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THE ROAD SOUTH

by

Roderick Stuart Kennedy

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TORONTO

THE ROAD SOUTH

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TO LILIAN

My Wife and Friend

PROLOGUE

The gears rasped, the lorry jerked forward, the driver leaned from his cab and cocked his elbow. "Goo'bye, Canada," he yelled. "Thanks for the gaspers."

The two young soldiers waved. "S'long—good luck—thanks for the ride." For a moment they watched the lorry chugging away from the crossroads, then turned toward the ugly brick building across the road. They stared at it silently.

"I guess it must be 'The Bull'," said the tall Lieutenant, at last.

"I guess," agreed the shorter, stockier Sergeant, doubtfully.

"Doesn't look much like a paradise, does it? It's a pity Hitler missed it if you ask me!"

"Well, we'll test its beer," the other suggested practically. "That'll show."

The beer gave little evidence of any except earthly,—and watery origin.

"Well, Joe," said the Sergeant sadly, "If that's the best pub in Britain, the way your dad said, he must have been easy to please."

Lieutenant Joe Mackell strolled across the big public bar, glanced through the bay window, through the door leading to a chastely labelled 'Snuggery', and, shrugging his shoulders, returned to the counter. "It was the place, not the beer, I think," he said. "Dad was never much of a froth-blower. British beer was as hard hit as everything else, in this war, but I expect it was all right in the last. You've got to admit that it would be handy having the bar next to the Orderly Room; but it's funny how all Dad's old regimental cronies get around to talking about 'The Bull' at Caster End before they finish yarning."

"Let's hope the Shrine's got a bit more glamor," remarked Sergeant Sam Thomas, draining the pewter.

"What Shrine?"

"Why, that something-or-other Terrace your dad was talking about in his letter. It sounded like a Shrine anyway, the way he insisted on you making this pilgrimage to it!"

"You're nuts," said the Lieutenant loftily. "Anyway, dad's sentimental, and after all, it's where he and mother first met. Maybe you'll be sending your son to visit that house in Highgate in the next war! Going to marry that kid, Sam?"

"It depends," Sam said non-committally.

"I'll bet it depends,—on her!" He turned to the big, florid barman. "Is there a Sea View Terrace around here?"

The barman nodded significantly. He was so stout, so red-faced, so apoplectic, that his smallest motion seemed pregnant with significance. Nothing else could warrant such apparently fierce efforts and imminent danger of something bursting.

"Well, where? How do you get to it?"

The barman, Summers by name, who was also proprietor, and had thus been able to drink himself into middle-aged congestion at cost, inclined his head to the left by slightly unfolding the creases on the right side of his neck. His fat thumb twitched in the same direction. "Keep on the road south," he wheezed, and paused for breath. "Five minutes does it."

They went out into the thin October sunshine and stepped briskly towards the village. No directions had been needed. There seemed to be only one street in the village of Caster End, and once they had passed its outpost, an ancient, tarred building, labelled "Nathn'l Runke & Sons, Sail Mk'rs," a row of incredibly ugly red brick villas loomed up on their left, while several small shops farther along on the right, which might have come out of the same box, advertised blatantly that this was the village. Still farther on were other houses and a few shops, but these were old and weathered, natural outgrowths of the beautiful countryside, rather than excrescences, and did not advertise themselves. Only a church at the far end—a grey, square-towered, flint-walled church, stood out boldly as the road wound around the foot of Caster Head and disappeared into the valley beyond.

"Sea View Terrace" carved in stone above the central villa of the row, showed that its builder at least had thought them worthy of a name. But the two young Canadians felt, as every stranger who ever saw them had felt, that these cramped, undetached dwellings with their tiny gardens and ornately ugly railings would have better suited the cheaper suburbs of a huge city than this hamlet nestling below the downs of the Norfolk coast.

"Some Shrine!" remarked Sergeant Sam, with disgust.

His friend looked at the row, rubbing his chin appraisingly. His eye passed along the little villas, and just as it reached Number 5, the door opened and a group of elderly people came out and turned along toward the church.

Joe Mackell started across the road but the group had passed along before he could speak to any of them. "Number 5 is the house," he said, "I wonder who those people are. I wanted to ask who lives there. Mother wanted to know."

As he spoke, the door opened again. A woman stood on the top step,—white-haired, broad, blocky, almost stout, with heavy brogues and a heavier stick. She slammed the door firmly behind her, and as she put the key in her pocket, looked enquiringly at the two young soldiers standing almost in her gateway.

Joe Mackell saluted as she came down the steps. He felt a little foolish as he asked apologetically if she lived there.

Her eyebrows went up a fraction of an inch. "I do," she said.

Sam grinned at his friend's embarrassment. Joe cleared his throat. "Well—er—I guess—that's all I wanted, Ma'am." He was floundering badly. He hadn't got her name—or anything! The stolid face and pale blue eyes that stared so unwinkingly did not help at all! But she made no move and he had a chance to finish the errand which now seemed even crazier than it had when he talked it over with Sam in London.

"I know I seem like a nut," he burst out as the silence grew embarrassing, "but I wonder—would you mind—I know it sounds crazy—I'm not trying to be fresh—but mother said I was—" This last touch he realized must sound the most fatuous yet of the idiocies he had perpetrated, "—said I was to find out the name—if you don't mind," he concluded lamely.

There was a ghost of a smile on the woman's lips as she scrutinized the two young men, one after the other, carefully. "I don't mind," she said at last with ironic emphasis on the "I". Nevertheless she did not answer,—just continued to look at the young Lieutenant. Sam had apparently been eliminated from whatever calculations she was making.

"So your mother wanted you to find out, did she?" the white-haired woman reflected. "In that case, I think—I am sure, in fact, that I can tell you *your* name almost as certainly as I can tell you my own. You are Joseph Mackell." Her eyes flickered from his face to his shoulders for a second. "Lieut. Joseph Mackell" . . . She thought for a moment, "—of the Montreal Rifles at present, previously of Baie Verte, of the Province of Quebec, in the Dominion of Canada."

Joe Mackell, amazed, and feeling more foolish than ever, could only confirm this dry diagnosis, hoping that his original question would soon be answered so that he could get away and finish the rest of his errand. He hoped it would not prove as embarrassing, but was beginning to take a dim view of the prospects,—based on his experience of Caster End, to date.

But he had to wait. The woman seemed to enjoy his discomfort. In fact, she gave Sam Thomas a brief glance which he interpreted as a sharing of mutual amusement at Joe's discomfiture. Suddenly she took a step forward, opened the gate, and pointing at the door with her stick, said abruptly, "Come in. I'll solve the mystery for you over tea."

The two young men marched in silently. If it had not been for that brief glance, Sam would have felt as silly as Joe. As it was, he was agreeably intrigued.

The woman opened the door with her latchkey and led the way into the narrow hall. Straight ahead was a steep staircase. On the right a door opened into a little parlor with a bay window. It was crowded with books, papers, furniture, and pictures, all of which seemed extravagantly superior to the pokey little villa which housed them.

"Sit down," said their hostess. "Make yourselves at home—cigarettes in the box—be with you in a minute."

She went out and down the passage to the back, leaving the young men in dazed silence.

Joe looked at Sam, started to speak, thought better of it, shrugged his shoulders and sank back on the morocco cushions. The mystery would have to unravel itself without any aid from him.

Sam merely grinned cheerfully and lit a cigarette from the silver box. He was content and unworried. This trip to Caster End was his friend's worry, not his. In a few days they would be on their way back to Canada with the last of the occupation troops. This trip which Joe had been so keen on, was as good a way of spending his leave as any.

A gaunt maid, looking very aged indeed in her ultra smart little cap and apron, came in, drew out an inlaid mahogany table, spread a cloth, and went out.

Once more Sam grinned,—and was caught in the act as their hostess re-entered. She had changed her heavy tweeds for a light silk dress, and he decided that she was not quite as stout as he had thought,—though stout enough! It was only her solid but well-shaped legs and her firm stance which prevented her looking ungainly as she stood in the door-way, watching them with the same slightly ironical expression. Sam decided that the honor of the Canadian Army called for some effort to take command of the unusual situation. Both young men had jumped to their feet as she appeared, and now Sam, standing very straight, rallied for a counter-attack. "I must apologise for my friend, ma'am," he explained gravely, "for not introducing me. He gets rattled. All right in a battle, but hopeless in society; and he's not accustomed—" he paused, and coughed as dramatically as he could, "—to English manners. My name is Sam Thomas of the Royal Canadian Artillery. I am very happy to meet you, Mrs.—er—?"

"Miss," she corrected calmly. Sam's counter-attack wavered. She came in, stood by the tea table looking at them for a moment, and when Sam found no words available for an effective reply, chuckled audibly. "Well, well!" she said, in a different tone. "I've got you boys rattled. I don't know what the younger generation is coming to! I knew your father, Joe, but I never saw him lose his nerve except when I first met him in this very room and he tried to stand at attention and salute, with his foot in a basin of water!" She laughed heartily. "I'm Dorothy Brador."

Joe's jaw dropped. "Well, I'm—but—what on earth are you doing here?" he began, and recovered himself. "Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. I meant that I thought you lived up at Bradderham Hall. I've got a letter for you. We were just going along there as soon as we'd looked at Number 5 here."

He pulled out a rather worn envelope.

"It's an introduction Mother gave me. She said you'd be glad to see me." He grinned a little, rather sheepishly. "I hope she's right, but you got us rattled,—Mysterious Lady at Number 5, sort of thing. Hope you didn't mind."

The stout woman laughed heartily again, as the ancient maid brought in a large silver salver with the tea things.

"I don't blame you! I felt quite a bit surprised myself for the first few months in this place. But the Huns got one wing of the Hall with incendiaries, and the other was taken over by the Air Force, and as I'm Chairman or something or other of pretty well every war activity in the village, from Girl Guides to Women's Land Army, I didn't want to leave the place where I was more or less useful, and moved into the only empty house there was. It has a lot of advantages too these days, with no servants, gardeners, chauffeurs, or gasoline, or anything else you need in a big house."

She broke off abruptly, "Buns, jam? The Air Force hasn't got the farms, luckily, so I can still feed my guests." She looked at Mackell meditatively. "So you are Joe Mackell. I recognized you, young man, as soon as you began expressing an interest in Number 5. There's not another Canadian alive, I expect, who has even heard of it. But I think I would have recognized you anyhow. You're very like your father, except for those eyes." She stared at them frankly, her head tilted slightly sideways. "Your mother was the most beautiful girl I ever knew."

Joe blushed furiously under his tan. His dark eyes and long lashes had caused him considerable heart-burning in his younger days. In his otherwise ruggedly masculine face they seemed exotic, and had brought him many unwanted nicknames and battles which had blacked them even more exotically than nature. He changed the subject. "It's a coincidence, your being here, Miss Brador. I expect you're missing a lot, being turned out like that,—but in a way it's lucky for us,—saves us a trip."

He looked at the glowing fire and the bright tea things while chewing a large, richly buttered, toasted bun. "And I'm sure it wouldn't—couldn't be more comfortable at the Hall than here."

"More tea?" Miss Brador asked cheerfully.

"Sam," said Joe suddenly, when the cups were being filled. "Your self-introduction to Miss Brador was a wash-out,—all about yourself,—a mere microbe,—nothing about Miss Brador. And Mother says, and you can take my word for it, she's always right, that Miss Brador is the finest," he ticked off the points on his upraised fingers, "—the sweetest,—the kindest woman in England, so you're getting more than buttered buns out of this visit and don't you forget it, Sergeant!" He grinned mischievously as their hostess colored. He had regained his normal self assurance. "And by the way, Miss Brador," he added, "I've got another message for you from Mother, besides that letter."

He walked around the tea table, bent down, and kissed her heartily on the cheek. "There," he said firmly, "that's from Mother, and I promised on my word of honor that I'd give it to you before I left England, so please don't throw me out."

Dorothy Brador smiled at him kindly. "I won't, Joe," she said. Then, after a moment's thoughtful silence, she sighed. "I won't, Joe. I like you Joe,—I like you,—for your name."

Joe had not given that kiss until he had made sure that this Miss Brador was a good sport, but now there was something new in the atmosphere,—he would have defined it as something "soppy", and he preferred the genial good fellowship which had preceded it. But it was Dorothy herself who brought the atmosphere back to normal. She seemed to jerk herself out of the past. More buns were passed, more tea was poured, and when the tray was carried out, they settled comfortably by the fire, and as cheerfully as ever, she demanded, "Now, Joe, let's hear all about how you got here."

Part One

The Crossroads

A chilling mist swirled in from the North Sea and joined with the deepening twilight to soak the countryside in sombre grayness. The yellow road, the hedges, and wind-stunted trees were clear and sharp to the men in the column trudging past, but beyond a narrow radius nothing was visible except cold, gray light. It was as if the sun had never shone, as if the mist itself were the source of light.

Riding at the rear of the column, Major Baxter hitched the collar of his Burberry closer to his ears, and turned to his silent companion. "You'd make a fortune in this climate, Doc!"

Doctor—and Captain—Joe Todd, looked around him distastefully and listened to the murmur of surf below the cliffs on their left. He thought of answering that he would rather starve in Canada. He thought of saying that the English were not affected by their climate. He thought for quite a long time about adaptability to environment and the effect of climate on national character. In the end he merely grunted, and tugged the corner of his greatcoat from between his knee and the saddle flap.

Captain Todd rode his horse as awkwardly as he bore his military rank. The two things went together, and he endured both with the same stoical half-amusement. His natural scepticism had been intensified during his year in the army. This rather nondescript little country doctor from the Eastern Townships of Quebec did not find himself very convincing as a Captain riding his charger to war.

For a time they rode silently with the g.s. wagons rumbling behind them, until a whitewashed cottage appeared through the mist, and young Wentworth, of Number 8 Platoon hailed them.

"Hey, Doc.! Wait a moment! Here's a case for you." He was standing just outside the wooden gate, beside a girl in brown tweeds. She looked broad beside his slim, uniformed figure, and leaned with masculine impassiveness on a heavy walking stick.

"Miss Brador, this is Captain Todd, our Medical Officer.

"Miss Brador stopped me just now, Doc., to ask if we had an M.O., so I said I'd wait and point you out when you came along. I'd better hustle and catch up my platoon. Miss Brador says we're right in Caster End now. That's where we billet."

Captain Todd started to dismount, then hesitated. "Urgent?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. An old woman,—here." She nodded toward the cottage

He dismounted clumsily. "Morton!" he called to the driver of the last wagon, which was just rumbling past. "Wait. Back-up here. I want my case."

While waiting, he questioned her about the patient. The reins were hanging over his arm, but he had forgotten his uniform. He was the alert, confident physician who, in spite of scepticism and impatience with pretense, was unexplainably popular among the farmers of his district.

"It's old Mary," the girl explained. "She's eighty if she's a day. Bronchitis,—pneumonia, too, I expect. I'm afraid you can't do much, but I had to stop you. Our local medico, Dr. Beringer, is up the coast. He won't be back for some hours. My mother is with her now."

"Quite right to stop me, Miss Brador. We doctors don't do any work in the army anyway,—at least, I haven't,—yet. Dr. Beringer will forgive me no doubt. I'll call on him before we pull out to-morrow.

"Put the case inside, will you, Morton? And wait a few minutes." He was turning to go in when the tugging reins reminded him that he still had a horse. He handed them up to the other man on the driver's seat. "Hang on to this beast, Mackell. He can't tread on your foot again, if you stay up there!"

The young man glanced at his bandage-swathed foot and grinned. "I'll take care of that, sir! Once is enough!"

"Ready," he told Miss Brador, and walked up the brick path beside her. The door opened into a flagged kitchen, bare,

clean, chilly. Morton placed the medicine case on a whitely-scrubbed deal table and went out.

Through a door into an inner room, Todd could see the foot of a bed, and, sitting in a Windsor chair beside it, a very erect, tweed-clad lady who repeated mechanically at intervals, "There, there, Mary! Quite all right, quite all right!"

She rose briskly as they came in. "Is that the doctor, Dorothy? Very good of you, doctor,—very good indeed." As she shook his hand, she leaned slightly forward as if to whisper something confidentially, but the words, when they came, were as loud as her greeting. "No hope doctor," she said. "None at all." Then, picking up a ground ash and a little brown basket, she went over to the door. "Very kind of you, doctor. So sorry I must go,—very busy,—ask Dorothy if you want anything."

She nodded again, flashed a smile which disappeared as suddenly as it came, leaving no trace in the darting eyes or tightly pressed lips, and clicked across the kitchen with back and head decisively erect.

Captain Todd watched her for a moment, nonplussed. He had never seen a back which said more explicitly, "Well, that's that!"

"Mother doesn't like deaths."

He understood the explanation and glanced up from his black case to say so. He was looking directly into her rather pale blue eyes for the first time, and he found so much comprehension there that he did not feel it necessary to speak at all. With a slight movement of his lips, which might have been the beginning of a smile, he drew up a chair beside old Mary's bed.

Only a short examination was needed to confirm Mrs. Brador's tactless announcement. The old woman's bloodless lips whispered faint, unintelligible words, and occasionally her body twitched as if she was trying to raise herself, but there was no understanding in the staring eyes. The announcement of her approaching death had been unheeded, the touch of death's finger would be unfelt.

"I could give an injection," he said doubtfully. "It would keep her a little longer. Is there anyone who should be here?"

It was the sense of the old woman's loneliness which made him ask. He was a chance stranger, the Bradors doing a charitable duty. There was not even a photograph in the room to link old Mary's life to that of any other human being. Only a bright lithograph of Queen Victoria stared moodily down from the distant past. The cheap, painted furniture might have come from the warehouse of an auctioneer.

"No, there's no one. She doesn't come from this part of the country, and her husband and son were drowned in a trawler out of Yarmouth. She's always lived alone since. Mr. Russell might have put in an appearance,—the Vicar, you know, but—"

Immediately he knew that she did not admire the Vicar, and his understanding must have communicated itself, for she smiled.

"Yes, he's—well, something like Mother in that way! But I don't really blame him this time. Mary doesn't like him and never hesitates to show it.

"So there is no one you need consider except Mary herself, Captain—? I'm afraid that nice young lieutenant's introduction went no farther than 'Doc'."

"It's a pretty complete diagnosis, Miss Brador, but Todd is the name, Joe Todd."

He looked thoughtfully at the dying woman. "We will just make her as comfortable as possible," he said at last.

He raised the shrunken figure slightly while she smoothed the sheets. He watched her while she found a clean counterpane in the bureau, replaced the creased one, and with brush and comb softly tidied the wisps of gray hair which straggled down the old face. As she finished, she laid her fingers caressingly against the cheek. "Poor Mary," she murmured.

His habitual, ironical self-analysis failed to elucidate his feelings. The girl was unusual. Solid common sense obviously, and humour,—but a glimpse of something beyond. He had sat beside many death beds, but none had seemed so serenely

natural as this.

He shrugged his shoulders and took out his pen. "There are one or two things I must attend to, Miss Brador, if you'll excuse me." He sat down at the kitchen table and tore a couple of pages from his field service pocket book. "I'm afraid our Quartermaster will think one of his baggage wagons is lost," he explained, and took the notes to the door.

She joined him, holding out her hand to say good-bye. "It's really been awfully kind of you to take all this trouble for perfect strangers, but I had to ask you—."

He looked down at the hand, then into her eyes,—slowly, and with an ironical twist at the corner of his mouth which was effective in preventing her from finishing the sentence. "You don't really think I'm going off, do you? And leave you alone? Huh!"

The twilight had deepened in the last half hour. It was easier to see the two glowing cigarettes above the wagon, than the men smoking them. "Come here a minute, Morton," he called.

Morton jumped down and came across to the little gate.

"Sorry I had to keep you so long. You can hump along now. Give this note to the Quartermaster. It'll save your skin! And give this to Mackell for Captain Blaikie. I want him to put Mackell in a billet where his foot can be looked after properly.

"And Morton, tell Nott to find my billet and get my things there. I may be quite a time. I wonder—" He turned to Miss Brador. "Is there some place in the village where I could be sure of meeting my batman?"

"It's not more than half a mile to the Bull Inn. I should think that would be the best place."

"No doubt Nott will agree! D'you hear, Morton? Tell Nott to wait for me at the Bull Inn."

"O.K., sir."

While Captain Todd and Morton were talking, Brian Mackell, perched on the driver's seat and aloof from responsibilities saw a girl appear out of the gathering darkness. She was walking briskly from the direction of the village, and stopped abruptly when she reached the wagon. She looked at the two dim figures at the gate, then up at Mackell. She seemed undecided, standing silent in the road, while Mackell—immobilized by his broken foot, and too close to the proprieties of his village home to volunteer assistance—sat silent and waited.

Then she came as close to the wagon as possible, and looked up. "Could you tell me if—" She glanced at the two men at the garden gate, "if anything has happened to old Mary? Is anyone with her?" She was close enough for him to realize the soft brilliance of her dark-lashed gray eyes, and their eloquence—in spite of her air of intense reserve.

"I mean—," she went on, "—you men—are you waiting because Mary is ill, or—?"

Brian hastily threw away his cigarette,—far over the hedge. At last he understood that a girl coming to visit old Mary might well be taken aback at finding strange soldiers, wagons, and horses gathered at the gate. For the other girl was standing almost concealed in the doorway.

"I'm very sorry," he apologized, "I didn't see what you meant at first. Captain Todd, our Medical Officer's in there, over by the gate. That girl in the doorway who stopped him. Miss—Miss—Brady, I think they said."

"Oh! Miss Brador! I understand." Her low-pitched voice, freed of its restraint, was full of relief, and when she turned to cross the road, saying quietly, "Thank you very much, I'll speak to her," the sweetness of the tone conveyed such a depth of gratitude that even Brian guessed that it was due to the voice rather than the speaker.

She walked quickly up the pathway. "I heard that old Mary was sick, Miss Brador. Polly Dyer told me at the post office, but she didn't say you were here. I thought perhaps I could . . . I don't think Polly and some of the other women like her very much, and I know the Vicar—"

"And I know the Vicar!" Miss Brador interrupted. "But it was good of you to think of her, Miss Page. I came down this afternoon. And then when I found Dr. Beringer was away, I held up this Canadian battalion and demanded theirs. He's

done everything possible, but—" She thought for a moment. "Would you mind doing this, Miss Page? Explain to Mrs. Beringer what I've done, and that Mary is dying,—she's quite unconscious now. I've no doubt Doctor Beringer knows how ill she was, because he saw her yesterday. But some arrangements must be made,—you understand? I can hardly stay here all night just as a watcher. Make it all clear to Mrs. Beringer, will you, so that the doctor will see about getting someone as soon as he comes back?"

Joan Page nodded slowly. She hesitated before answering. "And if the Vicar doesn't come, Miss Brador, do you think it would be any help if Father—? Should I ask him?"

Miss Brador seemed to understand her hesitation, and stopped her with a friendly touch on the shoulder, firmly denying any need for Mr. Page, or the Vicar. "It wouldn't be the least good, I'm afraid. I would certainly call on your father if it would, but Mary is far beyond anything like that."

"All right, Miss Brador. I'll see Mrs. Beringer immediately. Good evening,—and thank you." She inclined her head slightly, and walked quickly back to the road.

The horses were just leaning to their collars as she turned along beside them, and for the gallant Morton, for once in sole command of a detachment, there was only one thing to be done. "Give you a lift, Miss?" he called, hospitably. "Lots o' room, with a bit of a squee—Ouch!"

Brian's elbow jabbed heavily into his side. "What th' hell you doing?" Morton gasped, turning savagely and trying to recover his wind.

But Brian had applied the whip, and the horses were trotting briskly ahead before the outraged driver had recovered enough breath to insist on an explanation. Brian gave it more warmly than was justified, considering his unprovoked aggression. "Haven't you got enough sense to see that's not the kind of a girl to offer your silly lift to? A couple of strange Tommies on a muddy buckboard!—in the middle of the night! Use your head!"

"Aw, ye'r bughouse!" Morton growled sulkily, but impressed by such aggressiveness in his easy going friend. "I've a mind to knock yer block off for that punch."

There was more habit than intention to the threat, but Brian, his head turned over his shoulder, was not much interested. "Try it!" he said, coolly, and watched the slim, straight figure receding into the darkness behind them.

A regiment settling itself into strange billets is a spectacle of awe to the philosopher. A column of apparently disciplined men halts in a village. All are very tired and anxious to get settled and fed. To achieve that aim nothing is needed except a few rational actions well within the capacity of the humblest. There is plenty of room. A competent officer in conjunction with a competent local official has allotted specific quarters for each Company and Platoon. Every officer has been separately provided for.

What could be simpler?

Taking that situation as a basis, any philosopher using any philosophic system he patronizes, could forecast the logical sequence of events which must follow inevitably. This sequence would end—and end very quickly—with each man, officer, and horse snoring comfortably in his own allotted billet.

If the philosopher discovered that horses do not snore (which is unlikely), it would only confirm him in the correctness of his theory. For the absence of such flaws is viewed with suspicion as an indication that the theoretical system is too perfect to be practicable. He merely discounts it as an unavoidable lack of technical knowledge on his part,—or on the part of horses,—according to the degree of his philosophic egotism.

Such an observer, therefore, must be deeply dismayed when the column halts and starts billeting operations in actual practice.

Mad confusion in a routed army would not surprise him, because it is the logical result of a sufficient cause, but that an identical pandemonium should break out when an orderly column halts for billets in a peaceful village, cannot be brought within the scope of philosophy. The foundation of the philosopher's life and work would be destroyed. He would have to learn everything anew.

He would have to join the army.

The 2nd Battalion of the Montreal Rifles, upon arrival in Caster End, went to work with hearty goodwill to confound every logical system ever hatched, including the billeting officer's. Within five minutes the nominal strength of 1029 officers and men had grown to an apparent strength of five or six thousand. Lieutenant Wentworth was fighting his way profanely into the mob at the south end of the village, seeking No. 8 Platoon, which had just been herded into the north end sail loft of NATHANIEL RUNKE, Sailmkr., by Captain Blaikie, the billeting officer, who was determined to get somebody into their right billet, as a basis for sorting out the rest.

D. Company, which had been allotted to the old Lower Village under the cliffs on the edge of the North Sea, were marching briskly inland on the road which would take them—eventually—to Cardiff, South Wales.

They were missed by nobody except the Company cooks, who had despairingly set-up their cooker and started operations across the only entrance to Dr. Beringer's garage, and sorely needed a ranking officer to protect them from the doctor's Annie, whose professional and verbal eminence was far superior to their own.

In every direction subalterns, righteously solicitous for their own Platoons, were telling each other to get their lousy crew to hell out of here, in tones strained by the irreconcilable necessities of making themselves perfectly plain, without letting the men hear. All these officers were waving slips of paper on which were inscribed in a scholarly hand, the local names of persons, houses, barns, or stables, without mentioning where they were.

The Colonel and staff of Battalion Headquarters, having established themselves in the Tap Room of the Bull and demonstrated their efficient readiness for business by unpacking C. Company's typewriter, had hastened out to straighten things up by issuing overruling orders to anyone within earshot. In the meanwhile subalterns and N.C.O.'s, hurrying in to get instructions, were hospitably received by old Jem Wavertree who could not be intimidated by Regimental Sergeant Major Shanks and the typewriter, from the slow savouring of his beer.

But old Jem, although his baggy smock sported no stars, was much more effective in restoring order than Colonel Markey. For he could—and did interpret every billeting slip shown to him in such a way that its owner could find the billet.

When Colonel Markey and Captain Blaikie returned half an hour afterwards, pleased with the success of their efforts, and grumbling aphorisms about doing things yourself if you want them done properly, eleven brimming pewter mugs ranged in front of old Jem, gave silent witness to the contrary.

When the confusion subsided as suddenly and illogically as it had arisen, No. 234098 Private Brian Mackell was still sitting aloft on the seat of the baggage wagon.

He had delivered his note to Captain Blaikie and been told to wait. Morton, after being frustrated with curses from unhitching his team in the only likely places, had drawn into the ditch opposite the Bull, Brian had agreed that it was the best place since many officers' valises were in the wagon. There he had sat and watched the tumult, well content to be above it.

When the growing seriousness of the war had brought him to the reluctant conclusion that it was his duty to enlist, he had done so without self-pity, but without enthusiasm. The carefully matured plans of his mother and father had laid out the career of a doctor for him. When his father had died in 1914, a year after Brian had entered McGill University, Mrs. Mackell had firmly insisted on carrying them out. The little farm, the big greenhouses, and the nursery gardens had been let. Mrs. Mackell had gone to live in Vancouver with Jessie, his married sister, and Brian had remained at college. Jessie had insisted on that as strongly as his mother, and Brian, whose tastes and ambitions were not strongly developed, had appreciated their attitude and set himself to the job of becoming a doctor with somewhat more earnestness.

He was enjoying his life at McGill, when the decision to enlist forced itself upon him. He liked most of the men in his year and was well liked by them, not the less because he was a stalwart supporter of his friends' activities,—legal or illegal, without aspiring to the distinction of leadership. The epitome of his college life could be found on the football field, where he played a determined but unspectacular game on the scrimmage line, receiving the heaviest battering with satisfaction at his ability to "take it," but too good-natured to batter remorselessly enough in return.

At first the feeling among the university authorities had been that if the war were short, skilled physicians could be of more use to their country than as a cannon fodder. If it were long, the supplying of trained medical officers would be the prime duty of the medical schools. A doctor took seven years to train, a soldier seven months. If medical students were allowed to sacrifice their training and enlist, there would be an irretrievable shortage of doctors for the army.

But the attitude changed with a growing concentration on the urgent present. More and more medical students enlisted, as honest logic withered before equally honest emotion. After Brian's mother died on Christmas Eve of 1915, he made his decision, reported it to a gloomy but sympathetic Dean, walked down to the Armoury of the Montreal Rifles that same afternoon, and entered a new life. Physically it had been an easy one, mentally it had been comfortably irresponsible but not particularly interesting until this chilly evening arrival at Caster End.

There was no question about the coldness. He pushed his hands deeper into his greatcoat pockets, feeling about as snug as a statue on its pedestal.

Officers and their batmen began to straggle towards the Bull, giving anxious thought to their own fate now that their men were settled.

Among the last came Captain Shuter, the Quartermaster, walking beside a big, pink-faced, smiling young clergyman who carried a bunch of billeting slips in his hand. It was the Reverend Edward Russell, Vicar of Caster End. Captain Blaikie came out of the Bull, the officers gathered round. Most of them had their billet, they only wanted to know where it was. This want Mr. Russell supplied with the utmost goodfellowship, though less succinctly than had Jem Wavertree.

Batmen dragged valises off the wagon, the group thinned down to five or six officers from B. Company whose valises had not been unloaded. Captain Blaikie came across and spoke to Morton. "B. Company's kits, and Captain Todd's go up to Bradderham Hall," he said, and turned to the waiting officers. "Mr. Russell has kindly volunteered to show you the way. It's only half a mile. We'll probably parade about nine, but I'll send up the orders of the day later."

He was turning to enter the Bull when Morton, responding to Brian's urgent signals, drew his attention to the Battalion's casualty.

"Oh yes, I forgot. Just a moment, Mr. Russell. Can you find a place for this man somewhere? Our M.O. wants him where he can have a bed and be handy for dressings and so on. Can you stretch your elastic village that much more?"

Mr. Russell laughed heartily. "Yes, yes, Captain Blaikie. No doubt of it. The best india rubber here, the very best! We'll look after your lad. Caster End knows how to welcome its Canadian cousins."

A shade passed over the Adjutant's face, and he carefully refrained from replying. He had spent most of the afternoon with Mr. Russell, arranging billets, and all the time he had felt under the shadow of an impending speech. It would be a bit thick if the patriotic Vicar got a chance to deliver it now!

Mr. Russell picked over the slips in his hand. "Let me see now." He tapped his chin thoughtfully, and at last picked out a slip doubtfully and handed it up to Brian. "There you are, my lad. Just about our last bed, I think, but you'll be comfortable there. I'll speak to them myself, as it's on our way.

"Nothing else I can do for you, Captain? No? Then we'll hie us to the hospitable Hall." With a parting display of fine white teeth, he raised his arm with a genial gesture in which military salute and clerical blessing were tactfully combined, and led the bored little procession down the village street.

The night was very dark, and when the Vicar stopped, Brian still had little idea of what Caster End really looked like. The Bull was new and ugly and this cramped little brick villa suited his conception of an old English village even less.

Solicitously helped by the stalwart Mr. Russell, he hopped through a miniature cast iron gate which matched the iron railing. He could see little more, except that the house was two stories, or two and a half, judging from the gable windows in the slate roof, and that it was one of a solid row, the extent of which was hidden by the darkness.

As they waited for an answer to the Vicar's knock, Morton dumped Brian's pack on the step with an envious grimace, leaned his rifle against the doorpost, and went back to the wagon.

Brian felt a sudden nervousness at the sound of a step inside. This was the first time he had billeted in a private house. It was a bit tough on the owners, especially as he was being shoved in without warning. But the feeling lasted only until the door opened and he saw, outlined against the lighted passage, the same girl who had spoken to him outside old Mary's cottage.

All he could hear of the Vicar's explanation was its apologetic tone. Then Mr. Russell put the pack and rifle just inside the door, came down the steps and helped him into the hall, and introduced him. "This is—er—" he paused, but not long enough for Brian to supply his name, "—er—one of our Canadian cousins who have rallied round the old Lion so gallantly, Miss Page. He is a casualty, but I am sure will be little trouble to you. These Canadian lads are rough and ready, but they are the right stuff. You won't have any trouble."

Brian fumed, wondering if the pink-faced mutt was trying to convey a warning to him, but Mr. Russell's pulpit voice disappeared as he went on.

"Would you like me to explain to your father?" he asked, "or—"

"No, thank you, Mr. Russell. I'll tell him. I'm sure he will understand,—and be glad to help," she added.

Mr. Russell put on his hat. "Well, I must hurry along," he said with a joviality which was obviously tinged with relief, "—a lot of very tired officers waiting for me. Good night,—and my compliments to Mr. Page."

He strode down the path. Brian, seeing that there was little room for the girl to pass him in the narrow passage, shut the door. The movement over-balanced him, and he put his hand quickly against the wall to steady himself.

Realizing now what a special nuisance he would be to these people, if he obeyed Captain Todd's injunction to keep his injured foot off the ground, he looked apologetically at Miss Page. She had given him a polite little smile when he had first come in, but since then the Vicar had given them no chance to speak to each other.

The girl had made a slight motion towards him, when he had steadied himself, and now looked at him, silent and constrained, as if wondering what to do.

Sympathy for her perplexity broke down his own embarrassment. He plunged into an apology, designed not only to put her at her ease, but to give the lie to the Vicar's description of the "rough and ready" Canadians. As an afterthought he added his name, and explained that he was a student at McGill.

But she seemed neither more nor less composed than before. "Please don't apologize," she said, with another polite little smile. "We're very glad to have you,—really. But my father is—My father and I—live in a rather secluded way. I would like to explain to him first. Would you mind sitting down in here for a minute?"

She pushed the door beside her, revealing a parlour, dark except for such light as came from the oil lamp in the hall, and apparently not often used.

Again Brian realized his clumsy helplessness, but she interpreted his expression and came quickly to his side. "You must lean on my arm."

His pride revolted. A husky fellow like him having to be helped by a strange girl who must be wishing him to Jericho! Probably they would go sprawling on the floor and look like a couple of fools!

But cutting short his doubts she took his arm with a peremptory "Please!" which was so tensely impatient that he could only obey. Her strength surprised him, and he hopped clumsily to a seat, anxious to get it over, but feeling as secure as with the brawny Vicar's arm.

"I won't be long." The softness of her voice slightly soothed his humiliation at his unimpressive introduction to the house.

He was comparatively unsophisticated for his twenty-three years, and his ideas of other people's judgment of him were still exclusively the reflection of his own feelings. Whenever he blundered he was acutely self-conscious, although he did not consider other people fools for a momentary clumsiness.

The parlour in which he sat was very unlike the homelike sitting-room which his mother had evolved around the ineradicable shirtsleeve philosophy of his farmer father. It was less comfortable. It was more crowded. It was duller, and there was an air of solid and very faded opulence about the furniture which was incongruous in such a tiny, jerry-built villa.

Opposite the door was a fireplace with white marble mantelpiece. Grained folding doors, now closed, cut off what must be a room at the back, while a small bow-window took up most of the front wall. Two massively framed portraits hung, one on each side of the fireplace.

The room seemed non-committal in colour, and gave the impression of bareness in spite of being rather overcrowded.

Except for the portraits, a bookcase containing a set of Dickens, a set of Scott, and a large number of theological works, was the only thing which registered definitely on his mind.

The portraits interested him most, for he felt certain that the woman must be Miss Page's mother. The large, dark gray, long-lashed eyes were strikingly like the girl's, but that was the only resemblance. Nothing could be more unlike Miss Page's expressionless reserve and flawless, satin skin, than that network of fine wrinkles and deeply-etched lines,—mute testimony to sacrifice, patience and resignation.

The man's picture—if it were Miss Page's father—showed no likeness, except in the fine oval of the face. Brian disliked it immediately because of the incredible piety which the artist had over-laboured to depict. It was a clergyman, but he could not believe that any clergyman could be so clerical or any saint so ascetic as this!

Then the original suddenly appeared in the doorway, and Brian absolved the artist of exaggeration. The thin figure and drawn face might have come straight from the torture chamber. The light was too dim to see clearly, and the impression passed, for the man was not really grotesque. But the sunken cheeks and temples, the sharp cheekbones, and thin, colourless hair, which seemed to give the forehead an unnatural expanse, combined to give the impression of skin too tightly stretched over the bones to allow of any flesh between. There were none of the little seams and lines by which most old faces testify their common lot with life. There were deep clefts from the nostrils to the edge of the jaw, but they were more like chiselings on a marble block than folds in soft flesh.

There was plenty of time for Brian to observe, for Mr. Page stood silent in the doorway, subjecting him to a prolonged and curiously objective scrutiny. When he spoke, he might have been addressing a piece of machinery, so coldly impersonal was his tone.

"How do you do, Mr. Mackell," he said in a voice which, though very English, was precise and never slurred. "I bid you

welcome. You will stay with us tonight, and I will see that everything is done for your comfort. I regret that my house is not more seemly, but I live a very retired life."

He was silent for a moment, then, with a slight inclination of the head, turned and went out. It was as if he had been coolly considering whether anything further was necessary and proper to be said, and deciding to the contrary, had—quite logically—not said it. Brian, expecting something further, had no time to speak before he was gone.

His daughter, who had been standing behind him, and whose existence he had not recognized either by his actions or his words, came in, and with a light assisting touch on his arm asked Brian to sit down again. He was conscious of a difference in her manner now. The peculiar mixture of composure and restraint was still there, but some strain had evidently passed with the interview between her father and himself.

"I'm afraid we are not very experienced in making a guest comfortable," she said, advancing it as a fact rather than an apology, "so we want you to say exactly what you would like."

Brian noticed how she said "we," while her father had used "I" exclusively. He felt suddenly sorry for her, in spite of the sense of inferiority which her beauty and composure gave him, and as he protested how little he needed, and how much he appreciated their hospitality, his self-consciousness disappeared, and his rather boyish frankness and ease returned.

But when she suddenly broke into a laugh at his description of Captain Todd's mismanagement of his horse, he felt that something had happened. It was a hearty though melodious laugh, totally unexpected, more like a boy's than a girl's, and though her expression immediately reverted to its intent composure, it had flashed into such brilliant animation for that moment, that his mental picture of her face was permanently changed.

There was a silence when he had brought the day's events as far as the Page's sitting-room. He did not feel uncomfortable because he knew now that silence was natural to her and not an indication of embarrassment. She was evidently considering something.

"You must be tired after such a long day," she said at last, pulling an old-fashioned gold watch from her waistband. Its message brought doubt into her voice again. "But it's only eight o'clock."

Brian leaned forward smiling, but a little troubled. "Look here, Miss Page. You simply mustn't bother yourself about me. I know what's worrying you. You are wondering what to do with me until bedtime, isn't that it?"

He had not really expected an unequivocal answer and was pleased when she nodded definitely and said, "Yes."

"Well, it's mighty nice of you, but please don't! I'll feel mean if I'm going to be on your mind that way. I'll have to hobble right out and sleep in the road if that's the way you're going to take it."

She did not take that seriously, merely looking up and meeting his eyes steadily. But although it was serious, her look plainly said, "You don't really mean that,—but what shall I do with you?"

"I'm only thinking of you, Mr. Mackell," she said sedately.

"And I'm only thinking of you, Miss Page," he grinned. "But I'm afraid that won't get us anywhere. Suppose I have a bit of a wash and brush up? Lord knows I need it! That would take up a bit of time. Then—" He glanced round at the dull little room, wondering what then? It would be pleasant to light that fire and sit in an armchair, smoking and talking to this girl who found him such a problem—or merely looking at her. But apparently that would take a revolution! Maybe it would be fairer to get himself out of the way. If he took a book with him, he could go to bed and read. What a life!

He leaned over and pulled out "Edwin Drood," feeling very unselfish, and a little sulky. "Then I think I might go to bed. If I don't feel sleepy, I'll read this, if I may. I never wanted to start it before because there wasn't any ending."

She looked at him quickly when his voice changed, but took his right arm and gently supported him to the bottom of the narrow staircase. There they paused. Through an open door farther along the hall, he could see the head of Mr. Page, brightly lit by the lamp beside him on a dining-room table, and bending over a book. Papers were spread on his side of the table, some sewing on the other. It looked bright and comfortable.

"Put your hand on my shoulder," she directed as they started. "You'll get up easily between me and the bannisters."

"You're trying to spare me!" she expostulated, as he threw most of his weight on the bannisters. "Please be sensible."

He yielded to the exasperated entreaty of her voice, and they progressed more easily when he used her sturdily braced shoulder as freely as a crutch. "This is the bathroom," she said a little breathlessly, stopping at one of the three doors on the landing. "Your room is upstairs. I'll go and get your things and make the bed and come back for you."

She went downstairs lightly, and as he hopped into the bathroom Brian, unanalytical as he was, wondered that such graceful strength could be combined with such stiff reserve, and exist in such a poky little home.

The bathroom was dingy and inconvenient to a Canadian's eyes, but having taken off his shirt, he managed to make a thorough if somewhat messy job of washing in the small basin. He scrubbed himself from shoulders to hair, and felt much better, until he discovered that there was neither brush nor comb in the room. That annoyed him. It was another link in the chain fastening him to Mr. Russell's label, "rough and ready." His hair was stiff, thick and fair, with an objectionable wave which constantly threatened to become curly if not disciplined. A trial at all times, a tragedy when wet.

Of course Miss Page noticed it. "Your brush and comb are upstairs," she said as soon as he came out, and he took her shoulder again, surprised by the soothing effect of her tactlessness.

The little room on the top floor was clean and bare and chilly. There was an iron bedstead, a blue-painted chest of drawers and washstand, with large white-enamelled ewer and basin, and looming incongruously large, an impressive mahogany wardrobe.

The bed was only half made, some blankets and sheets being still piled on it. "I didn't want to keep you waiting," she explained, setting to work.

He did not make any useless offer to help, but sat down on the one hard chair and watched. Her method was very different from that of his mother or sister. She gave the bedclothes none of those tender little pats and strokings which he would hardly have remembered, except that they were absent now. Her motions were sweeping, and definite. The delicate nuances of the bedmaker's art were ignored. When she folded a sheet or tucked a blanket, either there were no adjustments to be made, or if there were, she did not make them.

But it looked inviting enough,—the first real bed he had slept in for months. If only he didn't have to get into it so early!

He rose just as she was finishing. Light from a street-lamp was shining up into the window, and he wondered why such a small village should have lights. A man and a woman emerged slowly from the surrounding darkness, and then a third. He recognized Captain Todd, and behind, Nott. The woman seemed vaguely familiar. Brian turned interestedly. "There's our doctor, Miss Page, and isn't that the girl who yanked him into that cottage when he halted?"

She joined him by the window. "Yes, it's Miss Brador, and—I'm afraid it means that poor old Mary has gone." Her softened voice moved him as she added, "I'm sorry. I liked old Mary,—and she was lonely."

He watched until the three figures disappeared, feeling but not knowing that he felt depressed. "I wonder where they're going," he said, though without much interest. "He isn't lonely anyhow."

She looked up with a slight frown, but he was still looking out of the window. "I expect they are going up to the Hall. Mr. Russell said that a lot of the officers were billeted there. Miss Brador is very clever, she will know just how to amuse them."

He turned. "It's been mighty good of you to take me in like this, Miss Page. I know I must be a darned nuisance, but it's only for one night. I think I'll tumble in right now and make the most of a good bed while I've got it."

Her brows were still overcast as she said "goodnight" and slowly closed the door. She was still frowning when, with a sudden change of mind, she pushed it open again. She stood, with her hand on the knob, stiffly graceful, resolute. "Mr. Mackell, do you really want to go to bed? Or are you doing it so as not to bother us?"

Her voice had the same note of exasperated entreaty. Brian felt foolish. What a silly question to ask,—just when he had made such an effort to be a perfect and untroublesome guest! Why couldn't she leave him to his deadly dull evening, instead of rubbing it in, and making him tell more polite lies? He felt resentful, and his good resolutions vanished.

Probably everybody else in the battalion was out about the village having a good time right now,—it wasn't even nine yet.

