardening and took him indoors,

forcing him to swallow a peg of whisky. He was keeping his story for Kilgour, he could not spare the effort of telling it twice; but her shrewd questions soon reached the heart of the matter. When she heard that Rawley was lost or dead her eyes sparkled with triumph at this confirmation of her prophecies of disaster, but pity for Antrim restrained her tongue.

"And Mrs. Rawley?" she asked, with a faint hardening of her voice.

"She has gone back to the Central."

"H'm."

The grunt was discouraging, but Antrim went on:

"She's in a pretty bad way. Rotten with fever, and no clothes to speak of. I know that you disliked her instinctively when you met before; but if you'd seen as much of her as I have you'd realise . . ." He hesitated.

"You want me to go and see her, Jimmy?" said Mrs. Kilgour.

"Be a Christian, my dear."

Mrs. Kilgour looked at him narrowly.

"Yes, Jimmy, I'll go along this afternoon," she said, "for your sake," she added, and covered this lapse from virtue by taking Antrim's arm and showing him where the trunks that he had brought down from Nairobi had been stored.

That evening he had it out with Kilgour, telling him, to the last detail, exactly what had happened at the camp above N'dalo. For a long time Kilgour was silent.

"It's a queer story, Jimmy," he said at last. "Upon my soul it is."

"You think it's a tall one, too," said Antrim, made nervous by his scrutiny.

"It is. You can't get away from that, my boy. Naturally I believe it."

"Thank you, Pat," he said.

"But other people won't, you know," said Kilgour. "That's the devil of it."

"I can't help that," Antrim said.

"Of course you can't. It's going to be deuced uncomfortable for you."

"I know. Can't you do anything officially . . . take evidence and that? Asmani and the *mtoto* are in Mombasa."

Kilgour shook his head.

"Quite out of the question. Our jurisdiction ends at Taveta. You might go down to Dar-es-salaam and get some sort of inquiry, but people here would take no more notice of that than of a man singing in the next street." He paused. "What about the woman, Jimmy?"

"She's at the Central. Your *memsahib's* gone to see her."

"Attractive woman. Are you going to marry her?"

Antrim rose nervously. "My dear Pat, you've got hold of the wrong end of it

altogether. There's no question of that."

"It's the only satisfactory answer to other questions. But, of course, you know best. I'm damned sorry for you, anyway, Jimmy. You know what people are."

In effect he didn't, but within a week his ignorance was remedied. The Antrim affair made the whole island buzz, the more so since Mombasa was crowded with officials, soldiers and their wives kicking their heels while they waited for a mail-boat from the south. Mrs. Kilgour, with splendid loyalty, stood to her guns, visiting Janet, whom she neither knew nor liked, at the Central, and helping her with her hurried preparations for sailing to England on the *Goth*.

"If you weren't here, Jimmy," she said, "I'd invite her to stay with us. As you're in the house I think it would be wiser not to." She fell back for explanation on her husband's phrase: "You know what people are!"

"If you like," Antrim suggested, "I'll get a room at the Club."

"I don't think you'd better," Mrs. Kilgour advised him, "and I don't think, for her sake, you should see much of her."

That evening Antrim was startled by a sudden confirmation of her right judgment. In the afternoon he had called at the Central to see if he could be of any use to Janet and she had sent down a message to say that she could not see him. This troubled him, for his mind was so full of her that he could not be contented without hearing her voice. He became anxious lest she had been taken with another attack of fever, but since he knew that he could leave her safely in the hands of Mrs. Kilgour he made his way to the Club, hoping to kill the time before dinner with a hand at bridge.

From the first moment of his entrance he felt that the atmosphere of the place had changed. It seemed to him that even the waiters were staring. He ordered a drink and sat down on the balcony. His seat commanded the narrow inlet of Mombasa harbour, and, looking over it, he remembered that he and the Rawleys had occupied that same table on the day of their first meeting. He sat there for half an hour, wondering all the time why Janet had refused to see him. The Club was filling up for the evening, but nobody came his way, and gradually he reached the conclusion that his end of the balcony was being avoided. He told himself that he was over-sensitive, that Kilgour's suggestions had made him uncertain of himself, he determined to suppress his fancies and the indignation that they aroused in him, to go down into the bar which was by this time crowded and put them to the test.