"Oh, do say something *definite*! Do you *want* to go to bed?"

"Of course I don't want to go to bed," he answered warmly. "Why should I,—the first night for a dog's age that I've been in a house,—or where there was somebody to talk to except a gang I've been talking to for six months!"

She opened her mouth to answer, closed it sharply, flung her head sideways in a despairing little gesture, the very pathos of which annoyed him the more because it jabbed his conscience so painfully.

"But why didn't you *say* so, then?"

"Because—oh, because I DIDN'T!" He tried to turn away, disgusted with himself, his billet, and the Great War. But his foot prevented more than a half turn, and with two short steps she was facing him again.

"Mr. Mackell, *please* say what you *want* to do, then. How can I do what you want, if you don't tell me? I—if I were Miss Brador, I would *know*, but—"

She hesitated for a moment and Brian broke in, sullenly emphasizing each word and tingling all over with a sense of their fatuousness. "I—want—to—sit—downstairs—in—the—parlour—and—talk—to—you."

Her brows unknit, rose slightly. Such a simple suggestion seemed to come as a surprise. Her voice was satisfied, matter of fact, but mystified, as she answered, "Well, come and do it, then."

She came to his side and offered him her shoulder. Brian took it without a word. He was feeling too foolish to speak. What a fuss about nothing! If only she'd thought of the possibility of him preferring company to bed at nine o'clock! Apparently she had no objection! Or if he hadn't been so damned courteous!

He hopped clumsily downstairs beside her. A fine start for a pleasant evening's talk!

The mist had risen and there was a cold moon shining as Captain Todd and Dorothy Brador turned into the drive of Bradderham Hall. They walked slowly in spite of the chill of the January night.

She had found in him a new type, intelligent, curious-minded, but diffident and sometimes almost naive. During the hours of old Mary's passing she had been conscious of a comfortable harmony.

They passed between the dark walls of rhododendron and out on to a lawn. "Home!" she announced, and raised her hand as if drawing aside the curtains of a stage.

Todd examined it thoughtfully. Very square, very gray, very solid, and in the moonlight very cold. He made no comment.

"Don't you like it?" she asked, amused at his characteristically over-careful weighing of the evidence before expressing even a casual opinion. "I am only beginning to appreciate it properly myself, now that most of my time is spent in the V.A.D. quarters in the Norwich Hospital."

"It has character," the doctor said quietly.

"It has beauty," she retorted, "—unless one is looking for something snug,—or smug." She looked at him pointedly. "In this moonlight, when you can't see the ivy or the warmth in the old walls, and there's nothing to mitigate the severity, I think it is really beautiful."

She laughed softly.

"Am I too rhapsodical for you? I'm sorry, but I've never felt the old place quite as I do now,—and your enthusiasm is infectious!"

The corners of his mouth twitched slightly, but he refused to be drawn, and as they came up to the big, square door, she stopped and turned to him. "Now, Captain Todd, I want an answer, or you shan't have your billet! Seriously, don't you think it is lovely?"

His eyes followed her hand up to the top of the dark walls outlined against a cold indigo sky, to the moon fretted by the black branches of an elm, and back to her smooth, pale face, half smiling, wholly straightforward and sincere. "I guess it must be," he said.

She nodded approvingly, rang a bell and led the way in. The square hall was large but unpretentious. Although there were a number of handsome oak chairs, and an impressive fireplace with coat of arms above it, it was clearly nothing but an entrance hall. On the left a broad staircase rose to a gallery which flanked two sides, to the right were several doors. Directly opposite the entrance a pair of Corinthian pillars flanked a curtained opening, and through it a butler was coming to meet them. He was extremely tall,—at least a foot taller than Todd's modest 5 ft. 6 in. Todd was surprised. He had only known butlers in books and plays and had considered them essentially middle-sized.

Miss Brador nodded cheerily, as she pulled off her doeskin gloves. "Captain Todd is the last of your responsibilities, Maddox," she said. "That is, if the rest got here."

"Yes, Miss Dorothy,—five officers. They are in the library with Sir James."

"Good! I want you to take particular care of Captain Todd, Maddox. He's been very good about poor old Mary. I hope you've got something for us to eat."

"Lady Brador told me to serve dinner in the breakfast-room as soon as you were ready, Miss Dorothy. Captain Todd is in the chintz room. His man brought his valise up with the rest. He will be comfortable there, I'm sure.

"Will you come with me, sir?"

Todd followed him, unusually aware of his insignificant appearance as he climbed the wide stairs, so spaciouly exposed to the hall below. They were better designed for something queenly in satin he reflected, or for tall, dark men with wigs and swords.

Maddox threw open a door, and stood aside as he entered. "Chintz room" had suggested something bright and feminine, but a glance showed him that his quarters were as square and solid as the Hall itself. There were chintz window-curtains, and a chintz canopy to the fourposter bed and chintz slip-covers to the arm chairs, but it was a misnomer all the same. The room should have been called "The Carved Mahogany Chamber."

His valise, unrolled on a couch, did not harmonize. Nor did the uniform and shirt laid out on the chair, nor the purely utilitarian brushes and stained waterproof toilet-case, set in shrinking loneliness on the massive bureau.

But the most striking incongruity was the fact that his things had been laid out at all! "I suspect you have been giving Nott a little course of instruction," he smiled to Maddox. "Hitherto he seems to have felt that his duties had ended when he had unstrapped the valise."

Maddox was non-committal. "I expect there are not many opportunities to learn such duties in the new armies, sir."

"No, so I hope your lesson sticks. But he's a first-rate fellow to have all the same. If he doesn't lay out my pyjamas, he takes very good care that I have a comfortable place to lay them out for myself. I bet he tried to wangle the best room in the house for me."

"He did raise some question, sir,—not understanding that the arrangements were—in other hands." Maddox allowed himself a slight smile.

When Captain Todd came downstairs, a bath and a change of clothes had restored his normal attitude,—unpretentious and unembarrassed. Joe Todd, M.D., of Howington, was no great figure in the world, but there was only one of him, and that one unchangeable. An army commission, a Bradderham fourposter, could have little effect on a job already completed by heredity and environment.

Maddox showed him into the breakfast-room. "Miss Brador will be down in a minute, sir," he said, and closed the door. Captain Todd sat down beside the fire and lit a cigarette contentedly. He had not eaten for eight hours and his sense of exhaustion told him that he was very hungry. His blood pressure was too low to stand much drain on his vitality. But the candle-lit tablecloth and silver held excellent promise!

He smiled as he watched the flickering coal fire. He had led a less exacting life as a medical officer than at any time since he first went to McGill, and when for the first time he felt a little tired, there was a charming room, a most civilized table, and a restfully satisfying hostess to restore him. Pretty soft! He dropped his cigarette into the ashes, and let his eyes close. It was delightfully quiet and warm.

When Dorothy Brador came in, he was asleep. She stopped. For a moment she was alarmed because of his pallor. She turned to Maddox. "I wonder—" Then walked quickly across to the sleeping man and stopped. Her relief was as unexpectedly deep as her alarm. She straightened up, smiling back at Maddox. There was a complete confidence between the butler and his mistress, engendered by thirty years of association in a household where, in their own spheres, each was subordinate to less able characters.

"I thought he was ill, for a moment," she said in a low voice. "He certainly looks very pale."

"I think it is just a matter of nourishment, Miss Dorothy. He mentioned something of the sort."

"That was silly of me,—you too, Maddox. We should have given him a drink before. Serve dinner as soon as you can, will you? And bring me some of the 1840 cognac."

When Captain Todd opened his eyes, he did not know that he had been asleep. While he had been dropping his cigarette into the ashes, a crimson silk version of Miss Brador had materialized curiously in the firelight. Wide awake now, he saw that she was sitting sideways on an ottoman, leaning toward him and smiling, and that she had a crystal goblet in her hand.

"Your medicine!" she said, holding it out.

"I'm very sorry, I must have dozed off. I hope you haven't been here long."

Her only answer was a meaning look at the goblet which she held towards him.

He sat up straight and took it from her, touched by the kindness in her eyes and the confident intimacy with which she had conveyed her wish by a look. The vivid dress, the firelight, the easy assurance of her pose, with bare white arms resting on her crimson lap, the touch of colour on her cheeks, made her seem almost beautiful,—and yet as solidly companionable as during the earlier evening when he thought her almost plain.

He stood up, raised the glass towards her, and with a bow which would have puzzled and amused him if he had been conscious of it, he drank.

"A superb prescription!" he said, as they sat down.

"An emergency case, Captain Todd. I have only you for company, and you would have been terribly dull if I had waited for the food to restore you! Something drastic had to be done to make you amusing."

He nodded. "Your handling of the case was masterly,—for both of us."

Lady Brador came in briskly. "Is everything quite right, my dear?" and continued without waiting for an answer, "I told Maddox just what to do, but with so many to dinner, and Mrs. Wortle a little touchy—because I must have forgotten to warn her when Mr. Russell told me this afternoon—so many things to think of—you know how it is, Captain Todd? And poor old Mary too—so sad—I was too distressed. But I'm sure no one could have done more. It was really too good of you—but they all seemed to enjoy themselves, and Sir James—really quite gay—he's always admired Colonials so much—he feels they're so much more forceful, you know—he was hardly ruffled by your batman, Doctor—such a forceful man, isn't he?"

Dorothy gave her mother a quick look when Nott was mentioned. Lady Brador's natural mode of expression was rambling and disjointed at all times, whether she was merely entertaining the Vicar, or conveying the severest reproof which her dislike of unpleasantness allowed.

Captain Todd, although ignorant of the nature of Nott's offense, felt reasonably certain that it would call for an apology, and gave one promptly. "I'm very sorry if Nott's been making a nuisance of himself, Lady Brador. Just what did he do? I'll speak to him about it."

"Nothing—nothing worth mentioning—I really don't know what put it into my mind—and after all we are in a war, aren't we?—and think of the poor Belgians! Well, I really must hurry back. I only slipped in to see that Maddox had done everything. You'll join us in a few minutes, my dear? Sir James will be so glad to meet you, doctor, after all you've done."

As she went out, Todd devoted his attention to his food with unrelenting concentration. He simply could not afford to laugh, and join Nott among the damned! But he would have liked very much to know just how much of that rapid fire had been aimed. He did not want Dorothy Brador to think him stupid.

"You are thinking very deeply, Captain Todd," she said at last. "Won't you tell me the result?"

"I wasn't thinking. I was wondering. Suppose you tell me."

"It's quite simple. That's just Mother's way. The complete translation is that she was a little annoyed at your man, and wanted to let you know without the responsibility of telling you! The other little digs were quite undesigned. I hate to admit it, because that one about the Belgians was perfect. But Mother's thoughts always run a couple of lengths ahead of the words, so she just jots down the phrases as fast as she can, to keep up. If she had time, she would leave out a lot, but you can't cross out when you're talking!"

Todd nodded. "I understand, and don't think my feelings were hurt. I was only puzzled. But just what has that anarchist of mine done?"

"It was simply that he was determined you should have the best room in the house. He didn't actually try to turn any of us out, though I understand that toward the end he did intimate to Maddox that civilians wouldn't have any rooms if soldiers didn't protect them. But he absolutely insisted on examining all the officers' rooms and choosing the best for you."

She paused, smiling at her cigarette for a moment. "I do wish I'd been there! And the funny part of it was that he took your valise out of Jack's room,—that's my brother—he's in India—and triumphantly took possession of the Chintz room

which is so gloomy that we only use it when there is a crowd. It must have been the fourposter which impressed him as sufficiently—formidable—for your dignity!"

He listened, enjoying the luxury of her companionable raillery.

"So you are going to sleep in a sunless and rather draughty room, instead of a bright, warm one, just because of your man's Canadian forcefulness! Maddox saw the humour of it, and Mother didn't interfere because she hates scenes, but if you were to have been here longer than one night, I would have advised you to be very polite to her!"

"And speaking of Canadian forcefulness," Todd suggested mildly, "would it extenuate matters in your Mother's eyes if I explained that Nott is an Englishman of the English, that he was born and bred in Leeds?"

Dorothy's eyes twinkled. "That would make it *much* worse!" She rose with a smile which Todd correctly interpreted to mean that duty was duty, and led the way to the library.

He would have had little difficulty in finding his way alone. Whatever their characters, the Canadian voices and laughter were forceful enough to act as guides. Dorothy's step quickened. "This sounds quite like a riot—for Bradderham," she told him hopefully. "Listen to Mother! I haven't heard her laugh like that for ages, not since Jack and his chums were here before they sailed."

The library of Bradderham Hall, more than any other room, reproduced the spirit of the building itself. It was large, well proportioned, almost square, unimaginative, and solidly comfortable.

There were French windows along one side, and the other was practically a continuous bookcase except where broken by the door. A large fireplace occupied one end. There were portraits between the windows and on each side of the fireplace, yet the room had little colour.

Time had dulled such bright pigments as the artists may have thought consistent with the solid dignity of the early Bradors. Most of the books were bound in 18th century calf or dark morocco, and they were so neatly arranged and so uniform in size that in the mass they looked more like an intellectual wall than a window to intelligence. A long table of massive oak stood in the centre of the room, the chairs were leather covered, the curtains maroon. It was more of a typical, than an individual library,—typical of those many libraries where the books have descended from one generation to another, while the desire to read them has not.

At one end of this room Sir James Brador was playing bridge with three of his temporary guests. He had endeavoured to secure the three senior officers present for this purpose, feeling that it was as well to be on the safe side as to precedence. Major Baxter and Captain Thomas had been obvious choices, but Mr. Scimold, the Lieutenant in command of No. 7 Platoon, though much older than any of the others except Major Baxter, had turned out to be the junior subaltern of the Company.

This had caused Sir James some qualms. He had taken the first opportunity to deprecate his mistake in an undertone to the genial Captain Thomas, whom he judged would be most understanding of his breach.

This influx of officers, even though they were "Colonials" for whom he had a hearty though hazy admiration, had disturbed his familiar routine. They raised problems, and Sir James shunned problems as his wife shunned deaths.

But Captain Thomas had solved this one by his boisterous public announcement of it. None of them had the least respect for precedence except Major Baxter, who secretly cherished his own. He was a bank manager, his nose beaked, his eyes pouchy, his figure portly. He felt and looked like a brigadier—and hoped. But for the rest of them, precedence was "the bunk."

Eldon Scimold, his long, craggy face breaking into a sudden smile and reverting as suddenly to its normal rugged tranquillity, had unflexed his gaunt 6 ft. 2 ins. and walked over to the real senior subaltern—the sleekly youthful Wentworth, and formally offered him his place at the card-table.

After that there had been no more ice to break. Wentworth had refused the honour, being more congenially engaged, with Wells and Morin as supporters, in undermining Lady Brador's mental wall between "quite nice people" and "quite ordinary people." He was a master in the art of breaking down walls. His technique was personal and flexible. In this case it consisted in making Lady Brador and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Joyce, both feel about twenty-five years old.

Dorothy and Captain Todd, after watching from the doorway for a moment, went across to the card-table. A rubber had just ended, and Captain Thomas did not sit down again when the introductions were over. "Joe is the real missing link in your table of precedence, Sir James!—A Captain, if only a synthetic medical affair. I'll surrender my seat to him, unless—" he added politely, but not at all persuasively, "Miss Brador would prefer to take my place?"

Miss Brador smilingly refused, and Todd unwillingly took his seat opposite Sir James. Thomas was twenty-nine and believed in enjoying himself. Sir James was a good player but slow and unenterprising. Baxter was inclined to be pompous, and Scimold taciturn. He felt he had done enough enlivening of that gang. Miss Brador looked attractive and interesting, even if she was not pretty. He would get her over by the fire and talk.

But she seemed to have no inclination to leave the card-table, so he stood beside her and watched the players. Sir James and Thomas had won that first rubber by a handsome margin, chiefly on the strength of Thomas's brilliant and speculative exploitation of his own luck. When the change was made the luck did not pass to Todd, and if it had, his exploitation, while it might have been speculative, certainly would not have been brilliant.

The difference between his partners was emphasized to Sir James by the fact that he himself continued to hold the same average hands as before. The game, too, became much more serious with the loss of B Company's lighthearted Commander.

Sir James's opinion of this scrubby little doctor fellow grew less and less favourable. He would have scouted the idea that bridge skill bore any relation to character. He certainly did not feel that size and elegance were other than superficial traits, inasmuch as he himself was only five and a half feet and stocky. All the same—.

Dorothy, who had finally taken one of Captain Thomas's hints, had kept an unobtrusive eye on the players until the rubber ended. Then she casually joined them again, standing with one hand on the back of Todd's chair.

"Captain Thomas wants to get back into the game," she said, as soon as the points were marked, giving him an expressionless look which yet conveyed enough to check his denial. "You don't mind, do you, Captain Todd?"

"Not at all, not at all. A very pleasant rubber, but Sir James certainly deserves a better partner."

Sir James said that he couldn't want a better partner—but he did not say it until Captain Todd was well out of the chair. This time Dorothy watched them for only a minute before strolling away with her salvage.

"A gallant rescue!" he said with a sigh of relief. "But did Thomas really prefer playing bridge to—?"

She interrupted with a quiet laugh. "That was a sacrifice of truth on the altar of filial piety. Father takes his bridge seriously, for an adult—" she regarded him judicially, "—and your bridge is terrible! I could see Father's opinion of you getting lower every deal."

"I don't blame him," said Todd, ruefully. "I never could work up any interest in cards, except maybe in a poker game where I stood to lose my shirt—in the days when I didn't have any shirts to spare!"

"Well, it's lucky we move tomorrow, or my social talents would be badly strained. I have to be very polite to your mother, and now I have to be very, very polite to your father, and for all I know, you may be feeling—" He stopped.

She watched composedly to see if he would go on, when he lighted a cigarette rather sheepishly instead, she smiled. "You were quite right to stop there, Captain Todd," she said.

The new rubber was just ending when Maddox came in with a salver agreeably crowded with glasses, siphons and decanters. He reappeared almost immediately with a long khaki envelope addressed to Major Baxter. "An orderly just brought this from the Bull, sir."

The Major took it. "Probably tomorrow's Orders of the Day," he explained. "I'll open it now, if you don't mind, Sir James. It should give us our starting time, which you will want to know as soon as possible. We have been so much trouble already that I hope that fellow Blaikie hasn't fixed any unearthly hour."

He stepped aside from the group to read, and when he had finished signalled Captain Thomas to join him. They talked in low tones for a minute and then rejoined the group. "I'm afraid this implies even more inconvenience for you than an early start, Sir James," Baxter apologized. "We are held up until further orders. Of course, we may get them in time to

march sometime tomorrow, but as Brigade has given instructions for drawing rations from Brantham Junction, it seems rather doubtful."

Sir James, momentarily discomposed, warmly denied the possibility of inconvenience, and his words were so hospitable that he soon began to feel them. After all, it couldn't be long, and these chaps would be sure to be interested in seeing over his model farm—Canada was a great place for farming. He could be sure of a good game of bridge too,—if he could avoid that doctor fellow. He said goodnight with assurances which were obviously sincere.

Captain Thomas, for one, was pleased with the prospect. A few words with Miss Brador had reassured him as to her reasons for pushing him back into that bridge game. That had been lucky. Sir James wouldn't have welcomed their stay so heartily if he had spent the evening as the Doc's partner. A sensible girl, Miss Brador.

Dorothy had won approval in other quarters, too. "Very clever of you, my dear," Lady Brador said, as she kissed her goodnight. "Father's so polite. But really! He was getting quite feverish—I could feel it—such an ordinary person, but bridge is something they can learn—and you had so much of him, my dear—you must be prostrated."

Sir James's approval was briefer but more coherent. "You got me out of a bad mess there, eh, my dear? Very clever of you. I don't know how you managed it. I felt guilty though. I hope the fellow doesn't talk as badly as he plays! Why, do you know, my dear, in that second deal—"

But Dorothy stopped the post mortem with a laughing kiss. "Tell me tomorrow, Dad. I'm ready to drop,—such a day!" She went out, leaving him shaking his head sympathetically, and feeling that he and Sybil hadn't been quite fair in shunting the doctor fellow on their daughter so much. But she was so competent. She always knew exactly what to do.

Dorothy walked upstairs, humming a little tune. Her parents' approval was pleasant,—and amusing. For although she was only thirty and had no official part in managing the household, she always felt as though she were the responsible parent, and they the children. She smiled cheerfully to herself at their dread of "the doctor fellow." Yes, she would enjoy protecting them from him!

Joan Page helped Brian down the narrow stairs with easy confidence in her strength. It was satisfying to feel his hand heavy on her shoulder, to brace herself to exactly the right resistance at each step, to know that he relied on her enough not to spare her.

If her shoulder had been all he needed, it would have been easy; but he wanted to talk to her! The misunderstanding about going to bed had impressed on her the immensity of her ignorance. She had always known that there were blanks in her social experience, but they had never troubled her before. Her dealings with other men and women were too rare. Her life was limited to the care of the house and an exacting father. In Summer the companionably lonely sea welcomed her for hours of effortful swimming, or quiet dreaming by its shore; in Winter the reading of many books, and the contemplative examination of their people, problems, and places, brought far horizons close to her; and in Summer and Winter there were the empty, wind-swept downs. These brought her all the freedom and scope she ever needed.

Seldom lonely or self-conscious, she carried on the duty left her by her mother, in contentment. She did not look far beyond the immediate present because the future depended on her father's actions, not on hers.

But now the responsibility for pleasing this strange Canadian was hers alone. Her father would not help her. She could not avoid it, and she did not want to. Her desire was strong and deep to be triumphantly successful in this, her first opportunity to give personal, intimate help to one of her country's soldiers. She ought to be as competent in companionship as she was in helping him down stairs.

Her feelings showed in the reserved eagerness of her eyes, as she sat down close to him in the parlour. She had drawn back one of the sliding doors into the dining-room, but only a little way, for although her father did little with his books and papers, and was oblivious to her movements, unusual distractions sometimes made him angry.

If only she knew how to start! The Canadian had been funny about not saying exactly what he wanted, before; or perhaps it had only been the natural thing; perhaps he had thought that she was funny! The sense of lostness oppressed her. She had lived in two strictly separated worlds. In one of them she was serious, reserved, practical,—but a stranger, dealing competently with all the phantom details connected with her father, the village, the neighbours. In the other, her real self—free, frank, gay—lived among significant realities. Here her thoughts and books, and the windy downs and foaming waves, and Joan Page were real. The two worlds often overlapped, but had never mingled until now.

In either of these worlds she could have done something, but hesitating in the void between them she was tongue-tied,—and she did so desperately want to make him pleased and happy. Her imagination wove a tender pattern round him, in which her helpless silence was an ugly flaw. He had come thousands of miles to the war. Chance had brought him here for a few hours—dependent upon her for everything. Tomorrow he would pass on, perhaps to die. This might be the last home he would ever enter. She might be the last woman of his own race with whom he would sit quietly and talk. His friends were outside somewhere, enjoying themselves; he was in here, alone,—for he might just as well have gone to bed for all the use she was!

"It's awfully good of you to put up with me like this," he volunteered at last, when the silence was becoming almost painful.

She felt the lameness of the remark, and the effort it had needed, but it was something that he had spoken. It was as if he had scrambled out of one of the worlds into the emptiness with her. But they couldn't go on like that, it would be awful! With a desperate effort she gained a foothold in her familiar world of frankness and reality. "Mr. Mackell," she said earnestly, ignoring his remark, "*please* help me to make you enjoy yourself. I know it sounds silly, but I do so terribly want to please you for the short time you're here, and I don't know how. We live so much alone. Talk to me as if you were with your friends, or at home,—whatever will please you most, that's what I want."

"But I don't need pleasing, Miss Page, honestly I don't. You shouldn't feel that way. It's I who should be trying to please you—after being dumped on you this way. What'll please me most is simply to feel that you're pleased to have me, or pretending well enough to fool me!" he added with a propitiating grin.

Joan's spirit unfolded to the clumsy words. She understood perfectly the state of mind which they implied. To a listener their explanations might have seemed to be going round in a circle, but actually they had bridged the gap between two

spheres. They stood side by side now, in the same real, and calculable world.

To him the change meant simply a sudden pleasant transition from constraint to ease. To her, whose worlds were so distinct, there was a conscious quickening of the khaki figure into a friendly reality, with hopes and fears and thoughts like her own, and a personality to whom her own thoughts would be as real.

It was the same transformation which she experienced when, after chatting to Polly Dyer at the post office, she crossed the road to the footpath winding up the green downs to the top of Caster Head.

She welcomed this first stranger to pass the bounds of her own private land, with the only greeting which seemed completely expressive of her feelings,—a frank smile. Its radiant loveliness was as little understood by her as the complexities which had caused it. She knew that she was pretty, but she had no valid standards of comparison. She did not really understand that she was beautiful. Nor was she in the least conscious of the sudden, breathtaking enhancement of every loveliness when a smile—a real smile springing from her heart—blossomed in her eyes and lips.

She settled forward comfortably, her elbows on the little table and her chin on her cupped palms, wondering why he stared with such wide-open eyes. "I don't have to pretend that I'm pleased to have you," she assured him. "I wasn't certain at first, but now that I know that you are so easy to please—of course I'm glad."

"Well—not so easy to please as all that! That wouldn't be such a hot compliment to you—and your father, would it? But I certainly owe the Padre something for putting me here of all places!

"Think of the hundreds of nights I've spent in wooden huts—and mostly raining outside. It gets pretty hard to work up any exhilaration out of letting old Sergeant Brunt loot my pay at Crown and Anchor, I can tell you, or even out of drowning my sorrows in sausages and mashed in the gay lights of a Salvation Army Hut! Not that I'd want to be ungrateful to my old pals, soss and em," he added feelingly, "but you can understand how grand this is in comparison."

She nodded, amused at the affectionate way he had spoken of sausages and mashed, but more interested in the comparison between his lot and hers. "But don't you see," she explained, "that it's even more of a change for me to have you here? I don't mean that I have any hardships like you, but it's just the—routine." She paused, not finding the exact words to express herself. "I mean—well—look!" She turned her eyes to the empty seat in the dining-room across the table from her father, and allowed her left hand to sink away from her chin until it pointed at the work-basket and book. Then when he had turned round again, she explained. "You see? Every evening; *much* longer than you've been in the army. Reading a lot and sewing a little. I like it, but having somebody interesting from outside that I can really talk to—I mean somebody that isn't just—just like sewing, is—nice."

He seemed surprised. "But surely you must have lots of visitors—friends, neighbours, and so on? You can't sit alone at that table every night!"

He spoke with such assured and smiling certainty that she wondered if she and her father were more different from other people than she had realized. Her reading had shown her that they were peculiar, of course, but it had also shown how many kinds of unusual people the world contained, even if Caster End had none. Probably people were more sociable in Canada.

Nevertheless there was a touch of wistfulness and doubt in her voice when she answered. "But that is just what I *do* do, Mr. Mackell, though you don't seem to believe it.

"And do you know that you are the only person who has stayed with us for a night since my mother died,—almost a year before we left Smettock? We've been here six years, so that makes seven altogether. Father doesn't like visitors,—and I don't think I do, either." She sat thoughtfully trying to analyse how she would have felt if anyone had come to stay with them, and it struck her now as odd that there had been no one. It emphasized their loneliness, but it did not make her regret it.

"No," she said slowly, "I wouldn't have liked people staying here, I'm sure. It would have been hard."

Her father was uneasy about something. He tapped on the table and glanced at her. She rose quickly, smiling at Brian as she passed. "No, I don't mean that—I meant here," she explained, and pointed to her head.

Mr. Page was sitting, as always, in the old wing-topped armchair, beside the dining-room table, his books on his right,

the fireplace and a small stand on his left. On the stand were an empty decanter, a glass, and a jug of water. They had stood beside his armchair almost as long as she could remember. But in her mother's lifetime the decanter had never been more than a third full. Every morning her mother had unlocked a particular pantry cupboard and with her own hands filled it to the exact level. Her father had always emptied it by the time he went to bed, but he had never asked that it be refilled, and as far as Joan knew the question had never been raised between them.

In spite of her ignorance of many social amenities, Joan was profoundly educated,—she was even wise in such lessons as experience and reading could teach. She had understood, even before she could have explained it, what lay behind that strict routine of her mother's. She had even apprehended that the only reason why the question had never been raised was because there *was* a question.

Gradually she had learnt that her father's reticence on that and many other matters had been abnormal and was growing more so. By ignoring a fact he could almost persuade himself that it did not exist, or at least attain the mental attitude appropriate to its non-existence. And he thought, or hoped—the two processes were indistinguishable now—that if he could feel as though an unpleasantness did not exist, others must feel the same.

And the tearing down of such illusions he resented far more bitterly than the unpleasantness which they veiled, and it was because of that undue, unfairly directed bitterness that Joan knew his state to be not a genuine mental blindness, but a deliberate closing of the eyes.

Until a few years ago the attitude had served him. But facts accumulate, even though they are ignored. When the gently protecting hand of his wife was withdrawn, they overwhelmed him,—quietly, decently, and without scandal, but finally.

His parish of Smettock, at first an easy rural cure, had become little more than a suburb of an encroaching city; his parishioners, shopkeepers, clerks, and factory workers, rather than farmers. Such parishioners have tested the fibre of far wiser priests than the Reverend Hilary Page. They made difficulties, raised questions, laughed at tradition, ignored authority. Chapels sprang up to give those who remained religious something which Mr. Page neither could nor would give.

The dwindling of his congregation hardened his determination to give them more and more of what kept them away. His piety grew more loftily austere—but to Mr. Page piety signified merely a fanatical devotion to the letter—to all the tenuous, historical and theological minutiae of the Church of England Liturgy.

More of that Liturgy was his answer to obduracy. The number of services increased as the pews emptied, until he was performing from ten to fifteen services a week,—and practically always, except on Sundays, without a single listener.

Almost suddenly there came a time when the atmosphere surrounding the strange, obstinate priest and his empty church underwent a change. The fantastic services began to draw tiny congregations. Sometimes a dozen would be seated far at the back, women chiefly, and from the city, people who whispered to each other during the service and hurried out quickly when it was finished.

They had come for the thrill, just as they would have gone to a murder trial. Mr. Page's defiant benediction brought them the same exciting shudder as the judge's sentence of death.

He had become a "show."

The Bishop intervened. There were conferences and persuasion. Mr. Page was adamant. The Law was the Law, and he abided by its Letter. A small annuity was arranged. Mr. Page "resigned".

As Joan came into the dining-room her father glanced up, then dropped his eyes to his book. His left hand went out to the stand beside him and motioned the decanter an inch towards her. The silence had never been broken: the illusion was rigidly maintained. She took the decanter, went back to the kitchen, and refilled it,—to the top. Mrs. Page's control had died with her. Joan had once tried to re-establish the system of allowance, but it had resulted in such an outbreak—although the offence was never specified—that she had submitted. Duty forced her to make the trial, but reason told her that it must fail.

She guessed that the little scene might have surprised their guest, but she did not allude to it. It was too definitely part of the other world to be worth talking about when she had passed the dividing door again.

She sat down in exactly the same position as before, with her chin on her hands. "Mr. Mackell," she began, "I wish you would tell me about your home in Canada,—I mean the difference between there and England. What I've read seems so contradictory, the terrible winters and yet the peach orchards, and the talk about your joining with the United States and yet the Canadian army coming over to fight for us. I would so like to get it—sort of straightened out, so that I could see a real picture."

"That's a big order," Brian laughed. "Canada's a big place—pretty hard to get all in one picture—unless you're a C.P.R. publicity agent!"

"Well, you try!—please, Mr. Mackell."

He reddened and hesitated, and she wondered if she had asked something embarrassing.

"Sure, I'll try," he said at last. "Anything you say goes. But I wish—my name's Brian, and 'Mr. Mackell' sounds so darned stiff! I'm 'Mac' in the army, and 'Brian' at home, but 'Mr. Mackell' sounds like somebody I've never met!"

He leaned forward persuasively. "Be a sport. Miss Page! And Joan is the prettiest name I know; it would be a shame to waste it!"

She studied him attentively. It had sounded pretty when he said it. She wondered if she ought to be offended. She would have disliked it if Bert Summers, or even Mr. Russell had asked her that, but this boy was so different, so natural and straightforward about it. Doing what he asked would be pleasant, but she would wait a minute, he was so engaging with the humble, apologetic look in his blue eyes.

"I didn't mean to be fresh," he said uneasily, still blushing under her scrutiny. "I thought . . . just for one evening,—and you'll never even see me again."

"I *wish* you were staying longer," she said wistfully, realizing for the first time since she had begun to like him that he would be gone in a few hours. It would be foolish and wrong to allow anything to dull their enjoyment of this one evening,—yet she was discomforting him by letting him think he had offended her!

She took her hands from her chin and put them down in front of her, palms flat on the table, fingers interlocked, and smiled the kindest smile she could. "You look nice when you're blushing—Brian!" she declared candidly. "I'm afraid I was enjoying seeing you get all confused! I'm sorry. Of course I'll call you Brian, but you don't look much like Brian de Bois Guilbert, and he's the only person I remember with that name."

He picked up the allusion quickly, evidently much relieved. "I know; we read *Ivanhoe* at school, and the kids used to razz me. My hair was terribly sissy looking,—yellow and curly, you know, and I used to hope I'd grow up into one of those swarthy, black-browed Bois Guilbert fellows,—but I didn't!

"Have you read all those?" He pointed to the row of Walter Scott in the bookcase.

"Most of the Scott's, but some are dull. I haven't read the theology, and that's what all the rest of the books are. Somehow that set of Scott's matches the theology, and nothing else. All my own books are upstairs,—lots of them. I made the shelves myself."

"You must be very learned! I don't mean making shelves! Are all your books as solid looking as these?"

She laughed. "Just the opposite. They look more like a flower garden than a church. I've been awfully lucky about books, because I have so much time for reading, and it would be difficult to get them if Miss Brador wasn't so nice about them."

"Do you share, or what?"

"Oh no, I couldn't afford to buy books like that. Mr. Russell has a little library for his Sunday school, and Lady Brador passes all her books on there when she's done with them, but Miss Brador gives me any of them that I want,—to keep. You see, hardly anyone uses the library much, and they get a box of books from London every week at the Hall. Lady Brador reads them all very fast, and forgets them, Miss Brador says, but doesn't care for the servants to read them—

some of them anyhow—although she seems to feel they'll be all right for the Sunday school! I think that's funny."

"I should say! They sound like a dangerous collection!"

Joan wondered if she had given the wrong impression. "I didn't mean that there was anything wrong about them; most of them are very moral—I think. But the Bradors like things to go along smoothly,—it's hard to explain, but you'd understand if you lived in England,—they don't like conventions being broken, not so much because they're right or wrong, but because—well, I suppose they don't know where it would stop, and things would get mixed, and they want them to stay as they are."

She wished she was surer of exactly what she meant. Even now she hadn't explained what was in her mind. "It wasn't exactly conventions that I was thinking of, it was more the politics—the poor and the rich, and Socialism, and things like that. You know how authors like Wells and Shaw poke fun at people like the Bradors and make you want to change things. The Bradors would be uncomfortable if their servants and the village people felt like that, though I don't think Miss Brador would mind."

"I guess you and she are pretty good friends, aren't you? There can't be many girls to mix with in such a small place."

"Oh no! She is very nice, and she's kind about the books, but—" She wondered if he could understand, or were Canadians like Americans, with everybody on the same level as everybody else?—"—but you know, in a village like this, there is quite a gap between the Bradors and us. It isn't snobbish, it's just the way things are, and I expect we'd be uncomfortable if they were different.

"Suppose I were being asked to dinner at the Hall all the time; where should I get the clothes? And how could we afford to entertain them? And what would we talk about, when we don't hunt or shoot or travel or spend the season in town, or do any of the things they do? It would be silly!"

She saw that her father was getting ready to go to bed. It must be eleven. He turned the lamp down to a slip of flame, put his book under his arm, and went out to light his candle. The presence of a guest had not changed his silent routine.

He swayed a little as he started upstairs. She felt a little troubled; he had been drinking more than usual since his interview with Mr. Russell a few days ago. Hitherto there had never been anything external to show he drank at all,—unless it were increasing self-absorption. She was sure that nobody in the village suspected. They only thought of him as cantankerous and absent-minded and immersed in some tremendously important book he was writing. She had fostered that idea, and it had not been too far from the truth when they first came to Caster End. Only she could know that what had once been a state of deep if somewhat rambling thought, was now almost the very negation of thought,—a perpetual musing which avoided the exertion of real thought like the plague.

A slight movement of Brian's, as if he were going to rise, reminded her that her father's ways might seem strange to him. "Don't bother about Father," she said. "He doesn't expect to say good-night. He's too absorbed to remember us just now. He isn't very well, and Mr. Russell was here the other day asking him to take over the parish duties for a time, if the Bishop agreed, and I think it's worrying him."

"What's the matter with Mr. Russell doing his own duties?" Brian asked.

His tone was critical. She wondered why. She would have liked to study his face again as she had been doing during most of their talk, but now that the dining-room lamp was turned down, the parlour was almost dark.

"Mr. Russell feels that he is not doing his bit here, I think. He wants to go to the front as a chaplain. He has an uncle or somebody at the War Office, and it can all be arranged, but the Bishop insists that he find somebody to take over the parish while he's away. That's what Mr. Russell told us, but I have an idea the Bishop isn't very anxious that he should go, and Mr. Russell wants to—tremendously."

"The Bishop's right,—the boys have got enough troubles in France already! And say, I wonder if he notified anybody about me being here? I don't know when we start tomorrow, or anything. If it's early, and nobody knocks me up, I might get left,—I'd get one happy strafing then!"

Joan considered the point soberly. "I'll get up early; then if there is any parade, I'll hear it. Would they be so very hard on you were you left behind?"

"You don't get up early for me, Joan! Not a chance! I should worry if they're mad,—it's somebody else's responsibility anyway, getting me my orders; that's one beauty of the army. I'd chance a heavy strafe anyhow—"

He did not finish the sentence. Joan smiled at him and rose to help him up. "Thank you," she said, "but I don't want you to get into trouble. I always wake early."

Brian woke to a bugle call next morning. He sat up, startled; then, as he became fully aware, sank back, relieved. If a bugle was sounding, the battalion was still there, and even if they were falling in for the march it would be a long time before they got started. Still he'd better hustle, especially if he wanted any breakfast,—and the very thought made him ravenously hungry.

He was swinging his legs out of bed when there was a knock at the door. He nearly called, "Come in," but remembered in time that his army shirt was built for economy rather than delicacy. Taking no chances, he swung his legs back again, and answered, "Yes?"

"Are you up yet, Brian?"

"Just climbing out. I heard the bugle."

"Well, it's all right, they're not going today."

The words jerked him up again; the subdued mixture of depression and elation which had pervaded his drowsiness changed suddenly to conscious, buoyant happiness.

"How do you know?" he called. "Who said so?"

"It's all right," she repeated, and he wondered if the jubilant note was merely an echo of his own. "I went out and asked one of the officers. It was the doctor who was with old Mary. He said it was definite, and he's coming in to see you later. When do you want breakfast? There's no hurry, but you can have it any time you like."

Brian was fumbling with his sock before she had finished speaking. "Right now, please!" he called. "I'm on my way!"

"I should think so! I'm very angry with you. Be quick."

He heard her going downstairs. There was no mistaking the indignant tone with which the sentence ended—but there had been no mistaking the laugh at the beginning, either. Brian, hurrying awkwardly into his uniform, did not feel his elation dampened.

He opened the door quietly. It would be pleasant to surprise her by appearing in the dining-room while she was still wondering if he was ready for her to go up and help him. Although the bathroom seemed rather meagerly outfitted, he did everything possible to smarten his appearance, and did it as quietly as possible. But when he came out into the hall, Joan was at the foot of the staircase. She looked up and opened her mouth as if to speak, then shut it tightly, watched him for a moment as he took the first two steps, turned, and disappeared toward the back.

He hopped on downstairs, puzzled at her behaviour, but more concerned with a sudden and violent dislike for army contractors and their crude ideas of tailoring. His tunic didn't fit, and the brilliant polish he had given to the buttons merely advertised the fact. That tunic could not have fitted anyone except a freak,—and it would fit worse when he had breakfasted!

If Regulations had called for winding puttees up to the waist, the trousers might not have been an eyesore—though still uncomfortable; as things to be seen, they were a wash-out, and looked it very literally. A soiled exhibit of first-aid bandaging did not enhance their effect.

For once Brian wished he were an officer.

"You should have waited for me to help you," Joan said as he came into the dining-room; but in spite of her directness, her voice seemed restrained compared with last night.

"I wanted to show that I wasn't really a cripple."

"But you are; that doctor said so. Besides," she added with naive conclusiveness, "I *wanted* to help you."

Brian felt the atmosphere unsuitable for quibbling. "I'm awfully sorry—honestly," he apologized. "I just didn't think—and I don't like being a nuisance."

She opened her mouth, but once more did not speak. She pulled out a chair for him, and went out. She had not smiled since he came down. Brian felt subdued, but her evident annoyance did not bring the sense of acute embarrassment which he would have felt before their talk last night. He was dimly conscious of a lack of power in it, as if he were being scolded by his mother. He wished that he knew what he had done. That business of coming downstairs did not seem enough.

But as he sat eating his porridge, worried at having displeased this girl who seemed more anxious to please him than anyone in the world had been since his mother died, some confused glimmering of the truth came to him.

Being a nuisance was not incompatible with pleasing Joan Page. He had not doubted the sincerity of her insistence that he ask for what he wanted, of her desire to make him feel at home, but he had not grasped the depth of it. Lots of hostesses had said the same. They had been sincere enough in their way, but they did not really mean it as literally as Joan. There was always the understood qualification, "within reason," which a sensible fellow bore in mind.

In his very rare moments of introspection, Brian had always credited himself with being straightforward and sincere. He had even wondered uncomfortably if he were just a little ingenuous, and sophistication was the admired quality on the Campus. But seen in the perspective of army life, and in the reflection of Joan's unique and literal candour, its glitter seemed tarnished. Hers was a much more admirable quality, and in comparison his own straightforwardness showed as a rather wobbly thing. He would have to live up to her standard when he was dealing with her. The only trouble with that sort of thing was that it was so easy! You were apt to be out of your depth before you knew you'd put your foot in it!

He was smiling at his mental metaphor when Joan came back. She took away the porridge-bowl and put—almost planked down in front of him—a large plate of sausages and mashed potatoes.

"There!" she said, accusingly.

He glanced up just long enough to meet the reproachful eyes, and with a meek "thank you" took up his knife and fork. So that was it!

For about half a minute she stood there as if to make sure that he was really eating, then sat down. He guessed that she would not be long in coming to the point.

"I woke up in the middle of the night wondering if I had really made you comfortable, and the very first thing I thought of was the way you had spoken about sausages and mashed potatoes, and then I realized that I hadn't given you anything to eat!"

She clenched and unclenched her hand, as if the emotion were still moving her. "*You could not have had anything to eat between noon yesterday—and now!* All the time we were talking, you must have been *starving*. And you never said a word. I know it was my fault. I should have known. I never dreamed that I could be so stupid. But you might have said something,—even a hint, because I told you I wasn't used to guests.

"I was so angry that I put on my dressing-gown and nearly went up and made you come and eat something right then. But that would only have been stupider. I didn't know what to do. There was nothing I could do,—and it made me miserable."

Brian stopped eating, as her low, serious voice changed from its note of reproach. Her last words moved him. They made him feel mean, and emphasized everything he had been thinking about her before she came in. He had no feeling that the incident was being exaggerated, because he would have felt the same way himself. Now that he understood her better, he realized that it must have been something like a tragedy for her to realize that she had failed so dismally in what she had set herself to do.

And she was so dignified and frank about it, when she might have been resentful,—or as angry with him as he was with himself. "I am sorry, honestly sorry, Joan," he said, and his apology was much more earnest than his earlier one. "But please don't feel so badly about it, because it was absolutely my fault. At first I didn't want to be a nuisance, and afterwards, when you were so nice to me that I realized you wouldn't mind the trouble, well, I wasn't bothering about food,—I'd rather have been talking than eating, anyway.

"I know that's not a real excuse—I could have done both—but it's only after you said what you did about wanting to help me downstairs that I've got on to the difference between you and other people. Most people don't mean what they say

about taking trouble, quite as much as you do. I'm sorry."

Joan answered quickly. "You'll make me feel worse if you try to take all the blame." But her tone was softer. "That would make you unhappy, and all I'm thinking of is making you comfortable and happy while you're here,—please understand that."

She paused thoughtfully, but continued before he could speak. "No, that wasn't quite true. I can't help thinking a little of how I feel when I don't make you comfortable,—but it's not the important thing."

She stood up. "Look, Brian. You will be here all today, and perhaps tomorrow. For my sake, not yours—I mean to help my ignorance of what I ought to do, I want you to promise me something. Will—"

"I promise, on my word of honour," Brian interrupted vehemently.

"But you don't know what I was going to ask!"

"And I don't care! I promise—faithfully—to do it anyway."

She seemed non-plussed, but her eyes were soft and grateful. "It's only that you should ask whatever you want,—every little thing. And be fair, I'll promise to say so if it's anything which really would be a nuisance."

"For the third time, I promise,—on my word of honour, Joan. And just to show I mean it," he added, smiling propitiatingly, "I *want* to go out to the kitchen and hot up these sausages, and though I can't do that because of my foot—I still want them hot!"

Joan stooped quickly to take the plate. Her face was close to his, their eyes on a level. She smiled—the most radiant smile she had given him—and hurried out.

He felt bashful—and humble—and the fresh, white tablecloth was blurred as he stared down at where his plate had been.

When Captain Todd had been stopped in the village street by a sedate young beauty and interrogated about the disposal of Brian Mackell, his conscience had pricked him. He had reassured her and hurried on to catch the others, thinking that it was lucky the battalion had been held up, or he might have left his only patient behind.

"Funny how all these women fall for a doctor," Thomas remarked as Todd fell into step.

Wells looked over his shoulder and grinned. "Don't let that one die on you, Doc. One per village is plenty!"

Todd looked at him thoughtfully. Curious sense of humour the fellow had. It was hard to know if he enjoyed bruising people's sensibilities, or if he were merely dumb. His gibes seemed a bit too consistently unpleasant for the latter. Still, it wasn't worth snubbing him; he hurt himself most in the end.

"If my other patient dies," he pointed out equably, "your platoon will be a man short, Wells."

"Is that where we stopped to put Mackell, last night?"

"Sure," said Wentworth. "Don't you remember that extraordinary little row of villas? They looked bad enough at night, but in daylight they're a wart! Why in hell should anybody want to stick a bunch of cramped little Upper Tooting atrocities in a place like this, with miles of empty downs to spare?"

"Builder's speculation," grunted Scimold. "Same everywhere. Same in Winnipeg. Sir James told me. Very disgusted."

"That's no excuse. Lady Brador said the fellow was hoping to make a summer resort out of the place. They had a landslide some years ago, and part of the old village went into the sea. They had to put up some new cottages for the fishermen, and some builder thought he'd turn the place into another Cromer,—but those cramped little eyesores would kill Monte Carlo!"

"Here's the Bull Inn," announced Major Baxter.

Thomas smiled. "No mistaking that. They don't cramp the pubs, in this country, anyhow!"

While the others joined in the bustle around the inn doors, Todd walked over and sat down on a stone below the signpost in the centre of the crossroads. There was a little island of coarse grass there, and he could see far down all four roads which met at Caster End.

The village was the same kind of mixture which he had seen in varying proportions in most parts of England which the battalion had visited. The old and the new. But here the new was rather uglier than the average, and there seemed less reason for it,—except that landslide.

The narrow road on his left, damp and muddy in spite of the pale sun and cloudless, gray-blue sky, led down to what must be the old village. He could just see the tops of a few dark cottages. The downs swept steeply up from each side of it to their highest point, a headland on the right, which seemed to end in a knife edge where the cliff had slipped to the undermining of the ceaseless waves.

In the angle of the road to the old village and the road south stood the Bull, large, square, blatant with unweathered red bricks and vivid green paint.

Behind him, the road down which they had marched last night was bare and lowly hedged. There were a few wind-modelled trees and three cottages of an earlier generation than the Bull. The farthest he recognized. It was there that Dorothy Brador had waited to call him to old Mary's deathbed.

Inland, on his right, the road which began at the old village by the shore, curved quietly out of sight among larger trees grouped about a farmhouse and dark gray barns. The land sloped away from the sea, for the high downs of Caster Head only came to their lowest level about a mile inland. There, far beyond the farmhouse and the trees, he could see the ground rising again, always with more and more trees and hedged fields. It was a striking contrast to the wind-swept downs and village of Caster End.

The village itself stretched along the road south. If there had been more trees to mitigate it, it would not have been quite

so bad. But trees did not seem to flourish under the constant North Sea gales, and the village, considering what it was, looked indecently naked! Particularly incongruous was that row of undetached villas with their slate roofs, ugly gables outlined with cast-iron filigree, grained yellow doors, strips of garden so narrow as to be useless, and along the front of the whole row a two-foot brick wall with more cast-iron fencing on top of it.

Scimold had talked about Winnipeg, but he doubted if there was anything there quite so cramped,—with quite so much open space to making cramping unnecessary. There were shortsighted, grasping builders everywhere, but Winnipeg or Toronto or Montreal were at least cities, with expensive land and convenience of transportation to be considered.

The closest analogy he could think of were the typical new farmhouses of his own district,—and they were the same in every prosperous farming community in Canada. Those red-brick, gabled, filigree-decorated houses which had replaced the frame and log farmsteads of earlier days were as discordant with their own countryside as these villas with the open downs. Probably both had much the same excuse—cheapness in building and heating—though he had yet to find an English house that could be considered heated!

But at the bottom of it—everywhere—was poor education. People didn't know beauty from ugliness, harmony from discord. They didn't know that there was pleasure to be gained by seeing beautiful things, so naturally they wouldn't pay for it.

The shops opposite the villas were of the same nature, except for Nathaniel Runke's Sail Loft. Todd felt grateful to Nathaniel for his oasis of weathered brick and tarred board.

He rose and threw away his cigarette. Standing, he could see farther past the village houses to where the road south rose gently over the lower slopes of Caster Head, cool, and clean, and pale yellow between the olive grasslands. In that road at least man had blended his work with nature.

He smiled with mild irony as he strolled across the road to the Bull. The Bull was built for blending man with beer, and if there had ever been any validity in the ridiculous definition that beauty is the perfect adaptation of an object to its use, the Bull Inn would have been rarely beautiful! For it was so admirably fitted for its purpose that even the irruption of a thousand new devotees of blending, and the necessities of an Orderly Room, had not only failed to disclose a flaw, but had revealed the true genius of the builder.

Like the commonplace man who, in the crisis of a battle discovers unsuspected reservoirs of heroism, the Bull had come into its own with this first wave of war sweeping up to its doors. And it was those doors—the pluralness of them—which were the key to its greatness.

At one end, discreetly concealed from the front, was a door direct into the Public Bar,—the main blending room of the establishment. Through it any N.C.O. or man of the 2nd Montreal Rifles could make his entrance and—more important still—his exit, unembarrassed by the critical eyes of officers and gentlemen of Westmount Boulevard.

It is true that another door led from the Public Bar to the central hallway, but the far-sighted builder had departed from tradition and fashioned it of honest pine throughout, instead of partly glass. George Albert Summers, a Licensed Victualler worthy of his premises, had shown his knowledge of basic military principles by locking that door and putting the key in the green vase on his mantelpiece. Thus there was no internal communication between the Saloon Bar and the rest of the Inn, except behind the counter.

The main door, under the great sign of the Bull in front, led into a central hallway, on the right of which was the locked door, and farther toward the back an opening which led behind the bar. Exactly opposite that opening was one of the doors into the "Snuggery." The other opened into a long passage running at right angles to the main entrance hallway, and opposite it was the Private Bar. There were several other doors farther along, but the only one which ever concerned the Montreal Rifles was the second on the right, next to the Snuggery, which gave on to a small room of undesignated purpose.

Such details may seem insignificant, but were not so to the officers and men who were to remember the Bull for the rest of their military lives as the only IDEAL Regimental Headquarters they were to discover this side of a high explosive shell.

For this happy memory George Albert Summers must receive much credit. It was he who tactfully but insistently

suggested the allotment of these rooms and doors, in spite of Regimental Sergeant Majors, Adjutants, and Colonels with a passion for giving short, sharp, military orders in abrupt voices, and a determination to get everything in somewhere, somehow,—IMMEDIATELY, and look lively, please!—and a habit of arranging everything at right angles to everything else, with a sigh of relief and a satisfied stroking of small moustaches.

When he had seen the military machine exemplifying itself by unpacking of C. Company's typewriter within easy range of a comparatively clumsy froth blower such as old Jem Wavertree, George Albert Summers, aided by a quiet orderly corporal, had made his own arrangements while the higher ranks were giving short, sharp, military orders elsewhere.

The orderly room impedimenta were shifted to the Snuggery, and the Saloon Bar thenceforth belonged to the men of the Regiment and the village.

The Snuggery thus became the Orderly Room; and an Orderly Room with one door opening exactly opposite the bar, and another elsewhere for official purposes, admittedly is well designed.

The room of Hitherto Undesignated Purpose was now designated the Colonel's Office, with a door into the Orderly Room and another into the passage,—an excellent arrangement, as any Colonel will agree.

The Private Bar, on the other hand, underwent practically no change of status, and became the Officers' Mess.

The excellence of the general arrangement can now be understood. The men could take their drinks undisturbed by critical eyes. The orderly room staff, who have a dry job and yet must be at the beck of the Colonel, were located to satisfy both requirements. The Colonel had them under his eye without being under theirs. Lesser officers could walk boldly through the main entrance to the Orderly Room, or the Colonel—or elsewhere—and no onlooker could know which. And from every room there was unrestricted, unobtrusive access to the bar.

When Captain Todd joined the throng in the Orderly Room, they were just realizing their advantages. Even the less fortunately billeted officers were becoming reconciled. Captain Bastable of A. Company himself was not very bitter, although he and his officers were quartered in the Eastern Arms, a mere pub down in the old village, the owner of which combined his licensed victualling with fish warehousing without drawing any fine distinctions.

"If it wasn't for this place," Bastable remarked to Todd, wiping the froth off his moustache, "I'd have a word or two to say to Blaikie on this billeting business! You fellows in a ducal mansion, and us in a fishy pub! That's a fine system!

"Is there any word from the seats of the mighty about a move yet, Colonel?"

"Nothing, Bastable. The Brigadier's just as much in the dark as the rest of us. He thinks that some little hitch has occurred—probably over at the Front—and the clogging-up process always grows the farther back it gets, so I shouldn't be surprised if we were here a week." He looked around the Private Bar, and through to his private office. "And we could be clogged in worse places, too," he added.

Bastable smiled sadly at Lieutenant Praed of No. 1 Platoon, another of the guests of the Eastern Arms. "Well, we'll have to do the best we can. If we can come here early enough and leave late enough, I guess we can sleep without smelling the fish, but it'll be a strain on the Bull's beer supply!"

Colonel Markey rose and picked up his riding-crop. He smiled drily as he looked at the cheerful group. "I must try and arrange a programme which will obviate such a danger," he said as he went out.

Todd laughed as he saw several pewters suddenly stop in mid-air, while their owners digested the implications of the Colonel's remark. "You were asking for it, Bastable!"

Captain Bastable's pewter finished its interrupted journey. "Oh, well! He'd have done it anyway. We all know the Colonel. He'll be reasonable." There was more hope than confidence in his voice as he watched the tall, immaculately-uniformed figure disappear.

Colonel Erasmus Darwin Markey, a wholesale grocer by trade, looked and dressed rather more like an officer of the Life Guards than any whom that famous regiment could have produced. He was the only officer in the battalion who had seen service in France, having been seriously wounded as second in command of the 1st Battalion. When he had taken command of the newly-formed 2nd Battalion, his left arm had been in a sling, which, when it was discarded, revealed

the absence of three fingers and much of the rest of his hand.

He was of the opinion, not uncommon among commanding officers, that he was the best soldier in the Regiment. But he held another and less orthodox belief equally firmly,—that every man in it could be brought to his own pitch of efficiency by intelligent discipline, training, and HARD WORK. The first opinion was sincerely subscribed to by every man under him. The second would have been questioned if it had not been proven by many minor miracles. Not the least of these was to be the record of the Regiment during its stay in Caster End, where, in spite of the perfection of the Bull's arrangements, not a single drunk appeared on the charge sheet.

After the rest of the officers had streamed off to the nine o'clock parade, Todd strolled into the Colonel's office to see if there was anything to do.

He admired Colonel Markey even more than the others, partly because the Colonel's mental and physical qualities were those which, in theory, he would have liked most to possess, partly because, as Medical Officer, he was privy to things deeper than the magnificent externals of Erasmus Darwin Markey's figure and uniform.

There was an intimate and unexpressed understanding between the two men. Only Todd knew that the shattered hand was the least of the Colonel's disabilities. Only Todd guessed that the Colonel's immaculate array was for a purpose closely akin to that of the dress suit which some white men are said to don each evening in their jungle homes.

Colonel Markey's peace time rank in the Montreal Rifles had precluded any but the most casual medical examination on the outbreak of war; but it was largely due to Todd's near-perjury that he had been allowed to return.

So there was a firm, unspoken conspiracy between the two men, to cheat the quiet disease which had marked the Colonel for its quarry years ago. If his doctor were skillful and his fate kind, Colonel Markey should lie, gallant and bloody, in the red earth, and not on the pallid obscenity of an undertaker's slab.

But apart from this, Todd was anxious to be of use to Colonel Markey. He was the only officer unaffected by the constant drive toward perfection, and the duty of attending a thousand healthy men was so light that he felt something of a sham. Any extra duty which he could extract from the Colonel or Adjutant was a sop to his illogically uneasy conscience.

But today there was nothing. However, he had one patient to visit, anyhow. That would save the morning from complete emptiness. He hitched the strap of his case over his shoulder and walked slowly down the village street, still amused at its incongruity.

There was a red-brick shop which might have been lifted from any suburb in the English-speaking world, except that the stiffly displayed "Gent's Haberdashery" was here subordinated to a sombre array of sou'westers, oilskins, and coarse, blue jerseys.

He went in to enquire where his patient was billeted, for those villas all looked alike. The shop was empty, but he was in no hurry to make his presence known. There was a comfortable familiarity about the inside of that shop. He speculated on national characteristics as expressed in shops, wondering if Russia or Spain were dotted with little shops selling exactly the same lines as this, or if it was merely that the nation of shopkeepers had managed to impress its characteristic on every country which shared any trace of its traditions.

No two places could be less similar than this East Anglian village, and the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where Labrador and Quebec met in isolated settlements of French Canadians and Indians, with a sparse leavening of Scotch. Yet he had been in many stores along that coast with exactly the same selection of collars, ties, shirts, and hats, displayed in exactly the same way. The work-clothes themselves differed only in their adaptation to different climates. But these rubber boots were as foreign to the sickly yellow Oxford shoes beside them, as were the sealskin boots of Seven Islands; the familiar, pearly-gray Homburg hat was as alien to the sou'wester of Caster End as it was to Hudson Bay Company's leather, fur-lined cap.

A pinafored child interrupted his reflections by appearing in a doorway behind the counter and sucking its finger at him attentively. It returned as silently as it had come, conveying the news, and a solidly-built woman came out, wiping her hands on her apron. Her hair was gray and very thin, and so tightly drawn back and twisted into a minute button, that the scalp seemed stretched like a drum, and the eyebrows pulled upwards in an expression of permanent enquiry.

She smiled, but it was not sufficient to counteract the rigid discipline of the button, and her eyebrows remained raised.

"Yes, sir," she answered. "That'll be Miss Page, the Minister's daughter at Number Five. I heard as how the Vicar had put a wounded soldier with them. John was wondering how they'd all make out together."

"You think it will not be an entirely happy family?"

"Not rightly that, sir; but they keeps themselves to themselves, if you know what I mean. The Minister, he's writing a big book, they say, but he don't seem properly awake when he comes out of it some'ow. It must be six years come Whitsun' they've lived here, and I don't think I've spoke to 'im more than a bob o' the 'ead since he come!"

"Well, I don't think Mackell will worry about that much, Mrs. ——?"

"'Cobbin', sir," she suggested, with a quick motion which could only be the "bob o' the 'ead."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Cobbin; I was only thinking that even if Mr. Page isn't the most genial host, his daughter seems quite capable of making an injured soldier contented with his billet."

Mrs. Cobbin stared over his head at some very distant spot. "You'd think so, wouldn't you, sir?"

Todd felt that he was snubbed, and the subject dismissed forever, or even longer. But he was to learn better. Mrs. Cobbin, aided by her eyebrows, had a genius for indicating silently that a remark was impinging on matters too delicate for discussion, that the speaker was mistaken in his suppositions, that she, Mrs. Cobbin, knew much better, if she had been willing to tell all she knew, and that the subject *must* be dropped IMMEDIATELY.

Any famous hostess might have envied her that talent, but it was rather wasted on Mrs. Cobbin. With her it was merely an exercise of art for art's sake. Like an actress with a particularly brilliant mannerism, who drags it into every character, however inappropriately, Mrs. Cobbin just *had* to put on her little act,—invariably followed by as full and intimate a monologue on the annihilated subject as her hearer would listen to.

"Yes, you'd think so," she went on, after exactly the right pause to give effect to her art without giving her audience time to take it literally and leave. "Especially if as how he's *seriously* injured."

"I don't quite see—," began Todd.

She leaned over the counter, resting on a brawny elbow. "Nursing, yes—p'rhaps, I can't rightly say. Sociability, no,—that I *can* say. And I do know what the young fellows like, though I say it meself,—'specially soldiers, having two in the army of me own, and Billy in the Navy this ten years. Sticks and stones ain't good enough,—not permanent, and quite right too. Six years, now, and not even a smile—not what I'd call a smile—for any of 'em. Not even my Billy that's a Petty Officer, or young Bert Summers that'll have the Bull when his father goes. Of course, they're gentry—in a way—but it ain't natural, sir—and they don't spend like it."

She stooped forward. "D'you know, sir—"

Todd, foreseeing more confidences, broke in, "It's very good of you to tell me all this, Mrs. Cobbin. You're an acute observer, and any information affecting my patient is useful. I'm the Medical Officer, you know, and I ought to have been attending to this young man before now. Thanks very much for your assistance." He saluted smilingly, and went out.

Mrs. Cobbin, after another bob o' the 'ead, resumed her position with her elbow on the counter, and looked after him, pleased and gratified. "A real gentleman, that, Canadian or not!"

The door of Number Five opened so promptly to his ring, that he wondered if Mackell's foot was causing anxiety. The serene reserve of the girl as she ushered him down the passage relieved him, and Mackell, sitting in the parlour armchair, looked as cheerful and healthy as any doctor could desire.

"Don't get up. No discipline here,—except what Miss Page chooses to impose." He glanced at her with a friendly smile. It seemed impossible that such an exceptionally beautiful girl should be as chilly as Mrs. Cobbin had implied. But he met only the ghost of an answering smile. Nor did she move from the position she had taken after she had shown him in, standing erect, but graceful, her hands hanging lightly clasped in front of her, and watching the scene with the reserved interest of a lovely portrait.

The failure of his mild joke made him professionally business-like. "Let me have a look at the foot, Mackell," he said,

putting his case on the table. "This stool will do. And now if you would let me have an old towel, Miss Page, or a bathmat, or something like that, and a basin of warm water, if you don't mind."

He hardly expected to need them, but felt a certain satisfaction in insisting on his military and medical pound of flesh. A billet was a billet, and if these people resented it, they would have to learn better. A girl with a face like that ought to have a generous spirit to match. Anything else would show extremely bad management on the part of Providence, and the girl would get away with murder! Miss Page had put his back up!

But she had gone to get what he asked, with complete alacrity, and returned swiftly with the towel and a basin of about two gallons capacity. It was difficult not to smile when he saw it.

"We'll hope it hasn't developed quite as seriously as that," he remarked to Mackell, taking the foot between his strong hands and pressing firmly up and down. "If it hadn't been for the caulk we wouldn't have had any cut at all. It's more of an abrasion than anything. There may be a bone cracked, but probably only a sprain. You'll be able to march before we get orders, I daresay."

Brian looked down at his foot knowingly. "It looks to me like a compound fracture of the Middle Cuneiform, sir."

Todd raised his head in quick surprise, and met Brian's grin. "Oh ho! An anatomist, eh? But a sloppy diagnosis, Mackell, very sloppy. And it'll look just like a modest blister to me, when we get marching orders!"

"And where did you learn about Middle Cuneiforms?"

"I was taking second year medicine at McGill, when I enlisted, sir."

"Well, well! A re-union, eh! Curious! I was learning the bones of the foot at McGill,—it must be eighteen years ago. You should have started earlier, Mackell, then you might have been riding a horse and breaking people's feet yourself."

He strapped the foot carefully and tightly. "Well, you know enough to look after this, anyhow. It'll be nothing if you just keep that foot off the ground; otherwise you may have trouble later with your arch.

"Look, I'm taping round the cut. I'll put a little dressing on that, and just as precaution—"

An idea struck him. He would see if he couldn't bring this aloof young lady off her pedestal. He had no right, but she wouldn't know that. "—just as a precaution," he went on, "you might re-dress it in the evening. Just as well not to take any chance of infection seeing that they haven't issued us any anti-T. serum yet."

He stood up, grunting doubtfully. "Hum! A bit difficult to get at, eh?" He looked at Joan. "I'm sure Miss Page would be only too pleased to attend to the dressing part of it, if I show—"

"Not a chance, sir. I can manage it as easy as—"

Todd, still watching Joan Page, was surprised to see her brows knit suddenly. It was not at all the kind of frown he had expected, but a significant, speaking frown, clearly designed for Mackell,—and clearly understood by him, for his protest stopped abruptly.

It was interesting. He continued his directions, watching them unobtrusively. "No, you'd better not try stooping, Mackell. You're no acrobat! As likely as not you'd end with that foot on the floor. However, if Miss Page doesn't feel able—"

She broke in before his intentional pause had begun. "Of course I do, Doctor. I was watching to see exactly what you did. And I went to the first-aid classes that Doctor Beringer had, though it didn't seem much use. I'll do it *exactly* as you did."

Brian was looking sheepish at the fuss about his modest abrasion. "But—" he began.

"*Please*, Brian! Remember your promise."

He subsided into uneasy silence. Todd looked at them. Evidently his psychology had been muddy! No resentment here! None of Mrs. Cobbin's haughty aloofness!

Joan explained, "He promised to ask for anything he needed, Doctor, and that ought to mean letting me do anything he

needs, oughtn't it?"

"Certainly it ought! Very sensible of you to make him promise, too, Miss Page,—and very kind of you. That dressing's really not very important, but it would be safer done,—for a couple of days anyhow."

This time she gave him something more than the ghost of a smile,—for backing her up, no doubt. That smile explained the exceptional state of discipline to which she had reduced Mackell so quickly. He had little doubt now that his instructions would be obeyed, and he addressed the last one to her. "The really important thing, Miss Page, is that he should not put that foot on the ground. Even if a bone is cracked it will heal easily and stay in place naturally, but *only* if it's not disturbed."

"I'll see that everything is done *exactly* as you say, Doctor," she repeated earnestly. "I'll go right over now to Doctor Beringer's. He has a pair of crutches, I know, that he would lend us."

Brian grinned sheepishly; Joan smiled consolingly; Captain Todd chuckled and hitched his case over his shoulder. "Fine idea, Miss Page. And don't let him beg off! It's just as hard to walk on one leg, whether the other is amputated or sprained."

He strolled down the street, cheerful with the sympathy which had grown in him for his patient and nurse. That McGill boy was a nice fellow, and he was certainly billeted in clover! In fact both McGill boys had fallen into pleasant places!

He was looking forward to the evening with satisfaction, when he heard his name called.

Dorothy Brador and the Reverend Edward Russell were walking down the side road coming from the Hall. It was she who had called. Now she waved to him to wait. "Good morning, Captain Todd. I don't think you've met our Vicar, Mr. Russell. This is Captain Todd who was so good about old Mary yesterday."

Mr. Russell stretched out a hearty palm. "Delighted, Captain Todd. We owe you a debt. It was most unfortunate that both Doctor Beringer and I should have been—unavailable. But coming so swiftly, you know, and so unexpectedly—very sad—but—"

Mr. Russell had learnt that excuses and pious homilies lost their savour, even to himself, when Miss Brador was among the audience. He changed the subject. "I have a visit to make, and called at the Hall on my way, when I heard that you were not marching this morning as expected. One night is all very well, but—it's merely the number, of course, seven—quite a houseparty—without warning—please don't misunderstand me."

For once the tools of his trade failed. Words, were playing him unseemly tricks. He was grateful when Dorothy rescued him with a laugh. "Mother reassured him, Captain Todd, so please don't worry." She looked at the big young clergyman gravely. "And Mr. Russell, there are two sides to the billeting in question, you know. Wouldn't it be fair—after asking us—to ask Captain Todd here, and the other officers, if they were satisfied?"

"What would the answer be, Captain Todd?" insisted Dorothy, when he made no comment. He gazed intently at the skies. "I was trying to think of something really clever in the way of an answer, Miss Brador. I had a flash, quite a brilliant flash, but it went. It's a pity," he added sadly.

Mr. Russell was sympathetic. "Indeed yes. I have suffered from the same disability—until my work forced me to cultivate some degree of fluency and—er—aptness."

"And now that we might benefit by it, you're going to leave us!"

"I hope so, Miss Brador," he said eagerly, then beamed anxiously. "You won't misunderstand me, I'm sure. But my conviction is strong that clergymen as young and fit as I are most needed as chaplains to the boys in France. Not that I undervalue parish—"

"I'm sure you will do fine work there, Mr. Russell," Dorothy interrupted kindly. "Is it all settled?"

"I hope it will be, today or tomorrow. I am on my way to see Mr. Page now."

As they came opposite the row of villas, Dorothy stopped. "Well, good luck, Mr. Russell. I think I will show Captain Todd the Old Village now, in case those mysterious orders come, and he doesn't have another chance."

Mr. Russell's cheery smile faded as he turned toward Number Five. He had no relish for the coming interview. He had called on Mr. Page, soon after being presented to the living. He had called twice since then. A call every two years was hardly a fraternal association between two clergymen. Yet, though he was uncomfortable about it, he could not blame himself, even in his most secret conscience. Mr. Page had given no indication of pleasure at his visits, nor of a desire that they should be repeated. It is true he had not seemed to be definitely annoyed; rather, he had given no indication of any feeling on the subject whatever. He had been, so to speak, immune to the occasion.

The Pages had attended Sunday services with exemplary regularity for a time, but for the last year or two it had been understood his health was unsatisfactory. Mr. Russell had not felt this an unmixed evil. Mr. Page had expressed some rigorous opinions on the sanctity of each word of the Liturgy, and Mr. Russell was not numbered among those who make broad their phylacteries!

He wasted no time in getting down to business. "I received a letter from the Bishop this morning, Mr. Page. He said he was writing to you. Perhaps you have heard from him?"

Mr. Page touched a letter on the table beside him with a thin hand which trembled noticeably. "This morning, Mr. Russell."

"Good! And I venture to hope that you have decided to accede to my very earnest request, and undertake the parish

duties. The Bishop expressed himself as very willing."

Mr. Russell was experiencing all the chills and doubts of a raw salesman approaching the bleakest prospect on his list. He continued quickly, not daring to let the old clergyman speak, for fear of immediate refusal. "And I am sure he would be more than willing, if he were acquainted with you personally. I myself feel the Parish would be better served in many ways."

The tight, attentive mask expressed nothing. Surely the old fellow must have some joint in his armour. He remembered the lectures at those constrained interviews.

"I am not attempting to flatter you, Mr. Page. But when I was at Oxford, I did not take—what shall I say?—quite such an austere attitude toward my vocation as I should. I feel that I may have allowed myself rather too much latitude in my interpretation of the Prayer Book, when strict adherence to its letter might have been wiser."

Some indefinable change in Mr. Page encouraged him. "Nobody is more aware than I that our Liturgy is as nearly perfect as generations of wise men could make it. Perhaps I have been, shall I say, over-confident in adapting it to local and modern needs. And yet—," he spread his hands disarmingly,— "you won't underestimate my difficulties, Mr. Page.

"That is why I sincerely feel that a different influence—yours, if you will consent to take the charge—may well be salutary for the parish."

Raising the letter and holding it joggling in the air for a moment, Mr. Page gave his answer. "I have decided to accept the Bishop's offer, and your request, Mr. Russell."

Mr. Russell sighed silently, deeply, in triumphant relief. He'd pulled it off! And how hard it had been was shown by that significant distinction between "offer" and "request". It had been as he feared. The Bishop must have been noticeably lukewarm in his offer.

"I do not question your sincerity, Mr. Russell, but you admit you have been lax. For that reason alone my conscience directs me to take up the burden which I had relinquished. The people of this village have erred and strayed, and you have thoughtlessly abetted them. I will bring to them that monument of piety and wisdom,—the Book of Common Prayer, pure and undefiled."

Tiny spots of colour had appeared on his cheeks where hitherto the only relief from ivory pallor had been a network of minute veins, so complete and fine that Mr. Russell had never before been close enough to notice them.

His voice, too, while as impassive as ever, gave the impression of a veil covering unpredictable turbulence.

"One thing I must ask you," he went on, leaning forward slightly. "Do not wait until your return to ponder and practice the truths which you are now seeing. The power inherent in our uncorrupted Liturgy is not limited to Caster End."

Suddenly he rose, gripping the table and pointing a shaking hand at his hearer. "It is LIMITLESS, Mr. Russell. The souls on the brink of eternity in France need it even more than others. Force the regenerating power upon them, if necessary."

His intensity was painful and unnatural, but not prolonged. Exhausted, he sank into a chair. The fire in his eyes flickered, and was gone.

Mr. Russell waited, awed, uncomfortable, doubtful. He did not know what to say. He wanted to get out of the house as quickly as he could, but how could he go with everything unsettled, and with the man he had guaranteed as competent, in this condition? He suppressed a disturbing question. It was nothing,—disturbed routine,—sudden resurgence of a dominant idea,—nothing that could be considered irrational.

His doubts vanished easily when at last Mr. Page spoke, his manner normal again.

"I will take over the duties at your convenience, Mr. Russell," he said, with cold restraint so natural that the young Vicar wondered if he were even aware of the extent of his previous agitation.

The big young man felt like shaking those two thin hands enthusiastically. But there was nothing in the tight rigidity of the parchment face to encourage such exuberance.

He rose, smiling happily. "I will bear it constantly in mind, Mr. Page. I am deeply grateful to you, and I will see to all the arrangements immediately. This is Tuesday. I should be in London on Friday or Saturday to make sure of this appointment which has been offered me. That would mean next Sunday's services would be the first call upon you. That would not be too soon?"

Mr. Page evinced no further interest. His immobile, skull-like head bent forward slightly, his thin lips moved. "At your convenience, Mr. Russell." That was all.

Moving toward the door, Mr. Russell bowed. "I will explain to Nathaniel Runke. He is the Vicar's Warden, and a most excellent Reader and Choirmaster. He will be a worthy right hand to you. Good morning, and my most grateful thanks, Mr. Page."

With immense relief he found himself in the hallway. He was smiling and touching his forehead with his handkerchief when Joan came out of the parlour. "Your father has agreed to take over the Parish, Miss Page, beginning next Sunday. I'm sure our people will benefit by his—mature experience, and I believe—" His voice dropped confidentially,— "that the renewed activity will be greatly to his own benefit. His life has perhaps been a little *too* retired. We have not been able to prevail on either of you to join as fully as we should have liked in the—er—village life."

Joan looked at him, her eyes awfully thoughtful. "Is there anything I can do to help him?" she asked.

"Much, Miss Page, very much. A woman can—but I will leave you a few notes,—that will be better,—if I can possibly make the time. But you will find Miss Brador a most efficient coadjutor in all village matters. You can do no better than consult with her, and—but I mustn't keep you now."

She opened the door, and he eased himself out on to the steps. "Good morning, Miss Page," he called cheerfully from the bottom, "and don't hesitate to come to me for any information that will be helpful."

At last he was out in the road again, and walking away from that most disconcerting little villa. What a pair they were. He was annoyed with himself for the unease which he always experienced when alone with Joan Page. She was really too trying,—too hard to place. As the daughter of a clergyman, she ought to have been the kind of a girl a fellow could talk to, play tennis with, even flirt with in a mannerly way; or at the very worst, devoted to good works, so that one could discuss charitable matters with her. But she didn't fit anywhere! She would just make brief and sometimes disconcertingly direct remarks, and look at him with a sort of reserved appraisal which was really not quite the thing,—for her Vicar. However!

His exuberance could not be clouded for more than a moment. In a week he would be out of this deadly little backwater, doing a real job, with real men! "Oh—oh—" What was it that the extraordinary young Canadian officer had said last night, when they were ushered through the big door of Brador Hall? "Oh laddie?" No, that wasn't it. "Oh—boy?" Yes, that was it; "Oh boy! Ain't it a grand and—thrilling sensation!" Extraordinary phrase!—but really most expressive.

The Reverend Edward Russell, swinging his stick gaily, repeated it aloud,—and looked apprehensively behind him.

Nobody in Caster End except Dorothy Brador would have chosen to show the Old Village to a stranger. The villagers themselves preferred red brick to tarred boards. Others, such as the Hall people, the Vicar, and the Doctor, did not consider that it was picturesque enough to offset its hygienic shortcomings. The somewhat surly independence of its people, too, did not commend itself to those whom it had pleased God to set over them.

Caster End had been a smugglers' rendez-vous in the days when past Bradors had not been too squeamish to extend protection and share profits, and something of the old mental attitude remained.

To Dorothy this was an attraction. Her round, pale face became animated as she described its history to Captain Todd. She found him a rather inspiring listener, naturally responsive and with the unusual faculty of seeing things with unblurred vision,—of being immune to the comfortable myopia of people who see things as they want them to be, or as they have been told they ought to be.

She talked, she almost chattered, as they walked down the lane, with a vivacity which Sir James and Lady Brador would neither have believed nor approved. But it was such a relief!

As they turned back from the beach, she led him up the steep bank on the side of the road to Caster End, stuck her walking stick into the turf and stopped. She faced him thoughtfully, her hands behind her on the handle of the stick, and half sitting on them, so that her feet were planted firmly in front of her, and her head inclined toward him. The East wind blew steadily in her face, pressing against her and filling her with an exhilarating sense of openness to the wide sky, and to the truth in the steadfast little man with her.

"Do you *ever* talk, Captain Todd?"

"Sometimes,—if there's an opportunity."

She laughed. He had a nice talent for irony without teeth. "But even with opportunity, I hadn't got the impression that you were—bubbling over! What I should have asked was, do you ever talk without thinking first?"

He considered her question so carefully that he could not help joining in her laughter. "I'm afraid I'm not exactly spontaneous, Miss Brador. There seem to be so many sides to so many questions! I'd like to think that it was the scientific viewpoint, but I'm afraid plain vacillation comes closer."

"You ought to know yourself best," she said at last, straightening up, and pulling out her stick. "I wonder." They walked slowly away from the village up the gently rising down. "I don't think that's such an awfully good diagnosis, Captain Todd. My guess is that you are so anxious to get the real truth about every little thing, that you have to give it your—most serious consideration,—that sounds well, doesn't it?—before you'll commit yourself."

"Well," he admitted, "I do like to see the true appearance of a thing, but that's all. I'm not so arrogant as to imagine that I can see the truth. I doubt if there is such a thing as truth,—in the sense that you mean it."

"Oh yes there is, Captain Todd."

"Oh no there isn't, Miss Brador."

"Now you're speaking without thinking, for once,—and you'll be sorry for it. It's ridiculous! I may not know what the truth of a thing is, or I may just feel it without being able to define it, but it's there, and in some things I'm very sure indeed that I do feel it."

"But your own words controvert you," he pointed out. "It's you who feel it,—which makes it a purely personal opinion, depending on a few million little cells that make up you, and all the billions of millions of previous cells and circumstances which have gone into their making. And as each human being consists of a different combination of cells and influences, it's quite out of court that one individual should be the repository of absolute truth."

"Excuse the professional manner, but you asked for it! It's impossible to talk reasonably about such a gigantic mystery as Truth, without straining one's vocabulary a bit."

"Don't bother about that!" she smiled, "I enjoy it. I never had to listen to any professors, so I find it quite invigorating. But—"

"No, just a moment, let me finish—invigorating you! Then I'll shut up for good. You said you could feel the truth? Doesn't that indicate how your opinion as to the truth is dependent on feeling,—on sensation? Well, you know as well as I do how deceptive and ineffectual all our senses are, even when most perfectly conditioned. An eye can't see how that blade of grass is constructed without a microscope; a tongue can't distinguish between most simple acids without laboratory tests. All our senses are just as feeble, and our memory and interpretation of past sensations is simply rudimentary!

"Then if you realize that the difference between what the eyes see and what the microscope shows is infinitesimal compared with the difference between what the microscope shows and what exists beyond its range, you'll begin to see my point.

"How can such feeble instruments as the senses work on such variable material as personality, and produce anything but a blurred and purely individual impression? And that's no definition of Absolute Truth!"

He had dropped any pretense of conversational manner in his eagerness to be clear and convincing, and Dorothy was silently impressed by what he was saying, and by his new intensity. They walked on slowly together, with the emptiness of the watery blue sky above, and the emptiness of the gray sea stretching to a lost horizon on their right.

"It's rather a melancholy sort of belief, isn't it, Captain Todd," she said at last. "It doesn't give you much to go on."

"It's heartening,—to me, Miss Brador. I'm sure you'll find it so, when it really sinks in. I wouldn't have talked like this if I hadn't sized you up as one of the exceptional people who are not dependent on too many illusions for happiness. But once a person has got beyond the obvious illusions,—and mighty few ever do,—the more light the better.

"Such knowledge helps inside, but it doesn't govern actions much. Reasonable human beings act reasonably,—according to what they *feel* is true,—whatever the absolute truth may be. If I feel some particular action is right, these ideas of mine don't tend to make me shirk it any more than if I were one of the cocksure people who are sure they're right. But I might be less severe in condemning people who act differently."

"It rather makes each person a law unto himself, doesn't it, Captain Todd? I've felt that way for a long time, and it's nice to have some heavyweight metaphysics or whatever it is, to confirm me! The trouble is that I don't want other people to be a law unto themselves!"

"None of us do. That's because usually we can't be sure whether another person is really acting according to his own idea of right. When you've decided that, it is a mere matter of expediency whether the action is in the best interests of society as a whole."

"That makes for toleration, doesn't it?"

"It's the essence of toleration. That's why toleration is a quality of the civilized and wise minority, and never of the mob."

"There's one thing which is rather funny when you come to think of it," she went on, with a whimsical look. "I've been listening to you with the most ingenuous confidence and respect, and according to your own principles it's all nothing but a blurred and purely individual opinion. Neither you nor anybody else can possibly comprehend the truth about anything, not even about Truth, and that is exactly what you were trying to do!"

She had expected a laugh, and it hurt her to see the indefinable change in his expression, from confident and intense, to subdued and melancholy.

"You are an apt pupil, Miss Brador," he said quietly, and turned his eyes again to the steep slope they were climbing.

She understood—dimly—his feeling. It was not pique nor lack of humour. Impulsively she took his arm, and as quickly realized that she was being impulsive. And she hadn't thought impulsiveness was a part of her! But the slope would serve as justification. "Norfolk isn't altogether flat, is it?" she said, casually and quickly, for she had no wish to disguise her sympathy. He was too sensitive and understanding for that.

"Don't be depressed, Captain Todd,—even if I was frivolous."

"It isn't you,—on my word it isn't!" He gave her a grateful smile which restored the melody in her spirit. "It's simply—"

"It wasn't I,—it was just *it*! Isn't that right? I know! I've gone cold to my very spine, sometimes, when I've tried to think just a little way into—eternity. This is really NOT the perfect subject for a walk in the sunshine, is it? I suggest the subject of Herring as more appropriate. It's a very important one in Caster End, and it leads to nothing deeper than the bottom of the sea!

"But," she added soberly, "that's not just frivolity. I appreciate what you were saying,—and I like you for saying it."

Again that grateful smile, and without a trace of melancholy. "Thanks, Miss Brador. And now, speaking of Herring..."

She felt a very gentle pressure on her arm, and their talk switched definitely to Herring, and grew exhilarated and free, as befits that universal fish.

Dorothy had found no reasonable excuse for withdrawing her arm until they came out to the main road south, after following the cliffs for two miles. At the stile, the fine exhilaration of windy downs gave place to the commonplace of hedged roads and fields. Their pace increased as their talk slowed, for it had occurred to Captain Todd to look at his watch, which had surprised them by indicating half past one. Lunch at Bradderham Hall was at one o'clock.

By the tactful organization of Maddox, a convenient arrangement had been made at the Hall, by which the family and its compulsory guests could retain privacy without compromising hospitality. The big dining-room had been placed at the exclusive disposal of the officers. It was so roomy that with the table adjusted for seven places, and moved toward the south end, ample sitting room space remained at the other by the fireplace.

The breakfast-room had become the Bradors' temporary dining-room, and it was there that Dorothy came, as the clock chimed two, and found her father and mother finishing their coffee and listening to Joyce's speculations as to what Dorrie could possibly see in that scrubby little doctor.

Joyce had been formally rebuked by Sir James for her criticism of an officer, and by Lady Brador for her implied criticism of her sister, but was cheerfully pursuing the same subject. Even at sixteen the difference between what people say and what they mean is usually apparent.

Dorothy understood her family so well that she needed no "atmosphere" to tell her that she had been under discussion, but unlike many "right-hand-to-their-parents" daughters, she had achieved the privileges as well as the drudgeries of a right hand. Her actions might be criticized in private, but they were not likely to be questioned openly,—beyond such innuendos as her mother's irrepressible verbal stream of consciousness might cast up.

Even in the serenest households unpleasantnesses occur and problems arise. They can only be avoided at a price. Lady Brador shunned unpleasantness as wholeheartedly as Sir James avoided problems, and part of the price they paid was that they could not tell their right hand that she was seeing altogether too much of this Canadian doctor fellow.

"I hope you had a good walk, my dear," said Sir James.

"Splendid, thanks, Dad. Sorry I'm so late. I dropped my convoy or guard, or whatever it was, at the Bull, and took Captain Todd on to show him the Old Village, then we came back along the cliffs by Opie's Causeway. It's wonderful for January, isn't it? You must be getting on nicely with the Twenty Acre."

While a reference to the progress of his plowing turned Sir James' attention to a much more important subject than Canadian doctors, his wife had noted two superlatives in Dorothy's description of the walk and the weather,—neither of which subjects commonly elicit such warmth.

"Well, dear," she said, rising, "we'll leave you to your lunch. It was kind of you to look after that little doctor so nicely. The Old Village needs medical inspection badly enough. Dr. Beringer—I don't know—sometimes I feel—not quite as keen as he might be—but so kind and obliging and you can't have everything—quite nice people—Shropshire, weren't they?—and that means so much in a small place—people *are* so noticing—Polly Dyer was up to see me about the Choral Society—I haven't much patience with Polly—just because the younger Runke girl—the red-haired one, isn't it?—walked down to the Post Office with a Canadian—very sensible, I thought, and I told her so—with all the young men away—what else can village girls do?—and the Choral Society really isn't—I haven't an idea what to put on the next programme—we seem to finish every last possibility every month! I wish you'd help me on it, dear—but don't hurry your

lunch."

Lady Brador went out, smiling brightly, leaving her husband to entertain Dorothy with a full account of progress down at the Twenty Acre plow.

Next morning, as she strode solidly down to the village, glancing from side to side over the brown fields, Dorothy was filled with a pleasant awareness of existence. At breakfast her father and mother had been serious, almost gloomy, oppressed with that same sense of the potentialities of the coming days which made the watery sunlight brighter for Dorothy, and set her stick swinging more vigorously than usual.

When Mr. Russell had called for the Choral Society programme, he had announced that Mr. Page would take over the parish duties. It was another change, and the war had transformed Sir James and Lady Brador's normal dislike of disturbances in their placid life, to something like dread of what even the smallest change might bring.

The coming of the Montreal Rifles, Dorothy's liking for the common little doctor, the change at the Vicarage, were all trivial matters, but Sir James and his wife saw them through the magnifying glass of war, and were sub-consciously afraid.

It was Lady Brador's suggestion that Dorothy should call on Joan Page. It might give some indication of what the change would signify.

Dorothy herself was merely curious and expectant. The undercurrent of restlessness which the war had thrust into every English village and home, was strong in her, and was increased rather than satisfied by the drudgery of her V.A.D. work in the hospital at Norwich. She did not much care who had charge of the parish. It was quite capable of taking charge of itself, if necessary. It had managed to work out for itself its economic and social problems, and if it became aware of its religious ones—which was unlikely—it could doubtless work them out as well with one Vicar as another.

But she was anticipating cheerfully the intellectual pleasure of getting an insight into two personalities whom she had known for six years, without knowing at all. She was sure that the girl would not disturb her mother's placid routine. Their few conversations had left no doubt in her mind as to Miss Page's essential dignity of spirit. Whether she would take even the modest, self-effacing part in parish affairs which Lady Brador would consider ideal, and whether the old clergyman was a tartar or a comfortable nonentity, were the interesting questions.

Joan gave her the same half smile of reserved interest as she always did. It was not shy, and it was not defensive, but it seemed to give no opening for anything but inconsequential chatting, and somehow that did not harmonize with either of them.

"Mr. Russell has just told us that your father is taking over the Parish," she explained. "We are all anxious to make it easier for him—and you, so I thought we might talk it over. I'm sure we are much more practical than our parents, and we're conveniently unofficial!"

Joan's face brightened. "That's very good of you, Miss Brador." She paused, suddenly doubtful. "Won't you come in and sit down? But I'm afraid things are rather in a mess. I'm doing some of that first-aid you and Dr. Beringer taught us. Did Mr. Russell tell you he'd put one of the Canadians with us?"

As they came to the parlour door, Dorothy caught a glimpse of a towel on the floor, and knew that she ought to postpone her call. But Miss Page, while excusing herself, had voluntarily led her in. It would be a novelty to see this extremely self-contained girl in such an unusual role. So she passed in, murmuring, "I'll wait. Don't bother about me until you've finished."