He rose, and as he did so he heard Janet's name spoken in the voice of a woman he had known well in Nairobi. He did not want to listen, and yet it seemed to him that this was a case in which the listener might well be excused. Evidently Mrs. Allerby was not afraid of being heard.

"I believe we shall have the pleasure of her company on the *Goth*," she said. "Of course, he was always a curious man: quiet, you know—rather too quiet for me; but those, my dear, are the very ones who always spring surprises on you. I guessed there was something up when I heard from Mrs. K. that he'd cancelled his passage and was going off on a trip with the woman and her husband. They say that this poor man Rawley died five or six weeks ago. It's easy enough to die down there, isn't it? No questions asked. In the meantime I suppose they've had a sort of anticipated honeymoon. Romantic: don't you think so?"

Antrim could stay no longer. He pushed his way blindly past the group of women who had been listening to Mrs. Allerby's story. Behind him he heard a sigh of mingled horror and surprise, but he had no time to waste on them. In theory he had steeled himself to the idea of scandal; as far as it related to himself he had been ready to meet it with contempt; but when he heard the name of Janet taken in vain there was nothing but a blaze of anger in his mind. During her stay at Mombasa he could trust Mrs. Kilgour to protect her; but on the long voyage home she must be exposed to the poison of Mrs. Allerby's tongue, and who should protect her then?

"I must see her and warn her," he told himself; but, when he came to think of it, it seemed to him that warning would be of little use. From the first moment when she set foot on the *Goth* Janet would be isolated by the moral niceness of his Nairobi friend. A month of purgatory. He could not bear it. He would not allow it. Had she not suffered enough already?

By this time his impetuous flight had brought him abreast of the shipping office on the hill. With a sudden remembrance of how, once before, its doors had seemed to offer him salvation, he entered, and found himself face to face with the suave young man to whom he had tried to pay his passage money on the *Vandal*. This time he was recognised. No doubt this fellow knew his story as well as the rest of them.

"Can you give me a passage on the *Goth*?" he asked.

The clerk shook his head. He was sorry; so many people were going on leave.

"Second class will do," said Antrim. "I'll go steerage if it's necessary. I suppose that by paying a supplement I can feed with the first?"

The young man consulted his ledgers. "I think I can manage 'second,' Captain Antrim; but you won't find it what you're used to."

"That doesn't matter," said Antrim. "I'll pay for the ticket at once."

"You know that the boat is two days late, sir?"

"Yes, I know."

He wrote his cheque then and there and hurried on to the Central with the ticket in his pocket. He scribbled: "I must see you," on a card and sent it up to Janet. He

had a suspicion that the clerk in the hotel office smiled; but in a moment he returned with a solemn face to say that Mrs. Rawley would see him.

They met on the dusky landing. Mrs. Kilgour, with a high sense of propriety, had insisted on clothing Janet in black, so that her dress merged into the darkness, and all he could see of her was the pallor of her hands and her face. Her fingers burned as he took them.

"Fever?" he said. "I thought that must be it."

"It's nothing," she replied. "I suppose one had to expect it, I shall be all right by the time the boat sails. Mrs. Kilgour is wonderful."

"I know she is." He hesitated, then plunged. "Janet . . . about this boat. I've been thinking it over. Certain things have happened. I can't possibly let you go alone. You can think what you like of me, but I can't help it. I've booked my passage on the *Goth*."

"Oh, *why* did you do that?" she cried. "I wish . . ."

"I knew you'd say that," he broke in. "You can be quite certain that I won't interfere with you. I simply couldn't face the prospect of your going alone. I don't want to explain to you why. But if you can trust me . . . if you can understand that I'm just thinking of your comfort and nothing else . . . you shouldn't resent my coming. In any case you'll have me to fall back on."