"It's very simple," Joan assured her. "I won't be long—" She turned smiling to Brian in the armchair, "—and the patient is very good. Miss Brador, this is Brian Mackell; Mr. Mackell,—Miss Brador."

Brian put his hands on the arm of the chair, and subjected his body to some polite contortions. Dorothy laughed. "I understand, Mr. Mackell! You're in an unfortunate position for being introduced. If Nijinski himself were sitting with his foot in a basin, I doubt if he could quite convey the impression of standing to attention and saluting!"

Brian grinned. "But probably he wouldn't feel quite so foolish as I do, Miss Brador!" He sat back, as Joan knelt down and took up the bandage. "And I think your first-aid lessons are partly responsible. If Miss Page hadn't had them, she'd

think as I do,—that a bit of adhesive tape was plenty."

"Not at all," Joan interrupted composedly, "Captain Todd ordered it himself,—in case of infection. Don't you think it needs proper dressing, Miss Brador?" She raised the bare foot in her hand for inspection. Privately Dorothy considered that tape was closer to the mark, but she did not say so. The change in Miss Page intrigued her, and like all first-aid novices, she was enjoying her practice on a real "case"; it would be a shame to be too truthful. "Certainly it should be dressed," she agreed authoritatively. "Captain Todd ought to know. Go ahead, Miss Page; I'll sit down and do nothing and look wise, and feel just like the Matron! It will be a nice change; generally I'm the one who's kneeling down with the basin."

She watched them. When she had confirmed the necessity for that dressing, the girl looked up into her patient's face with a smile which she had never seen before. It not only expressed a natural triumph at being supported, but it also suggested a degree of friendliness which was rather amazing under the circumstances.

Did the loveliness of her eyes and smile just naturally exaggerate her feelings, or could the silly girl be falling in love?

What kind of a boy was the young Canadian soldier? she wondered. She must ask Todd. She liked his friendly lack of self-consciousness. His manner was something like Todd's, but more boyish and impulsive. It was easy to see that he appreciated his nurse,—if only by the way his eyes followed her when the dressing was over and she took the basin and towel out of the room.

"I think Captain Todd told me that his horse was the enemy in your case," she suggested.

"He's just passing the buck, Miss Brador. He hasn't had anybody on the sick list for days, so he rode me down just to get a patient to keep his hand in!"

She stiffened for a moment, then relaxed, as she realized that this was not meant seriously. Captain Thomas had introduced her to this inverted type of humour, but one ran the risk of appearing stupid when some of the phrases were unintelligibly Canadian, and the speaker was so careful not to betray his meaning by his expression.

"He didn't turn you into a very exciting 'case', did he? But tell me, what is 'the buck' exactly? Something connected with an—alibi?"

Brian grinned. "You said it, Miss Brador; just about that. There must be some English expression to cover it, because it's the good old army game, and the British army knows all the moves. The Prime Minister blames the War Office for not carrying out his instructions, the War Office blames the Commander-in-Chief, he blames the Corps Commander, and it goes down to the Tommy who can't blame anybody without getting fourteen days in clink! So he just says he didn't get any orders from the Sergeant, who says he didn't get them from the Lieutenant, and the Lieutenant claims he didn't get them from the Captain, and so it goes right up the ladder again to the Prime Minister, who hasn't got anybody to pass the buck to, so the people throw him out,—and serve him right!" He laughed contagiously. "It's a grand system—and you can't tell me they don't have it in the British Army, Miss Brador!"

"I won't try. We invented it! But in this case the system seems to have broken down because Captain Todd has—passed the buck to Miss Page, who isn't in the army at all,—and has to do the dressing!"

Brian became suddenly earnest. "She doesn't mind it, Miss Brador, honestly, she doesn't. I tried to stop her, but she really wanted to do it. I think she feels she ought to do her bit or some hooley of that sort, but if I wasn't absolutely sure that it wasn't a bother for her, I wouldn't let her,—Doc, or no Doc!"

Confirmed in her feelings that he was a decent, honest boy, Dorothy was the more anxious to find out more about him. "Won't you find it very dull, though,—tied to the house like this?"

He seemed surprised, and his eyes glanced toward the door. "It's not dull, Miss Brador. Everything's new to me, you know. This is the first private house in England I've lived in. It's interesting. Besides, I shan't be tied to the house. Joan borrowed some crutches for me."

The note of pride, as well as the involuntary "Joan," told her much. She looked at Joan with renewed interest as she came in again. If the girl would only dress better! And then she smiled to herself that such a thought should be the first in her mind, when she ought to have been disapproving of her foolishness.

She would like to have seen more of them together. She found them rather heart-warming. They were so clearly under the impression that their behaviour was unexceptionally casual,—as it might have seemed to her if she had not been more aware than usual. Her thoughts turned inward, and the change brought a touch of melancholy, whereas in contemplating these young people, there had been none, although their fate would seem to be inevitable unhappiness. Perhaps it was the sacrifice one paid for the intellectual pleasure of introspection,—the difference between those who thought, and those who were content to feel. These two did not act as if they knew that they were falling in love. Perhaps it was all moonshine after all!

She had no opportunity to decide. As soon as Joan came back, Brian took the borrowed crutches and rose clumsily to his feet. "Now that the consultation is over, the patient had better beat it. I've got to practice my crutch work."

He looked at Joan as if for permission, and she nodded a little doubtfully. "All right—but please do be careful."

—2—

It was a striking tribute to Joan's influence that Brian Mackell really was careful,—for nearly a hundred yards. After that the possibilities which crutches present to an athletic young man with nothing much the matter with him, bade dull care be gone. The unconscious exhilaration which had filled him for two days needed an outlet, and walking with crutches, far from being a handicap, had such obvious mechanical affinities to pole vaulting, that Brian reached the Bull with a speed and originality which Long John Silver himself would have envied.

He made straight for the Public Bar, not because he wanted a drink, but because military instinct told him that only there would he find all the boys who were not on parade.

There were only two, for Colonel Markey's "programme" had gone into effect with lightning rapidity, and nearly everybody had been very hard at work indeed ever since. These two men were present only by virtue of the Bull's supreme suitability for a battalion headquarters. They were, in fact, not in the bar at all,—they merely appeared to be so. Properly speaking,—and both of them spoke properly,—they were working hard in the orderly room.

Quartermaster Sergeant Stringer, an eagle-nosed, middle-aged newspaperman who had dyed his hair and ragged moustache in order to enlist, had not gone through a morning's work for twenty-five years without his bottle of beer. The unity of his beer and his work was so complete that no jury of newspapermen would have found him guilty of not being at work now. Lance Corporal Isidor Fickler, the dark, sleek-haired orderly room clerk, was present because he knew his discipline,—what was good enough for the Sergeant was good enough for him.

"Well, if it isn't the Regiment's wounded hero!" murmured Stringer, putting down his pewter. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Just sitting about and reading and sleeping mostly. You can't do much on crutches," he added unvarnishedly.

"You can make out indents," suggested Sergeant Stringer, wiping a moustache which shone with a curious shade of purplish black beside which Fickler's seemed almost blonde. "And strange as it may seem, that's just what you're going to do!"

"Sir Arthur Currie, himself!" Brian jeered.

Stringer ignored it. "We have it on the best authority," he stated, editorially, "that Buck Private Mackell will shortly be seconded for duty as clerk in the Quartermaster's department, in place of Buck Private Billy Mackenzie, who will return to duty with No. 5 Platoon, which is now shorthanded,—or shortfooted, owing to a prominent member of that organization having kicked the Medical Officer's horse."

He took another swig with great contentment. So far he had found army life strangely satisfactory, for he had quickly found a niche,—and Sergeant's stripes, in the Quartermaster's department, which suited him to perfection. It was a complete change. Nothing but a world war, death, or incorrigible drunkenness can get a man out of the newspaper game after twenty-five years,—and the latter is not always effective. Within six months of being promoted from "devil" to cub reporter, and thenceforth for twenty-five years, John Henry Stringer had been vocally insistent on his desire for a change,—any change. A hundred times he had proved to the satisfaction of himself and the unanimous news-room staff that, even considering their many mutual aspects, a street-cleaner, or an organ-grinder's monkey, led a far more desirable life than

a reporter. But it had taken the war to make him change it.

In the Quartermaster's stores he had found the identical organized disorder with which he was familiar. The stripes brought just the amount of modified responsibility which suited him, and it was his secret pride that he did not need them,—that he could give and take with the toughest man in the Regiment, and regain discipline when he pleased by the power of his satirical tongue, and the tough fibre of his character. He was without a care in the world. The death of his bitter-tempered wife soon after he enlisted had relieved him of his only responsibility, and brought only one regret,—that some of the boys had wasted money on a wreath.

But he had taken considerable trouble to work the fragile Billy Mackenzie into an orderly room job.

When he had finished his beer, he rose. "Back to work," he told Fickler, "and you can let Mackenzie out for his beer." He grinned at Brian; they both knew that Billy's conscience was even more delicate than his constitution. Beer was among the many things which were against his principles.

"That's right about you being for orderly room work, Mac," he said more seriously. "You'd think the Colonel and Todd were a couple of grandmothers, the way they talk about this gang of roughnecks! They aren't changing you and Billy for the fun of it. They think you need keeping out of mischief, and that Billy can get hardened up mildly with all this route marching and physical training.

"Hello, Billy. What's yours? Beer with a spot of rum in it goes well at this time of the morning! It's on Mackell!" He winked at Brian and went back to the orderly room.

Brian held up his pewter invitingly. Billy smiled. He did not even have to shake his head. He and Brian had been friends since they had found themselves in the same section at Valcartier Camp, but every man in the Regiment knew that his money was safe if he offered Mackenzie a drink. Partly for that reason, offers were abnormally abundant. But there was also a feeling that while it was right enough for a guy to have principles, it shouldn't be made too easy for him to live up to them, or they wouldn't be worth having. Their offer of drinks to Mackenzie was primarily a subtle compliment to Principles. They would have thought less of him if he had accepted.

"So you're for the army again," Brian remarked as Billy sat down.

"Yes, and I think it'll do me good. I don't want to get soft. How's your foot?"

"O.K. The Doc says I can use it a bit in a few days. I've got crutches. Feel like a mutt, but boy! You ought to see me do the double pole vault! What kind of billet have you got?"

"We're in a sail-loft belonging to a man called Runke. It's a bit chilly, but we clubbed together and got some coal, and Runke lets us use the big shop downstairs until lights out. Laski has got the cooker in the yard at the back,—and we eat up in the loft. And Mac, aren't you supposed to eat with us? Thompson has been drawing your rations and sharing them out."

"I should worry! The people I'm with are very decent, they wanted me to eat with them. They enjoy my witty conversation about Canada so much!"

Brian pushed away his mug. "I must say beer is over-rated as a pick-me-up for the middle of a cold morning. You've got the right idea there, Billy, but you ought to smoke. Nobody can make out a real case for smoking being wrong."

"I don't think it's wrong," Billy volunteered eagerly, "—for anybody who doesn't feel it's wrong. It's just how you feel, Mac. That's all. I think you're quite right to smoke, but I don't think I would be." He got up. "I'd better be getting back to work. I rather enjoy it. It's quite like what I was doing back at Berry and Maule's."

"Well, I hope I like it! But as I never made out an indent in my life, old Stringer is going to have a tough time." He watched Billy go out, and puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. He had quite an affection, of the motherly kind, for Billy, but occasionally he had a puzzling, brutal desire to give him a hearty smack in the face. Not a punch—which might hurt him—just a nice, clean, heavy smack!

The bar was empty now, and he hoped it would remain so. The smell of stale beer did not offend any of his principles, nor did he notice any aesthetic disharmony between his surroundings and his thoughts.

The arrival of old Jem Wavertree interrupted his dreaming. Jem was one Englishman who would maintain to his dying day that a Canadian soldier was the final pinnacle of God's handiwork. Today his faith was justified for the fiftieth time.

"What's yours?" asked Brian cheerfully.

"Pint o' four ale," said Jem.

The barman was drawing it before he answered, and Brian had paid before it was drawn. That was American hospitality! That was American hustle! "I'd ought to hev' gone to Americy when I were young," he said feelingly. "I wor browt up on th' Broads an' since I were a-movin' I might as well hev' gone t'Americy as Caster End, but I'd heered it were a quare place i' th' owd days." He shook his head and drank slowly and lovingly.

Brian was in no mood for talking. Judging by the old boy's eye, he might soliloquize indefinitely, and Joan's orders were for lunch at one. He picked up his crutches hastily and went out, and at exactly five minutes to one was in the parlour of Number Five, virtuously washed, brushed, and ready.

When Mr. Page had taken his place at table, and said the customary grace, it became clear that the presence of a stranger was still a strain to him. At lunch the day before the constraint had lasted throughout the meal, emphasized by his sporadic efforts to recognize the presence of his guest. At tea the effort had been less sustained, and before the end he had lapsed into habitual silence.

"You have spent a profitable morning, Mr. Mackell?" he asked, after he had said grace. It was the same question that he had put yesterday, and as difficult to answer.

"I did my best, Mr. Page," said Brian gravely, remembering that the occasion was not suitable for any manifestation of his exuberant cheerfulness.

Mr. Page made a great effort. Something akin to a smile appeared on his thin lips. "I think I remember that when I was a young man,—a very young man, I found it difficult to occupy myself satisfactorily when physically incapacitated."

Brian laughed. It was the nearest thing to a funny story that he had heard from Mr. Page. "I've always been that way too, sir,—until now." He could not resist the indirect allusion. Joan did not look up from her plate, but there was a slight movement at the corners of her mouth.

"I soon found," went on Mr. Page, "that such discontent is due to the mental inertia which prevents suitable intellectual employment of the time available. You imply that you have come to the same conclusion. That is very proper. The acquirement of an absorbing intellectual interest is the greatest step toward contentment."

Brian had become suddenly inattentive to Mr. Page's pronouncement, but the finality of the conclusion recalled him for a moment. The old chap had evidently done his good deed for the day! Brian's eyes went back to the corner of Joan's mouth. He had read of dimples without getting any definite impression except of something silly. He had never identified anything in the flesh which he would have described as a dimple,—certainly nothing which deserved the encomiums he had read.

Joan Page, with her graceful dignity when you didn't know her, and her frank simplicity when you did, was the last person in the world he would have associated with dimples, but when the corners of her mouth had moved with that repressed smile, a sudden tiny cup had appeared in each smooth cheek, which had been—fascinating. He wondered by what minor miracle dimples could appear so illogically. They had not been part of any hollow or line created by her smile, they had appeared suddenly in the smoothest surface of the satin cheek,—a pair of little, isolated—miracles!

Until now the overpowering sense of beauty which she brought him had been something indivisible,—an impression,—like a summer sky at night, so that he could not have described the colour of her eyes, nor the shape of her lips or nose. During the hours they had spent together, he had watched her, met her eyes, even stared at her, but he had never consciously scrutinized her. He had felt a quality of unprotectedness in the exposure of such beauty, and had enjoyed it without self-consciousness, looking no more deeply into her loveliness than she herself might have desired.

Now he relapsed into his natural, unanalytical pleasure in her, a little moved, and feeling that somehow he had been taking an unfair advantage. There was silence for a few minutes after Mr. Page's mental withdrawal, but it was without constraint. Silence was the old clergyman's natural element, and for Brian and Joan, it illumined their contentment.

She rose suddenly, collected the plates, and brought in dessert.

Brian watched, feeling the same difference in her that he had noticed when she was making his bed, a feminine sureness and dexterity combined with a distinctly unfeminine and casual attitude toward the job. Her peculiarly objective attitude towards housework had been brought home to him before lunch when he had told her that he would have to spend his afternoons in the orderly room, but hoped to wangle the mornings free.

"I'll change my housework," she said decisively, and when he had intimated that housework was usually considered too sacred a thing to "change" so light heartedly, she had seemed puzzled.

"That's funny. Why?" she had asked.

And he had admitted weakly that he did not know why. But he knew in his heart that while most men would agree that it was funny, the funniest thing of all was that a woman with housework to do, should think so.

"You act as if dishes were quite ordinary things," he said, grinning, when she sat down again.

"So they are, aren't they?"

"Suppose you broke one!"

"I've never broken one."

"Never mind; you ought to act as though there was a tragic cloud of possible broken dishes hanging over you."

"Now you're teasing me. If your foot were well, I'd ask you to help me, and then you would have to show if you really do know so much about it or—or if you've just been reading things up in Mrs. Beaton to tease me." She glanced significantly at her father's empty plate. "You'd better finish your pudding. Do you like it? I tried making it this way, because I thought it would be nicer."

Her serious tone took him unawares. She had sounded as anxiously earnest as his mother would have been. He triumphed mildly, "It's fine,—but what about that lofty indifference I've been crediting you with! It might have been holy from the way—"

Her eyes were on him, and he flushed, suddenly conscious of what they were saying. She was too darned honest to pretend, even about a slip like that. "I'm sorry, Joan, kick me—on the bad foot."

She smiled,—only a half smile, but tinted to radiance by her heightened colour. "Finish your pudding, Brian."

Mr. Page was restless that afternoon. Yesterday he had been oblivious to them in spite of the half-open doors. Today he had more books on the table and moved them about uneasily. He even stood up twice and sat down again without doing anything in particular. The third time, he came to the folding door and stood stiffly in the opening. He inclined his head slightly to Brian. "I have somewhat unusual calls on my attention this afternoon," he said, and returned to his chair.

Brian looked at Joan. "I think I ought to get out in the open and practise my crutch work."

She nodded. "We'll go for a walk,—I'll get my coat."

He had reached the gate when she joined him, making a single stride of the three front steps, and proclaiming the delightfulness of going for a walk by every movement. Brian had never felt what had been in Dorothy Brador's mind when she had wished that Joan would dress better, but he did feel that she was more beautiful when she was dressed to go out. The brown Harris tweed suit, the old felt hat which looked like nothing on earth,—until she put it on, and the vivid yellow muffler suited her and the open downs, to perfection.

He felt stuffy in his heavy khaki overcoat. "Isn't it a bit chilly,—for just that?" he asked, looking at her short jacket.

"Chilly?" she laughed. "Well—! and you're from Canada!"

"Canada's got nothing on old England for chilliness, believe me! The thermometers can say what they like, I've never felt colder than I have over here. Why, when I slide into those icy sheets, I—" He stopped abruptly and faced her, as he saw her expression change. "Now then—stop—looking—like—that! You'll be offering me a hot water bottle next!"

"Well, don't bully! Why not? I suppose you'd rather die than have a hot water bottle!"

"I would that!" Brian averred, and they laughed at each other.

As they passed the last villa, Joan pointed to a stile. "That's my best walk."

"Watch me do my pole vault!" He took two swinging strides towards it with his crutches, and stopped at her terrified "Don't!"

"You didn't think I meant it, did you?" he laughed. "Why, I couldn't jump that with both feet,—and a spring board!" A

note of apology crept into his voice, under her steady gaze. "I've got to work off a bit of steam sometimes, Joan. I only wanted to see if you really thought I was such an idiot as that,—which you did!"

"I think you are idiot enough for anything."

"Well, this is how 'Sissy' Mackell really does get over stiles." He scrambled slowly across, sitting on the top bar, swinging his legs after him, and then retrieving his crutches. Joan followed, but with four easy steps, and without touching the stile with her hands. It was superbly natural, balanced, and graceful, but he was too exhilarated this morning to be tactful. "Now who's showing off!" he jeered.

She flashed a look at him, but now she understood. She would not be "drawn" so easily again; he would not have to think before speaking. It was just as well, because the footpath gave him enough to think of. It was steep and worn through the cropped turf, and not wide enough to get the crutches into. His flapping overcoat, a nuisance and much too hot for exercise which the crutches made strenuous. By the time they were half way up, he was sweating and panting ingloriously.

Joan, walking in front, had not turned nor slackened her pace since they had left the stile; and he began to wonder if she had been hurt by his little jokes after all? Then she turned and looked at him gravely.

No, she hadn't been hurt. Her attitude and expression needed no words to explain that she liked his type of humour so much that she had adopted it!

"Poor Brian!" she said, and a smile flickered, glowed, and burst into laughter. "It's your own fault, you were to tell me absolutely everything you wanted,—and you wanted to stop,—and you wouldn't say so! This path is much too narrow and steep for you. I was going to keep to the road, but you hurried over that stile so—"

He confessed defeat. "O.K.! You win, Joan! Not today for 'Sissy'."

—2—

On Saturday at half past twelve Joan walked to the little bow-window and saw Brian walking confidently back from the orderly room. He was using a stick, but apparently more from prudence than necessity. Captain Todd had strapped his foot securely the night before, and supplied him with an arch support, as well as certain admonitions as to care, but Brian had gone out gingerly, now he was returning confidently, and Joan smiled. This afternoon they would walk up to the pines on the cliff.

She turned back to the kitchen, glancing at her father as she passed. For the first time in several years he had not taken his morning walk. The responsibilities left by Mr. Russell must be worrying him. She thought he had been taking more whiskey too, although she had ceased to watch very carefully how much he drank. He had seemed as set in that as in his other habits.

Lunch brought a further surprise. For her father did not withdraw into himself after his usual few forced remarks. He seemed anxious to keep the conversation alive, talking almost continuously to Brian, asking questions which he answered himself, as was his way, and even addressing her occasionally.

"The Church in Canada has had great advantages over the Episcopal Church of the United States," he was saying, "—according to what I have read. The continuity of tradition has been much less drastically broken, and the tradition of our Liturgy is the greatest force we have to keep us from religious degeneration. I would like to hear more of the practical working of your Synodical system in Canada, but I fear you may not have given it the attention it deserves."

"I'm afraid not, sir," Brian admitted. "I was brought up in a very small place, you know, and I don't think they have anything in the way of endowments, and that sort of thing, in Canada, so our Vicar had to spend most of his time hustling to keep things going. We didn't hear much about anything except common, everyday affairs from him."

Joan was pleased with both her father for the attentive way he listened, and with Brian for the serious way he was tackling a subject so obviously out of his range.

"And then, you know," he went on, "there's more,—what you might call competition in our parts. Even in our village there was a Presbyterian and a Methodist Church, and people didn't mind switching if they didn't like the minister. I

remember we had one Vicar—"

Joan looked up quickly. Her father was in no state to be angered now.

"—we had one Vicar," Brian went on, with a face which was suddenly rigid, "—who stuck so strictly to the Prayer Book and all the Sunday and week-day services that everybody had a tremendous respect for him, and a lot of the Methodists and Presbyterians used to come to his services."

Joan tried to thank him with her eyes. It was sweet of him, and her father was absolutely smiling!

"That is very gratifying, Mr.——"

"Mackell," she supplied gently.

"Mr.—Mackell, and your Vicar must have been a wise and upright man,—and his parishioners less stiffnecked than some in this country!" He leant forward slightly, emphasizing his words by tapping on the table. "When we have been given something as perfect as the English Liturgy, we cannot sacrifice one letter of it without losing something of the spirit. I fear that has been forgotten in this Parish. I am given the difficult task of guiding it into better ways."

He was silent for a minute. "Joan, have you taken out my vestments? They are in good order?"

"Yes, Father. I had the surplices washed, and I'll put everything in the little Gladstone tomorrow morning. Runke would carry it over for you."

He frowned. "H-m. Runke is Warden, he is hardly a suitable person." She could see by his deepening frown that the unimportant problem was growing into a momentous difficulty,—a cause for anger and resentment. She was afraid to suggest any simple way of meeting it, because in this mood he could find objections to anything, and then nothing would move him. Since the shadow of responsibility had fallen on him, he seemed to have lost the power to make decisions.

But Brian grasped the nettle with ready assurance. "Why not let me carry your grip down to the church, sir?" he suggested. "I'd like to. You've been so hospitable; I'd like to be a bit useful for a change."

Joan waited anxiously, but there was no outburst. "Thank you, Mr. Mackell," he agreed with stilted politeness, which reminded her how seldom he had received even such a modest courtesy in Caster End. "I willingly accept your offer. It relieves me of a difficulty which my predecessor might well have anticipated. My daughter will show you what is necessary to be done, if you will speak to her tomorrow. These matters—" He broke off suddenly and stood up. "I have much to do this afternoon," he declared, and his voice told of irritation and strain.

A pale sun was shining as they climbed the stile leading to the downs. A cold east wind came down over the headland. Joan had been silent since they left the house, preoccupied with the problem of her father. She was grateful for the respite,—for the quiet transition from one of her worlds to the other.

Brian walked beside her on the turf. It made him seem taller than usual. She had to look up at him when he spoke. "Joan, you don't know much about me," he said hesitantly, "and I may be off any old time now, but—if there's any possible way I can help you,—or your father, that's what I'm here for,—that's part of our bargain."

"You *are* helping me, Brian." For a moment she wanted to cling to his arm. He was so comfortingly strong. For the first time since she had come to Caster End a premonition had crept upon her, of things with which she might not be able to cope unaided. Suppose her father—! She looked up into Brian's honest blue eyes. "Brian, I'm worried," she said impulsively. "Father has changed."

Earnestly she told him of their life at Caster End, of what she remembered of their Smettock days, of her Father's obduracy and resignation, of his habitual drinking. She had never spoken of these things before. Brian was the only person in the world she could have spoken to like this. She did not know why, but he had entered her private world so completely that it did not seem strange.

"And now this sudden change," she ended. "These duties,—and all his habits broken! He may not be able to—face

them."

"There's nothing you can do, Joan,—now,—as far as I can see. You can only wait, and do as you've always done,—meet the difficulties as they come up, sensibly." His tone was firm,—almost brusque, but when she looked up at him, his eyes were full of sympathy. She felt that it wasn't fair to burden him with troubles which were not his, and smiled an apology, consoled that none was needed.

His instant sympathy with her mood restored all the heightened contentment, the soft sense of inward gaiety, which she had felt since their first evening. "Look! There are my pines," she said, pointing.

The path, after reaching the highest point at Caster Head and skirting the cliff's edge for a hundred yards, led downwards to the group of pines on the southern slope. Some of them had gone with the landslide, years ago, the others remained, closer to the cliff and more unsheltered than nature had intended them to be. The path rounded them on the landward side, but Joan led the way among their trunks, almost to the last great tree.

There she stopped, standing close to him and silent. She did not want him to say anything, but she did want him to feel what she always felt here. She followed his eyes as they looked at the sea far below to the left, and as they turned southward down the hill and over to the next headland. The road south wound across its lower slopes, vanished behind it, rose on farther slopes, dipped into distant valleys, and reappeared on rounded hillsides until it was lost,—too far away to show whether it were mist, or trees, or a valley which had received it at the last.

In Summer that genial sea was her friend, in Winter these placid distances. She swam, or walked, or sat here and read, or dreamed, and was never lonely. It was her world, yet a different one now that Brian had become part of it. How could she have imagined that her feelings, alone in that world, were happiness?

He turned and looked at her. Everything she wanted to see was in his face. She met his eyes and moved to the little bank at the edge of the wood where she always sat. She knew that he was moving in unison with her mind, but did not resist the impulse to touch his arm gently to indicate that he was to sit. It was the first time she had touched him except to help his lameness, and as they sat down together she felt that something had changed; and her heart was glowing with the sense of an openness and intimacy far transcending the passive happiness she had felt with him before.

She was looking into his eyes, and they were smiling, drawing her towards him, as her's drew him. She raised her arms, making room for his around her body, and their lips met gently, sweetly, and she clasped her hands tightly round his neck, striving to enhance the power of his embrace, to press his lips more closely to hers.

For a timeless space they held to each other while her spirit soared in singing harmony with her glowing body. Their arms loosened, he was smiling at her, his eyes were moist. He rose, took off his great-coat and stretched out his hand. She took it and let him draw her to her feet, while he arranged it on the bank. She watched him with detachment, too filled with the emotion of what had happened for conscious thought. From the moment he had turned from the wide vista and looked at her they had seemed to live in a new element, where emotions spoke to each other direct, and minds and bodies only need obey.

When he had spread his coat, they sat down on its skirt, and together drew the rest around their shoulders. She held one sleeve to keep it wrapped, linked a finger of his hand which held the other, and brought it to rest against her own beneath her breast. Her other arm was around him, and she could feel his, warmly pressed against her back by the enveloping coat. They had settled together and arranged their little shelter with such perfect unison that it might have been rehearsed. She could never want to move again, no other comfort could ever be like this. His face was buried in her hair, and his motionless lips touching her ear so that each deep breath told her the same story as the rise and fall of her breast against their linked hands.

She wondered that the rhythm of their breathing could fail to be in the same perfect harmony as everything else. His quicker breaths gradually caught up with hers, moved twice or thrice in unison, then parted company until they alternated regularly, and slowly synchronized again.

Then his arm tightened, the lips brushed her ear in a gentle kiss, drew away, and they were looking at each other again. The cold east wind crept in, bringing understanding. Her whole soul smiled on him. "I love you," she said.

"Joan, I love you—I love you. My darling—how can I tell you how much! I don't deserve—"

She silenced him imperiously, dropping the sleeve and pressing her palm against his cheek to bring his face closer. "I love you, Brian," she explained, and kissed him fearlessly,—explicitly, and looked into his eyes again. She must make him realize the fullness of her love and cease even to think of "deserving."

He returned her kiss with such passionate fervor, such strong embracing arms, that it was almost painful; but his momentary forgetfulness of everything but the overpowering urgency of his own love, brought her an even deeper joy than his first sweet tenderness,—lovely as that had been. And when he loosened his arms contritely, she clung to him still with her remaining strength. She knew now that his love was as strong as hers. She had known it before, but somehow this had been needed too. Every depth of his emotion was mirrored in her own heart, and she felt complete—invincible—and utterly safe in his crushing arms.

When at length she drew away, brushing his cheek delicately with her lips, they pulled the great-coat round their shoulders and sat as they had before in ecstatic silence, until some current moved them to another long kiss, and left her breathless, as he stroked back her hair with clumsy tenderness, and smoothed the creases from her sleeves and shoulders.

Again and again they drew together, kissed, and parted. They talked more now,—softly, gaily,—with words which were caresses, until the winter twilight obscured all except the nearest pines. Then Brian sighed deeply, smiled at her with a different smile, and raised her to her feet. He put on the coat which had sheltered them, while she waited, and before they moved took her two hands, looked long and steadfastly into her eyes, and kneeling down, raised the hem of her dress to his lips.

Her heart was too full to speak. She understood,—so well, and as she slipped her arm under his and took his hand, she bent over and kissed it humbly, and they walked slowly home.

Those men of the 2nd Montreal rifles who had inscribed themselves "Church of England" upon enlistment, had done the wise,—if not always the truthful thing. On this first Sunday in Caster End, as on many previous Sundays, they could chuckle at the irreverent sophisticates who had warned them on joining up that, in the army, any religion was better than "C. of E." These shrewd fellows had explained that wherever you went in England or France there would be found either a Church of England, or a Church of England chaplain. Anglicans, therefore, could never escape a church parade, while Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Roman Catholics always had a chance.

But these subtle thinkers, having avowed themselves to belong to one of those other denominations, according to its supposed rarity, had found their subtlety shattered on the rock of Colonel Markey's character. Colonel Markey had early ordained that every man should attend his own church on Sundays. If they had to march ten miles to get there,—as they sometimes did, so much the more merit would be acquired.

On this occasion the Anglicans marched half a mile to the parish church, the Methodists and Congregationalists plodded a bleak six miles to that hotbed of Cromwellian Puritanism, Moulton-under-Bure, and the Catholics and Presbyterians four and a half miles to Brantham Junction.

Three Agnostics and an Atheist cleaned out the transport stables for the greater glory of God.

In view of the strictness of Church Parades, Brian thought it best to get specific leave from Lieutenant Wells. "I promised to carry the parson's bag, sir," he explained. "I'm billeted in his house,—the new parson, I mean, not Mr. Russell,—and he was worrying about how he'd get his togs down to the church this morning. I've been a lot of trouble to them, so I thought it would be only decent."

Beyond the hesitancy natural to him before granting any request, Wells did not demur. The action was quite in line with the Colonel's policy of creating good feeling between Canadians and English.

"O.K.,—but don't try to dodge the service on the strength of it," was all he said.

Brian hurried back to No. 5 untroubled by Wells' grudging manner. He was used to it anyhow, and he was too strongly under the influence of yesterday's revelation to be affected by anything else. Each step he took towards the ugly little villa was taking him to Joan, and increasing the mingled humility and exaltation which filled him at the thought of her. Even Mr. Page had come within the aura which surrounded her. He was as glad to be doing something for her father as for her, because it would please her just as much.

Yesterday evening, after a supper at which hardly a word had been spoken, Runke, the Sailmaker and Churchwarden, had come in to consult Mr. Page about the hymns and service. Mr. Page had indicated that the folding doors should be closed, and Joan and he had sat together in the dim little parlour all the evening, and the ecstasy of the afternoon among the pines had renewed itself in quieter, more abiding form. He felt that he was even happier, because he had been better able to understand and savour the happiness than when it had swept him so far above all conscious understanding. He had not touched her, except that her hand had been in his all the long evening, but that had seemed so natural and inevitable that to have done otherwise would have been embarrassing to both. And when they had said goodnight, they had not kissed,—the slow unclasping of their hands had been the only caress which had passed between them, but that had remained with him until he went to sleep. He knew they could not love each other more, but they knew each other far better for that evening, and as it wore on, all the heart-warming frankness and fellowship which had grown so swiftly since their meeting had returned to them, deepened and enriched. They had not wanted to kiss when they had parted for the night; they had known, without understanding, that perfect beauty may have many moods.

She opened the door for him now, with the radiantly eloquent smile which always so exalted him, but it vanished like a flash, as she took his arm to prevent him going down the hall. "Brian, I'm so glad you've come," she whispered. "I was afraid something might prevent you, and I'm so bothered about Father. I've never known him like this. He seems all nerves. Look after him,—please."

She moved away as the handle of the dining-room door rattled, and Mr. Page stepped out. He had his watch in his hand, his hat and coat on, and his parchment-like face had more colour, his leaden eyes more fire, than Brian had seen there before. He started toward them with quick, nervous steps. "Mr. Mackell," he asked excitedly, "do you know what time it

is?" He stopped abruptly and seemed to gain control of himself with a fierce effort, which tightened the skin around his mouth as if he was grinning.

Brian hastened to placate him, forgetting Joan and everything else as he concentrated on dealing wisely with the old man. "I'm very sorry if you were waiting, sir," he apologized, "but I understood you wanted to leave at half past ten, and it's only a quarter past now. I'm ready right now, if you like."

Mr. Page inclined his head with a calmness which seemed exaggerated after the excitement. "You are right. I remember. But I have decided—we will start immediately, if you please." He hesitated a moment, then turned back into the dining-room. Brian followed Joan quickly into the parlour, where the small Gladstone bag was lying, ready to be closed. As he shut and strapped it hurriedly, he could see Mr. Page through the folding doors pour out half a tumbler of whiskey and gulp it down.

They met in the passage. Joan held the front door open, and whispered to him as he passed, "Look after him,—I'll be there at eleven."

Although the street itself was almost empty, it had a not entirely deceptive air of busyness. A good many of the village people were around their front gardens or gates or doors, the men in most cases dressed in Sunday trousers and boots, but lacking the objectionable collars which would be donned at the last moment. The women were dividing their time between Sunday dinners in the kitchen and children being dressed upstairs, but still managed frequent visits to front doors and windows. Brian guessed that church this morning would be more crowded than usual. But he did not quite understand that, for Caster End, Mr. Page was not only the new parson, but a long-standing enigma, an object of intense curiosity amounting almost to suspicion.

At first they walked quickly, Mr. Page's eyes,—after a brief glance to right and left, fixed far on the road in front; Brian's frankly interested in the furtive curiosity which he was beginning to notice. It made him remember that although the old clergyman had apparently regained full control of himself before they left the house, he was certainly not in a normal state of mind, that he'd just swigged down enough whiskey to turn an ordinary man dizzy and that Joan, who knew him best, was terribly worried. If he had not been in a mood to welcome any difficulty and unpleasantness in Joan's service, he would have felt uneasy. Yet he could not see what unpleasantness could arise in merely taking a parson and his bag to church. The whiskey would hardly cause any trouble. Evidently Mr. Page had been taking so much for so long, that it had lost the power to affect him.

As they passed the last straggling cottage, where the road from Bradderham Hall joined the main highway, Mr. Page's pace began to slow. Half a mile ahead, the square church tower showed above some trees, and the road sloped slightly towards it, but still Mr. Page walked more slowly. Several traps had passed them, and a wagonette with a farmer and his family. A young couple, dawdling slowly behind, overtook them unwillingly, the young man touching his cap, but Mr. Page did not seem to see them.

An older couple, with two children, stiff and smug in their Sunday best, came up. The man said, "Gude mornin' to ye, sir." Mr. Page's eyes remained on the road ahead, and Brian saw the villager glance meaningly at his wife, and, when he had passed, whisper something, so that she looked back. It was difficult to keep pace with the old man now, he walked so slowly. Brian, who had respected his silence so far, made some non-committal remark to the effect that he supposed there was plenty of time. Mr. Page took no notice. He repeated it more loudly, and this time the old clergyman turned his head and looked at him.

The fixed stare had gone. The smooth fleshless face was distorted by the same clenched jaws and contracted muscles which had greeted him at the villa. He had seen that sort of look on a man in physical agony, trying to repress a scream. Once more it passed, as Mr. Page's will conquered whatever threatened its control.

He turned his head away silently; his step momentarily quickened, slowed again, and lagged, as if each foot were being forced forward against a dragging weight.

Brian was filled with uncomprehending fear. Here, in this commonplace little village, there was a horrible unexpectedness in what he had seen in the old man's eyes. Everything else was so normal. Even Mr. Page himself had seemed moulded from the common matrix of the ordinary little English village, and peculiar only because the stolid immobility was so exaggerated. Yet in this quiet road he was faced with some terror which belonged rather to an Asylum, or the after-wrack of a great battle!

They were close to the church now. More people had passed them. In the churchyard and around the big Gothic door groups of early comers strolled and gossiped, formed and re-formed, as they whiled away the time until eleven o'clock. Then all the motion stilled as Mr. Page came into view. He could not distinguish their features, but Brian felt that all those eyes were fixed on Mr. Page, and that he understood it. His eyes had lost their insensibility now, and glanced incessantly sideways at the people in the churchyard, although his face did not turn. His features were suddenly mobile, his jaw tightening and relaxing, his brows wrinkled, the lips pressing on each other or opening to receive the moistening tongue. It was as if the key which had locked those features into impassive rigor, years ago, had been turned again, and released the crowded accumulation of emotions.

His very figure, his attitude, his walk, showed a new sensitiveness to the impacts of the outside world.

To Brian's relief, he did not turn up the broad path to the church door, but went on to a side gate, leading to the vestry, some forty yards farther. There he paused. Brian knew that he ought to get him home,—that he was not fit to conduct a service, but he was afraid to speak. The old man seemed under such a strain that anything might cause an outbreak,—or a breakdown. Mr. Page's hesitation ended in another of those spasms when he seemed to gather together the last dregs of will and hurl them against his fears. He walked through the gate and up the footpath to the vestry door. It was open. Through it came the sound of the organ and the hollow rustling of a filling church. He stopped, turned, looked consciously at Brian for the first time, and his eyes begged piteously for help.

Brian took his arm. He half turned at the vestry door, but otherwise did not resist. It was a gesture which he must have known was vain. He flung his arms upward despairingly, and Brian noticed that the rolled manuscript which he had been carrying was moist and crumpled almost to pulp.

"Mr. Mackell," he muttered, "I am ill." Then his voice rose. "My God! Thou hast forsaken me!" Again it fell into a sort of confidential whisper. "I am ill, Mr. Mackell,—very ill. I cannot—I CANNOT—we must go home—I am ill—those people,—they must not see me—ill. This path—it will take us home."

Without loosening his hold on Brian's arm, he hurried along a winding path which led under some yew trees to the Vicarage garden. He walked swiftly past the house, glancing furtively at the staring windows, to a wicket gate on the side toward the village, and so into another footpath across the fields.

Brian guessed from its direction that it was a private path from the Vicarage to Bradderham Hall, probably joining the side road near the park gates, but he had little time for wondering. The old clergyman was in a pitiable state, but however Brian racked his brains, he could think of nothing that he could do,—except to get him home quickly, and privately, and then,—poor Joan! Was there anything she could do either?

Her father seemed to have lost all his defences against fear of things outside, and terror at something horrible within. Sometimes he shuffled slowly, not as though forcing himself forward as before, but from pure weakness, and at such times he spoke in a low, halting voice,—to Brian, and clung to his arm. Then his pace would quicken, his hands move in spasmodic gestures of appeal and despair, his voice would rise, and at such times he spoke to God, and flung out his arms as if to cling to his Master, and found emptiness, and his hands would drop and clutch at Brian,—and the weakness would fall upon him again.

As they crossed the last field, Brian could see the opening in the hedge where the footpath ended at the road. Two figures passed it as he looked, and a moment later the drums and bugles from the village announced that the Battalion had started its march to church. The sound brought sudden quickening to his intelligence, and a vivid picture of the little world of which Mr. Page should have been the centre. The villagers waiting for their service; the Regiment, with buttons and boots brilliantly polished, marching with drums and bugles to hear—this poor, hysterical old man; Runke, panic-stricken; Joan, tortured by anxiety for her father. The whispered questions, the urgent messages, the hurried consultations,—everything which could exaggerate the importance of the parson's breakdown.

Then some delayed cog in his mind slipped into place, and he remembered the figures which had just passed. Captain Todd,—and that Brador girl!

"Look, Mr. Page," he begged urgently, "you sit down on this pile of hurdles for a couple of minutes, will you? Somebody's just passed who'll take a message to the church,—to say you're ill. He's a doctor. It will save all kinds of fuss. Then I'll be right back,—truly I will."

Mr. Page's arm gripped tighter, but Brian forcibly unclasped it, pushed him gently down onto the hurdles, and dashed for the stile. A jagged pain in his foot reminded him to be careful, but he caught Todd and Miss Brador when they were still a hundred yards from the main road.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, getting in front of them and saluting, "—something urgent."

Todd looked at him in surprise. "Your foot will be urgent if you run like that! What's the trouble now?"

"It's private, sir, but—Oh! I didn't mean you, Miss Brador," he broke off, as she started to walk ahead with a nod and smile. "You would help a lot. It's just that it's so private that I didn't know what to do,—except tell you. It's Mr. Page,—the parson. His nerve's gone or something. I just got him to the church,—I was carrying his bag, and he was getting more panicky all the time,—and then he wouldn't go in,—couldn't. He's got the wind up, completely. I had to bring him back by that footpath over there. I got him to sit down, but I don't know what he may be up to now. I ought to get back. I thought you might tell the Colonel and the Churchwarden,—his name's Runke,—to prevent a mix-up,—because nobody knows yet that Mr. Page won't be there."

"But what really is the matter with him?" Todd broke in. "Surely not mere nerves,—at his age!"

Brian hesitated, but he couldn't help himself; Joan would need the help of both of them. "Well, sir, I think—I hope you'll keep it dark, sir,—I think the old chap has been drinking a lot for years,—not too much ever, but steadily, and he's a bit peculiar anyway, I should judge, and now this sudden responsibility and so on! Probably nothing's turned up this last six years to show him that he was losing his nerve, until right now,—and he suddenly discovers that it's gone altogether."

Captain Todd looked thoughtfully at Brian, and then at Dorothy. She nodded slowly as if to confirm Brian's suggestion. "I—see. How is he physically? Shall I come and look at him?"

"I wouldn't—now, sir. He's fit,—but desperate to get home. I thought I'd get him there as soon as the Regiment passes and the road's clear, and then when you've smoothed things out, perhaps you could drop in, as if you were going to have a look at my foot, and we might get him to see you,—he sure needs a doctor!"

"And then there's his daughter; she is to be at the church at eleven. If—" He looked appealingly at Miss Brador.

"I'll speak to her," she said decisively, "and send her home. You can arrange those other matters, can't you, Joe? I'll speak to Father; he can read the service. We'll say that you've seen Mr. Page,—look—through this gap. Now you really have seen him! And that you think it's a heart attack. Will you?"

"Certainly. If Mackell is right, there's sure to be some heart condition."

She smiled her thanks, and Brian, who from his brief glimpses of her had gained the impression that she was rather pale and plain, saw the charm which Joan had insisted on.

"I'm awfully obliged, Miss Brador, and now I'd better get back on the job." He saluted and hurried off.

Mr. Page sat with his head buried in his hands. He took no notice of Brian's reassuring greeting. He just sat on the pile of weathered sheep-hurdles, motionless except for an occasional tremor, and Brian sat beside him, and the absurd little Gladstone bag lay at their feet. In the green expanse of the wide pasture, with the vista of plowed fields and thick hedges in front, the swelling downs behind, and the dome of pale gray sky above, they were as incongruous as passengers from a wrecked excursion steamer washed ashore on a strange island. The clergyman's black coat and shovel hat, the soldier's stiff, ill-fitting khaki, the smug little bag, were perfectly anomalous in that wide earthiness and sea-washed air.

Brian waited until the bugles had passed the side road. Most of the church goers would be following closely, and certainly all the children would be following the band. There would never be fewer curious eyes than now. He touched Mr. Page, and when he did not respond, took his arm. "We'd better get home now, sir." Still the shoulders remained bowed. Brian shook him gently. "If we don't go now, Mr. Page, there'll be crowds in the village to watch us," he warned.

The old man looked up; the meaning of the words sank home; his harrassed eyes grew wildly purposeful; he stood up, and without answering, hurried toward the stile. Brian only had time to grab the bag and catch him before he got there. But Mr. Page still feared to be alone, for he glanced over his shoulder before he climbed the stile, and as soon as they were on the road, clutched Brian's arm again, and once more repeated his excuse: "I am ill; I am ill," as if by reiteration

he could convince Brian,—and Caster End,—and himself. All through the deserted village he muttered: "I am ill; I am ill," and pressed on, holding tight to Brian's arm, until at last he was at his own door, twitching with uncontrollable impatience as Brian fumbled with the key, and hastening to his chair, the instant it was opened.

Even as Brian was helping him with his overcoat, his hand was groping for the decanter. It was empty. His jaws clenched and he sprang up, pushing the table aside to get more quickly to the pantry, and hurrying back with a full bottle in his hand, as if there was no peace or safety for him outside his habitual chair. After drinking down half a tumbler of the whiskey, he sat quietly for a little time, while Brian, half in the dining-room, half in the parlour, tried to be both inconspicuous and reassuringly at hand. He guessed that the calm interval was one of expectancy,—of hope that the liquor would bring strength,—or apathy, and as the minutes passed he could follow, in the changing expression of the staring eyes, the growth of suspicion—of fear—of cruel certainty that now in his desperate need, his only succor was failing him.

And with that realization passed the interval of calm. Once more his self-control seemed to crack under some cold terror sweeping his naked and defenceless soul. But now in the seclusion of his own room, excuses were forgotten, cast aside. It was to God he spoke, or to himself, and although he often fixed his eyes on Brian, as he muttered or cried aloud, it was still God whom he addressed. And Brian sat and listened, his heart full of sympathy, but helpless, uneasy, and ashamed.

"Oh God, thou hast forsaken me," groaned the cowering old man. "I have dissembled and cloaked my wickedness, but thou wast watching me. I have sought to cover my vileness even from myself, and thou hast made it manifest to the people and brought me into public shame."

He leaned forward breathlessly as the full wave of merciless self-revelation seemed to engulf him. "Oh my God, what have I done, what have I been all these years! Is there no health in me? A whited sepulchre!—a drunkard!—blind of heart—covering my rottenness with vain-glory and hypocrisy! A faithless priest, concealing my drunken sloth under a blasphemous pretense of devotion to thy holy word! I knew it,—oh God, I knew it, and yet I knew it not."

Brian heard Joan come quietly in the front door, and slipped out to meet her. To the accompaniment of her father's hysterical prayers, he whispered all that had happened.

"Your doctor and Miss Brador are coming along behind," she told him. "I hurried. He thinks he or Dr. Beringer ought to see Father, and wants me to find out if he'll consent. If so, he'll come right in."

"Poor Father! I should have known that something like this must come sometime,—I think I did know, but I didn't know what to do. Whatever I tried, he got so angry I had to stop. Poor Father,—and poor Brian!" she added sadly. "It's been hard for you."

He gripped her hand fiercely. "Don't be crazy, Joan! You know that I'm proud if I can help you. You know it,—don't you?"

She nodded, looking up at him with a ghost of a smile, and he kissed her gently,—for the first time since they had come down from the pines on Caster Head.

"I'll go and ask him about the doctor right now," he said, much more confidently than he felt. "He's been more used to me than you since this—attack."

Mr. Page had not ceased his pitiful confessions when Brian went back, but his manner was less hysterical, his eyes less terror-stricken than before. The shattering blow dealt him by that first revelation of his present state had spent its virulence, his despairing pleas were quieter, and at times he seemed trying to justify himself, where before he had accused.

But only Brian, who had seen his breakdown from the start, could have recognized the signs of returning normality. The fury of his refusal to see any doctor frightened Joan by its suddenness, but Brian, who had been with him when he would not have heard nor understood the question, felt that it was a natural reaction, however exaggerated, and therefore an improvement. But he desisted from his suggestions at the first breaking of the storm. He dare not risk what might happen with the old man in that state. It was up to the doctors to say what next. He and Joan withdrew quietly and went to the front door. Captain Todd and Dorothy Brador were waiting, and there on the top step, with the door ajar, and scattered villagers watching curiously, the four of them held a brief and whispered consultation.

The village street was empty as Dorothy and Joe Todd turned away from the Pages' house. When they came to the crossroad to Bradderham Hall, Dorothy paused. "What's the time, Joe?" she asked.

"Too late for church, anyway!"

"Good! But I'm so glad to see this emptiness. Runke must have risen to the occasion and got the service going without any complications."

"I guess the Colonel had a hand in it. He's quite capable of filling a mere Vicar's shoes in an emergency!"

"Then we might as well go home. I think I've done enough walking for today." She watched his quiet smile at her allusion to their early walk that morning.

He looked at her seriously. "Yes, I do not expect such another walk,—ever."

They strolled toward the Hall in silence. Her thoughts were on the morning, when they had met and walked inland through Lord Beeston's woods, and gradually fallen silent under an experience as dim and indescribable as the light which came to them through the lofty canopy of over-arching boughs.

Her arm had been in his, but they had not communicated their experience to each other by even the lightest pressure, by even the softest word, although both knew that their minds had been merged together while it had been upon them. And when they parted she had merely said, "It's been a lovely walk,—Joe," and he had taken her hand, bent his head, and then looked steadily at her with eyes which seemed sad, and murmured, "Thank you,—Dorothy." And she had gone to her room, knowing that she loved this little Canadian doctor, and that he understood it and loved her.

It had been delicate and perfect. She would have grudged any difference in what had happened, and yet she had just made that allusion to it,—and she did not quite know why. She loved him for the reticent answer he had given her, and for the outspoken message of his eyes, but,—he was so intensely conscientious and reserved!

And she herself,—what was the matter with her? She understood that thoughtful intelligence of his so well. The same influence had been her own guide for so many years, and so successfully she had thought. Yet if the guide itself was confused, what was left? As they walked up the drive she thought, felt, reasoned, searched, and still she did not know,—or even define satisfactorily what it was that she did not know.

Maddox greeted them at the great door. She had the feeling,—and it was not altogether amused, that if anybody could tell her what she wanted to know, it would be Maddox!

"There has been a little—misfortune, Maddox," she explained. "Mr. Page became ill on his way to the church. We have just come from his house. I had to get his daughter from the church, and when we had seen them safe at home, it was too late to go back."

"That's unfortunate, Miss Dorothy. It would be a strain for Mr. Page, after these years. Is there anything you would like done?"

"Nothing now, Maddox, but you might let me know when the others come back,—I'll be in my room."

Todd started to walk through to the dining-room, but she stopped him. "It will be empty. You'd better keep me company until the family comes home. You haven't seen my room,—I never know whether to call it a boudoir or a study, but the books will please, if the curtains don't!"

She closed the door after him and felt more comfortable,—but slightly silly at the tenseness which had gripped her. Lighting a cigarette she watched him examine the books and wondered what impressions of its owner her sitting-room would give him.

"It's not quite the collection I would have expected to see in a girl's bookcase," he said at last,—"even yours."

She smiled. "And why?"

He considered. "Well, I would find it hard to say,—exactly. Perhaps the lighter side of life is not represented as fully as one might expect, and there seems to be—how shall I put it?—more blue blood than red blood."

"Good gracious! You're dangerous, Joe! Do you make a profession of reading people's characters from their books?"

"It's a sounder method than tea leaves!"

"And what is your objection to the blue blood,—or is that just a nice way of saying 'cold blood'? Don't I strike you as aristocratic? Do sit down and smoke. You have an unfair advantage, lecturing on my character,—and standing as well."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to do that. I was looking for information, rather than giving it. I admit I'm dogmatic about your aristocracy, but unless you've been acting a part very brilliantly ever since I met you, your outlook is the very opposite from aristocratic."

"Father wouldn't like to hear that, even though he does loathe the word 'aristocratic'."

"That's because he has the aristocratic outlook to a very marked degree."

"Poor Father!"

He smiled with her, but it passed quickly. "Poor daughter, rather."

"Again I have to ask 'and why?'"

"Because the aristocratic outlook is a happy one. It seldom doubts, it is sure; it knows. So it's spared a lot of worrying, and as its dogmas turn out to be right just about as often as the most careful rationalization would, it comes off just as well as the sceptical outlook in the end,—without the anguish of doubts."

Dorothy sat silent for a while, but she was sure he wasn't applying his generalization to her, at the moment, although he might later. He loved generalizing! He had started by talking about her, and now it had become the aristocratic outlook. Most people were the opposite,—they could not hear a generalization without making a personal application of it. But he was right. If only she had the aristocratic point of view now,—or any other! If she could only be sure!

"Joe, according to your own definition of aristocrat, what are you?"

"I—?" He frowned, staring at his cigarette. "I—? I guess I'm somewhere about a tenth degree Nihilist!"

"And what about those poor Pages, whom we ought to be worrying about now? Not Mr. Page, because he's abnormal, but his daughter,—and the young soldier?"

What association had brought them to her mind? Yes, it was the way they had looked at each other. She wondered if Joe had noticed it.

"Miss Page and young Mackell," he said slowly, "are, from what little I have seen of them, aristocrats of the deepest dye,—according to that rather dubious definition of mine. They seem straightforwardly, untroubled by doubts. They are unselfconscious, and they *know* things,—they don't just think them, or wonder them. They know what they want,—and they know that what they want is right, and that's the truest sign of the dyed-in-the-wool aristocrat!"

He paused. The frown had gone. Was he thinking of the young couple down in the village, or of himself and her,—or of both?

He got up suddenly,—awkwardly. "Dorothy," he said in a constrained voice, "I don't know whether I'm a fool—"

There was a rap on the door. Dorothy sighed, whether from relief or regret she did not know. "Come in," she said.

Maddox opened the door. "The family are returning from church," he explained. "I thought you would like to know."

"Thank you, Maddox. We'll hear about the excitement now."

They went out into the corridor, but Todd left her at the head of the staircase. "I think I'd better go and wash up before lunch. I've had—you've given me such a wonderful morning, Dorothy, I've enjoyed it enormously—"

She thought he was going to add something, but after a slightly embarrassing pause while they stood on the bright landing, he nodded brusquely and went off to his room.

At lunch that day, the Bradors were to be the "guests" of the officers billeted on them. Captain Thomas had hit on the idea of "inviting" them, in order to relieve the tedium of the daily Mess, but curiously enough only Eldon Scimold, the taciturn mining engineer had been able to draft the invitation to everyone's satisfaction.

His literary taste ended with the eighteenth century, and was based on that most massive of cornerstones,—Dr. Samuel Johnson, whose epistolary style proved eminently suitable to the delicate and important occasion.

Happily the conversation fell far below the portentous elegance of the invitation. It was cheerful, almost gay, as was usually the case when the Hall's two "sets" came together.

"I thought the church was absolutely electric!" Joyce repeated for the third time. "Didn't you, Mr. Wentworth?"

Wentworth frowned with great severity. "Your father has already said that it was not electric. I'm surprised at your venturing to contradict—"

"But you're not my father! and I want *you* to say it wasn't electric, and then I can contradict you as much as I like, and say it was simply bristling with electricity."

At the end of the table, Sir James, on the right of his favourite Captain Thomas, was explaining how effectively his high opinion of "Colonials" had been confirmed by the Montreal Regiment.

"—quite apart from the pleasure of having you all in my house, they tell me the impression your men make in the village is very favourable. And one might have expected—er—this incident this morning, for instance, the presence of a large number of soldiers might have been—er—not troublesome exactly, but—er—troublesome. You follow me?"

Thomas laughed. "Sure I do,—the more the worse, very often!"

"Exactly!" Sir James beamed at having made his point so easily. He suddenly sobered, realizing that he still had his real point to make; and making a point, was always a somewhat complicated matter for this very unvocal baronet. "But I was going to say,—just the opposite, in this case."

Thomas looked puzzled.

"In effect, I mean," Sir James explained. "Your men, in command of the situation, one might say, and under the excellent handling of your Colonel, practically causing the incident to—er—not exist. You follow me?"

"First-class troops, eh Sir James? Always ready with the good old bluff!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good. And I don't mind telling you, Captain Thomas," Sir James went on confidentially, "that a large part of our congregation had really come to see the new incumbent. He has been quite a—er—puzzle to the villagers. And then—not turning up at all! Really, I wouldn't have been surprised if some of them had gone off to—er—now what was that word you used last night?—somethings connected with Bridge! I meant to make a note of it,—most expressive! I had it on the tip of my tongue when I was speaking to Lady Brador this morning, but then it went. Expressing the idea of looking very hard, and possibly with vulgar curiosity."

Thomas grinned. "I guess it's 'rubber' you mean. Short for india-rubber, which is short for looking at something so intently that you need a rubber neck to stretch towards it!"

"Ah! 'Rubber'!"

"My dear," he called across the table to his wife, "india-rubber! That was the word! You remember? We should make a note of it,—most expressive!"

"But I was saying that many of our people would have gone off to—er—india-rubber at poor Mr. Page, or his house, if it hadn't been for the solid—er—phalanx of your men,—evidently under instructions."

Lady Brador, between Major Baxter and Todd, was a sacrifice on the altar of precedence. She found Major Baxter distinctly dull although he was a banker and therefore, almost—. But her feeling for Captain Todd would have amounted

to plain dislike, if he had not been really too—, for any specific feeling whatever. Sometimes Dorothy was really quite too provoking,—but one couldn't say anything. She addressed her next remark to him as much to interrupt his conversation with Dorothy as to get answers to her questions.

"Is it really very serious, Doctor? So often any interruption in old people's routine—such a mistake I always think,—if Mr. Russell had consulted us, I'm sure—but so anxious to do his bit and all that—I hope there's no question about next Sunday. What *is* he suffering from—exactly?"

Low as was her opinion of the insignificant little doctor, she had not expected him to decline to tell her anything she chose to know. But that is exactly the course he took. He could not be certain what was the matter with Mr. Page, not having examined him, and if he had known he would not have told Lady Brador, or anybody else. Unfortunately it was this lack of willingness rather than the lack of knowledge which got stressed in his manner. He was feeling out of sorts after the unsatisfactory ending to his morning. In this cheerful luncheon party he felt depressingly alone.

Thenceforth Todd had to be content with her right shoulder. Dorothy was on his other side, and yesterday that would have been enough to make the meal pleasant. Today it merely emphasized his loneliness. She seemed able to enjoy herself; he could not.

He could understand feeling out of place with the Bradors, although the others did not. But it was hard that the same sense of aloofness should separate him from his brother officers, a decent, average crowd, quite undifferentiated from himself by birth and upbringing.

For a good many years he had accepted with resignation the impalpable veil which separated him from other men, but occasionally, this afternoon, for instance, it saturated him with depression. Why couldn't he enjoy Dorothy's society now? She was obviously willing to give him more than his share. Apparently the same quality which prevented him from being completely at home with Thomas' gaiety or Baxter's solemnity, barred him from enjoying the one person in whom he had found a perfect community of spirit,—except when conditions were almost impossibly ideal!

The officers were friends who liked him. The Bradors were all interesting in different ways. Lady Brador's disapproval worried him not at all, and Dorothy whom he loved and who loved him, sat a few inches away, acting exactly as he ought to have liked. And he sat there,—despondent, lost, hopeless!

When lunch was over he slipped away from the party and went up to his room. He looked at the writing table but there was no one in particular to be written to. He had no close relations except two older brothers, one in California and one in Winnipeg, whom he had not seen for years. Neither they nor his Howington friends would be particularly interested in hearing from him, until he got to France and saw something worth describing. He stretched himself on the couch and smoked, and for the first time for more than a year surrendered to despondency.

It was twilight when he walked down to the village to fulfill his undertaking to see Dr. Beringer. But Lady Brador's hints had vitiated his determination to give him all the facts. If Beringer were the court physician type, with different standards for Hall and village, the matter would bear more thinking over. There was no etiquette involved. All he had to think of was Dorothy's wishes, and Joan Page's feelings.

The thought of the beautiful girl in that little villa brought young Mackell to his mind. It cheered him slightly to recall the serene confidence between her and young Mackell under the strain of her father's breakdown. He wondered if they were connected with his lonely depression that afternoon,—they, and the reaction from that perfect, silent morning with Dorothy in the dim woods. Mental states like physical, had their sufficient causes. Those would have been enough, with perhaps a touch of indigestion. He almost smiled. An incongruous truth, that!

He decided to speak to Miss Page first, and then judge as to what he should tell Dr. Beringer.

She opened the door to him, and her slight but extraordinarily expressive smile warmed him. He felt like a doctor again, and as a doctor he was always cheerful.

"Father is in bed," she told him. "But he seemed better if Brian was near, so he's been sitting just outside the door. Just a minute." She went out to the stairs and beckoned Brian down.

Todd listened thoughtfully as they told him all they could about Mr. Page and his habits. He liked Mackell's unconscious assumption of joint responsibility. He would like to help them, but soon realized how helpless he was.

"Look here, Miss Page," he said slowly, "It comes to this: Your father is in a bad state,—nervously. Any man is, who has been living within himself and drinking too much. He will need expert attention, possibly now, certainly in the future, and for that you must rely on Dr. Beringer, not me. So I must absolutely decline any responsibility for your father's case, which means nothing, as he's already declined me. All I shall tell Dr. Beringer is what I have seen of your father,—very little, as you know. What you have told me, I will leave to you to tell when you consult him. I am sure Miss Brador will say nothing of the circumstances. But remember, you must not allow any considerations of privacy to influence you. I rely on you to call in Dr. Beringer the moment it becomes necessary, even against your father's will, otherwise I would feel it my duty to tell him everything now."

He paused, sympathizing with her disappointment. "In the meantime, while I cannot do anything for your father, I am still responsible for Mackell here, which includes his peace of mind while in this billet, considering that we haven't a chaplain!" He raised an eyebrow whimsically, watching Brian.

"So, Mackell, if you find yourself under any severe mental strain, or feel your self-control slipping, this is what you are to do." Slowly he outlined the possible developments in Mr. Page's case, and the safest ways of meeting them. It was all addressed to Mackell, but Joan, leaning forward, listened intently.

"That's all I can advise," he finished. "Now I'll be moving along to call on Dr. Beringer, and if you'll come up to the Hall and ask for me about nine tonight, I'll give you your medicine."

Brian walked home with "his" medicine that night at an average pace. When he thought of getting back to Joan, he walked quickly; when he tried to think over the problems they would have to face he walked slowly, and it averaged comfortably until he came to the post office.

In the light streaming from its window he could see a small group standing and talking. A voice hailed him. It was Morton's. "Well, if it ain't our prize invalid! Now we'll know all about it. Hey, Mac! C'mon here and meet the ladies."

There was no dodging it. He crossed the road, remembering to exaggerate his limp,—in case he needed it.

"Meet Miss Polly Dyer!"

Brian did so. She was a red-cheeked, black-haired maiden,—or old maid, who said rather challengingly: "How dee you do, Mr. Mackell," with an unquiet smile which was at once roguish and suspicious.

"And this is Miss Matilda Runke. I call her 'Tilly', don't I, dear?"

Matilda giggled, "You just dare!" but omitted to acknowledge the introduction owing to some further giggling excitement. The exact cause of it Brian could not see, the rays of light being discreetly limited.

"And this is Miss Janey Runke, sister of the beautiful lady mentioned in our previous issue. She's got red hair, but they ain't told me which of 'em's most bee-utiful, so I can't say."

"Cheese it!" said Janey. "And it's obun,—ain't you got eyes?"

"Howd yer gab!" put in a brusque voice which Brian recognized as Nott's. "Ah thowt we were going ter hear what coom on t'parson."

The words were addressed to Morton rather than to Janey, whom they had interrupted. Nott was dour and silent, but not ungallant. At that very moment, while his wooden countenance was staring at Brian, his arm was finding,—or seeking rather, a resting place around Janey's waist. She edged away toward the younger Morton, and the arm remained curved in space. Slowly it sank to his side; Nott's reactions were notably slow.

"Do tell us," begged Polly Dyer. "There's some as says he fainted, and some as says he's been an atheist for years and is writing a book to prove it, so he was struck down as soon as his foot touched holy ground, and some says—" Her voice fell to a lower pitch, "—says that he was drunk; and we all know that officer doctor was in to see him twice today. You'll know, Mr. Mackell. Which was it, now?"

Brian was glad that he'd been stopped. Here was some spade work to be done for the Pages, and it could be done with more effect right now,—and by himself, than would be possible later. He,—the supposedly unbiased observer, would be believed when nobody else would. Such information as he chose to give out here and now would have all the mysterious contagiousness of rumor, with the added power of incontrovertible authority at the source.

He limped into the centre of the group, and became one of the boys. "I'll say I know!" he averred importantly. "I've been in on it from the start, haven't I? You girls didn't know the old boy had heart disease, did you?"

Polly Dyer, leaning forward eagerly, her full red lips open in her eagerness to drink in the facts, interrupted to sustain her cherished reputation as the infallible heroine of the village phrase: "Polly says—."

"Oh yes, some of us knew about his heart," she said breathlessly, "even if we does prefer not to talk about other people's business, excep' when public property like now," she added hastily, not to stifle confidences.

Brian nodded to her admiringly as one of the inner circle to another. "Well, I know, anyhow. I was training to be a doctor when I enlisted,—isn't that right, Mort? Sure!—and I knew it the first minute I saw him. You can always tell about heart disease if you've had the training."

"Then just what did happen 's morning?" asked Matilda eagerly. "Oh don't!" she added in an impatient undertone, and again Nott's arm was left suspended, a lonely mechanical thing apparently quite unconnected with his expressionless face.

"I'll tell you what happened. This morning when he was about ready to start, I said 'I'll carry your bag, Mr. Page.' 'Thank you,' he said, 'I can manage very well.' 'No, you can't, Mr. Page,' I said. 'You've got a bad heart, and you'll have enough strain taking the service. I doubt if you ought to be doing even that,' I said."

"Then he turns a little pale, and says, 'Great Heavens! I thought nobody knew!' 'I know!' I said. 'So please let me carry that bag for you.'"

"So he thanked me, and I carried his bag, and before we'd gone more than a few yards he looked at me and said, 'You were right, Mr. Mackell, I can feel it.' And the farther we went the more it hurt him. You know how hearts are?"

The group nodded wisely. "Well, that's the way it was with him, feeling of faintness, severe pain, afraid of breaking down, but determined to stick it out for the sake of the congregation. But when we got right up to the church I could see from his face that he was all in, pale as death, he was, and sweat streaming from his face like water, gasping for breath, eyes screwed up as if he was being tortured. So I knew my duty, and I took him by the arm to help him, and I said, 'You come along home with me, Mr. Page, or you'll die in your own church!' He was suffering so much he couldn't resist, or even speak, and I took him home by the footpath to avoid the crowds,—they'd have made him worse, of course, and Miss Page put him to bed. But Captain Todd didn't see him,—he just happened to be coming to Number Five to see about my foot which I strained again last night. Mr. Page doesn't like doctors; I think they're against his religious principles, but I'm not sure of that.

"Then in the afternoon the Doc came down to strap up my foot, but he didn't even ask about Mr. Page, because he's very strict about professional etiquette,—you know how doctors are?"

Again the group nodded as one, enthralled by the vivid tale.

"Our Doc wouldn't butt in on another Doc's case,—except in a death-bed case like old Mary's when Dr. Beringer was away. And our Doc's a good guy,—knows his business. I've just been up to the Hall to get my liniment." He displayed the little bottle,—a convincing proof of the truth of everything he had said. But it was not needed. The story, as Brian had told it, carried its own conviction.

"My!" said Janey and Matilda in a breath.

"I thought that was just what it was," said Polly, setting herself to memorize each vivid detail. Suddenly she half turned. "Oh—," she began impatiently, as the mechanical arm came to rest on her waist, but checked herself and did not try to wriggle free.

The subtle current in the little group which had edged Nott from waist to waist had at the same time been moving Lance Corporal Fickler away from the imperceptible advances of Polly's amicable shoulder. Polly found the sleek corporal desirable, but Fickler had hitched his waggon to a Lieutenant's stars. He watched his step,—and this one took him out of reach. Her mind was too busy filling her reservoir of dramatic gossip, to feel more than a passing venom at his coldness, or to register more than a vague impression that Nott was better than nothing. In the end, when Brian hurried away, explaining that his foot was getting more painful every minute, and the group had formed column of route, the lonely arm rested, secure at last in an ample groove.

Brian might well feel satisfied with his evening's work. For whatever truer facts might be revealed in the future, and whatever their authority, they would never quite catch up to this original version among the people of Caster End.

He was thoroughly pleased with himself, and it was only the reminder of Joan's serious eyes which saved him from recounting his brilliant fiction with more gusto than would have been suitable for such a painful subject.

But her eyes approved what he had done, without reserve. "If Polly and the two Runke girls were there, it will be all over the village in no time, and they'll go on repeating it until they come to believe they saw a lot of it themselves, and they'll say so,—especially Polly. It was good of you to think of it so cleverly, Brian. We shan't be troubled much now,—for a little while."

She went out, tip-toed up to her father's room and returned. "He's asleep,—I think. I took the lamp and left it on the table on the landing, and he didn't move."

"Sit down, Joan. You've had lots of strain for one day." He half rose, holding out his hand. He wanted to touch her before

she went to the other armchair, and wished vehemently that there was a sofa or a chesterfield so that they could have sat together, and he could have kept his arm around her. He had not thought of it much before. Since their afternoon under the pines, the few quiet kisses which had come so naturally and without premeditation had contented him. But now it was emptiness to have her over there.

She took his hand, holding it against her cheek, smiling tenderly at him as she gently pressed him back into his chair, and he knew that she felt as he did. She drew up a low footstool and sat down at his feet, facing him. Her right elbow was across his knees, drawing them against her side as a support. Her velvety, dark eyebrows and long lashes were raised as the shining grey eyes lifted to his, and he trembled at the love and the loveliness in them. He bent quickly and kissed them, while her free hand curved round his neck and drew his head closer, until he feared his lips would hurt her soft eyelids, they pressed so hard. But for a full minute she kept them there with her firm clasp, and then, relaxing, smiled at him again, her left hand falling to his knees beside the other. He took them both in his and there they rested contentedly while they talked about themselves, the homes of their childhood, the home they would make for themselves—sometime—somewhere, and of their dreams, until it was time to go to bed.

Brian's dreams were nebulous,—of strange places, and happy moving beings, who wove swift inconclusive scenes by their activities, and talked to him as one of themselves in a manner which was meaningless, and yet somehow comprehensible. It was all colourless and vague so that he knew he was dreaming, until he wondered if it might be real,—and suddenly knew that he was awake.

He was awake,—and tense,—and listening for those nebulous voices. They faded, and as he listened grew near again. No, they were different,—they were real, faint but real.

He sat up, all his senses alert. Voices downstairs! One of them, high-pitched for a moment, he recognized. It was Mr. Page, and the words he had caught were "I will!". He opened the door and listened. There was a faint light coming from the old clergyman's door. He was speaking to Joan and again his voice rose, louder than before. "I tell you I must do their bidding!" Joan was protesting, but Brian could not hear the words.

Brian pulled his overcoat over the pajamas which he had found on his bed the second night, and went to the head of the stairs. Something was wrong. Mr. Page was giving trouble, and he guessed what it was. Captain Todd had warned him.

Once he and his room-mate at McGill had laboured through a distressful night with a young fool in their fraternity house who had earned delirium by a week of wild drinking. It would be horrible if Joan had to face anything like that. It had been bad enough even with two men to handle it.

He had no sense of intrusion as he came to Mr. Page's open doorway. He was too close to both father and daughter now. Rather, he felt as a son would have done,—that he should have foreseen this and been at hand more quickly. But relief was his first thought as he looked into the dim, candle-lit room. Mr. Page was sitting on his bed, clothed in his pajamas, with only the brightness of his staring eyes to show that he was not normal.

Joan turned apprehensively, as a board creaked, but the relief which swept over her face showed how much she needed him. He had only time to notice that she held a candle and wore a mannish-looking dressing-gown of some soft material, before grappling with the situation. For Mr. Page was looking at him,—not with normal surprise or resentment, but with enough suspicion to call for an immediate explanation.

"Good evening, Mr. Page," Brian said with matter of fact directness. "I hoped you were asleep, but I thought I'd come down and see if there was anything I could do for you. I was with you this morning when you were ill."

The old man's face cleared, and Brian guessed that he had not recognized him at first, or that he had forgotten their close association that day. "Is there anything I can do for you now, sir?" he continued, trying to give him time to get his bearings,—if that were still possible. "If so, you have only to say, because you've been so hospitable, taking me into your home, that I owe you a lot."

Mr. Page was not listening,—or at least not with sufficient interest to distract his attention from his immediate object. Brian saw for the first time that he had a half-laced shoe on one of his bare feet. He finished lacing it before he spoke, doing it earnestly, but without apparent excitement, although his hand was trembling. "I am going to the church," he stated, pulling on the other shoe.

"It's late for that, isn't it, sir?"

Mr. Page paused, looking fixedly between Brian and Joan at the large walnut bureau in the corner. "I must do as I am bidden," he said, and went on lacing up his shoe.

Brian felt helpless and afraid. There was a deadly commonplaceness about his words and actions which showed that he was living in another world. His glances toward the bureau were as intelligent and expressive as if he was looking at his own daughter. How could he be dissuaded from doing what "they" ordered?

Joan caught his eye and looked questioningly at her father's clothes on the chair beside her, and then at the candle.

Yes, that would be something gained. He could not go out without his clothes. It would be time gained. He nodded. Joan quietly blew out the candle, and there was a rustle.

"The candle's blown out, Mr. Page," Brian spoke up. "Don't be afraid. I'll find a light right away."

"It is nothing," was the indifferent answer. "I see well enough without."

When Joan lit the candle, her father had just finished lacing his shoe. The clothes had disappeared, but he did not notice that, or even look toward the chair. His impulse to dress, as part of the routine of going to church, seemed to be satisfied by the putting on of his shoes. Now he rose, took his prayer-book from the bedside table, and was ready.

"Are you coming?" he asked the bureau. "I will not fail this time."

In desperation Brian took his arm as he started toward the door. "Thank you, Mr. Mackell," said the old clergyman gravely. Then, as an afterthought, "Do you not find them very small?"

"What?" Brian parried. "I don't see anything—unusual, Mr. Page."

"The angels,—on the bureau. But perhaps not; they are extremely beautiful. What smiles they give us! They have obeyed God." He looked at Brian, his own lips reflecting the happy smiles. "We will go to the church."

Joan had closed the door when she put the clothes outside, and Brian, holding Mr. Page's arm, led him past it without resistance, and slowly round the room, talking quietly of the cold outside, the locked church, the late hour. When they turned he felt a more violent trembling and symptoms of resistance. Joan pushed the head of the bed from the wall, so that on their next round they were able to continue without the interrupting turn.

Slowly they paced round and round the room; Brian, his bare feet and blue pajama legs showing below a khaki overcoat, his bare neck and tousled head above; Mr. Page with creased pajamas hanging loosely, and his preposterous black shoes and prayer-book. The flickering candle threw strange shadows and lights, accentuating the tight drawn skin across his cheek-bones and distorting it into unreal textures and shapes. Only Joan's face was close enough to the candle to avoid the mysterious remodelings of the little flame. She was like a lighthouse of lovely sanity to Brian as he walked, stiffly slow, in a ghostly world of bright little angels which smiled and frowned, encouraged and threatened.

He talked interminably with the old man, trying to grasp fully his hallucinations and wean him from dangerous action by using the logic of his own illogical world, and all the time Joan's eyes gave him eloquent encouragement.

Except when she had moved, quickly and quietly, to remove her father's clothes or push out the bed, she had remained standing with the candle, serene, serious,—and comforting.

Her soft, fawn dressing-gown, with its brown silk cords knotted at the waist, heightened the brilliance of her dark hair. Its deep lapels emphasized the grace of her white neck, and, in contrast to its masculine cut, the nightdress brushing her bare instep lent a new and precious fragility.

Twenty times or more Brian circled the room while Mr. Page commented on the bright little angels, complained of the smell of incense, or reiterated his intention of going to the church,—all in an even, murmuring tone. He would pause while Brian answered, understanding the words but apparently not affected by them. At last, growing discouraged at the weary monotony which seemed to bring no change for better or worse, Brian led him to the bed and sat down, drawing him with him. "I think you ought to rest awhile, Mr. Page, or you'll get tired."

Without opposition, although trembling and quivering as he had done before, Mr. Page sat staring over at the bureau. His arm was still firmly in Brian's, and at no time had he seemed to resent it. Rather, he had shown the same acquiescence as he had that morning, acquiescence growing into conscious need when the arm threatened to be withdrawn.

Joan, still holding the candle, came and sat down on the far end of the bed. Her father trembled violently. "Keep her away," he shouted. "Keep her away," and pressed against Brian's side even after Joan went over to the chair. "She hates me," he explained in a lower voice, "because I have deserted her and shamed her and made her to be a household drudge. Vengeance is the Lord's, but he hath given it into her hands, and changed his angels into messengers of darkness. Watch her! Watch her!" he cried frantically. "Their black cross must not come closer, and if I remove my eyes they will reach me! Look how they thrust it on! Guard me from her! Oh Lord, have mercy! Bid them all spare me. It is Satan's cross, not thine. There is fire within it! They have betrayed thee! They are not angels! Oh God, destroy them! Save me! My eyes weaken, I cannot keep the cross away, if thou dost not aid me!"

He thrust forward the prayer-book as if to ward off the evil, and cowered behind his protector. His back was against the pillows now, and he was trembling so that the whole bed shook. Brian took advantage of his terror to throw back the bedclothes, push his legs under, and pull them well over him. It was something to have got him in bed again, while its suggestion of shelter made him more than willing.

Again he set himself to comfort and soothe the terror-stricken man, but it was harder now that the visions were evil. There was compensation in the fact that fear had driven out his obsession to go to the church, but that was all. The horror of those dark angels and their black cross shook him like an ague. In whatever position he lay or crouched, every muscle was taut and strained,—and above all, the muscles of his neck and face, as he strove to ward off the threatening evil with the agonized power of his eyes.

Wide and staring within their deep sockets, his eyeballs seemed to be as tight-stretched as his livid skin. And now for the first time, Brian, whose face was nearly touching that of the clinging man, saw that his skin was not the opaque ivory surface it had seemed. Under it were a multitude of tiny, distended veins,—a web of blood which combined with the livid skin to give the healthier appearance of parchment pallor.

If he had seen that skin as closely before, he would not have been so surprised at what the day had revealed.

He shifted his position a little. It was constrained and tiring sitting half sideways on the bed, braced against the old man's clutching, and as the muttered ravings went on and on and lost their power to move him by their very monotony, he felt that he was very tired,—body and mind. He had been under almost continuous mental strain since the morning, and he was unused to mental stress of any kind.

He yawned and had no free hand to conceal it. The momentary relaxation brought a revulsion. He grew impatient and disgusted with the pitiful figure clinging to him, with the whiskey-reeking breath, with the hypocrisy which peered out craftily sometimes, even in delirium.

It seemed as if the night would have no end. How much longer had he got to wait? The old chap wouldn't do himself any injury now, why not leave him alone to his fears? He had more than done his duty by him that day!

Duty, forbearance, sacrifice, were still abstractions to the young soldier whose life had been a pleasant and untroubled one. He knew the exact signification of the words. If pressed, he would have claimed that his conduct had never seriously offended in such respects,—without remembering how little it had been tested.

He was still only a boy. He had not yet come to a spiritual crossroads where he would have been forced to decide whether to outrage his own happiness for the sake of someone who could not add to it, or whether to act without compunction for his own advantage. When that choice should have been made,—whatever his decision might be,—he would be grown up. At present he was a boy, and because of the unaccustomed strain, a rather peevish one.

But one abstraction at least had begun to take form as a personal reality, and that was Love. When Joan's eyes took his exasperated thoughts from the father to the daughter, his impatience waned. He did not consciously tell himself that he must be kind to the one for the sake of the other, or even think about Joan's opinion of him. For the moment his feelings for Mr. Page and for his daughter were in separate compartments of his mind, but their incompatibility was so marked that the strong automatically displaced the weak, and he continued his determined efforts to comfort the old man, never realizing that there had been any other possibility.

It was a weary business. Mr. Page's trembling tension, and the rise and fall of his voice with the intensity of his visions, showed no sign of change. Brian, on occasions when he heard his own reassurances objectively, could have laughed at the inanity of them. It was incredible that a man should be comforted by them,—even in delirium, and yet they did have some effect, combined with his protective arm.

But at last he noticed a slight relaxation, some moderation of the terror in the voice. The long-continued muscular and mental exertion was having its effect.

When Mr. Page became almost quiet, Brian made a sign to Joan, and she went out quietly and returned with some whiskey and a dose of Captain Todd's medicine. Brian put it on the bedside table. "I can fix everything for you fine now, sir," he said confidently, and walking across to the bureau swept everything on it to the floor. He returned quickly to hold the glass to the old man's lips, and as he did so, blocked his view of the place where the dark angels had been.

For a moment Mr. Page hesitated, and then, finding his self-protective stare interrupted without any materialization of the threatening terror, he drank with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"There! All gone, you see!" said Brian, stepping aside for a few seconds. "And now I'll sit by you while you go to sleep."

He arranged the bedclothes sketchily to avoid disturbing his drowsiness, decided not to risk taking off his shoes, and sitting down beside the bed began to talk in a monotonous voice about the most uninteresting things he could think of. Except for a sign to Joan to put out the light, he did not stop his droning story until the old man's heavy breathing had slowly changed to snores. Then, preceded by Joan, he tip-toed out into the hall, leaving the door half open.

"Whew!" he murmured, drawing his arm across his forehead.

She glanced nervously behind and motioned him to the door of her own room opposite. She had taken him there before, because all her books were there, and because of them and the simplicity of its hangings and furniture, it had hardly seemed like a bedroom. It had been more tasteful, more characteristic of her, but hardly more intimate than the parlour downstairs. But now, as she lit the candle, everything was softened by its dim flame. Some clothes were draped limply over one of the chairs, the bedclothes were tossed back, the brown dress she had been wearing that evening hung on the cupboard door, a pathetic wisp of silk which he hardly recognized.

It was a bedroom now, and Brian had a new sense of intimacy and shyness. "We'd better wait for a few minutes," he whispered hesitantly.

"Please, Brian."

She had seemed a little surprised, and his eyes turned toward the door and back to hers, in a silent offer to wait outside.

She smiled at him with a slight shake of her head, took his hand, and led him to the little easy chair, then bent over and kissed him. He knew that she was both thanking him and showing that she trusted him, and his heart was full of gratitude and love. He kept her hand, and the other one which she gave him caressingly, as she sank down on the floor beside him.

"I'll wait ten minutes," he said firmly. "If he's still asleep then, he should be all right till morning. It hasn't been nearly as bad as it might have been, that's one comfort."

"I can't thank you, dear,—and I don't have to," she added with assured contentment, and paused. Then, laying her head restfully on his knee, "I love you, Brian."

He had no reply, but sat silently, with only a gentle pressure on her hands to show that he had heard. Gradually she relaxed. He felt the subtle softening of her arms and fingers. Perhaps she would go to sleep. The drowsiness had been so heavy on him only a few minutes ago that he was surprised to find no traces of it left. Instead, each nerve seemed strangely alive, his quiescent mind was illumined with a shining clarity which gave new intensity to the random thoughts floating through it, and made the homely objects around him more vivid and more foreign than reality.

It was happiness, unalloyed and undefined, and he knew only that it came from, the still figure at his knee.

Something of that limpid quality remained in his spirit after he had aroused Joan tenderly and gone upstairs to bed. Something of it was with him all the next day when, at Captain Todd's orders, he was freed to stay in his billet in case he

might be needed. The long hours of unobtrusive watching, the efforts to help Joan regulate her father's drinking without irritating him, were easy because of it. He felt as if all these tiresome little attentions and strains were less personal to himself, as if his personality were lifted to a plane where it was both more powerful and more distant. And the hours he spent talking to Joan brought him the same happiness as before, but clarified by perspective.

He did not find a convenient opportunity to get a nap during the day. He had not felt particularly sleepy, although he knew it would do him good,—especially if there were another wakeful night ahead. So bed-time was welcome when it came, and although he insisted that Joan should call him the moment her father showed a sign of needing her, instead of delaying as she had before, he hoped from his heart that the old man would allow them a quiet night.

But creaking sounds coming through his open door woke him. He did not know how long he had been asleep, and he was too wearily comfortable to look at his watch. He lay for a minute in snug lethargy before his mind began to work, and when it did, it slyly advised him to lie quiet,—suggested that Joan might merely be glancing in her father's door,—that he might not be called on,—if he didn't volunteer.

Complete lucidity brought a quick change. He scrambled out and pulled on his overcoat, grumbling at himself and Mr. Page beneath his breath. Joan had just reached the landing when he came out. She too looked sleepy, her eyes drowsier and her hair more ruffled than last night, when he had not seen her until she had been awake some time.

It gave her a softer, more earthly loveliness. He did not try to resist it, and kissed her more ardently than he had done since that day among the pines, and she too seemed warmly willing. They went down together to her father's room, their thoughts less on him than on themselves.

An hour and a half later they crept out. The nightmarish vigil had been almost a repetition of the night before, but this time Mr. Page was less violent, his hallucinations apparently less wild and terrifying. Brian had managed to keep him in bed, the physical restraint which had been necessary to do it had been acquiesced in rather than resisted, and the old man had fallen earlier into his restless sleep.

But although Brian was even more tired than before, as they stood hesitant, listening in the doorway of Joan's room, his brain had been too active to find immediate relaxation. When they were satisfied that Mr. Page's sleep was real, he went over to the easy chair, but the atmosphere was one of reality now, not enchantment. He hesitated about sitting down. It was the only comfortable seat in the room, and the question of politeness obtruded itself, as it had not done the night before.

The shade of their separate thinking vanished as she took his hand, kissed him, and smilingly showing him that she wanted him to sit. But this time there was less aloofness in their embrace, and as he sat down, his arms drew her with him, and she rested in them instead of on the floor. Her cheek, and lips lay against the side of his face, as though in a passive, never-ending kiss, and he could feel every slight movement of her body as she settled herself into perfect ease.

Even last night he had felt no greater happiness than this, but now it was more real, more comprehensible, and his mind worked in its ordinary channels, bringing a smile as he thought how each new experience of her brought the same feeling of a new and unsurpassed perfection.

At the motion of his cheek she moved her head enough to look into his eyes, and her lips parted in a soft, answering smile. He kissed them tenderly and pressed her closer to him, and they remained silent and motionless, while the old clergyman's stertorous breathing came through the open door, as if from another world.

Tonight Brian had no thought of how long they should wait until Mr. Page should be soundly asleep. He did not think of the old man at all. His body and mind were wrapped in Joan. The rise and fall of her breast on his grew slower and more gentle,—she was falling asleep, but he could hardly resist his surging impulses to crush her more closely to him, to look into her magic eyes, to feel the message of eager burning love which her arms and lips and eyes would give him.

But no desire, however fierce, could have made him disturb her sweetly trusting rest. Its tide ebbed, and he sat in quiet happiness, until he began to grow stiff and chilled. Then, exerting all his strength, he managed to rise with her still asleep in his arms and laid her very softly on the bed. He was triumphant at his success, and drew the bedclothes over her carefully, put out the light and went up to his room, deeply satisfied that he had forced his passion to give place to tenderness.

But he slept ill that night, and the touch of Joan's sleeping lips against his cheek, the lovely comfort of her body in his arms, haunted him wakefully, until the gray mist of morning began to creep into his room.

The officers' mess in the bull inn was crowded. For the first time all the Officers of the Regiment were there together. Colonel Markey's orders.

There had been no sun to dissipate the early gray mist, and now, although it was after two o'clock, it seeped into the room and added its pearly haze to the blue cloud of tobacco smoke in the packed Mess. Everybody was talking at once, asking the reason for the call, and guessing the answer. But there was only one answer which met the case. It meant a move,—at last.

Silence fell like an axe when the Colonel came in with Captain Blaikie. Those who had seats rose,—and sat down again at his gesture. He took the chair which had been kept for him, laid a handful of papers on the mug-ringed varnished table, lit a cigarette, and looked up. "Well, gentlemen, we move at last. Tomorrow morning,—early. I have just received orders from the Brigade. Battalion orders are being prepared now, and I will ask you all to wait for them, and to digest them thoroughly while you are together. In the meantime I would like to stress one or two of the points in them.

"First, the inspection this afternoon must be thorough and complete." He looked around the room meaningly. "Every article of every man's kit must be examined, and shortages supplied from the Quartermaster's stores before Companies are dismissed,—if it takes till dark.

"Next, I have put in orders, but I want you to inform your Platoons, personally, of my gratification at the behaviour of all ranks while we have been in Caster End. Nearly ten days of idleness—" He looked up, eyes twinkling at some audible signs of incredulity. "—of comparative idleness, without a single serious breach of discipline is a record of which the battalion may be proud. Please make it clear that I *am* proud, and that I expect all ranks will subdue any inclination to mar their record on this last night, when spirits may run a little high.