"Yes," she said, "I should be glad of that. Don't think me ungrateful. For the moment I wasn't thinking of myself. It was for your sake. . . ."

"Mine? What do you mean? Surely you realise that when I lose sight of you I shall have no other interest in life. Whether you like it or not, that's a thing that can't be helped." As he spoke he saw her eyes grow frightened and repented of his indiscretion. "Janet, I'm sorry," he said. "I'm a bad hand at disguising my feelings, and you rather asked for it."

She smiled wanly. She wanted to put out her hand to reassure him, but knew that any weakness on her side would surely precipitate an emotional debacle.

"No, I haven't misjudged you," she said, "I'm only anxious that you shouldn't suffer because of me. I don't mean you yourself, but your future." He laughed to himself, but she continued: "Since I've been here I've realised that you and I are supposed to be scandalous people."

At this he grew angry. "So that's the explanation? Mrs. Kilgour has been talking to you? I see." A new idea suddenly occurred to him. "It was because of Mrs. Kilgour that you wouldn't see me this afternoon?"

"You're quite right," she answered frankly, "but there's no reason why you should flare up like that. Mrs. Kilgour was perfectly justified. She was doing her duty

toward you as an old friend.”

“She had no business to interfere between us, telling you one thing and me another.”

“You’re unjust to her. I shouldn’t have thought of it myself. She was only trying to protect your reputation.”

Antrim gave a short laugh. “My dear child, it wasn’t worth it: you can take my word for that. These people can say what they like: there’s nothing to prevent them; and you can guess what they will say. As soon as you get on board the *Goth* you’ll know. That’s what I couldn’t stand, the thought of your having to face it all alone. You see?”

She was silent for a moment. “But won’t it rather add point to the scandal,” she said, “if we are there together?”

He could not answer her argument, and yet he knew that he was right. “At any rate,” he said, “a trouble of this kind is lighter when it is shared. The blame is mine, so I’ve a right to share it. And what does it matter what people think of us if we know in our own hearts that we’re innocent of the ghastly thing of which we’re accused? In any case we’re isolated and condemned. For God’s sake, let us bear the thing together. I can’t leave you to face it alone. You know I can’t.”

She turned away from him. “It’s generous of you,” she said, “and it’s like you. But your position’s quite different from mine. You have your career in the army to think of. Mrs. Kilgour. . . .”

“Mrs. Kilgour has nothing to do with it. As for my career in the army, I’ve finished with it; or rather the army will have finished with me. Don’t think of that. To-night I shall write resigning my commission. The matter is just a personal one between you and me. I’m in your hands. If you forbid me to come with you on the *Goth* I shall cancel my passage without any fuss. But you won’t; I know you won’t.”

“No,” she said quietly. “I can’t forbid you.”

Two days later, to the honest indignation of Mrs. Kilgour, they sailed for England together.

EPILOGUE

“I’m not going to talk about that voyage,” Antrim told me, as we lay side by side in the hospital marquee at Handeni. “Looking back on it I’m not sure we weren’t better off with old Asmani on the Masai Steppe. You’ve no idea how beastly civilised people can be when once they have a chance of pointing their fingers at you. One’s so used to being one of a herd, that when people of your own kind give you the cold shoulder you feel it like the deuce. As far as I was concerned they could have gone to Hell; but with Janet it was different. I wanted to get up and tell them

how innocent she was; but the swine would have laughed at me. I learned a good bit about human nature on that voyage.

“We left the ship at Southampton. Janet didn’t know where she was going; neither, for that matter, did I; but we’d decided that as things were it’d be better if we separated entirely. Of course, she had any amount of business matters to attend to; they were her lawyers’ business, not mine, and in any case I knew I’d no right to inflict my company on her. We didn’t even travel up to town together; parted on the dock at Southampton. She hurried off by the special, and left me in the Customs.