"Finally, I must repeat that this afternoon's inspection must be as thorough as if it were the last one before going into the front line. Orders give no indication of our movements after tomorrow's march, but experience leads me to expect anything! We may have another long period of preparation ahead, or we may find ourselves in for a fortnight of trains, boats, marches, ending up at the front, with no chance for another serious stock-taking.

"Thank you, gentlemen; that is all."

The crowd thinned. Everybody was pleased to be moving again. Some went into the Orderly Room, some to the Colonel's office, some outside to wait for the Orders.

Todd, with a careful smile on his face, and distress in his heart, wandered into the Colonel's office, and waited with concealed impatience for a chance to speak to him.

One after another the little group asked their questions and went out. Todd was about to speak when the Colonel looked up. "Hello, Todd! Sorry, but it's night work for you this evening,—you've had too easy a time so far!"

"I have, Colonel, and I only wanted to ask whether it would last for this afternoon. I've got a few—er—personal matters I'd like to attend to, unless I'm slated for any duty before dinner."

"Not a thing, Todd. Couldn't interrupt the inspection for treating ailments, but platoon commanders will make a careful foot inspection, and also take any complaints they can get out of the men as to physical condition, and every doubtful case will report to you at half past seven, when the men have had supper. Summers has let us have his garage for your consulting room. Sorry to spoil your evening, but there it is!"

Todd's smile had become a natural one while the Colonel spoke. "Don't worry about that, Colonel. I've got nothing to do in the evening,—not a thing,—but I'm glad to have the afternoon, so I'll be moving along."

His relief as he walked quickly back to the Hall reminded him of his freshman days. He could identify the exact sensation he had felt in his first year, just before leaving for his vacation, when the girl of the moment had telephoned saying that she had managed to get out of some duty engagement,—and he could come around that evening after all. Love at twenty, or love at forty,—it did not seem to be very different. The three months' vacation had loomed as an age then, bringing the same sense of conclusive separation which he now felt under the shadow of the great question mark of war.

But he must hurry. At present it was only he who was free. Dorothy, with her father and mother and Joyce, was to drive over to Lord Beeston's place for dinner. They would be leaving about four,—possibly earlier. He must get back well before that. He smiled a little sadly at the ingenuous castle he was building in the air,—just as he would have done twenty years ago, yet he could not feel that it was merely a wishful hope. Dorothy would want to stay at home for his last afternoon,—he could not be mistaken in that. And if she wanted it enough, she could manage it. They would have that little time together.

And what about it?

He slashed off an ox-eye daisy growing by the roadside. What then? What was he going to say? What on earth could he say? For all his eagerness for this afternoon with Dorothy, it might be just so much more constrained frustration. Only his first few talks with her, and that enchanted walk in the beech wood, had been altogether free from that chilling blight.

He had not loved, nor been loved, for many years, and he had been satisfied. How right he had been! For now that love had crept into his heart, it brought more torment than happiness. In those few days while the hope of it had been growing, he had been happy; and when it was his,—certain and beautiful, although unspoken,—it had brought misery!

He was ready to give some years of life for this afternoon alone with Dorothy,—and afterwards he would probably be ready to give a few more years of life,—to blot out the memory! What fools men were!

But the cold mirror behind all his hopes and doubts and emotions showed that the most foolish thing of all would be to ask her to marry him. She would be as foolish if she accepted him, so she would probably refuse. But she might be hurt; she was wise enough to be content with the happiness of sharing their unspoken emotions. It would be cruel to spoil that sweetness by clumsy demands for the impossible.

His reason told him that it was impossible. They could be happy for a time, and then the fundamental difference of their environment and traditions would begin to tell as the first fervor waned. What could he offer her in Canada comparable to what she had now? A restricted, comfortless village life, without a quarter of the amenities which even Dr. Beringer had. Even the blessing of friendship would be wanting. He himself, though born and bred in the district, had no real intimates. The years away at college, the broadened outlook he had gained there, and the skeptical twist of his mind,—a quality which Dorothy shared,—had prevented real intimacies with any of his groove-thinking, faith-soaked friends. In Howington Dorothy would be far lonelier than he had ever been. And there was nothing very different from Howington to hope for. Battalion Medical Officers did not have much chance for spectacular achievement to raise them out of their pre-war spheres. They could get decorations, they could get modest promotion, and they could get killed!

If he did get killed, and they had been engaged, what a mess he would have made for her! All the acid opposition of her family,—perhaps the veiled contempt of her friends,—the innuendos and spiritual discomforts she would have to bear,—all for nothing, except a public rather than a private grief. He frowned bitterly, as the dark cloud of depression settled on him. If he were such a fool as to let her become engaged to him, he would bring less misery to her dead than alive,—in the end.

When he reached the Hall, the torturing indecision had so benumbed him, that he almost decided to go to his room, and let Dorothy go off to her dinner party without telling her that it was their last day together. He knew there would be no chance of seeing or talking to her alone, except this. The battalion was to march at eight next morning.

But Dorothy's sitting-room overlooked the drive. He did not have a chance to go to his room to brood over his decision. As he crossed the entrance hall, she was coming down the stairs, waving a cheerful greeting. "I thought this was such a terribly important parade! Did you desert, or didn't they need a Medical Officer? And what's the news of the war?"

He looked into her eyes. "The worst news I could have had, Dorothy. We march tomorrow at eight."

Dorothy had nothing to say. The gaiety went out of her face. She stood quite still, looking at him.

"I'm free all the afternoon," he went on desperately. "The others will be busy, but my work doesn't start until half past seven. I asked the Colonel that, particularly."

Dorothy was thinking. She did not need his troubled eyes to spur her. She wondered if her own looked as miserable, while calculating her next move. Whatever happened, she would not go to the Beestons! and probably something would

happen, because Lady Beeston had arranged the affair some time ago,—and largely for her, and her father and mother took these semi-formal social interchanges very seriously.

"Well, I can't let you spend your last afternoon alone," she said at last, managing to speak lightly. "I'll have to beg off the Beestons. We were to leave in about an hour, I think. I should be able to work up a nice headache by then!" Her light tone changed in spite of herself. "It won't be difficult, I'm afraid, Joe.

"You'll be in the dining room?"

He nodded, and she turned upstairs again to her room.

Somehow she was feeling almost more sorry for Joe than for herself as she lay down on the couch. What did he want? What did she want? What could they do, other than drift on powerful currents far beyond their control? If they did nothing, they would be swept apart. If they were going to resist, they must make the stand now. An irrefutable intuition told her that everything was NOW. If they temporized and hoped for some solution to turn up, the forces of war and circumstance and time would settle it without consulting them.

She could make him ask, even if he felt that his duty lay in silence. The strength of the emotion which had laid his heart bare to her,—and hers to him, without a single spoken word, without a single kiss,—would put each at the mercy of the other, if either chose,—duty or no duty.

She sighed. In truth, it had not been hard to attain the headache she had laughed about!

Lady Brador knocked and came in briskly. "Lying down, my dear? Nothing the matter? Have to get dressed soon. Father's always in terror,—such a car!—he really needn't worry—it's a wreck, but it does run,—I'll say that for it,—it won't take us two hours! but he always thinks so.

"Headache?"

"Quite a headache, Mother. I'm just lying quietly for a while."

"Too bad! Cologne—and a rest—I'll tell Ann to get it for you."

She let her mother go without further explanation. It would be easier when it was too late for much explanation and expostulation. She would not descend to feigning serious illness,—subterfuge was too distasteful to her. They would have to make the best of a headache.

She lay back and thought. It would have been almost a relief if Joe had been the sort of man to force things his own way with a high hand. But he wasn't,—and if he had been, she would not love him as she did.

When at last the restrained but bitter little scene had been played to a finish, and she could hear the old Vauxhall throbbing down the drive, Dorothy waited with closed eyes for the agitation of her heart to still. "Scenes" were disgusting things. She had told her mother that she was not going to the Beestons, in such a decisive way that she must have realized from the start that argument was useless. She certainly knew her own daughter's character well enough for that! But it had taken her half an hour to submit to the inevitable, and then she had enlisted her husband and taken pains to rouse all his fretful obstinacy. And Sir James Brador was as obstinate as his daughter was firm. In their rare clashes, victory depended simply upon advantage of position. Neither could ever move the other, so matters always remained in status quo,—to the advantage of the one who wanted it. In this case Dorothy, being determined to stay where she was, there had been nothing for her father to do. But it had been extremely unpleasant, because they had heard the news and knew about Captain Todd's return. Her motive was even plainer to them than she had expected, and her reiterated, "I have a headache. I will not go out today," had only incensed them. She had said practically nothing else, and admitted nothing, but her mother's innuendos and her father's blunt reproaches had showed painfully clearly what they thought about her humiliating infatuation for an ill-bred, scrubby little doctor fellow.

She had maintained her appearance of cool determination throughout but it had left her spirit taut and quivering, and her body limp. She lay with closed eyes for a while, trying to ridicule herself out of her weakness, with only moderate success, until Maddox knocked at the door.

"Ann said you had a headache, Miss Dorothy, and I wondered if there was anything you would like?" He paused

thoughtfully. "Tea, now, Miss Dorothy,—that would be good for you, if you feel like it."

"I suppose so," Dorothy said without much interest.

"I can tell Ann to serve it here. It's not very entertaining I know, but perhaps—" Maddox appeared to be searching his brain for some device for enlivening her. "—yes, I think Captain Todd is in,—perhaps you would like to give him tea. I am sure he wouldn't mind, and he would be a more amusing guest than a—headache."

Dorothy smiled at him gratefully. "You're a genius, Maddox!"

"Don't talk please, Joe! I'm going to have my tea before I say a word."

Todd had given her a quick glance as he came in,—a searching, medical glance. Maddox had said that she had a headache. For the moment he was both doctor and lover. As she made a motion toward the tea table which Ann had drawn close, he touched her wrist lightly, as though to prevent her and feel her pulse at one and the same time. He held it just long enough to note the quick, staccato beat, and laid it decisively on her lap. "I will only speak to prescribe complete rest," he said firmly, and pulled the table a few significant inches away from her.

Then, drawing up his own chair, he poured out the tea. He was accustomed to the routine in his own bachelor establishment, and he was not afraid of worrying her by any clumsiness. He placed a small table at her side, with her cup on it, offered her the toasted crumpets, and sat down to eat in silence.

The silence suited him as much as her. The major decision was still to be made, although these minor activities had veiled it consolingly.

The silence was not broken, but it gradually dissolved as the tea, and Joe Todd's unobtrusive attentions, banished Dorothy's headache and raised her spirits. With that trace of the physician in his manner had come a sense of strength which was very comforting. When she rang to have the tea things removed, she had recovered from the scene with her family, but there still remained the deep undercurrent of melancholy which the news of his departure had brought. It was difficult to talk. What was there for her to say? With an effort she could have sustained a cheerful conversation about nothing in particular, but she resented the idea,—it would be far more distressing than the most painful silence could be.

And so after the brief remarks about their recent doings, which had come naturally with the influence of the tea, they found themselves sunk in a silence more complete than before. Joe Todd made one or two half-hearted efforts to find some topic which would lead them back to the frank easiness of two days ago, but nothing he tried sounded convincing, even to himself, and after Dorothy's replies came silence again. It was hard talking. He did not want to talk without having something to say, and if he talked he could not be thinking,—trying,—trying desperately to decide what that something should be. Soon he gave up all pretence of conversation and concentrated on reasoning out his course, while an ormolu clock on the bookcase ticked and plagued him with its sickening message.

Dorothy watched him, impotent to help, disgusted with herself, seeing in the shadow which settled more and more darkly on his face the reflection of her own soul. She felt the same unity with him as had joined them under the beeches, but instead of unity in the rapture of unquestioning love, it was a common misery at love under the pitiless questioning of doubt.

At last he rose, walked up and down the room half a dozen times, and sat down again, drawing his chair close to the couch from which she had not moved. She could see that motion had not helped him; the frown was still there. It vanished for a space as he took her hand in both his, sitting with his elbows on his knees and looking down at her. His touch comforted her, and she put her other hand on his to comfort him. She felt that the almost impersonal touch of his hands was a seeking for relief, and she yearned to give it to him,—and to herself, but she did not know what to do. The bleak shadow fell across his face once more, wringing her heart. By pressing his hands just a little tighter, by exerting the gentlest pull upon his arms, by the slightest uplift of her face, even by a message in her eyes, she could end all this anguish. She knew it, she felt it, she craved it,—but she could not move. It was as though two walls were closing in upon her. A step to the right or left would free her, but some paralysis of doubt prevented her deciding which,—and the walls kept closing in.

Joe Todd was but dimly conscious of the hands he still held, or of their coldness which his light clasp did not prevent. His mind was hopelessly lost in a labyrinth of conflicting duties, of frantic efforts to pierce the future, to assess the unknown, to do that right thing which could be neither right nor wrong until the future should bring forth its judgment of the past.

Deeper and deeper he floundered in the spiritual quicksand where there was never a foothold on right or wrong, on happiness or unhappiness. His only desire was to do his duty, and there was no uncertainty as to what it was,—to ensure for Dorothy and himself the greatest portion of happiness. But there were thirty years of their probable life to consider,—thirty years, each one of which might be happy or sad, according to what they decided now, under the strong emotion of love,—which must inevitably wane. And he could not decide which course would lead to the greatest happiness, he could not feel where his duty lay, he could not summon that directing voice which would tell him to speak or remain silent, which would make clear whether his desire for her was a temptation to be resisted or a true impulse to be obeyed.

It was horrible to think that all their love should end in nothing but this anguish of indecision! His eyes, which had been unseeing before, turned upon the subject of his thoughts, and for the first time since the silence had enfolded them, he saw her,—the sweet and so human woman who embodied all the abstractions of happiness and misery which were rending him. He loved her! His hands quivered as the sensation of her cool flesh became a conscious reality. He loved this girl,—body and soul, who lay close to him on the sofa, and looked at him with pale blue eyes which were so eloquent of living love, and despairingly useless as a guide.

It was this Dorothy,—his Dorothy, whom he must make happy. But would she be happiest through the long years with him, or without? Would he, for the rest of his life, have to reproach himself for transplanting her into a soil where he should have known she could not flourish? Or would he,—and she, be able to conquer the disabilities of incongruity and environment with contentment? His long-restrained breath came out with a deep, unconscious sigh as the vacillations, doubts, and fears flooded in again, and decision seemed to grow more elusive, the harder he sought it.

Dorothy, feeling the tremor of his hands, hearing the hopeless sigh, could have wept at her impotence to help him. She, the reliable, practical, managing mind of the family,—she, who always acted promptly, sensibly, firmly, because she always knew, or felt that she knew what was right and best,—she, to lie there as weakly helpless as a feeble-minded child, because she could not decide,—anything! If only she had less of that balanced common sense, she could do *something*. She had felt his passion when he looked at her, when his faintly quivering hand had touched her wrist she only had to press it to her breast—and he would follow. She could give the unhappy man whom she loved so much, that rapture, she could experience it herself,—and then—what? Must they part? What would their memories be? Should they bind themselves?—what bitterness might ensue,—bitterness that he would realize, and share. How much deeper his fear of death must be then! How wasted all the misery! And if they married, could she at thirty, go to that raw new country and force herself into happiness, once the first flush of love was past? For if she could not, his life would be damaged as much as hers. His unspoken devotion to duty was too strong. There would be remorse, regrets, an assumption of responsibility for her unhappiness even though the decision had been really hers.

She gazed at him, and his wandering eyes met hers again, the tight misery of his mouth relaxed, and once more she felt the faint pressure of his hands. She was exhausted. In another minute, if she could not regain control of her will, the tears which were dimming her eyes would be on her cheeks.

A knock on the door.

Joe pushed his chair back a few inches, and clasped his hands on his knees again. After all this time their clasp had been so light that her hands were hardly disturbed when he moved! After all this time,—the harvest-time of their love, that slight movement of his chair served to re-set the scene for inquisitive eyes!

She swallowed her tears and set her lips tightly. "Come in," she said.

After a perceptible pause Maddox opened the door. "Archdeacon Bannerman is here, Miss Dorothy. He has driven over from Norwich. I explained that Sir James and Lady Brador would not be home until late, and he asked me to say that he would be obliged if you would give him the opportunity of discussing certain parish matters with you."

"I suppose I'll have to," Dorothy said wearily. "But the poor old dear will find an awful lot to talk about!"

"And have you any instructions about dinner? It is now a quarter past six."

Dorothy looked at him ruefully. "I suppose he'll have to stay, Maddox, after coming all this way. Tell him I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Yes, Miss Dorothy."

As the door closed, Joe Todd rose. His mind felt tired and empty, washed coldly bare by the scouring whirlpool of reasonings and doubts. The whole business seemed settled anyway. Something like relief cloaked the full depth of his sadness. It was over!

"I'd better go along," he blurted out. "And in case I don't have another proper chance—" He put out his hand. "—good-bye." The mute wretchedness of her eyes overbore him. "Oh God!—it's on my head, Dorothy,—if we're wrong,—forgive me,—never think I don't love you."

He bent and kissed her so swiftly that her lips could hardly form to welcome his,—to murmur, "Forgive me, Joe," before he was gone.

The rain which had been threatening all morning had begun to fall. Brian and Joan watched it from the cramped little bay window of the parlour. "You've been lucky, Brian," she said. "This is the first rain since you've been here,—ten days, and it's only a drizzle now!"

Brian looked at her. "I've sure been lucky!"

She smiled a thoughtful, contented smile, which seemed to savour the meaning of his words, although the answer ignored it. "Father seems better, don't you think? I think he's gradually getting back into his ordinary routine. I'm sure that will be best for him, he's too old for any real change, I'm afraid. If this horrible war will only let me have you for another few days, I will feel safe,—about Father. Things may settle down about the way they were before." She looked meditatively out of the window and added softly, "Except that I'll be a thousand time happier, with a thousand new hopes and dreams."

Brian touched her hand, and they gazed at the misty rain together. He felt as if a spell was on them, as if their souls were whispering together. Although only her shoulder was touching his,—and lightly, they seemed closer than ever before, merged in indescribable contentment. The exciting currents of hope and fear alike were stilled in the depths.

Each day with Joan brought some new wonder of experience. He did not analyse or understand them, but gradually he was gaining from them some groping comprehension that there was a design of life.

Standing between the faded green curtains they watched the rain falling, and did not speak until the clink of Mr. Page's glass in the dining-room recalled them. "Do you know, Joan," he said, hardly conscious of the long pause, "I think if you put a little water in the whisky bottles, before he has them, it would be a good idea. If you watered it by, say an eighth, he probably wouldn't notice it, and if he stuck to the same amounts it would mean that he would actually be drinking an eighth less!"

She nodded thoughtfully. "I'll try that, Brian, but I'd better put in less water at first,—I'm so afraid of his feeling any distrust of me. And if you're going out, you'd better go now before it rains any harder. It's not going to stop. I'm so glad I got my walk this morning. I get absolutely suffocated if I'm in all day."

With his coat collar about his ears, Brian went out into the village street. There were more villagers about than usual, and quite a few of the Montreal boys, too, in spite of the drizzle. He had had a vague idea that they were out on one of the route-marching or trench-digging jaunts which the Colonel was so keen about. But he had hardly given the matter a conscious thought during the day. He had been too occupied in keeping an unobtrusively companionable eye on the old clergyman, and enjoying the hours with Joan,—including one devoted to silver and brass polish, which had given them both a lot of amusement.

Morton hailed him from the yard of the Bull. "Hello! How's yer pore, delicate constitootion today? Heluver day for a general inspection, eh? Betcher we'll march off in a good old souser tomorrow."

"Where are you going to march to?" Brian asked. "You'd think the old man would admit we were hardened by now."

"To Death or Glory!"

Brian laughed. He had not yet realized that practice route marches were things of the past. "Any rumors when we move on?"

Morton stared. "Ain't you seen Orders, Mac? Well, I'll be jiggered! You bin wrapped in the lap of luxury too deep, young feller! And just as well to make the most of it, too. Tonight's your last night in sheets, and don't you forget it! And you're a damn sight luckier than I've been, to have 'em at all.

"Marching orders,—parts unknown,—eight thirty tomorrow morning. We bin inspecting and messing about all the afternoon. You'd think we'd be in France tomorrow! while prob'bly we'll be stuck in the next village for another week. I'm getting good and sick of it, I can tell you. I didn't sign up for a nursemaid to a lot o' bloody horses!"

He hurried off to the stables, leaving Brian standing in the rain. It was so unexpected that he did not know whether to believe it. Morton was an unreliable beggar, anyway,—too much of a joker. He went in to see Sergeant Stringer.

Within five minutes he was hurrying back to Number Five, angry and troubled. It was true! That was bad enough, but Stringer, in the strained atmosphere of the overworked Quartermaster's Stores, had found time to curse Brian heartily for not knowing it, for skrimshanking, for not reporting for inspection parade. He had ignored the fact that it was his own duty,—theoretically, to have seen that the orders got to Brian, who was officially, though temporarily, under the Quartermaster. He had told him to hustle and report to his Platoon, and not try to work any alibi out of his nominal job in the Stores.

Brian had told him to go to Hell,—in the kind of voice which can be understood by the lip movements, but cannot be heard, and therefore is not evidence, and had got out seething. He knew very well that he could not have remained unaware of the new orders whether he had been notified or not, unless he had been so completely immersed in his own private affair,—and private affairs wouldn't go far with Lieutenant Wells!

When Joan opened the door for him he did not feel in a fit state to tell the truth. "Got to turn out for a kit inspection," he explained briefly. "The idiots never thought of notifying me. It's been going on for two hours. I'll get merry Hades!" He grinned reassuringly, already restored by Joan's mere presence, and hurried upstairs to stuff his things in his kit bag and pack. She was still in the hall when he came down, looking at him questioningly, but he was not going to explain now. "I'll be back about half past six, I expect," he said as he went out, "but don't worry if I'm a bit late,—and don't hold up supper for me."

"Where the Devil have you been, Mackell?" Sergeant Valentine asked angrily, as he climbed the stairs into Runke's sail loft.

"What the Devil do you mean strolling in at this time of day?" snapped Lieutenant Wells, straightening up from his inspection of a pair of calloused feet to receive Valentine's report of the culprit.

"Why the Devil didn't you keep your ears open?" his section Corporal,—Stainer, demanded furiously, with a premonition that in the end he would be the scapegoat for Brian's absence.

With surly speed Brian went to work to catch up with the inspection, keeping his mouth tightly shut despite ample provocation from N.C.O.s and pals, all in a state of irritation at the conflicting demands of speed, red tape, and thoroughness. He was determined that nothing he said or did should jeopardize the freedom of his evening, and by the careful inconspicuousness which he managed to maintain by convenient lapses of memory as to shortages in his kit, he did succeed in getting so merged into the busy confusion that his character as delinquent was lost sight of.

At half past six the platoon was dismissed. Brian, keeping well in the centre of the group, edged toward the gate of Runke's yard, and as soon as nobody with stripes or stars was in sight, slipped out and made for "home." It was his billet; he had no other orders; everything was absolutely correct,—but he was taking no chances!

—2—

Not until after supper did he tell Joan. Not even when he was alone with her washing dishes in the kitchen would he answer her insistent "why" in connection with the sudden, long inspection. But his refusal told its own story.

"You are going away, Brian!" she said, as soon as they were together in the parlour and Mr. Page settled in the dining-room. "When is it?"

"Tomorrow morning,—eight o'clock."

They stood there, mournfully silent. He watched the melancholy surmise slowly disappear from her eyes as they came back from the distances of the future. She was looking at him now,—loving him, and her arms were rising. He bent his head to receive them. "It won't be for long," he whispered. Her thick, crisp hair pressed against the side of his face and lips as he kissed her half-covered ear, breathing softly again, "It won't be long, darling."

For long minutes they stood holding each other gently but closely, speaking no more, but thinking of a future separation which was so veiled by this present sweetness that it could not dismay them. But not until Mr. Page had gone to bed, and

the subtle restraint of his silent presence in the other room was removed, did he kiss her again and speak of what had been in his mind all the evening.

Joan had sat down on the footstool again, beside the big chair, but he did not resume his old place. It had been perfect to sit there, her shoulder against his knee, holding her hand, leaning forward occasionally to touch her hair or brow with his lips, talking in a desultory way, but often silent. It had been wonderful, all these evenings, but this one was different. It was their last,—and almost gone. Only a few minutes were left for everything which had been left unsaid, for all the happiness which had been missed, for every emotion which they had not yet shared. Just a few minutes!

He stooped, put his hands under her arms, and raised her to her feet. "I want you closer, Joan," he pleaded. "There's so much more to tell you,—and for you to tell me."

She understood, and smiled and put her arms round his neck, and as he sank into the chair, settled herself naturally in his arms, as she had done that night in her room. Her forehead was resting against his chin when she was comfortable, and she looked up to ask him, "Is that close enough, dear?" and then reproved him gently.

"You mustn't ask me things as if you were afraid of me, Brian darling. I *love* you! Isn't it funny," she went on, "that only a few days ago I had to almost bully you to make you promise to ask for what you wanted!"

"Thank Heaven I'm not one of these Lord Chesterfield fellows, Joan! If I'd been a little more polite, or unselfish or something, I'd never have promised, or I'd have promised and not kept it,—and then—"

"And then—what, Brian? I wonder what we would have been doing,—and feeling, now,—on your last night."

"It's hard to say,—these 'ifs'! No, it isn't,—not when you come to think of it. It's obvious. I couldn't have lived with you for ten days and not fallen in love with you, you know I couldn't, Joan,—nobody could. So I'd have been loving you just the same, and if I loved you, even I couldn't be such a fool as not to tell you. The difference would be that we shouldn't have seen enough of each other for you to love me,—and that would have been one Hell of a state of—Sorry, sweetheart,—the language just slips out after a year with—"

She stopped his apology by pressing her fingers firmly on his lips. "It would have been just that,—so it's not swearing! But it couldn't have happened, dear,—I don't think. There were little things about you from the very start which made me think of you as different, so even if we hadn't talked much, I don't see how I could have helped loving you,—by now."

"Then maybe we'd have been just where we are now,—only probably it would have been the first time. I mightn't have had the sense to tell you, until I knew that it was my last chance."

"We'd have missed a lot of happiness, Brian."

He hugged her tightly. "It doesn't bear thinking about! And I owe it to you, sweetheart, all of it. It makes me want to love you more than I do,—but I can't."

"Joan."

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't you think we ought to have been a little more—formal?"

"No, dear!"

"Yes we ought! There's one formality we—I forgot. I never really thought about it properly, until now,—when I'm going away. I've forgotten to ask you to marry me!"

She looked at him, smiled, and laid her head down on his shoulder again, as if it was not a very important matter to bother about. It was an unconscious confession of faith in him, so innocent, so sublime, so changed from her reserved invulnerability when they first met, that it was some minutes before he could speak again. "And now you seem to have forgotten to answer whether you will marry me or not!"

"I will, dear."

"When?"

"Whenever you like."

The problem faced him now,—squarely, for Brian knew that the solution lay with him. His day-dreams had been luminous with happy visions of Joan,—as his wife, they had even talked of the things they would do—when they were married, but the actual details of how and when to get married had never seemed important.

And there would be problems! He was in the army. He would be going to France sometime. It was too late to get married before he left Caster End. If only he had another week!

But after a little more thinking, he realized that part, at least, of their problem was already solved. It was unquestionably decided that they would get married as soon as they possibly could, and that meant on his next leave. They always gave leave before a battalion went to France. Then they would be safe. He felt sure that if the worst came to the worst and he was killed, Joan would be less sad if they had been married. With the drawing aside of her reserve, he was learning much of her aloneness, and of her single-minded strength of purpose. It filled him with wonder and humility to know that since he had entered her inner life, no other single soul shared it with him. Yes, whatever happened, she would be happiest married, and if he died there would be a pension. His coming would have brought her something beside a memory of happiness and tragedy. Only the "how" remained to be settled, and that was in the hands of the brass-bound fates. He could do nothing about that now.

"Joan," he said, "I feel we should get married just as soon as I can get leave, don't you? You wouldn't mind being left alone, until the war's over?"

"It's what I would like best of all, Brian, but only if you really want it. I want to do what you want. If you feel that we should wait until the future is—is solidier,—your work,—after the war,—I want to do what you want most,—or think best."

He had a momentary vision of the elm-bordered campus of McGill, a momentary qualm at the thought of those years of study before he could become a doctor,—the added years before he could earn a living by it. But there was no reality in the vision, it was part of another world,—a past, not a future world. With the war engulfing the whole world, anything might happen. It was crazy to plan for years ahead,—to think of sacrificing any certain happiness for a problematical career in a profession which he did not care much about anyway.

"I want it, Joan. It's tempting fate to bother about the future. We'll have difficulties to face, but we can handle them better if we know how we stand, and handle them together."

Her shining eyes thanked him. "I wish I deserved you more, Joan," he sighed. "But I'll try, sweetest, honestly I will. I'll never let you down, whatever happens."

"I know that, dear. That's why I had to love you."

For a while they talked,—a medley of practicalities and dreams blended into a future which might never come, until he felt her head heavier on his shoulder, heard the drowsiness in her voice, and felt his feet suddenly cold and stiff. It must be very late. He set her on her feet and, taking their candles, they went upstairs.

Mr. Page's door was ajar as usual. They listened, but his heavy breathing was slow and regular. He put his candle on the little table on the landing, placed hers beside it, and took her in his arms. It was almost their final good-bye. His throat felt constricted as he embraced her, at first tenderly, then fiercely, as the thought of parting beat on his brain.

They *had* to part. Nothing could save them. They had to—they had to. He held her to him passionately. They had to part,—perhaps forever. He kissed her lips, her hair, her eyes. They had to part! He felt her lips seeking his, unsatisfied, trembling. They had to part! He was responsible. She trusted him. She loved him. She had put her spirit in his hands,—defenseless. And they must part,—now! It was long after the time when her father had needed them before. That would not bring them together again tonight. They must part now.

They had come closer to her open door, moved by the power of his embrace, drawn by her clinging arms. He had not asked,—she had not consented. His mind was smothered with emotion; he could only feel and desire, and their spirits were so merged that her desires were his. He could not separate them, could not know what she wanted, could not think for her, could not think for himself. His body felt strong and more demanding than he could understand. Hers, clinging, sighing, seemed more weak. They were meaningless. They were straws sinking in this warm torrent of love. They were

nothing.

He felt her hand once more trying to draw his lips closer to hers, and as the overpowering strength of his kiss bent her body backward in spite of her eagerness to meet it, that one difference between them,—his strength,—her weakness, fell into the balance. For a moment he thought clearly, as the scales tipped. Now—he knew, and the sense of the beauty of perfect love uplifted him above the anguish of frustration.

His arms loosened sufficiently for him to look into the sweet helpless eyes. He kissed her again, holding her more tenderly, and released her quickly, taking her two hands and pressing them to his lips, and dropping them.

She leaned against the doorway, flushed and breathless, her eyes moistly bright, and looked at him.

He had meant to go, but her loveliness overcame him. He took her once more, kissed her ardent lips vehemently, murmuring "Good-bye,—my darling—my darling!" and at last tore himself away, and without looking back went quickly upstairs. Joan watched him, her lips still shaped for his kiss, heard his door close, walked in a vision to her bed and sat down on the edge.

For ten minutes she sat there, smiling dreamily, and flooded with the glory of love. When she got up and slowly undressed, the commonplace routine gradually brought her spirit to its normal plane. She was understanding now,—consciously as well as subconsciously, the sweetness and the bitterness of that parting, the hot strength of his desire which she had shared in an ineffable contagion. It had passed. For all its splendid reality, it had passed. Her own emotions as she quivered in his arms were hardly credible now, and yet they had been as real as anything she had ever felt,—and she knew that she would believe again, whenever Brian chose.

She stood in her nightdress, doubtful and wondering, hardly knowing what was in her mind, until the cold draught touched her and she shivered. She went toward the bed, but instead of getting in, something made her take her warm dressing-gown from the cupboard, and put it on before lying down on the quilt.

But when her head touched the cold pillow she understood and faced the reason for her indecision. The passing of her own dazzling unity with Brian had left her mind clear to realize more fully what he must have felt. In those lovely, terrible minutes, he had been tender and understanding when she was swept with uncomprehended passion. He had been merciful when she had not known that she needed mercy. His love had been fine enough to fight her battle for her,—against himself. He was going away. He might be killed. She might never see him again, never again feel his lips and arms, except for tomorrow's hurried, agonizing farewell, when every tick of the clock would be a stab, and misery would drown the sweetness. He knew it, as she did, and he was lying upstairs wanting her!

She turned on her side, and the tears which had been gathering unnoticed in her eyes trickled down her cheeks. She pressed her face into the pillow to try and stop them. There were only six hours before he would be out of reach of her arms, beyond the comfort of her love. And he must lie upstairs alone, and she must lie here, loving him,—and withholding the only thing he had ever wanted of her which she had not been even more eager to give. She had made him promise to ask her for anything he wanted, and he had broken his promise,—because he knew that in those minutes she had lost the power and desire to refuse him.

But now she was mistress of herself. She had made him promise to ask for what he wanted, because she had not known what things to offer him. But in this greatest thing of all, she knew,—she knew and yet did not give. His last memory of their love would be happy, unreproachful,—but would there be a shadow? And if he died, if they were divided,—inexorably,—eternally, it would never pass,—from her. Never—never!

Certainty filled her suddenly. She sat up. What a waste of time this anguish and self-pity! That sickening vision of her soul, if Brian should never return, flayed her heart and melted her doubts. She wanted to spend those last hours in his arms, to give him every sweetness that could be squeezed from their love, to merge herself with his desire again, and share it; and when they said good-bye tomorrow, and he passed into the distance on the long road south, to watch him through the unclouded crystal of perfection.

She rose, bright-eyed, and went over to the bureau. She took from its lavender and tissue paper a silk nightdress which she had never worn, slipped out of the one she had on, and drew the new one over her head. She put on her dressing-gown again, smoothed her ruffled hair, wiped the last trace of tears from her eyes, and after listening for a moment to her father's breathing, went softly up the stairs.

She turned the handle of Brian's door quietly, but he was awake. "Is that you, Joan?" he asked, and she could hear him sitting up in bed. "Is he bad again? I shouldn't have closed the door." He struck a match and lit the candle beside the bed.

Joan looked at him in the flickering light, and her love for those honest, wide-open blue eyes, for the glint of yellow in his tousled hair, for the strength of his body and spirit, welled up so overwhelmingly that she knew with certainty that she was right. She had felt a quick chill of apprehension outside his door, that at this final moment, something,—she did not know what, might be different from the vision in her heart. But now she knew that they were still one, and she went to him and kissed him without thought of embarrassment or doubt.

"No, dear, Father is asleep and quiet. I came—" She hesitated, not knowing exactly what to say, but untroubled, for the words would not matter. "I came—because I love you, Brian, and—we should be together for our last hours."

He took her hand, holding it tightly. "Joan—Joan," he said, as his eyes explored hers eagerly. "You're sure? You've given me so much,—you don't have to give more,—not just for my sake, darling,—honestly, I don't want more than—than you really want to give,—I love you too much."

She was radiant that he should speak so, supremely sure of herself and of him, and the sense of their unity grew within her, and warmed her. "I know, dearest," she smiled serenely. "I understood,—downstairs, and I was grateful, but now I've thought quietly about us both,—" She let the soft folds of her dressing-gown slip to the floor, and stooping, blew out the light. "—and—oh, my darling,—I love you!"

—3—

The pale morning mist veiled the little pine wood as Joan started up the path across Caster Head. Not until she was halfway up did she emerge from the white pall which blanketed the lower ground and village. The strong, straight trunks and thick roof of green welcomed and comforted her by their solid, silent reality. Only a few days before they had shielded the flame which her love and Brian's had kindled. And now they must shelter her fluttering spirit, with all the confusion of joy and sadness, pride and humility, and strong abounding gratitude, which had flooded it in those last sweet hours with Brian.

Her pines must protect her while she watched him march away. She crouched on the low bank, looking between the trees at the unfolded country below her, the valley screened by the green clearness of the headlands jutting into the leaden sky. If only the morning breeze would unshroud the valley before it was too late.

There was a mutter of drums and a blare of bugles in the village. They had started. She tried to pierce the mist with her eyes, although it would be a quarter of an hour before the column could appear around the foot of Caster Head. But she wanted to see the road south, to have her eyes fixed on the spot where the marching men would first come into view, to watch over Brian for every moment that the winding road and intervening downs allowed. But the mist hung too densely in the valleys, and only on the shoulder of the next headland could she see a short strip of the road. She must watch that,—the nearest point on it, where it rose out of the gray veil.

A crackling of pine needles brought her sharply from the distant road. Someone was in the wood. She turned in vexation, and saw Miss Brador coming slowly through the trees, unaware that she was not alone. Her face was tired and sad, as Joan had never seen it before, and the firm, brisk step which was so characteristic of her seemed slower and dispirited. Not until she had almost reached the bank did she see Joan sitting there. Then her expression changed, first to surprise, then to its normal cheerful confidence.

"Good morning, Miss Page. I did not know anyone was here. Am I disturbing you?"

"It's all right, Miss Brador. I often come here, but—not so early generally."

She felt, as the girl from the Hall hesitated, that there was a change in her, that in some way Miss Brador was weaker than when they had last met, and she herself stronger. She was touched by the irresolution in her manner. "Won't you sit down and share my bank?" she asked doubtfully.

There was gratitude in the answering smile. "Thanks, if you don't mind. The departure of all our officers rather upset the household, so I thought I would stroll up here and see the last of them without being in the way."

Her voice, the lameness of her explanation, the fact that she had explained at all, brought back to Joan the picture of Dorothy Brador and Captain Todd walking home that night when the regiment had just arrived. She recalled other times she had seen them together, Brian's joking words about them, and the deep sadness of her face just now when she had thought she was alone. Her sympathy went out to the silent girl, whose mask of cheerfulness had already changed to an intent watching of the valley.

"I came up here to see them off, too," she confessed simply. "I—Look!" she broke off suddenly. "There,—that strip of road,—they're coming; it will be the only place where we can see them." Forgetting Dorothy, Joan leaned forward, staring at the road south. A mounted officer came out of the mist, heading the column. The khaki ribbon of marching men flowed steadily up from the gray veil, filling the road, as the van passed over the headland into the next valley before the rear had emerged from the mist. For a brief time it seemed to stand still, but Joan knew well that it was moving; yes,—moving—moving, and somewhere in that indistinguishable stream was Brian, moving with the rest, and thinking of her.

They watched silently until the last waggon and the last man had passed across the distant stage, and then as silently rose and went down the path into the empty village.

Part Two

The Road

Privates Brian Mackell, Billy Mackenzie, and "Spud" Thompson, with Corporal Saxby Stainer in command, were gloomily engaged on their morning warfare. All four had rubber sheets tied over their greatcoats. At intervals Brian looked over the parapet through a periscope, watching the faint dawn over the German trenches. The others were leaning with their backs against it, rifles between their legs, arms folded, and chins sunk drowsily upon their chests. It was drizzling and very cold, and the duckboards underfoot, though jacked up on sandbags, were barely above black water which filled the bottom of the trench.

Brian stared at the dark wilderness of churned earth, tangled wire, and shadowy tree stumps. He could not see the enemy line,—even by daylight it was practically invisible. And he did not want to see it,—or any of its occupants. At first he had craved action, and chafed under the monotonous soaking in the evil-smelling trench. The loafing about Vandy's Farm, when back in "rest", was almost as bad. The one smelt as offensively as the other. The smells were different, that was the only variety.

But since his last letter from Joan, he had changed his mind about action,—danger,—death. It had only been an unconscious hint in the long letter which breathed so much love and longing, but it had been enough. That unexpected, hurried movement which had started at Caster End, and finished with hardly a pause, in the front lines, loomed now as a possible tragedy. There had been one three-day stop in a camp which everyone expected to occupy for more dreary weeks of waiting. He had bought a special licence then, and a ring, had enquired aloofly as to necessary formalities, and spent his time dreaming of Joan's radiant smile when he returned on embarkation leave, and she opened the door of Number Five to see him standing on the step.

And then,—without warning,—marches, trains, embarkation, the confusion of Boulogne, more trains, Niessen huts,—and the trenches. For nearly two months the trenches, or Vandy's Farm! Another world from Caster End, and the two worlds as hard to bridge as if they had been separate planets! It had been interesting, even a little exciting at first. He had been pleased when the first shells to burst near him had not upset his composure, and rather proud that the fear he felt was so easily controllable. He had felt like a veteran then, and taken unnecessary chances like a raw recruit,—until Lieutenant Wells' grim sneer had brought a sour determination to let the war look after itself.

But what he had read between the lines of Joan's letter had done more than battalion orders or Lieutenant Wells to make him careful of his safety. He couldn't afford to get killed now!

Slowly the day dawned. It was lightish now,—that was the only difference! The texture, almost the colour of earth and sky, was unendingly the same, drab and formless. There had been neither moon nor stars by night, there was no sun by day.

Sergeant Valentine trudged past the bay, grunting, "Stand down." There was a stirring of voices and clink of tin cans all along the trench. Brian unclipped the mirror from his bayonet, tucked it in his pocket, and yawned. Billy Mackenzie leaned his rifle against the parapet and yawned. Spud Thompson yawned, but made no other move.

Spud had worked for a market-gardener, only a few miles from Brian's home at Baie Verte. It had been soul-dulling work, and Spud's soul had not been too bright to start with. Trench life affected him little. Trench philosophy he had before he came to France,—to care for his own creature comforts with reasonable fairness to his pals, to take little thought for the current day, less for the day past, and none for the morrow.

They plodded along to the dug-out to see what the rats had left of their rations. It was a dug-out by courtesy only, being built up from sandbags piled over a corrugated steel roof. Their part of the line was on low-lying ground where real dug-outs were impossible. Four feet below the surface was water, and, receiving sufficient water from above, they refrained from digging for more.

With what was left of their damp rations, Brian and Billy returned to their bay and started getting breakfast. Brian made the tea, Billy fried the bacon on a little fire of slivered wood, partly issued, partly stolen. Billy's principles did not allow him to steal wood, or anything else, but he was not too orthodox to drink the tea. Brian never pointed out the discrepancy. He had watched with amusement, and some admiration, his friend's struggle between principles based on home, office, and church, and the harsh practices of war. He never jeered, because he felt that Billy had reconciled them reasonably well. Up to the point where they became ridiculous, Billy stuck to his principles,—and Brian gratefully drank

his ration of rum!

"Tomorrow morning we'll be dry!" remarked Billy, intently restraining the contortions of the grilling bacon with a spoon.

Brian grunted. "Wonder if we'll get leave this time? I'm a bit fed up with Vandy's Farm. A corporal in "C" Company told me he thought from something Captain Blaikie said, that they were making out leave schedules."

"We should try and go together, Mac. Where will you go, Paris or England?"

"England, I guess." Brian was carefully dubious.

"I'd like to see Paris before the war's over, but I've got a married sister in London, and there are a lot of places in England I ought to see, too. I never seemed to have the money or chance to see half the things I've read about. If we saved carefully we might be able to put in a regular round of sightseeing in five days. We might make out an itinerary down at Vandy's. Even if we don't get leave for a time we can enjoy it a bit in advance. Have you any particular ideas?"

"No. Bum around! Haven't much use for itineraries,—it's tempting Providence. You'll get your head shot off while you're making it out!"

Moving down the line that night, after being relieved, Billy exhibited less cheerfulness. The trips down and back were his most serious ordeal. There was nearly a mile of narrow, winding communication trench to be traversed, and at such times it had to carry more than its fair share of traffic. The jostling, pushing, swearing crowds of men going in, men coming out, ammunition carriers, ration parties, signallers, and working parties, the darkness and the mud, made the short journey a nightmare of wearied muscles and frayed tempers.

It was Billy's muscles, not his temper, which tended to give under the strain. With Brian it was the reverse, and consequently it was he who helped and encouraged his friend,—however rough the help might be. A sweet temper is useless in a crowded trench, but angry irritation gives power to jabbing elbows and thrusting shoulders. Brian, strong, and with a true soldier's views as to the "rights of the road," plowed and jostled down the trench, with Billy keeping close behind him.

When at last they emerged into a sodden field, and the traffic jam was over, Brian and his fellows left their irritation in the communication trench. "Anger Boulevard,"—its name aptly Anglicized, was full of it,—left for the use of the next party! It soaked each new Company on entering, and fell away at the exit. It was as necessary for getting along that trench as pontoons for crossing a river, and as undesirable an encumbrance afterwards.

They formed up beside "B" Company, waited drearily in the rain for the Companies behind, and started the four-mile march to Vandy's Farm. The same old road, the same old rain, the same old leaky barn, the same heavy sleep and stiff awakening, the morning parade, inspection, and elaborate cleaning up of what must inevitably grow filthy again. And then the grateful afternoon, with minutes when the sun itself appeared from behind the clouds, and there was a feeling of spring warmth in the March air.

Not until the last afternoon of their rest could Brian get any definite information about the possibility of leave. There had been rumors, most of them unpleasant, and there had been an increased rumbling of heavy guns to the south. He did not ask Lieutenant Wells about it, for Wells gave out his information when he liked. He was a good man to keep away from when you wanted anything. Leave would come—when it came, and none the sooner for asking,—especially if you asked Wells!

So when Captain Todd strolled past the fallen tree where he and some of his pals were reclining, he jumped up and followed. The Doc. was a good scout; he'd proved that at Caster End. "Excuse me, sir," he said, saluting.