“It was only when I’d finished that part of the show that I realised where I was. Everything was an absolute blank, I’d no interest in life. There I was, back in London, with a pile of things I’d imagined I wanted to do and no inclination to tackle one of them. I remember taking a taxi to the club; but when I’d got out on the pavement and paid the fellow, I pulled up short on the doorstep; couldn’t go in for the life of me. I knew what would happen. Somebody would come up to me and start blithering about Africa. If I’d had to talk about Africa I should have burst out crying. That was what I felt like. Simply couldn’t face it. So I caught the taxi-driver just as he was shoving up his flag again and told him to drive me back to Waterloo; picked up my luggage there and took it straight to Euston in time for the Irish mail. I didn’t think what I was doing. It was just instinct: I was just making a bolt for the country I’d been bred in, like a sick rat tracking for its hole. And she, funnily enough, was doing just the same, you know. The address she’s given me—she didn’t want to—was care of her solicitors in Plymouth. Much good it did the two of us!

“I stuck it for about three months; put up with my sister Honor, near Athenry, in Galway; tried to do a bit of fishing and shooting and that. I was just as lonely as ever. It wasn’t Honor’s fault, poor old dear, but somehow I couldn’t bring myself to make a confidant of her. No doubt she’d have understood, but I wasn’t taking any risks. I just mooned about the country, and it settling down into the rotten melancholy winter you get in the west of Ireland, without any interest in the world: not the ghost of an idea of what I wanted to do. The only thing I lived for was an occasional letter from Janet. I used to wait round for the post-bag like any boy of twenty. Even when her letters came she hadn’t much to say in them. She was still down in Cornwall at a little place called Polperro on the coast, eating her heart out, poor kid! but never giving me a sign of it. I used to answer them at once, in hope of getting another, and then start waiting for the reply. I might as well have been dead as the way I was.

“Well, I stuck it till I could stick it no longer. There was no sense in my hanging about the west in that dead-alive way. One day I rode into the post—I always liked

to post my letters for myself—and suddenly I got so sick of the whole business that I sent her a wire; said I was coming down to Cornwall to see her, and that if she'd any objection she might send me a note 'poste-restante' at Plymouth. It gave poor old Honor the shock of her life to see me pack off, but I couldn't help that. It took me the best part of two days to get down into Devonshire. Even when I got there I wasn't certain that she wouldn't turn me down; but it was all right, thank God!—it was all right; there was a wire waiting for me, saying that she'd booked a room for me at a hotel in a place called Fowey.

"I went on that same afternoon; slow train, crawling over a lot of viaducts. At the hotel they were expecting me. Very polite, too. Evidently Janet's name counted for something in Cornwall. And next day we met.

"I'm going to tell you about that, either. We went for a long walk over the cliffs toward the place she was living in: a heavy sea was pounding down below and our faces wet with mist. It does one good to think of a thing like that in this God-forsaken country. Anyhow, we talked things over, and came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth spoiling both our lives by pretending to be happy apart. Of course, there were a lot of legal formalities that had to be dealt with first. The wretched business dragged itself out for months and months; but nothing really mattered when once I knew that I'd got her; and she felt just the same. We were married in the following June, just under twelve months from the day that we'd met in Mombasa. That was the best thing that ever happened to me. After that nothing mattered. It seemed as if all that had gone before simply didn't count. Absolute complete happiness; all the past forgiven.

"We were anxious to make it a new start in every way. At first we thought of living in Ireland or in the West Country; but while we were about it it seemed better to make a clean cut, and just when we'd grown sick to death of looking at small country houses we suddenly pitched upon a beauty: a place called Chalke in Wiltshire: a little old manor-house with a pattern of flints on it. I know nothing about architecture, but it's said to be early eighteenth century, and what appealed to me was the fact that one hadownturf to ride on and a mile or so of first-rate dry-fly water to fish. We didn't get into it till the following Spring, and I can tell you that Spring in that part of the world takes some beating. Of course we were in love: that may have had something to do with it.

"I suppose it was a bit too good to be true. One doesn't get anything worth having in this life for nothing. Of course, as you say, we'd had enough rocky times to be going on with; but the Fates, or whatever you like to call them, hadn't finished with us. I must go a bit easy with the story to let you know how it began.