Todd stopped. "Hello! It's Mackell. How are you?—and your Middle Cuneiform? I'm glad you haven't needed any professional attention since we left England. Much safer out here, eh?—with no horses!"

Brian grinned. The Doc. was certainly a good scout. "Seems pretty safe, sir,—so far. I got more action in a football game than I've seen in the army yet."

"Nonsense,—you've had more excitement than most. What about that first professional case of yours at Caster End? Good practice for a medical student that,—or a soldier! And how was the old padre when you left?"

"There was a bit of trouble, sir, at nights, but he slept all right the last night. His daughter thinks he's settling down now. He hasn't had any recurrence, but she's not quite satisfied that he's normal yet,—for him."

He felt the Doc. looking at him keenly. "They were both very kind to me, sir," he explained casually, "so I wrote them after I got out here, and Miss Page wrote and told me all about the way things were going."

"Anything else of interest?" Todd asked. "Caster End was a good billet, for you at any rate, and for us at the Hall. Did Miss Page give you any news of the Bradors, by the way? I meant to write Sir James, but never got around to it."

"I don't think so, sir, except that Miss Brador has been back at her hospital in Norwich since we left. She's a V.A.D. Miss Page says she's like us,—only gets a week's leave every month or so. And I was wondering if there's any news of leave being started for us soon. Nobody seems to know a thing."

Todd looked thoughtful, "Well, as far as leave is concerned, I don't suppose there's any harm in telling you now, Mackell,—Orders will be out this evening. All leave is stopped. It should have started this week, but now the Colonel himself couldn't get leave if he wanted to.

"There's been a big German push down south somewhere. It started on the twenty-first, so maybe we'll find out something from the next batch of papers from England. It's evidently a big affair."

Brian did not rejoin his friends. He gave them a wave as he passed, and walked back to the farm. The barn in which "B" Company was billeted was comparatively quiet and empty. He settled down in his corner with a writing pad on a board across his knees, and thought of what he should write to Joan.

It was a hard job. He knew that he would get leave sometime. Even a big push would not postpone it for more than a month or two at most. But Joan would be worried. It was hard to explain. He was not even sure if she had meant him to understand anything more than what she had said,—that she hoped they could be married soon, and he did not want to be more explicit in answering. But she mustn't feel that he didn't understand,—that he wasn't worrying about, and with her. It was hard to write the things which it would have been so easy to say,—impossible to convey in words what a look, a touch, a smile, would have told her. He struggled with the recalcitrant sentences which never seemed to express what he meant them to; and everything he wrote was clouded by the fear of saying too much or too little, and by the thought of Lieutenant Wells' censoring eyes.

When the letter was finished, he handed it to Sergeant Valentine with the illogical feeling that somehow he had settled something. He went out, lighting a cigarette cheerfully, and joined the noisy gang in the farmyard, speculating wildly as to what the big German push,—now common property,—would mean.

There was an old postman at Caster End who, twice a day, rode his ancient bicycle to Brantham Junction, took the Caster End postbag from the train and carried it to Polly Dyer's combination millinery shop and post office. While Polly sorted the letters he would sit smoking his pipe and exchanging gossip, much of which was in the nature of "leads" towards interesting news items which Polly thought might be obtained from the different houses on his route. Then he would shoulder his bag and pedal through the new village, then the old, then up the coast, inland, and south again to the village, his bag empty and his mind stored with the day's gleanings of gossip. It was from his reports that the reputation of "Polly says" had been largely built.

On the decreasingly rare occasions when there were letters for Number Five, Seaview Terrace, it was one of his first stops. It was also the least interesting. There was never any news to be gleaned there, or gossip to be exchanged. When a parcel made it necessary to knock, a friendly word and smile from Miss Page were all he expected or got. The Pages seemed as uninterested in the rest of Caster End, as the village was in them. For since the exciting Sunday two months ago, when the parson had been taken with heart disease on his way to church, Number Five had supplied no single item worth discussing either in the bar of the Bull, or in Polly's shop.

So, on this occasion as on others, Martin put the letter for Number Five in the box, knocked his quick double knock, and rode off for more fruitful visits.

Joan started at the sound, yet she had been waiting for it! Since lunch, she had been up in her room, a book on her knee, disciplining her soul to wait for the knock, or for the knocks on other doors farther along the street, which would show that Martin's bag had contained nothing for her. Many times she had wanted to wait downstairs, just inside the door, or to walk down to Polly's before Martin left, as many did, but she had always resisted and waited as quietly as if letters were of no more interest to her than they had been two months ago. At first she had felt obscurely that the discipline was good for her soul, but now she was glad that no action of hers had betrayed her interest in those letters from France.

She went down stairs quickly and drew a deep breath of relief as she recognized the active service envelope on the doormat. "There is nothing for you, Father," she reported, going into the dining-room. "Just a letter from Brian Mackell."

"I trust he is well,—but what can he hope? He is a mere pawn!" He paused, frowning at the paper-strewn table beside him, his lips closed tightly. "A pawn,—helpless,—and moved by the powers of evil." Suddenly his voice rose. He stared at his daughter, rapped his clenched fist on the table. "Yes, the powers of evil. I am more and more convinced that this terrible war is a machination of the evil powers. It is not God's chastening, of his people. He has withdrawn the light of his countenance, and the powers of darkness ravish the nations at their will. Why? Why, Joan? It is the answer to that question which our leaders should be seeking, instead of stratagems and armaments. He who discovers why our Lord has deserted us,—he who first teaches us to understand the cause of His wrath and to show our penitence, will do more than all the armies and commanders to end this destruction."

Joan waited quietly until his heat had died away, and he was once more fumbling at his books and papers. She had grown used to these new outbursts of his, and was thankful that they were so short, and seemed so separated from practical matters where his irritation and strangeness might make trouble for them both. If no worse result came from that terrible Sunday, life would be easier for them than she had sometimes feared. And yet the change from his years of apathy was disconcerting. He was drinking less than in the past and, while she should have been pleased, forebodings crept in. A stranger might have said that he was more healthy now,—more normal, but Joan could not help feeling anxious.

"I think I'll go for a walk now, Father, if you don't want me," she said when he was quieted, and, getting no answer, went out to seek her refuge on the side of Caster Head.

The sun was shining when she reached the trees. Sheltered somewhat from the sea wind, Spring rested beneath the pines, breathing softly. Joan gazed dreamily at the distant road south, where it crossed the foot of the next headland. Her emotions during the long hours she now spent in this lonely retreat were so mixed that she could never tell when they would be happy, and when sad, and often they were so mingled that she could not disentangle them, and only knew that this was the only spot where her soul was at ease. At first happiness had been predominant, but a shadow had grown with time, and for a week it had banked in a heavy cloud above her,—threatening.

For she knew now what she had feared before,—that she was pregnant. And with the knowledge, all her love and hopes and dreams had crystallized into one small, unanswerable question: When would Brian come back to her?

She had felt her love so pure and selfless, until now. She had re-lived the wonderful hours with Brian, gladdened most of all by the comfort those memories would be bringing him.

It was when she was reading the news of the new German offensive that she had first realized that the sudden fear that jabbed her, was fear for herself as well as for Brian. And now she admitted sadly that there had not been,—that there could not be anything selfless in a love which was so much a part of her own body and soul.

She held his last two letters in her lap, and, hesitating to open the new one, unfolded and re-read the old. It comforted her by its cheerful confidence and warmed her by the love which the abrupt constraint of the pencilled words could not conceal. She had no doubts about Brian's love and loyalty, no regrets that she had made it perfect and complete. Rather she cherished a new pride. If the cruel worst came, she had in her spirit and in her body the supreme things that love could ever give her,—and she cried gently, not knowing that she did so, until a tear fell on the unopened letter in her hand.

She brushed her eyes, but although she was smiling as she tore open the envelope, her heart was fighting desperately against its own forebodings. In his last letter he had hoped for leave. Now, another letter had come instead. It would not have troubled her greatly, such early leave was unlikely; but now this great battle had started,—and anything might happen.

She finished the new letter. He could not come. All leave was stopped. He did not know. He did not know. Their future lay between two armies in a dark valley shadowed by death.

For a long time she sat motionless, the two letters in her hand. Something in her craved for the relief of tears, but that something was not the power which controlled her body. She felt as if her body and her intellect had achieved mastery of her emotion, without any effort of her own. And when she walked down toward the road she felt so normal that she almost wondered what had happened to her love.

As she came close to the stile, she paused. Bert Summers was striding along the road from the direction of the church. She calculated whether by hurrying she could be over the stile quickly enough to keep ahead of him until she reached home, or whether by walking very slowly she could come into the road behind him.

But the road and the path to the stile were too open, and he was too close to prevent him joining her if he wanted to, and she knew that he did. He had been home for four of his seven days leave, and for the last three of them he had contrived to meet her as she came down from Caster Head.

She did not change her pace; she acted as if she had not seen him. She had no particular dislike of him, nor nervousness, and above everything else she had set herself to seem,—to be, perfectly normal. That had been her first reasoned thought on coming back from the pines after Brian had gone away, and since then her determination had been intensified a hundred times.

She heard his heavy step behind her. "Good day, Miss Page," he greeted her cheerily, as he drew abreast and saluted. "Fine weather for a walk!"

Bert Summers was beefy and self-confident in body and brain. He walked beside her, talking genially about himself and his life in the trenches, of his new promotion to Sergeant Major, too pleased to be walking with such a handsome girl to worry about what she was thinking of him. He was heir to the Bull Inn, and in the little backwater of Caster End, a notable,—and strong and good-looking to boot.

Joan answered his remarks pleasantly, glad that the distance to Number Five was short. She knew of no way to chill the admiration which she saw growing in him. She had none of the subtle methods of showing him that he was not wanted,—without being rudely forthright, and she had never learnt how to be rude politely!

"You don't have to go in yet," he suggested, as they came to her gate. "It's a caution how dead this place is nowadays."

She swung the gate open before she answered. It gave her a feeling of safety. "I'm afraid I have to be home, Mr. Summers. Father expected me before this."

Bert leaned his elbow on the gate-post. "Hope he's all right again, Miss Page."

She was on the steps now. "He's much better, thank you, but I still have to be careful." Bert Summers looked as if he wanted to be asked in, but when she put her key in the lock, he straightened up. "Well, cheerio, Miss Page. See you tomorrow," he called, and walked on toward the Bull.

Joan realized uncomfortably that this farewell implied an understanding,—and she could not prevent him seeing her, unless she stayed in the house until his leave was up.

Next day when she came in from her walk, she went straight up to her room. She felt exhausted and sick. She stood looking at herself in the glass, not knowing exactly why, until she realized suddenly her subconscious feeling that those offensive lips of Bert Summers must have left some mark on her face!

For when she had gone out that afternoon, two hours after her usual time, she had been dismayed to see Bert Summers coming out of Cobbin's shop opposite—to meet her. It nauseated her to think of the rest,—his crude lovemaking when they were out of sight of the village,—his half successful attempt to kiss her,—his proposal, honest though it was,—his half sullen, half propitiatory temper after she had refused him.

If she had not felt so sick she could almost have been pleased with her own self control. Always there had been in the forefront of her mind, the bitter necessity to speak and act exactly as she would have done before Brian had come.

In a way the fact that she was acting a part had made it easier, because less real. Now with the reaction, her spirit was confused and almost deadened, but her body was still taut, she could not relax. Her calmness disappeared suddenly. She was flushed, exasperated, ashamed. It was incredible that she could have borne all that, acted that part and made no sign! She threw herself on the bed, but the nausea returned, and only after her cruel sickness had exhausted itself could she drop back on her bed, and draw the quilt over her shivering body.

It was nearly seven before she hurried downstairs to get her father's supper, tired and angry with herself, but with the unpleasantness of the afternoon put in its proper place. She was determined that this should be the last time her spirit should succumb, whatever the weakness of her body.

But after Mr. Page had gone to bed, she sat down and relieved her too conflicting, confused emotions by trying to write to Brian the things she would say if they were sitting together downstairs. She knew how ill she was succeeding, but at least she could tell him how much she loved him, how fully she trusted him, and how happy she was,—in a way. But she must make him understand that she needed him—soon. It was the first time she had had any other thought when writing him than to say what would cheer and comfort him most.

Next morning, completely restored, she posted the letter. Somewhere in her was a vast reserve of courage, and what was sometimes better,—humor. Under necessity she was developing some slight power to look at herself with detachment, to understand that there was a future,—long after the war should be over, to see herself as one of millions of others whom the war was tormenting.

She did not often have to draw on that reserve, in spite of the daily pang brought to her by the newspaper, for there was nothing she could do, and stoicism came to her aid, as it was aiding women in every corner of the earth. And the new life that was growing within her brought the deep comfort that,—whatever happened to Brian, to England, to the world, that one consolation would be saved to her. She avoided resolutely any thought of the anguish she might have to endure in payment.

Each day she read confused accounts of German attacks and successful allied counter-attacks. Each week the confusion resolved itself into the ghastly clarity of defeat, and slaughter. Each day the maps showed incomprehensible variations in the allied line. Each week they had grown into a great area conquered by the German attack. And somewhere along its edge, where shells were screaming and bursting, and men fighting and retreating and dying, for others to fight and retreat and die behind them,—was Brian.

For two months she went about her daily routine, took her walks up to the pines, and devised ways of satisfying and placating the growing irritability of her father. Only during the hours when she was writing her long letters to Brian did she let her soul wander beyond the closest limits of emotion. Only when she was reading his own letters, and feeling the sweet relief that he was still alive, did she allow herself the luxury of boundless hope and a few short hours of dreaming.

For the rest she dwelt in the immediate, happy past with Brian, and the far distant future,—with his child.

But as June opened, and the great battle in France came to an end to relieve her of its weight of fear, she found the forebodings of her personal predicament harder and harder to escape.

It had been the end of March when his letter had arrived to say that all leave was stopped. Since then they had told her everything she had wanted to hear, except the most important thing of all,—that he was coming back.

But the last of those letters had been two weeks ago, and now that things were quieter there should be a chance of leave.

On that first day of June she sat down in her room, with no thought but to write another letter which would make him happy. All Brian's letters, in their soiled buff envelopes or the green "honour" ones, were on the desk in front of her. Her chin was on her cupped palms, her eyes open, but seeing nothing except the reflection of her happy musings. These hours with Brian were the happiest she knew. They were the radiant interludes in her strictly self-disciplined life, and she made a treat of them, lingering over her preparations for writing, and savouring the pleasure. Her lips moved and smiled as she took up the pen, and after a little while, laid it down. She had never had to write many letters, and words did not come fluently. At nearly every paragraph she stopped to think what she would say next. She could not just go on repeating how much she loved him, although that seemed the nicest thing to say, and nothing else in her own life seemed important enough to write about. But the pauses did not make the task laborious. They brought too many happy pictures, and often it was the re-drawing of one of those pictures which would start her writing again, and from that to the little personal details of her doings. They seemed uninteresting, but her own feelings always reminded her that, with love to help him, he would enjoy reading anything she wrote about herself.

She had almost finished when the spell was broken by her father's voice. She went down quickly, but it was only an irrational desire for her presence which had moved him. With all appearance of dutiful attention she listened to his vehement denunciation of the blindness which failed to recognize and placate the Power in whose hands lay peace and war. But she heard little of what he said. Sitting relaxed in the semi-easy chair, she had suddenly felt what had been indefinable,—almost imperceptible, before,—the movement of her child. It brought a strange, deep listlessness which fell on her suddenly, as a premonition of faintness might come, and when her father rose to go to bed, she did not move.

She did not feel exactly ill. She knew that she was not going to faint, or anything like it. She was not frightened, and the lethargy slowly passed. She blew out the lamp and went to see that the front door was locked. Half audible voices came through it from the street, and from among the confused sounds a sudden high cackling laugh. It was Polly Dyer's,—there was no mistaking that malicious, unmirthful laugh, and Joan realized scornfully that some reputation must have been well shredded to elicit it.

When she sat down to Brian's letter again the mood of its writing could not be recaptured. And, more disconcerting, something of her own defences seemed to have melted. She had been contented and happy, writing to Brian and thinking of him, but now that quiet mood seemed suddenly meretricious and unsatisfying. The warm strength of her emotions, seemed to have reacted into weak despair. She craved intensely for Brian himself, for his rough khaki tunic against her cheek, for his strong, protective arms to ward off this breathless loneliness. Only Brian himself,—his real bodily presence could save her from the shadows which were threatening her.

She needed him—desperately. He must come back. The Western front was quiet,—somehow he could come,—somehow he would come, if he could only understand how she needed him. And picking up her pen she tried to tell him. She did not think of what to say next, of grammar, of words. Desperately she scribbled her aching need direct on to the paper. It was her happiness which depended on what she wrote, not his.

"Come back to me, come back, Brian darling. I need you so much. You don't know how I need you, dearest, or you would make them let you come. Please—I love you so much—I need you so much—just for a few days, dearest,—or a few hours,—just so that we can be married. My darling, darling Brian, please try. I know I'm silly and it's impossible, but try, and get back to me, Brian, just for a day. Please, please, darling, try."

She was weak and cold when she sealed and stamped the letter, but in spite of it, and knowing that she was foolish, she threw on her coat and went out to post the letter. Her urgency would not brook delay.

It was almost zero hour for the raid. The men of No. 5 Platoon of the Montreal Rifles lay motionless among the crumbled debris of the annihilated village in no man's land. Their own trenches lay thirty yards behind, the enemy a hundred yards ahead, and the quiet night was spread above them all.

Identification of the opposing enemy unit had been demanded by the Division,—a German,—dead or alive, and Colonel Markey had decided that No. 5 and No. 6 Platoons should go and get him. But it had seemed as if the whole strength of the Brigade was to support them. All day Brian had been bumping into observing officers, studying maps, calculating ranges, laying wires, and choosing posts. And now the trench which Brian had just left, to crawl out to the tape which marked the jumping-off line, was choked with Stokes mortarmen, with their clumsy-looking relics of the middle ages, and stretcher-bearers who had squeezed in as their prospective clients crawled out.

No. 5 Platoon would enter the German trenches on the right, No. 6 a hundred yards along on the left. One party from each would close the pincers along that doomed hundred yards. A smaller party of each would remain where they entered and resist flank attacks. Two green flares would mark the moment for retirement, with the expected prisoners,—or their bodies.

Brian knew all about it. Every detail had been carefully explained to every one of the eighty men who would take part,—had been explained so thoroughly that Brian was heartily sick of them. But now he was only thinking of the twenty minutes ahead, and of what they would bring. Experience had shown him that he would not be frightened, yet he was chilled by the fear of death. Joan had confirmed her first unconscious hint. Her letter had been quiet, serene, cheerful, and completely trustful,—but unmistakable. He knew now, for certain, what misery and shame his death would bring to her. That letter and all her others had striven mercifully to reassure him, but he had understood too well why she wrote that way, for he did the same himself.

More and more he had chafed and rebelled at the chains that held him. He had worried Lieutenant Wells and even Captain Thomas about getting leave; he had taken such scrupulous care for his safety that Sergeant Valentine had become puzzled and suspicious; he had studied all the malingering dodges he had ever heard of, hoping to hit on one which was worth trying. But they were all old stuff,—the authorities were wise. Even should he succeed with Captain Todd, nothing he could do would get him past the main dressing station. He had been like a rat in a trap. He would have been happy now waiting for zero hour, if his hope for a wound was not complicated by the fear that it might be a mortal one.

Corporal Stainer was shifting his sack of Mills grenades in readiness. Brian looked at his watch. A minute more! He grasped his rifle, hitched his own bombs round to his side,—waited. He would need them. He was part of the covering party, and if their bombs did not hold the counter-attack, nothing else would, and to be taken a prisoner—

A shrill scream passed overhead with incredible swiftness, but its end was drowned in a deafening torrent of noise. The barrage was down. The earth spouted mud and fire and smoke for a mile along the German line. There was an arch of trailing sparks above him where the Stokes bombs passed, higher still was a ceiling of screaming shells, and in front that ear-cracking thunder of shell bursts.

He was up and stumbling forward, with the first shell. His friends were all around him. Machine gun bullets spat past with their venomous "chit chit chit." Red S.O.S. lights were going up in the German line.

Wells waved and shouted. They all dropped. The barrage was close in front—cutting the wire. A sudden decrease in the din,—it had lifted. More shouts,—more stumbling in and out of unseen shell holes,—over piles of crumbling brick. And then the wire, much of it intact, but that had been expected. Valentine was stopping with his wire-clippers, and Brian set to work fiercely with his own. It was his job. All but the wire-cutters went to ground again, but they were too eager, too nervy to wait until the job was done. They struggled, wriggled and jumped, while the cutters finished the lanes and followed.

A long, curling strand caught him round the legs and sent him sprawling with a thud which nearly knocked the breath out of him, and sent his rifle yards away. He gasped and cursed as he untangled the barbs from his puttees, and retrieved his rifle.

All the rest were almost on the enemy's parapet,—except one who lay motionless on a sagging hammock of uncut wire.

Without even wondering who it was, Brian rushed to join his party. The barrage was well behind the front line now, the noise less deafening. He was almost at the parapet; the others out of sight,—in the trench. "Chit chit chit." Bullets went past—closer and closer.

A stab in the arm—a rap on the ribs,—and before he had finished saying "damnation!" he had tumbled into the trench.

Outside he had seemed so far behind the rest that it amazed him to find himself back in the middle of them. Thompson yanked him to his feet.

"Hurt?"

"No,—tripped." He had forgotten that he had been hit somewhere. From the wire to his dive into the trench, things had moved so quickly that the hits had, hardly registered on his mind.

"Hurry there!" Valentine's voice snarled. "Hurry! Bayonet party up. Where's them bloody spades? Get down to it,—here. Bombers back."

Lieutenant Wells forced his way through the crowded trench where twenty men were trying to disengage themselves for their appointed jobs. "O.K., sir. Bombers in this bay. Get 'em ready. Not a bomb till you're ordered."

"Get those men on the barricade hustling, Valentine," Lieutenant Wells snapped. "They'll take all night."

Brian was calm now. So were the rest of the little party of bombers. He shifted his bag to the front, sagged its mouth open conveniently, stuck his bayoneted rifle on the firestep, and as he did so felt a twinge in his arm. "Hell! I forgot I was hit! Look at this, Spud!"

Thompson raised the outstretched arm. "Two of 'em," he grunted laconically, pointing at a hole in Brian's sleeve, just above the left elbow, and another in the left side of his tunic, at exactly the same level. He looked at Brian's back. "They come out, too," he reported, apparently with some surprise. Brian laughed elatedly. "Of course they came out, mutt!" He was feeling enormously cheerful. It was a blighty! "What d'you think I am? A bloody hero!—walking about with a couple of bullets in me?"

Beyond the trench the protective barrage roared and flashed and spouted black earth. Back in the Canadian trenches a lesser barrage was falling in retaliation. Shrapnel was bursting over no man's land to cut off the raiding party. But the two men were oblivious of it all, interested, in an almost objective way, in these cushy, lucky little wounds. The trench itself was as free from shelling as their own front line on a quiet day.

Wells broke the pleasant interlude. "Here, what the hell—what's the matter? Get to your posts. Mackell—what—"

"Just a couple of bullets touched me up, sir."

Wells stooped, turned Brian round, took his arm and bent it "Scratches," he asserted, relieved. "That won't prevent you carrying on."

"I never said it would," retorted Brian. "I got 'em out in the open, and I carried on this far, didn't I?" He allowed himself some license in the effect his words would give, even though they were strictly accurate in themselves. It would get a rise out of Wells. He was too damned casual with his men.

Wells scowled. "O.K. Get to your posts—all of you. This isn't a picnic. We'll be rushed any minute. Look alive."

Brian saw that Wells was the only man in the group who was flustered. Of course, he was responsible, but still—! "What about me and Spud staunching the ghastly wounds, sir?" he suggested politely.

Someone sniggered.

"You go—" Wells stopped himself in time. "Make it snappy then,—and be ready,—and watch out the rest of you." He turned and hurried back to the rising barricade.

"That'll hold him!" Jock Scott grinned, from the other side of the bay. "But ye'll no be vairy popular with Wells fra' now on, Mac."

Brian and Spud hurried. A simple turn of the bandage fixed the flesh wound in the arm. It was not bleeding badly. But when he opened his tunic and pulled up his shirt,—always keeping his bombs slung ready in front of him, he found that the wound in his side had already stopped bleeding, that it was only a short, shallow groove. "Don't bother with that, Spud," he said impatiently. "The shirt will stick to it. Can't wind bandages round my chest for that."

Spud stooped. "Think it cracked yer rib?"

"Don't know,—don't care."

Spud put his thumb on the nearest rib and pressed.

"Ouch! What the hell—"

"Ay, it's broke."

"It is now, you silly chump! Whatever it was before." He hastily buttoned his tunic, grabbed his rifle. The din was as loud and continuous as ever, but they had heard no bombing from the party which should have been closing the pincers and mopping up the trench, and there was no sign of the expected counter-attack from beyond the barricade. The lack of action was nervy. They waited, quiet, restless, wondering.

Wells came back, stopped, looked at his watch, frowned. A whistle sounded. He darted off to the barricade. "Back here,—lively. Hold your detail, Sergeant, till we're out. I'll say when. Now then, ready all. Wait."

The whole party, with the exception of Valentine's four men for a rearguard, lined along the parapet ready to scramble out. Wells' eyes were on his watch. "Remember,—you all know what to do. Stainer, you and your section are to get Philpotts back. He's on the wire. And be damned sure you do,—we don't want them identifying us."

Green lights,—another whistle,—out of the trench, lying in the mud. A sharp shout from Wells,—Valentine's men out. Another order,—up and away across no man's land again,—helter skelter,—stumbling, running, tripping, scrambling up again. A hail from the Canadian trench,—tumbling into shelter again,—safe!

"Dearest Joan," Brian wrote, twenty-four hours later, dating his letter June 5th. "Grand news! I got two beautiful bullet scratches the day before yesterday,—honestly, they are nothing but the merest scratches. I've been hurt worse a dozen times playing football or hockey, so don't worry. But they ought to get me back to England. I couldn't have fixed it better if I'd done it myself. And the license is safe in my pocket, and what do you think? It was folded in four in my inner breast-pocket where I keep it and your letters, and the bullet, which just grazed my ribs, touched the folded corner, so there's a little hole in the centre when you open it out,—and just enough blood on it to prove that I didn't do it with a pencil! The Sister's waiting to do my arm, so I must hurry. I'm not in bed, of course, as it was just a clean bullet through the muscle, and not through much of that either, so don't worry even a little bit. I was about due for a letter, so I expect one is hanging round the Regiment, but I should worry!—so long as no one reads it! You can say it all yourself! Look out for me, maybe in a week. All the love in the world, darling. Your Brian."

But three weeks later Brian re-joined his Regiment,—without having been closer to England than the base hospital at Etaples, where he had written his jubilant letter.

Late in the evening he reported at Battalion Headquarter dugouts, deep in the side of a disused railway cutting, exhausted as much by the maddening exasperation of disappointment which had seethed in him all the way up, as by the tiresome journey itself.

Fickler gave him a letter,—Joan's,—the one which had just missed him after the raid, and he sat down in the dark, lantern-lit dugout to read it. "*—just for a day. Please, please, darling, try.*" For minutes he sat there, his body motionless, his mind racing in tortured circles. Suddenly the orderly officer stumbled in. It was his own Platoon Commander, Wells, and it was the first time they had come in contact since those strained minutes in the German trench. Wells looked at him grimly. "Back, eh, Mackell? I hope they succeeded in staunching your ghastly wounds to your satisfaction?"

Brian did not answer. His face was cold and wet. He wiped it with his sleeve.

Wells paused, as if hoping for a reply, but getting none, he said curtly, "No. 5 Platoon is in the same trench as before, report to Sergeant Valentine,—and make it snappy; he's short handed."

"Now?"

"Now!"

Brian picked up his pack and rifle and went out. It meant three quarters of a mile up the winding communication trench, loaded with his full equipment, when he might just as well have been allowed to sleep at Headquarters and go up in the morning; it meant a distinct score for Wells, and his manner had showed it. But Brian was apathetic, his mind still trying to grapple with the emotions raised by Joan's distraught letter. He picked his way along the trench, hardly noticing the jostling he received, and only when he was nearly up to the front line did he begin to feel the full force of the anguish which Joan must have been suffering to write those frantic, imploring, and yet so loving words. He was so absorbed, so blind to anything but his horrible vision of Joan in lonely, deserted agony, that he almost collided with Sergeant Valentine making his final rounds.

The Sergeant grinned cheerfully. "Hello there! You back? What are you coming up now for?"

Brian looked at him. Suddenly he realized that something dangerous was swelling and swirling inside him. "I'm reporting back," he said, between clenched teeth, and hurried past.

"Red" Hibbert was snoring in the corner which had always been a subject of good-humored contention between Brian and Spud Thompson. Spud was not in the dugout at all. Red's offence put edge to his fury. Such a little thing,—and it made him feel like a murderer! He must control himself, he wasn't normal just now. He threw his pack and rifle into another corner. Billy Mackenzie raised his head drowsily. "Hello, Mac! You back already?"

Brian took no notice.

"When did you get back? I thought you'd have got a nice blighty." He gritted his teeth. "Go to hell!" he growled, and lay down with his head on his pack, and his back hunched against the earth wall. He was a little breathless.

What wicked, wicked luck! And only three weeks ago he'd collected his belongings in the same filthy hole, confident that he'd be back in England, proving to Joan that her trust was justified. Poor Joan! Three weeks of messing about at the base. Every effort to get to England on his wound, snubbed, sneered at, cursed,—by a lot of dugouts and scrimshankers covered with medals and sitting tight in cushy jobs. And now,—back again,—and with God knew what ahead to keep him from Joan. Poor Joan!

He turned over, and groaned under the pressure of sheer impotent fury with the remorseless machine which had him in its grip, and of his sickening dread for Joan. At one moment his brain and body seemed burning hot with rage which he could hardly control, and at another, cold with fluttering chills of fear and presentiment.

He could not sleep,—it was as much as he could do to lie still. He had just decided to give up the effort and go outside, when Corporal Stainer pulled back the rubber sheet across the entrance and shouted, "Turn out, there, turn out! One o'clock!"

Billy Mackenzie, Hibbert, and Jock Scott shifted and grunted and sat up. They started to lace their boots and collect their traps with surprising alacrity.

"What's the matter now?" Brian asked angrily.

"Hello!" said Stainer, in surprise. "When did you get back? Thought you were in England."

"I asked what's the matter?" Brian repeated, suppressing his growing exasperation at the constant reminders of England. "What are you turning us out for at this time of night?"

"Relief, you poor simp! What d'you think? You're nutty, Mac—coming all the way up here just to go back again! You're nutty!" He grinned and let the rubber flap fall.

Brian stared. "D'you mean to say we're being relieved,—tonight?" he demanded of the others.

"Sure,—we've had our seven days, haven't we?" said Red Hibbert.

"Corpr'l's right," asserted Jock. "You're daft,—coming up now. Why didn't you wait at H.Q.?"

Brian glared furiously. "That's what I'd like to know! And by God I will, too. That sneering bastard Wells sent me,—that's why I came. Sent me just out of bloody spite!"

He remembered the look in Wells' eyes as he ordered him curtly to report to Valentine,—"now." He'd put the butt of his rifle in those eyes next time he saw them! And he hurriedly collected his kit, as if to hasten the moment of meeting. Somebody's pack was in the way, its straps entangled with the lock of his rifle. He gave it a kick which sent it flying. "Get that junk out of my way!"

"Hey! Lay off that, that's mine," shouted the affronted Red.

Brian whirled round. "Keep it out of my way then,—or I'll chuck it over the parapet,—and you after it. See?"

Red, for once a little intimidated, and held back by his friend, Jock, contented himself with some muttered curses. Brian pushed out of the dugout, hearing behind him Jock's admonition, "Forget it, Red. He's daft, I tell ye."

Brian was ashamed of himself by the time the tiresome, struggling push down the communication trench was finished. The familiar muddle, irritating though it was, focussed his mind exclusively on the immediate job of getting along Anger Boulevarde, and enabled him to vent some of his accumulated spleen on physical efforts. As they marched back toward Vandy's farm, he healed the breach between himself and Red Hibbert with a full packet of cigarettes comprehendingly accepted by his friend as a full apology.

It made him feel better. He swung along, soothed somehow by the rhythm of marching feet, gratified that in spite of his long, sleepless and exhausting twenty-four hours, his tough strength still made nothing of this four-mile march with full pack, rifle, and equipment. There might still be a chance of leave. Things were quieter down south, probably regular leave would soon begin, and with his wound to back him, he ought to have a good chance to be among the first.

"Where's Spud?" he asked Billy Mackenzie as they reached the broken crucifix which marked the half-way point. "Not wounded?"

"No,—on leave."

"Do you mean—have they started regular leave?"

"Sure, Mac—the first relief after you left. Whew! This four miles gets longer every time."

Brian took his rifle from him after a weak protest. It was simpler than apologizing for that cursing.

He congratulated himself, as he threw off his equipment in the big barn at Vandy's, that he was completely normal now, though tired. The news that leave had started while he was away, that he might have got it himself if it had not been for that wound, had not roused him as it would have done earlier that night. It was the last straw, but the camel's back was too strong,—or numb.

The dim raftered building was full of dirty, tired men arranging the few square feet which would be their home,—the luxurious vacation quarters of "B" Company for the next week. Lieutenant Scimold had just come in to see that all was well with Number 7 Platoon before going to his own quarters. He was perfectly laconic, but his long, rugged face showed humor, and he seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of chocolate and cigarettes. Lieutenant Morin of No. 6, a little dour, a little shy with his men, but scrupulously polite, had just gone out. Platoon Commanders in the 2nd Montreal Rifles did considerably more than their duty to their men under the regime of Colonel Markey.

Brian was having some difficulty keeping himself in that normal frame of mind which he thought he had attained. A dozen of the men in the Company had already wandered across to ask him if he was back, and state that they thought he was safe in Blighty. It was getting exasperating again. Neither did he appreciate their simple and wholehearted amusement when they were told,—and his immediate neighbours never failed to tell,—how he had trudged up to the front line just in time to trudge back again.

Nevertheless, he was getting his things settled with nothing worse than some surliness, and considerable conscious

restraint, when Lieutenant Wells came in. He picked his way over the littered floor, asking here and there if there were any complaints or ailments before the men settled down for their uninteresting morning of sleeping and cleaning up.

It was familiar routine, and Brian did not bother about it now that his determination,—although not his desire, to butt-end those dark little eyes, had evaporated. Squatting on his blanket, Brian watched him with a covert scowl, but without much interest,—until Wells glanced his way and their eyes met.

Deviating from his passage to the door, Lieutenant Wells came towards him. Brian felt the blood rushing to his head, the pounding of his heart, forced himself to lower his eyes to his boots, and started doing something to the laces. He'd got to control himself. He'd untie this knot—nothing else,—keep on untying this knot,—the damned thing wouldn't come undone,—concentrate on the knot. The mean little devil wouldn't have the face to speak to him if he kept his face down and worked at this knot.

"Mackell!"

Brian kept working at the knot.

"Mackell, I hope your wounds haven't troubled you?"

Brian looked up,—met the little eyes. Yes, the same sneer, he might have guessed it from the tone. He stared into Wells' face, unconscious of anything in the world except what he saw there,—and what he felt.

"Any complaints?"

It was a quiet, insolent challenge. It was a "dare"—which could not be taken up without facing the ponderous discipline of the army juggernaut.

But Brian never thought of that. He thought of nothing. He felt the arrogant challenge and leapt to his feet so quickly that Wells stepped back in alarm. The hurried step saved him from a badly battered face, and Brian from a year or two in prison, for it took him against Billy's outstretched legs, so that he tripped and fell sprawling backwards.

A pleased but awed snigger ran through the barn. Brian did not hear it. Wells' fall had stifled his impulse to attack, but its humour was lost,—frozen in the icy resolution which had displaced his anger.

He looked down at the undignified figure trying to get its legs clear of Billy Mackenzie and his blankets. "Yes sir," he said clearly, "I have a complaint. Some spiteful rat in this regiment sent me up to the front line last night to report, knowing very well that I'd have to come right back again. That's my complaint, sir."

As Wells got to his feet, Brian sat down and returned to his bootlace. A hushed silence accompanied Wells to the door. He did not look back; Brian did not look up.

Ten minutes later Sergeant Brunt with two men of No. 7 Platoon came in. "You're under arrest, Mackell," he announced importantly. Brian, smoking comfortably on his blankets, his boots off for the first time in nearly two days, was feeling immensely better,—as if he had taken a dose of medicine which had completely cleared his system. "Well, what of it?" he asked cheerfully.

Brunt looked puzzled. "You're under arrest," he repeated.

"O.K., Sergeant. What do we do when we're under arrest?"

It was a poser which the sergeant could not solve. There was no guard room, there was no suitable vacant place for a jail and if there had been, he hadn't any authority to commandeer it. Lieutenant Scimold had told him to put Mackell under arrest, and he had done it.

"Put that man under arrest," he ordered the guard, with considerable dignity, and departed for further instructions.

In the afternoon when the barn was empty, and the men outside basking in the early summer sunshine, Captain Todd came in. Brian was alone with his guard. "Arrest" had proved to mean that he had had to move over into a more secluded and comfortable corner than he had occupied before, and that his guard must stay with him. He had apologized to the two men from Scimold's platoon, whom he had made as much prisoners as himself, but they had seen the episode and knew

Wells. Few apologies were needed.

Todd motioned them away, and sat down on the straw.

"Cigarette?" he offered. "I'm here to examine your arm, let me see it."

Brian took off his tunic, rolled up his sleeve. Todd only glanced at it. "Right. Put your tunic on, and listen,—with your brains as well as your ears. I don't want you to talk. When I've finished, I want 'yes' or 'no' and that's all. I don't like to see a McGill man in a scrape, and you're in a scrape, take my word for it! Point is to get out of it as easily as possible."

Brian started to speak. He particularly desired to tell a sympathetic unofficial officer something about Lieutenant Wells. But Todd held up his hand authoritatively.

"I said listen! Mr. Scimold, who saw this business, and Mr. Wells have been thrashing it out for a couple of hours. But it hasn't gone any farther, not even to Captain Thomas—officially. I was brought in because of your wound. Now then, if it goes down on the charge sheet as 'insubordination,'—no lurid details one side or the other, you'll first go up before your own Captain at orderly room tomorrow; then if you keep your fool mouth closed,—tight,—and don't try and buck the army system,—never mind how right or wrong you are,—then I imagine Captain Thomas will deal with it in the routine way and mete out such punishment as comes within his authority, and the matter will be closed.

"But if that charge goes on the sheet as something more than 'insubordination,' as it easily could,—as it certainly will if it's thought that anything you say might bring—er—complications; or if you object to Captain Thomas' jurisdiction, or appeal from his sentence, as you have the right to do, the whole matter goes beyond the control of—of those who want to avoid unpleasantness.

"Now, what I want is your definite but quite unofficial statement,—one McGill man to another, and so on,—as to whether you prefer to take your own Captain's sentence, or whether you have any idea of forcing the matter higher up?" Captain Todd lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall.

Brian's decision had been made long ago. He had had all the morning to realize what a crazy fool he had been to sacrifice himself and Joan for the sake of humiliating a worm like Wells. His decision had been very, very definite,—to wriggle out of his trouble with the least possible offense to the powers who could keep him and Joan apart. He would swallow all his pride,—in a gulp! Anything to get out of the net!

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir. I understand the point. I made a fool of myself,—but I'd got a bad knock in not being sent to England. I'd promised to get back there soon,—and then Mr. Wells—" He saw Captain Todd's hand begin to rise, and broke off. "Sorry, sir. My firm intention is to keep my mouth shut and take whatever Captain Thomas hands out. And —" He swallowed. "—I'll apologize to Mr. Wells for losing my temper."

Captain Todd got up, smiling. "Seems a very sensible decision, Mackell. Let's hope it gets to the right quarters!"

Next day Brian sat down in the shade of the old barn to write the bitter news to Joan. His case had been disposed of in record time. "Charge,—'Insubordination'," Captain Thomas had read out, and looked up from the charge sheet. "Were you insubordinate, Mackell?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thirty days C.B. All right, Sergeant, next case."

That had been all, and Brian had thought he could detect distinct relief in Thomas' voice when he had said "next case."

It was a bad business, but he was well out of it with thirty days of extra fatigues and leave stoppage. He didn't mind the fatigues, but the leave aspect was bad. It was likely enough that he would miss a chance during those thirty days, and even if he didn't, his "insubordination" wouldn't help to put him up at the head of the list!

It was a hard letter to write. When he had written last, he had been at Etaples, still with some slight chance,—so he had thought, of getting to England on his wound. Joan would get a cruel blow from his letter. It was horrible to think of her reading it,—it was too horrible to think of. His face was moist with sweat. How—how could he get out of this mess? If only—

He struck the ground fiercely with his fist, and felt better because it hurt. It was enough to drive him crazy,—he must manage to keep control of himself. He clenched his teeth and sealed the green envelope. Poor Joan!

At the end of July, 1918, the military hospital at Norwich still retained many of the anachronisms of the temporary quarters erected in 1915. The long wooden wards were becoming the worse for wear and weather, the annexes where Dorothy Brador and the other V.A.D.s washed surgical instruments and trays, scrubbed rubber sheets, and prepared dressing, were ill supplied with every convenience, including water, which should have lightened the work. In winter they had been bitterly cold, damp, and draughty, and now they were so hot and stuffy, the accumulated smells of antiseptics and suppuration so heavy, that Dorothy wondered dully how she had got through the long day without being physically sick.

It was nearly eight o'clock. She finished wringing out the damp cloths, put the last of the debris into the galvanized iron bucket, already nearly full of pus soaked waddings and bloodstained bandages, washed her hands, and went into the ward.

"Finished at last, Sister," she reported to the Sister in charge.

Sister Wickly looked at her watch suspiciously. It was still three minutes to eight, and Dorothy knew very well that she was trying to think of some new, unnecessary drudgery to give her for those three minutes before she would go off duty. Sister Wickly disliked V.A.D.s on principle.

Dorothy stood on aching feet, waiting. Sister Wickly looked at her watch again. Evidently she could not think of anything.

"You're going on leave tonight, aren't you, nurse?" she asked.

"Yes, Sister."

"Well—" She looked at her watch again. A sudden rise in pitch of the moans which were coming from No. 14 drew her attention. "Well—," she said grudgingly, "you'd better just wait till the night nurse comes on," and turned away.

Dorothy hurried her packing. There was little of it. A large handbag was enough for the few belongings she was taking. The cubicle in which she lived did not encourage the accumulation of personal effects.

She said a casual goodbye to the two friends who had just come off duty and were getting some vicarious satisfaction by watching her pack, and started toward the station. She did not feel much of the exhilaration which her friends attributed to her. Her leave would be a rest, that was all, and she would have unlimited baths, breathe air which was uncontaminated with the smell of pus, and feel really clean for a change. That was about the height of the rapture she expected.

She had not let her parting from Joe Todd break her heart or her health, or her determination to do her work thoroughly. She had done nothing old-fashioned and silly at all. But since those days in January the work had become plain drudgery, unalloyed with any of the feelings which had made it seem worth while before. She might have felt that somehow she was emotionally deficient, if it had not been for wakeful nights haunted by sickening visions of emptiness, and her feelings as she searched the papers for news of the Canadians.

She did not appear until lunch next day. A bath when she got home, another when she got up, and clothes which had never been within twenty miles of a hospital, had metamorphosed her. She joined her father and mother and Joyce in the dining-room with an air of gaiety which was only partly assumed.

She laughed at her mother's apologies and complaints on the subject of food shortages. "You bloated landowners don't know how lucky you are! I had dinner with the Archdeacon last week, and you should have heard poor Mrs. Bannerman's troubles,—real ones! Meat cards, butter cards,—and then it's margarine, sugar cards, and never enough of anything. Are you sure it isn't illegal, Father,—this using butter from your own dairy?"

"No, no, my dear," Sir James assured her anxiously. "I'm not one of those profiteers, thank God. No, no! We are all under regulations, a little difficult to understand sometimes, of course, but still, we certainly keep them as well as we can."

"You're too conscientious, Jimmy," Lady Brador broke in. "I've always said so,—much too much. After all, we do own our own property even if there is a war,—very difficult sometimes, Dorothy,—and they're not used to it,—and if Mrs.

Wortle left,—well, really I don't know what,—absolutely impossible to replace servants now, my dear,—everyone says so. Look at Mr. Russell,—now it's no use laughing, you know what I mean,—his substitute,—my dear!—incredible! A nobody,—positively,—and the aitches!—less than that. Mr. Page would have been better,—that was a misfortune after all,—we never thought that,—so peculiar,—Dr. Beringer's never even seen him, he tells me. Nobody sees them much. Polly says,—they might be German spies,—the North Sea and all that,—but of course I know that's ridiculous,—but why can't people be normal?"

"It's not always so easy, Mother, these days, but I'm going to be normal for a week anyhow, and I'm going to start off with a good, clean windy walk. It's funny how the hospital makes one brood on cleanness,—like a mania! I feel about fresh sea air the way an opium smoker must feel about his pipe!"