“Janet noticed it first. I suppose I’m a lot less sensitive than she is. If you knew her you’d realise what a brick she is. It was just like her to keep it to herself for months. But I’m not as dull as all that, you know, at any rate where she is concerned. I knew there was something up with her. She began to lose the little colour that she’d got, and sometimes, when I spoke to her, she didn’t hear me. Of course, it might have been reaction: I knew better than any one what she’d been through; but that explanation didn’t satisfy me. I thought it just possible that Chalke didn’t suit her: some people never thrive in valley air. I began to worry about it, and that kept me awake at night. It was then that I discovered that she was sleeping badly as well. I thought I’d got to the bottom of it at last.

“‘Now, look here, my child,’ I said, ‘you’ve got to see a doctor about this. I’m going to run you right away into Salisbury,’—but she kept putting me off, saying it was nothing: change of climate and things like that. For a time I allowed her to persuade me; but eventually I couldn’t stick it any longer: lying by her side at night and feeling that she was awake. I didn’t only feel she was awake. I felt she was unhappy. If you’re a married man you can realise how one gets to know things of that kind without a word being spoken. Of course, I thought she was worrying about Rawley, and that made me more uneasy than ever. It seems a shabby thing to be jealous of a dead man; but that’s how it was. And at last I managed to get her to tell me.

“When you hear what it was you’ll realise why I’ve been boring you with this long story. You’ve brought it on yourself by something that you said to me—probably you’ve forgotten it by now—on the day of our first meeting at M’bagwe. I was pretty bad with fever that day, I don’t mind telling you, and when I saw you come round for a ‘*bak*’ that evening I wished you further. Then you began to talk about the country. ‘This country’s full of secrets,’ you said: ‘ghosts, if you like to put it that way.’ Well, this is a ghost story. . . .

“Not an ordinary ghost-story by long chalks, none of your veiled ladies or headless cavaliers nor any characters of that kind. There was supposed to be a conventional ghost at Chalke, but we never saw him nor heard him. Possibly he was frightened away by the newcomer. I don’t suppose that he, or you, or any one else had ever heard of a ghost that you could only smell. . . .

“One laughs at it now, but I can assure you that it was no laughing matter to us. I can quite understand why Janet hesitated to tell me of it; the whole thing sounded so incredible. To put it shortly, it was this. Every night about two o’clock for the last couple of months she had wakened up with a feeling of heat and suffocation. The nights were quite cool at that time of the year; but, as she said, it was just like

waking up on a night of January in Mombasa. And then, just as she was trying to get her bearings, she became conscious of a faint but extraordinarily definite smell: the smell of nigger. No one who'd been in Africa could possibly mistake it. This went on for about five minutes, during which she felt as if she were being asked to understand something: that's how she used to put it, and I can't find any better words myself.

"Of course, I tried to joke her out of it, poor kid, but that didn't make any difference. She'd tried to do that herself, already. And about a week after she'd confided this to me, I began to be conscious of it myself; the heat, the oppression and that definite smell of nigger. Of course, I tried to find a natural explanation for it. I thought it was just possible that we'd stored some of my old African kit in the room and that the heat of our own bodies was bringing out the odour that remained in it. As a matter of fact we found an old valise of mine and cleared it out into the attic. But that made no difference: devil a bit!

"In fact it grew stronger. After a week or two there was no mistaking it for either of us. It was just as if a black man were lying in the bed between us. I can't put it clearer than that. Still, it was hard to believe. Old houses have queer influences of their own; perhaps the traditional Chalke ghost was changing his form out of compliment to his African tenants.

"It was easy enough to settle that. We shut up Chalke and went to a place over on the Welsh border, a fishing-inn in one of the valleys of the Black Mountain. I remember the night we arrived. We drove up the valley in a moth-eaten wagonette. They gave us mountain mutton for dinner. There was a moon, and after our meal we strolled down to the bridge to listen to the river. It was as quiet as Africa: nothing but the sound of the water and brown owls calling. 'We shall sleep soundly to-night,' I told her.

"But we didn't. At two o'clock in the morning it came again, and stronger than usual. It was just as if the beggar wanted to convince us that we couldn't shake him off. We woke at the same moment, and each of us knew that the other was awake. We were more or less forced to throw up the sponge: if the fellow could track us to the Dulas Fechan in twelve hours there wasn't much hope of escaping from him.

"I say 'him' because, by this time, we were pretty sure in our own minds who we had to deal with. We were both of us certain that it was Dingaan, the boy that I had sent adrift in the bush to look for Rawley. Whether he were alive or dead, didn't matter much. The point was that he wanted to communicate with us, and this was his way of doing it. We felt, both of us, that the Dulas Fechan valley was too damned lonely with the mountains all round it and the trees and the rotten old owls calling. So we pushed off again next day without doing any fishing, and took a fast train from

Hereford to London. In London, I thought, night's just like day, and there won't be any chance for the brute to appear . . . chance for him to smell, I should have said.

"There was another reason. I'd just had a wire from Pat Kilgour to say that they were back on leave and wanted to meet us; and though we weren't particularly keen on renewing memories of Africa, those two had been thundering good to us, and the least we could do was to roll up. I sent a wire from Hereford to say we were coming, and when I'd deposited Janet at Brown's I went round to the Sports Club to pick up Kilgour.

"There he was, on the top of his form, telling his old shooting stories in the smoke-room. He and Mrs. K. were doing a splash at Claridge's. As soon as he got my wire he'd booked seats at the Gaiety and a table for four at his own hotel for supper.

"A couple of hours later we met at the theatre. It was the first jolly evening we'd passed for long enough. Mrs. K. was as charming as I'd expected her to be to Janet, who was rather frightened of her. When the show was over we taxied back to Claridge's and warmed up over supper. Then we trailed off to the Kilgours' room and went on talking scandal until the small hours.

"Suddenly, about two o'clock, Janet gave me a look. She didn't need to do that. I knew, at the same moment, that he'd come. We just went on talking as if nothing had happened until Mrs. K. stopped in the middle of her best bit of Nairobi gossip.

"**'Pat,'** she said, 'I don't know what clothes you're wearing, but you smell like a Kikuyn.'

"Old Kilgour began to laugh at her; then he, too, started sniffing. 'It's a funny thing,' he said, 'but I believe you're right.' He turned to me: 'What do you make of it, Jimmy? You ought to know if we're mad or not?'

"Of course she was right, but naturally I didn't want to worry them with our troubles. I told him that he'd imagined it; but that wouldn't satisfy Mrs. K. 'Open the window, Pat,' she said: 'It's getting stronger. Talk about the heat of Mombasa!'

"Kilgour opened the window and let in the noise of the taxis. I could have told him that that would make no difference, and of course it didn't. The only way of getting rid of it was for us to go. So we made our excuses, said good-night, and toddled back to Brown's.

"By the time we reached the hotel he'd gone; but after that confirmation we couldn't go on living in misery any longer. We lay awake talking it over all through the night. There was only one way out of it as far as we could see, and that was that I should go back to East Africa and find out what was wanted. I wasn't over keen

on it: I need hardly tell you that. It was bad enough leaving Janet alone in any case, and to leave her alone with *that* to face. . . . However, there it was. Either I had to go or else we had to settle down to a life of misery. At any rate it was my duty to have a try at settling it, though Heaven only knew where I had better begin.

“Of course, I couldn’t go for a month or two. No man unless he’s a bachelor without responsibilities could start on a trip of that kind without any preparation. We just made inquiries about sailings and booked a passage provisionally two months ahead. I half wondered if he’d be intelligent enough to realise that I’d decided to do my best and if he’d leave us alone for a little bit until I sailed. And of course he didn’t. The brute grew more persistent than ever.

“Then just as all my plans were settled—I’d taken my passage to Dar-es-salaam and had determined to work up-country as fast as I could to our camp on the escarpment above N’dalo—the war came. It took us entirely by surprise: and the first thing I thought when I heard of it was that it had bitched my expedition. One would have thought that a big thing like that would have made the other affair seem trifling; but I assure you it didn’t.

“Of course, I was still on the Reserve. In a couple of days I got my mobilisation orders; they sent me to a place on Salisbury Plain, not far from Chalke. Every day I expected to be sent over to France. It’d be a scurvy business, I thought, if I got killed there before this other affair were settled, and left Janet to suffer alone. Of course, she was wonderful; just what you’d have expected of her.

“And then, of a sudden, I tumbled to it that the war had probably done me a good turn. Fighting was going on in East Africa; I knew the country and the language. I put in for it like a shot and was accepted. I came out here by the Cape and arrived at Mombasa just after the Tanga show.

“You know the rest. Of course, it was a bit awkward. In spite of everything that the Kilgours had done for me the scandal still remained, and I wasn’t exactly welcomed in Mombasa. Still, I knew my job, and though, in the Army, that isn’t any reason for expecting to get it, they soon found that I was useful. At first I had six months getting full of fever in the Uмба valley. Then I went up with the Kashmiris to Tsavo. Then I drifted down L. of C. to the Pangani and the Lukigura, doing the kind of odd job in which you found me at M’bagwe.

“And all this time, you know, I felt dead certain that something more than orders from General Headquarters would make me fetch up at N’dalo. Even when I had my first go of blackwater fever I knew I wasn’t going to be scuppered; I knew that if I reported sick I should be crossing my own Fate, so to speak. So I hung on. And I was right: you see I was right!

“Three weeks ago, when we began to threaten Morogoro, I knew that it was coming devilish near: devilish near in more ways than one, for the fever had just about done with me. Then, without any effort on my own part, we reached N’dalo, and I knew that I was in for it, whatever ‘it’ might be. That morning when I saw you coming along to my tent I knew for certain that it was all over. I wasn’t in the least surprised when you handed me Rawley’s message. It all seemed perfectly natural; as ordinary as the orders for the day. You must have thought I was clean mad. Funny, too, that you should have brought it.

“And now that the whole queer business is over I don’t know where I am. Looking back on it it’s almost difficult to believe that it actually happened. And what beats me is this: that a savage like Dingaan should have the power to trouble us over in England when his bones were lying at the bottom of a game-pit in German East. He was a remarkable boy in many ways: I always said so; and I suppose, in a manner of speaking, I’m responsible for his death. Well, it was my idea of justice, and I think I should probably do it again. African justice. And he cleared himself; the beggar cleared himself all right. I told him to find Rawley, and he found him.

“I wonder when he found him . . .

“That letter of Rawley’s. Lacey. Who the deuce was Lacey? And figures . . . Rawley was always mad on figures. If I’d been able to carry on and question more prisoners I might have found out more about it. Rawley had a bee in his bonnet about the gold deposits near N’dalo. I wonder if he found them before he died. It makes no odds. The gold was of no use to him. When you come to think of it, gold’s of damned little use to anybody personally. That’s a thing the war must have taught a lot of people. Life’s the only thing that matters. Life, and love, and a few things like that.

“I’m getting sentimental. You’d better shut me up when I start on that game.

“How long, exactly, is it since you sent that cable? Eight days? I suppose, when we get out of this hole, it will take us another four to reach M’buyuni. That makes roughly a fortnight. In a fortnight one ought to be sure of getting a reply, if the post-office *babus* don’t make a mess of it. Fourteen days. That should be all right. I’m not anxious. I’m just curious to know if it stopped at the same time.”

Anacapri—Hales Owen,
1922.

Author’s Note.

The next stage in the history of the N’dalo gold is recorded in the

novel called "Pilgrim's Rest."

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation and accents has been retained.

Chapter VII is missing. Chapter VI contained sections 1, 2, 3, 4; followed by 2 and 3. The 2 and 3 were renumbered as 5 and 6; and the following chapters were also renumbered.

There were two sections 4 in Chapter X (the old Chapter XI). The second has been renumbered section 5.

[The end of *Woodsmoke* by Francis Brett Young]