It was mental as much as physical rejuvenation which Dorothy hoped for from her walk. After her cramped quarters and crowded days, the lonely sweep of the green downs and the soft murmur of trees were restorative. She could live alone with her own thoughts for a time, although they might not be too pleasant. She could not resist the warm languor of the summer day. She would let her spirit and body go free for a while.

But it would be silly to invite too deep a melancholy, she would not walk through the beech woods,—yet. She would go over to Caster Head and sit under the pines. She wanted to remember, to feel something of her association with Joe,—but not so much that it would hurt. And here she had been sad,—it would be less distressing than wandering along those other paths,—alone.

She sat where she had sat before, watching the road south, now bright and harsh with sunshine where before it had been shrouded with mist. She had nothing to hope from that road. She wondered just what she had to hope from any road. Neither she nor Joe had written. She had felt that it would hurt her less,—and him, to admit the finality of what she knew,—by its very indecisiveness, was final. Their parting,—the frustration of thought and word and desire, which had made the end of their brief day so bitter and humiliating, could not be assuaged by letters. Letters would only excoriate the wounds, not heal them. Only a miracle which would bring them together with mutual determination to let nothing separate them, could erase the sense of shame which that parting had left.

Why, oh why—She turned at the crackle of the pine-needles. It was Miss Page! She was glad of the interruption,—of any interruption. She knew that she had been on the edge of that bottomless morass of indecision which she had managed to avoid, except for a few cruel nights when she had found it as strangling and as heartbreaking as if the decision still had to be made.

Miss Page had not seen her yet, she was picking her steps through the trees with her head down. "I'm afraid I'm poaching, Miss Page," she called.

"Oh!" Joan looked up with a start, drawing together the folds of the loose dust-coat she was wearing. "Oh! I didn't know ___"

"I hope you don't mind. This seemed the pleasantest place I could think of to sit quietly and get the hospital swept out of my brain."

"No, of course I don't mind, Miss Brador. I was only going for a walk. I wasn't going to sit down."

She seemed about to turn, but Dorothy stopped her. She wanted her to stay. Their meeting in this wood had revived the memory of that other meeting. She wanted to talk to her, and she was the only person she did want to talk to just then. There was a bond between them, although Miss Page could not know it. "Please don't go, Miss Page. I'm sure you were really coming here. If anybody should go, it's I; but I was feeling a little in need of cheerful company!"

After a thoughtful pause, Joan came forward and sat down on the bank. "I'm afraid I'm not very cheerful company, Miss Brador," she said with a doubtful smile. She did not say anything else for a little while, sitting with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her palms, looking out toward the road south.

Dorothy saw that her face looked tired, and that she had lost that quietly confident manner which would have been almost debonair if it had not also given the impression of such intense reserve. Now she seemed subdued as well as reserved. She must have been very much in love with that young Canadian,—unless she was ill.

Dorothy's heart went out to her,—she was so beautiful that the indefinable change seemed the more poignant by contrast.

"The last time we were here we were watching our guests march away. Do you ever hear from that invalid of yours? He would be very ungrateful not to write, after you and your father were so kind to him."

Joan looked up. "It was he that was kind to us, Miss Brador—and he has written, several times."

"Of course,—when your father was ill. I remember. He struck me as a nice boy. It was rather amusing the way Mr. Russell was so careful to tell us that the Canadians were 'rough and ready' when he billeted those officers on us at the Hall. I never found them so, did you?"

"Mr. Russell was silly," Joan said decisively. "I don't expect he'd ever seen a Canadian before. Brian—" She looked up quickly as the name slipped out, "—that's Mr. Mackell,—we got to be—friends, you know, Miss Brador." She bit her lip, and there was something appealing in her look as she gave the explanation. "He used to laugh at Mr. Russell, and I think the officers did too. The Canadians were just as gentle and thoughtful as English soldiers would have been, I'm sure. Mr. Mackell was—"

Dorothy interrupted, "There's no sense calling him 'Mr. Mackell,'—to me, if you liked him and were friends. I think you were very sensible; friends aren't too common. You were—lucky—both of you. One doesn't let the smallest bit of happiness escape these days, if one's wise."

She felt the bitterness of her own words, even as she enjoyed the radiance of Joan's grateful smile. "I know, I know," Joan agreed eagerly. Then the smile vanished as suddenly as it had come, and her face was more wan than before. "But—" She seemed to be trying to say something,—or not to say something, and her eyes were searching Dorothy's anxiously.

Dorothy touched the other girl's shoulders with a reassuring arm. "One can't get something for nothing," she said sadly,—"not even happiness. But I quite agree that Mr. Russell's ideas were about as silly as they could be. Nobody could be gentler than Captain Todd, when old Mary died."

"And he was the same when Father was ill, Miss Brador. He—he was awfully good to us," she finished lamely, and again Dorothy had the impression of a curb upon her words.

"Has your friend given you any news of Captain Todd,—or any of the other officers?"

"Yes, sometimes. He likes him, you know. He was going to the same university that Captain Todd used to go to. He says all the men like him."

"He hasn't been wounded, I hope? Where are they now?" As casually as she could, she cross-examined Joan to glean any scraps of news of Joe which might have crept into Mackell's letters. Joan seemed glad and anxious to tell her everything she could recollect. She seemed to have forgotten her own depression while she was doing so,—until the end, when the hesitancy crept in again.

"—and he says Captain Todd must have spoken for him or something, or he might have got into terrible trouble, and never—. His letters sometimes have to be censored, so he can't tell me things. At least, I can't know whether what he tells me is everything. But his leave was stopped for thirty days. That was on June thirtieth, a month ago,—but he couldn't be so lucky as to get away immediately."

With each sentence Dorothy grew more sure that this girl's love for a Canadian soldier had brought with it something of the grief which she herself suffered. With the understanding came a deep desire to help her. If she herself was condemned to disappointment and regret, it would bring some ease to help the troubled girl beside her to a better fortune. Now that Joan's calm reserve had melted a little, Dorothy understood how lonely she must be with her troubles, how badly her life had equipped her for grappling with the impact of the world. She remembered that, as far as anybody knew, neither she nor her father had been outside of Caster End since they had come there six years ago, so that they could hardly have any more friends outside the village than they had in it,—which was none.

"My dear," she said impulsively, putting her arm round Joan's shoulders, "if there is any way I can help you,—please don't think I want to intrude,—I would be so glad. You can't have so many friends that a new one won't help."

Joan stared at her. "I haven't any friends,—not one. There's not a single person in the world that I could go to if I needed help,—or—sympathy,—or even advice, Oh, Miss Brador, if only you—would let me—"

The great dark eyes were searching hers with a sort of anxious desperation. Dorothy smiled as comfortingly as she could. "'Dorothy'—if I'm to be your friend," she suggested.

Joan did not appear to notice. She was still gazing into her eyes, and had taken her hand, as if to hold her from any movement which might prevent their silent questioning.

Dorothy was beginning to guess the reason for all this. There could only be one trouble which would change the dignified, reserved Joan Page so drastically. "My dear," she said earnestly, "whatever you feel like telling me, or asking me,—remember you can at least trust me—absolutely. I'm not Mother nor Father nor the Vicar, nor anybody except a girl who's been seeing a lot of trouble these last two years, and is ready to be your friend,—if you like."

Joan's eyes were glistening with tears. She tried to swallow them. "I need advice—so—terribly,—if only you won't think—" She could not finish. Her head bowed on Dorothy's lap, as she let herself slip down the sloping bank, and half sat, half lay, with her face concealed on Dorothy's knee, and her shoulders shaken by convulsive sobbing.

Gradually Dorothy felt the spasmodic breaths grow calmer. She sat silent, full of sympathy, but hoping that the appearance of deep strength which she had admired in the other Joan Page had not been too deceptive.

But only a few minutes passed before she was reassured. Joan sat up with an apologetic little smile. "I'm sorry. I'm silly,—but I won't do it again." She found a handkerchief in the pocket of her dust-coat, and dabbed at her eyes and cheeks. "I couldn't help it,—for once,—but I feel better. I must tell you, Miss—Dorothy. I must trust someone,—I need advice so badly. I've got to go away somewhere,—anywhere except here. I've got to. I'm—please be kind,—I'm going to have a child;—and I can't hide it any longer."

As Joan explained briefly and simply, her natural serenity reasserted itself. Dorothy had managed to convey by some little gesture or expression that she was not shocked, and it had been effective. She liked the way Joan spoke, her freedom from vain regrets and false humility, and at the end almost envied her. This girl at least had known that love was not a thing of self-analysis and careful computation.

She was suffering now, but Dorothy knew too well that she herself was suffering too,—and without the hope,—the pride which made Joan's last words seem almost triumphant. For as she finished, all the tragedy of her present state seemed to pale before some inward sense of a fate woven strongly and without flaws, and a future which at its worst could not be too sad.

"That is all," she said quietly. "I need advice so badly,—someone like you who knows so much more about the world than I do. But—Dorothy,—I can't be sorry,—I can't. Brian loves me. Nothing but—but death will keep him from me—in the end. And if he dies,—it will be horrible—but I'd feel far, far worse then, if I didn't feel that I'd been—been—honest."

She looked up appealingly. "Don't think too hardly of me,—I couldn't have done differently."

"I don't," Dorothy said shortly. Her thoughts were bitter just then, but the bitterness was all with herself. No doubt she ought to feel that it was all very wrong and crude, but she didn't,—except for a slight abstract distaste for crudeness,—and that was merely due to the inability of one mind to experience completely the emotions of another. If it had been her story which she had just heard and Joe's she knew with perfect conviction that she would have felt just as Joan Page felt. In spite of possible tragedy, the fact remained,—these two had succeeded,—somehow, and she and Joe had failed. They had gone too far, but you couldn't have everything. It had been closer to the truth of love than—object surrender to misgivings about the future.

She frowned, silently thoughtful, almost forgetful of Joan and her problem. Too far—not far enough,—her own heart gave her the answer clearly,—and yet—. Her mind, going over that last anguished scene with Joe, could not even now escape the same sickening indecisiveness. As soon as emotion presented its apparently conclusive case, reason pushed in with paralysing doubts! She brushed her palms together nervously, although there was nothing to brush off, except doubt. She simply must not start thinking of all that again.

"Don't be foolish,—now, Joan," she said almost fiercely. "Weakness is the most foolish thing of all. It's wicked. You knew,—and acted accordingly, and the foolish, feeble, wicked thing is not to know, and to do nothing."

She put her arm reassuringly round Joan's shoulders again. "I'm sorry. I don't sound very sympathetic, do I? but I am, I—

"I'm not as wise as you, Joan, that's the only trouble! But now let's see what can be done. If you go away, what about your father?"

"I think,—although I don't understand him very well now,—that for some reason he actually wants me away. I'm sure he doesn't know—anything about this. But he's said things,—I'm sure they were meant to be hints, about his cousin in Manchester. She used to be terribly unpleasant to us when I remember her years ago, and Father never liked her, and she hasn't been mentioned for I don't know how long. But I couldn't go there. She's so strict that she's cruel. I think she's really strict because she's cruel.

"If you could only tell me of some quiet, lonely place,—I've got a little money,—not quite alone,—a doctor,—when I need him,—and how to get there."

Dorothy considered. "I'll have to think about it. We can talk it over as we walk back." She rose. "But don't worry any more. We'll arrange it somehow so that everything will be comfortable until your Canadian gets back."

Very early on the third morning after her talk with Joan, Dorothy drove the old Vauxhall down to the village and stopped outside the row of brick villas. It was just after five, and the first streaks of dawn were showing over Caster Head. The village was dim and still, but Joan must have been waiting, for she came out immediately, carrying a big Gladstone bag and a coat. Dorothy would have got out to help, but saw how easily Joan managed the heavy bag, and waited. "Can I help you with anything?" she asked, as she opened the door and helped to get the clumsy bag in the back.

"No, thank you, there's not much more." She turned up the narrow path again, came out with a shawl-strap and a hand-bag, and closed the door behind her.

Neither spoke until they were nearly a mile from the village, and driving steadily northwards. Dorothy was contented. She was doing something now, something about which there were no doubts in her mind, with no red tape to complicate it, something she herself wanted to do, and to do her own way. In the four days during which she had been arranging her plan to help Joan, she had become more determined to balance the failure of her own wretched love story by ensuring a happy ending for Joan's. And now as she drove, it was that sense of duty to her own conscience, as much as her sympathy for Joan, which made her feel so comfortably single-minded about the job in hand.

She looked back as they passed the stile where she and Joe had come into the road after their walk along the downs. How gay they had been when they realized that they were going to be terribly late for lunch! And that extraordinary talk they had had about the nature of Truth, with its conclusion of—blank nullity! How pleasant it had been,—and how sadly prophetic!

Her thoughts occupied her for a time, then she turned to Joan. "I don't think a soul saw us," she said. "Not that it makes much difference, except that the less people are interested in us the better. I told Father that I was driving you over to stay with a cousin near Manchester, and that was that!" She smiled to herself. It had taken all her cool assurance to awe her mother and Joyce from undue curiosity as to her new friendship for Joan.

"Did Mr. Page make any difficulties?"

"No,—and it worries me a little, Dorothy. It was too easy. He's strange. I'm sure he was glad that I was going away, but he was so wrapped in his thoughts that he didn't seem to take any interest in where I was going, or when, or how. I asked him for Cousin Agatha's address, and he looked blank and said it should be available. Later, when I said I'd found it, he didn't ask where, or what the address was, or anything. So I just mentioned that she'd moved to Yorkshire, but it made no impression, and I doubt if he remembered where she really did live. It's strange, isn't it?"

Dorothy nodded.

"So if I really had been going to Cousin Agatha, he wouldn't even know my address now. I told him about the arrangements I had made for Eliza Wrenn to look after him, and he hardly listened."

"Did you give him the address?"

"Yes, I pinned it on the mantelpiece and showed him, and asked him to be sure to forward anything immediately, and he said he would. He seemed willing to say anything and agree to anything,—almost as if he was afraid that I might not go after all."

"It does sound peculiar, doesn't it? I should be getting leave again in two or three months, and I'll make it a point of seeing your father then,—just to make sure that he's all right."

Joan clasped her hands tightly. "I wouldn't sacrifice Father, whatever happened to me, but he is really better than he has been for a long time. After that shock, when you and Captain Todd and Brian were so good to us, he seemed to drink more than ever for a time, but about a month afterwards I found that he was cutting down the amount. It was a tremendous effort, and I couldn't help him. I daren't even allude to it. But he must have had some rigid plan,—a sort of timetable, I think, for reducing his daily allowance, and now he hardly takes anything. I think that's partly what makes him so different. He talks much more, and takes a tremendous interest in the war, and he's more irritable. I'm sure he's better physically, and yet—"

Dorothy took her hand off the steering wheel long enough to pat Joan's knee encouragingly. "No good worrying, my dear. Your father will be all right. You owe yourself something as well as him. I'm afraid I don't know much about it, but I expect you should make a point of being as placid and cheerful as you can from now on. My old nurse at Gretmanby will look after you beautifully, and she's by way of being an expert in maternity matters. I've told her that your husband was over in France, and that as your family are furious at your marrying a Canadian Tommy, I've arranged this temporary home for you, and that she's to consider that you are her niece. Gretmanby's a very small place, just the manor and church, a few cottages and a couple of little houses, and as Jessie has lived there for years, there will be no questions.

"The manor came to us through Mother's people, but there's no land with it. When Jack,—that's my brother, is at home we spend a month for the grouse, but Bradderham is much more convenient, and Father would be lost without his farms. The place is nothing but an expense nowadays. Jessie and her husband,—he's deaf as a post,—live there and look after it, and it's just the place for you."

"You've been so good to me, I don't know what to say," Joan said earnestly. "I didn't mean you to,—really I didn't. I just wanted advice,—and it was such a relief to speak to somebody. I never knew how terribly alone Father and I were, until these last few months, when I needed someone."

"You won't be alone any more when your Brian gets back! Look at that old timbered inn. Isn't it impossible to imagine war going on, and that peaceful, lovely old place, in the same world? That's Saxby, I think. We must be half way now."

She drove steadily on, the motor hummed, the villages slid by, the level road gave place to hills and dales, the lush green pastures and mangold fields to larger, barer pastures and sometimes stretches of moor and heather. The country was grayer, and sometimes when the sun retired behind a cloud, there was a touch of bleakness.

But when it was nearly eleven o'clock, Dorothy turned north off the main road, and following a little brook, drove down a long straight hill into a quiet valley which was as green and smiling as any scene they had passed. "Nearly there," she said, steering slowly over a narrow bridge, and a few minutes later stopped before a long, low, many-gabled, many-chimneyed, brick house. It stood less than fifty yards back, with a semi-circle of driveway which began and ended at iron gates set in a mellow brick wall between the road and the unkept lawn. A gray stone church with a squat tower stood directly across the road. The two solid buildings seemed to be alone, for the many oak trees in full foliage which surrounded them effectually screened whatever else there might be of the village of Gretmanby.

A very stout, white-haired woman opened the main door as they drew up. Her cheeks were creased in a broad smile, but she kept her hands folded between her voluminous apron and her blue cotton dress, while she engaged in the difficult manoeuvre,—for one of her figure,—of curtsying, until Dorothy jumped out and kissed her heartily.

"Well, it's good to see you again, Jessie! You're getting younger all the time,—and I'm getting older! I hope you're as well as you look?"

Jessie patted Dorothy's hands delightedly. "I've nowt to complain of, Miss Brador," she beamed, "praised be! But you to be talking about getting old! When you're nobbut a little lass that I could pick up in—"

"No, no, you couldn't, Jessie!" Dorothy laughed. "But this is your guest, Mrs. Mackell. Joan, this is the best nurse in England, Jessie Barton,—even if I'm not much of a credit to her!"

"And now I know you've got a grand lunch for us, Jessie,—and we need it! We've had a long drive, and I'm afraid I can't stay nearly as long as I'd like, because I've got another long drive home."

It was a long drive, and tiring. But when she left the car in the garage, and got out rather stiffly, she was satisfied with her day's work. Her long hours at the Hospital were more tiring, and although it was useful work, and necessary, and of direct benefit to men who had sacrificed much to suffer much, yet the help she had just given Joan Page brought satisfaction, more than she had experienced since her first proud week of duty in the ward.

But the hardest part of the day's work remained.

After a not very cordial dinner,—for neither Sir James nor his wife were more than superficially reconciled to the new order in which young women drove all over the country alone, she went up to her sitting-room and sat down to write to Joe.

On the table in front of her she laid the letter which Joan, on her advice, had written hurriedly at the manor. It was to give Brian her new address, and Dorothy wondered what else it contained. How easy it must have been to write, compared with her own! Joan need not trouble to pick her phrases. How much easier things were,—in spite of all afflictions, for the lucky people who knew what they wanted, and were not afraid of themselves!

Dear Joe:—she began, paused for a time, wrote *August 3, 1918*, paused again, frowned, leaned back in her chair. She found herself forming mental phrases, discarding them, and thinking of other ways of saying the same thing. Her task was simple enough,—to ask Joe's help in getting leave for Brian Mackell, but the white paper with Joe's name on it had complicated things. In all those phrases which had been running through her head there had been a secondary motive. She wanted so much to convey the suggestion of love,—without giving it any definite expression.

She knew well enough that the desire should be resisted. In spite of her weak irresolution when she and Joe had had that miserable tea together in this very room, she knew that it must be one thing or the other. Their very indecisiveness had brought its own decision then, and she had abided by it firmly ever since. She would never have written to Joe if Joan's happiness had not dictated it.

She took up her pen again. It would be silly,—it would only mean more misery, if she put more into this letter than the simple reasons for which it was written, and once more she started:

I was glad to hear from Joan Page, who has told me how grateful she is for what you did for her father, that you have come through safely so far. She had heard about you from Brian Mackell, the young man in your battalion who was billeted with them.

She is a very lonely girl, as you probably realize, but recently has confided in me, and I am writing to ask you,—to beg you to do her, and me, a favour. She was engaged to young Mackell, and they were to have been married before he went to France. Unfortunately you were rushed across so suddenly that the leave did not materialize, and he went to France without seeing her again, and with the license in his pocket which ought to have been used but was not.

I have found a pleasant place for her to stay in the meantime but she is desperately anxious to be married soon and is sure that Mackell feels the same way. She tells me that he has been in some trouble with an officer recently, and that you helped him out of it, and perhaps that is the reason he has not been able to get leave yet. If there is anything you can do to help him get home as soon as possible,—you will understand how soon,—please do it, even if it means a strain on your poor, overworked conscience.

She looked at the sentence again, and scored out heavily and illegibly the words "poor, overworked." Her feelings had crept in, in spite of herself,—and with irony! Had it been his fault or hers? Either of them could have broken that impasse,—neither of them had. And yet both had wanted to! What could have happened to them? And with the thought she found it beginning to happen all over again, and tightened her fingers on the pen and wrote quickly and unthinkingly to the end:

Please do not mention to Mackell that I have written to you, unless it is absolutely necessary, because I have said nothing to Joan, and both of them are the kind of people who would hate to have anyone know about them. Joan is a brave, straightforward girl, and I must say I can't help

admiring her single-minded devotion,—however much anybody else may condemn her. I would do anything to make things come out happily for those two, Joe, and then I would feel less utterly useless, so please do what you can for them,—for my sake, and yours. I'm sorry we parted as we did, Joe. I was watching you march away, from the top of Caster Head. It was a dismal, misty morning, but I'm afraid you must have had many worse ones since you got to France. I hope so much that you will come through it all safely, and be happy again sometime.

Your friend,

Dorothy Brador.

She sealed and stamped the letter without re-reading it, and resolutely stifled the suspicion that she had been false to her own decision. She would post both letters in Norwich tomorrow. It was the best she could do, and whatever came of them,—would come! She was tired of trying to hold fate on leading strings.

At the very hour when Joan's reserve was melting before Dorothy's warm sympathy, Brian, "somewhere in France," was taking his appeal to the highest court,—Colonel Markey. It is possible, even probable, that the Colonel was sympathetic, although it was not apparent, but Brian could find no signs at all of warmth.

His thirty days were ended. In the line and out, his lot had been working parties, extra duties, and fatigues,—until yesterday, the thirtieth of his C.B., and the thirty-first of July.

All the time men had been getting leave! Another party had gone down the line a few days ago, when the Regiment had moved back into Brigade reserve. Company commanders might be choosing more names now, and Brian was grimly determined that his should be among them. He had seen Captain Thomas, who had indicated with some humour, but not without kindness, that a clean crime sheet was much more weighty than "urgent business" in earning leave. But he had given him permission to speak to the Colonel if he wanted to, although indicating clearly that he thought it futile.

Brian had insisted, and had got his way, and now, faced by Colonel Markey's expressionless but very penetrating eyes, was realizing the truth of Captain Thomas' opinion. He made his plea with straightforward brevity, the Colonel's expression had not changed, the Colonel's eyes had not moved, and as each word of his request added to his own sense of its fatuousness, Brian knew that the Colonel was not going to grant it.

At last the Colonel spoke. "You realize that these matters are in the hands of the Company commanders, Mackell?"

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Markey glanced down at the pile of paper on his plank table. "You are a medical student. What year?"

"Second year at McGill, sir."

"Two years are sufficient to learn something of the discipline of life, Mackell. You have also had time to learn something of the discipline of the army. Therefore I acquit you of mere levity in this request. And for the same reasons I credit you with the sense to understand that when I refuse it,—as I do,—it is the only course open to me."

"But, sir— isn't there—I give you my word of honour, sir, that I'm not asking for my own sake. I'm needed in England. I've got to get there,—somehow. It's other people that are concerned. I'll give up any other leave that's coming to me,—for the rest of the war, if only you'll let me go now, sir. And I'd only need a couple of days in England. I'd come right back. I'd be back in five or six days, sir, at the most."

The Colonel picked up his pen and drew another sheaf of papers in front of him. Brian, hot and cold by turns, his clenched hands wet and clammy, knew that the matter was closed. There was nothing else he could say,—unless he told the Colonel the whole truth,—and he couldn't do that,—he couldn't tell about Joan. It would be ghastly to have anybody know—after she was married. It wouldn't be fair,—while there was any other hope, and there was still a good chance that he would get leave in the ordinary way,—in time. And the damn Colonel was so stiff, it might not make any difference what the reasons were,—he must have understood that it was something terribly urgent.

He pushed his hand distractedly up to his wet forehead and through his hair. He must think quickly,—quickly. He couldn't go on standing there. He'd be had up for insubordination again, and make it worse. Something brought Billy Mackenzie into his mind,—he was never in trouble,—he'd be getting leave without needing it. It gave him an idea. He took a mental grip on himself. Another try.

"I must apologize for speaking again, sir," he said very quietly and respectfully, "I won't question your decision, but may I say one word more?"

Colonel Markey looked up, pen poised.

Encouraged, Brian went on quickly. "It's only this, sir, that if any of the men who do go on the next leave are willing to change with me,—to let me have their turn,—would you allow it, sir?"

"That is in the hands of your Company commander, Mackell. I shall certainly not question his decision on that point,—or on any other connected with the leave for "B" Company. That is all."

Brian saluted. "Thank you very much, sir," he said gratefully, and turned right about to the door. He was full of elation. It was a solution! The old boy had been as decent as he could. He wouldn't stand in the way. And Thomas should be all right,—he was a good scout, he had to give the irreproachables the first show, he wasn't trying to give him an extra punishment, so if he could bribe one of the boys on the list to exchange, it ought to be all right with Thomas. If only they'd hurry up with the list, he'd know where he stood.

Three-quarters of the Company had not had leave yet, and half of it had applied, including many who were as unlikely to get it as himself. But the remaining "irreproachables" alone were far beyond the number who could actually get leave. It was Brian's chief hope that Billy Mackenzie would be among the next. He was the only one with whom he had more than superficial friendship, and the principles which forbade smoking, drinking and swearing, and dictated attendance at Divine Service on non-compulsory occasions, would certainly make their owner eager to do a good turn to a friend. Even with his own much less defined principles, Brian could not imagine himself letting down a friend.

So, two days later, with a satisfactory interview with Captain Thomas behind him, he could hardly suppress a cheer when he learned from Brunt,—now acting Company Sergeant Major, that Billy's name was on the new list. He had haunted Brunt for two days, but had said no word to Billy. Hope and anticipation filled him. He allowed his mind to dwell on Joan, as he had not done since the bitter disappointment of a month ago. He had only opened the door which led to her for brief glimpses. Opening it wider brought him such a cruel illumination of all that she must be feeling and suffering, that he could hardly control himself. And he knew from painful experience that any failure to control that black mood of desperation would destroy his last hope.

He found Billy in one of the ruins adjoining the Quartermaster's store. The stores themselves were in a roomy stable, the roof of which had miraculously escaped destruction. With the intimacy between man and beast which distinguished that part of France, a door led directly from the stable into the house to which it had belonged. This house had proved less immune to shell-fire than the stable, but one of the lower rooms was rain-proof, and Quartermaster Sergeant John Henry Stringer had established his personal domicile there. Across a passage was a large room without much roof, which was his office—in dry weather. In wet, the planks and trestles were moved, and Sergeant Stringer entertained the staff in his residence. Adjoining Stringer's own room at the back was another with no roof at all, and therefore sunny. There was a trestle table in it, Stringer's prudent provision for expansion of business. The expansion had not materialized, so the room made a convenient scriptorium for those whose literary efforts demanded more than a stub of pencil and a knee, and who did not shun too close proximity to Authority. For the shell which had begun by removing the roof and south wall, had finished by blowing a hole in the north one. Only a blanket draped over that hole by the modest Stringer separated his bedroom from the scriptorium habitues.

Naturally these were few, but Billy Mackenzie, a writer of voluminous letters, and on the best terms with Authority, was one of them, and here it was that Brian found him.

He made himself comfortable on an empty box and lit a cigarette until Billy should have finished his letter. He had to consider exactly how to open negotiations, and felt slightly embarrassed. This was due to the fact that it was Billy,—the one fellow he felt sure of, whom he must approach.

He had no doubt as to the fitting basis for negotiations with the ordinary run of his pals. It was cash! That was the sensible, and the only effective inducement to anybody to give up his leave, although various degrees of friendship might make varying amounts of cash acceptable, a point not without importance. He only had one hundred and eighty francs to his credit, and he would need eighty for expenses. One hundred francs was not an irresistible sum,—especially to "irreproachables." But although cash was the only reasonable inducement, the matter was complicated by the fact that Billy was his friend,—and an educated man. Offering him money would be uncomfortably like offering a classmate money to buy assistance in a scrape,—something which any good fellow would resent. He would have to watch his step,—maybe leave the money behind in an envelope, when Billy couldn't refuse it.

Billy folded his letter and put it in the envelope. "And what can we do for you, sir?" he asked sportively.

"You can do a whole lot, Billy. Brunt says you've got your leave."

"I know. Isn't it grand! I've been getting more excited—ever since I saw there was a chance. Any little commissions I can

execute for you, sir? We aim to please, and allow a liberal discount for cash!"

He suddenly dropped his frolicsome manner. "It's a shame you're not going too, Mac. I'd looked forward to us going around and seeing the sights together, and my married sister in London said she could put the two of us up. It's not half the fun sight-seeing alone. Was it that row with Wells that did it?"

"Maybe, though lots of the boys with clean sheets haven't gone yet. But I expect it will put me in the last lot,—whenever that is, and that's why I want to ask you something, Billy." He leaned forward, tapping the table with his fist. "I've—got—to get over—to England—for a day or two, Billy. I've simply got to. It's the most important thing in the world for me just now. And one damned thing after another has cropped up to prevent me. Even that cushy wound, which ought to have been a sure blighty, fell through because of the casualties from the Hun push, or something. And now, after this row with Wells, it may be weeks,—months, before my turn comes, but I've got to go now,—or very soon, anyhow."

"Couldn't you speak to the Colonel, Mac? He might make a special case of it, if you explained just what the trouble was."

Brian frowned impatiently. "I couldn't explain,—exactly, for one thing. It's private. And I've seen the Colonel,—and Thomas, and all I can get out of them it comes to this, that if I can get any of the boys who are going on leave two days from now to change with me, they won't interfere."

He paused. Billy was looking at him attentively, but apparently not very comprehendingly, and he went on, "So that's what I've got to do,—find one of the boys who'll understand how important it is for me, and let me go in his place, and take my leave when it comes round."

Again he paused. He was putting himself in Billy's place. He wanted him to have the chance of making the offer spontaneously,—you got a bigger kick out of doing a favour that way.

But Billy made no offer; and when he spoke, Brian knew from something in his tone that he would have to be asked. He wasn't just dumb about it. He understood,—but he wasn't taking the hint.

"Won't you find that hard, Mac? The boys have been waiting for leave for months. They won't want to give it up, especially now we're overdue for another turn in the front line."

"That's where you come in, Billy. I hate to ask you, but none of the others with leave have any reason in the world to put themselves out for me, whereas we've been friends from the start. I want you to do this for me, just as I'd do it for you."

Billy's eyes opened, indicating a degree of surprise which was hardly warranted, considering the introduction. "But Mac, I couldn't. I would if I could, you know that, but really and truly I can't do it, Mac."

Brian watched him, noted the eyebrows raised in prodigious bewilderment at such a singular request. Billy's face seemed to be changing, and as he watched it, he began to feel a change in himself as well.

"I would if I could, Mac, honestly," Billy repeated, "but—but I promised,—my sister, you know. I promised her faithfully that I'd get a leave as soon as I possibly could, and come direct to her; because you know she wants to have her baby boy christened, and I'm to be the godfather, and she doesn't want to put it off any longer. She's very particular about that sort of thing, and we've always been so fond of each other that I wouldn't want to disappoint her. I can't very well break a promise, can I, Mac?"

Brian eyed him, marveling at the metamorphosis which had occurred, either in Billy's personality or in his own perceptiveness. But he suppressed the caustic phrases which crowded to his lips. It was his business to get him to change his mind.

"You could break a promise like that if there were sufficient reason, Billy. And I give you my word of honour that there is,—that from the purely unselfish aspect, I'm much more badly needed over there than you. If I can't get over, it will mean—well—real misery, not just inconvenience. Not that I don't appreciate your feelings about your sister," he added hastily, "I do. All I mean is that postponing your leave won't have as serious effects. It's a matter of honour with me,—honestly it is."

"But it's a matter of honour with me too, Mac. I can't break my promise. I've always tried to do what I felt was right,—

not always successfully, I know," he admitted modestly, "because I don't always know. But when I feel—here—," he tapped his chest, "that something is right,—well, I just have to do it." He leaned forward with the ingenuous smile which had always made Brian feel like a dissipated but affectionate mother talking to a saintly son.

But the look had lost its magic. He ignored it, and the words which had gone with it. "I'm asking you this as a friend, Billy," he repeated gravely, "—the only thing I ever have asked you,—asking you to take my word for the necessity. We have to stick by our friends, Billy, that's a good principle for any decent man, whether he's got any others or not."

He remembered that hundred francs, and his artless embarrassment,—and wondered. "Here's another thing," he went on before Billy could speak, "I've got a hundred francs which I thought would help the fellow who changed with me enjoy himself. That was before I knew that you'd be getting leave. I know you wouldn't want it for yourself, but maybe there's some good turn you could do somebody with it." He moistened his lips with his tongue as he said that. "Or you could buy a crackerjack of a christening present for that little nephew of yours, see? We can think of something good now, and as soon as I get over I'll buy it myself, and I'll take it up to your sister myself, if you like, and explain to her why you didn't come, and what a darned fine thing you did for me. She'll think all the better of you, I'll bet."

Billy got up when the money was mentioned. He looked at Brian steadily. Severity, sorrow, and righteous indignation were all blended in the look. Brian met it coldly unabashed. It was too damned perfect! Now for the pious exit!

"I'm sorry you should see fit to offer me money, Mac."

Yes! There he was, gathering up his writing paper. Fine! Now something really effective at the door! Trust the bastard for a good curtain! Ah—!

Billy had paused half way across the room. There was a fitting throb in his voice now,—Righteous Indignation Controlled by Higher Feelings! Attaboy!

"I would like you to know," he said, "that I can't be bribed to break a solemn promise for a hundred francs."

"Make it a hundred and one!" Brian called savagely, as Billy went out with his head held high, "—and that's a hundred more than it's worth!"

He stared after the erect figure outlined by the bright green grass and azure sky, and framed with jagged brick. He groped painfully, in a sort of mental fog, trying to readjust himself. Billy,—a friend,—with all kinds of principles,—understanding the imperative need,—refusing to help him,—and covering it with a lot of slimy hypocrisy!

It was beyond his comprehension. He could imagine himself committing most of the crimes on the calendar, but he simply could not see himself,—or anybody who was not a complete blackguard, letting down a friend just like that! And if Billy Mackenzie were a blackguard, how in hell could you tell a decent man? If he couldn't look to Billy Mackenzie for help in a tight place, who in hell—

The blanket across the hole in the north wall suddenly billowed. He looked round quickly. Stringer's grizzled, unshaven face was grinning sardonically through the opening. His gaunt, shirtsleeved body followed. "Trouble, trouble, trouble!" he grumbled. "Secrets of the confessional revealed! You must think this place is soundproof, Mackell! And I was just having a good snooze!" But in spite of his drowsy air, he was watching Brian shrewdly. "Well, gimme that hundred," he said abruptly, "I want to finish my nap."

Brian snapped out of his fog. "Did you hear what I was saying?" he asked hotly.

"Bright boy! You guessed it first time! How else should I know you'd got a hundred francs? Of course I heard you,—and your dear friend too! How could I help it?"

"It beats me!" Brian muttered, looking out through the shattered wall again, and still obsessed by the drastic revision of his ideas. "The little rat! The bloody little rat!"

"Well, don't burn! What d'you expect—a saint or something? They don't grow these days!"

"Is that the way you'd treat a friend?" Brian demanded.

"You ought to know those birds by this time," expostulated Sergeant Stringer good-naturedly. "The world's full of 'em.

They don't drink or smoke or cuss or gamble, but they've got their little vices,—or they'd be angels! You don't mind doing a lot of things they think terrible, so you've got to expect them to do things you think terrible."

His sallow, rugged face broke into a reminiscent grin. "Oh, I know those birds! I didn't hold the city desk for ten years for nothing! Boy! I could tell you a few things about some of our pillars of piety,—but I won't!

"But don't get any wrong ideas. They don't average any worse than anybody else, but till you're on to them, you expect more. I'm just telling you not to. A man who doesn't drink or smoke or gamble, and goes to church twice on Sunday, is just as likely to let you down as anybody else,—maybe a bit more, because as I said, everybody's got vices, and if they're not the obvious ones, look out for the ones that aren't so obvious.

"That kid's not Satan in khaki because he let you down. I know his sort. Most of the time they're sincere enough, and plod along the strait and narrow way, but when they do take a breather on the broad road they know how to convince themselves that it's as strait and narrow as you'd want! They've just got a forty horse-power, high-speed ability to fool themselves, that's all. Three-quarters good, one quarter rotten,—just like the rest of us,—only they're generally rotten in different spots.

"Here endeth the lesson! I ought to put it in an essay! You ought to have worked on a newspaper, kid,—you don't learn anything in the army. Where's the hundred?"

Brian, slowly digesting the lecture on human nature, had forgotten Stringer's first peculiar allusion to that hundred francs. It didn't convey anything to him now. He couldn't suspect the old boy of blackmail,—after that sermon, though it sounded like it.

"What about it?" he asked cautiously.

"What about it? You were offering a hundred francs for a leave, weren't you? I'm taking the offer, that's what about it."

Brian stared at him. It began to penetrate. "You're going on leave?"

"I *was* going on leave," Stringer corrected patiently. "I now find I can make a hundred francs by not going on leave. So I am not going on leave. You're going on leave. Clear? I'll repeat it if you like, but it's beginning to sound like a chorus!"

"By God," shouted Brian, jumping up, "you're a gentleman, Stringer! You'll swap with me? You'll let me take your leave?" He gripped Stringer's hand and shook it up and down, until the embarrassed quartermaster sergeant managed to free it.

"Took a bit of explanation, didn't it?" he suggested ironically.

"By God, you're—you're a gentleman!" Brian repeated, almost choking. "I'll never forget this, Stringer. If—if you only knew what it means—"

"Put water on it!" Stringer grunted, pulling aside the blanket curtain. "Better tell Thomas. I'll explain to Shuter."

"Say, I've simply got to thank you properly, Stringer. I—"

Stringer retired. "Go to hell!" he suggested from behind the blanket.

Three days later, Brian, loaded with all his kit, squatted in an evil-smelling box-car with forty other men of the Montreal Rifles,—and with his hundred francs in his pocket again.

Sergeant Stringer had handed them back exactly one day after he had received them. "Sorry, old man," he had explained gruffly. "All leave stopped! Don't know why,—nobody does,—not even the Colonel. Means dirty work at some crossroads, but nobody knows where. Probably just a quick strafe, and then you'll be on your way."

Brian had taken the news stoically. He was getting hardened now. He would have liked Stringer to keep half the money anyway, but a sardonic look from under the shaggy old eyebrows had nipped his offer in the bud. And now he was on his way God knew where! And there was nothing to be done about it,—absolutely nothing. He was as helpless,—as ignorant of what was happening, as a worm in a load of earth being carted to the dump.

He had written Joan, but he hadn't even been allowed to use a green "honour" envelope. Strict censorship of every letter

was being enforced. Some of the boys who had written that their leave was stopped had been told to re-write their letters. They were not allowed to mention the stoppage of leave. Luckily Brian had not posted the triumphant announcement of his approaching arrival at Caster End. That letter had been in his pocket when Stringer had returned his money. But the new one which he had written and sent would hurt her. He had been able to say so little, with every word to pass under Wells' jaundiced eye. It would seem so damned casual. And she would have been hoping,—now that his thirty days were up. The deferred hope would be bad enough, but if she thought he was casual about it,—if she didn't understand how desperately he wanted to go to her,—how desperately he had tried, she would feel a hundred times worse. If only she didn't lose faith in him! His letters,—until this last one, should have reassured her, but they were only words. As far as translating them into action was concerned, he might have been any casual, lying hypocrite in the army!

It didn't bear thinking about, but there was little else to do. The train rumbled and bumped through the deepening twilight, stopped, started, stopped, crawled through the darkness, jerked and creaked through sparsely lit towns. Only occasionally could he manage a few minutes of uncomfortable, twitching sleep, and then there would be a bump, a stop, a rattling, and he would be awake again,—and thinking.

In the early hours of the morning they detrained, ate a meagre breakfast, and were packed into busses. They wound through a countryside which nobody recognized, halted, ate, jolted, halted again, and were herded into a wood. But when they had slept for a couple of hours and eaten their evening rations, word was passed that they were to move again as soon as it was dark. This time they marched for six miles. Then there was a long halt in a ditch beside the road until the dimmed lights of a column of lorries crept up the road, and they climbed in for another ride. There was little room, and there were no seats. They took it in turns to stand or squat. The column crawled along. Always they were passing other troops going up,—marching battalions, jingling batteries, with horses which could hardly keep their traces tight, gunners dozing on limbers, and drivers almost asleep on their horses. Always they were meeting transport coming down. Every variety of truck and wagon and limber known to the army seemed to be on that road.

The whole army seemed packed on it. All that night they did not see a clear stretch of as much as fifty yards. Ahead and behind it was solid with troops, transport, and guns, and the throb of the motors was like a rumbling of distant, tuneful thunder.

Streaks of dawn began to show,—ahead of them,—they must be travelling East again,—toward the "crossroads"! But even when they were unloaded and distributed in another extensive wood, with strict orders not to leave its shelter, nobody knew even approximately where they were. But field guns were firing occasional shells close by. The worms at least knew that they were close to the dump!

Brian remembered Sergeant Stringer's prophecy of a "quick strafe," thought of that last fifteen miles of solid troops, and smiled grimly. But there was nothing he could do. He scooped a hollow for his hip, spread his ground sheet, and with his pack for a pillow huddled into sleep.

—2—

Until the last halt, officers knew little more than men. Their maps, and elaborate guesswork told them they were somewhere in the Amiens area, and that was all. But by the time the evening came they had been given more information than they could easily absorb, and the wood was dotted with groups of platoon commanders and their sergeants poring over maps, consulting operation orders, discussing, puzzling, and then trying, with only partial success, to explain to their men all those elaborate orders of which they were not too sure themselves. But about one thing there was no misapprehension. Next morning,—August 8th, at 4.20 a.m., they would go over the top from the line marked with black ink, and—

There were other lines marked with different coloured inks, two, three, and four miles behind the German trenches, there were later hours marked in small, extremely precise figures, and a Brigade Objective, and an hour for reaching it,—but every officer and every man who could read knew well enough that all those other lines and times were merely little jokes. They would go over at 4.20,—true and sometime, somehow, some of them might reach that Brigade Objective. But it was as certain as death,—and nothing could be much more certain,—that none of the routes laid down, and none of the neat little time schedules would bear much relationship to the actual events.

For once Captain Todd had enough to do. Up to this time his service in the army had hardly seemed worth while, and the

bitter self-abasement which had followed that revelatory fiasco at Bradderham Hall had only confirmed his sense of uselessness.

Feverishly working with Nott and his stretcher-bearers, establishing a first-aid station in a dug-out between the wood and the front line, he was happier than he had been since he left Caster End. He would not have to complain of idleness tomorrow!

It was two a.m. by the time he had got it into shape, and started back to Battalion Headquarters. It was slow going, for the battalion was on its way up the same trench.

Colonel Markey was established in a semi-dug-out, roofed with planks and sandbags, and cut into the face of a shallow chalk pit at the rear edge of the wood. It was full of men and officers,—Major Baxter, Blaikie, Willis of the Signals, Wellington, the Scout Officer, some gunners whose battery was close by, and all the N.C.O.s of the headquarters details.

As Todd reached the Colonel's dug-out, Captain Shuter, the Quartermaster, joined him, swearing vigorously. "Those damned brass hats have got a nerve, believe me! Told me to establish communications; told me where to mark the transport; told me where to get the reserve ammunition and bombs; told me this, told me that, and not a bloody thing they said was right, and if it had been I'd have needed airplanes to do it. And then I get a message,—urgent,—go back to Brigade,—and they give me this! My God!" He threw a leather bag down in front of the Colonel's dug-out. "Hey! Fickler! Here's your mail. How about distributing some valentines in no man's land!"

Fickler came out, glanced at his wrist-watch, saw that it was a quarter to four, and understood with a respectful smile that the Quartermaster was being sarcastic. He picked up the bag and took it inside, Todd following him.

"I wonder how many of those letters will have owners when the show's over?" he asked the Colonel.

Markey shook his head. "Get what you can to the headquarters details, Fickler," he said. "Put the rest back in the bag and leave it here.

"All set, Joe? That's good. This is the time a fellow,—if he's a Colonel,—needs a friend! I've done all I can. Now I just wait,—safe and comfortable for an hour, while those poor boys—It's damnable, Joe! It ought to be the other way,—this would be a good show to finish up with, eh, Joe? The biggest yet."

Todd was silent for a minute. He agreed,—but you can't agree openly that it would be nice for a friend to get killed. "Feel a bit the same way myself, Colonel,—just nerves, of course, but there are plenty who'd lose more than I by being napooched."

Colonel Markey looked at him sympathetically. He had realized before that something had happened to Joe Todd at Caster End, and he could almost guess what. "Cheer up, Joe," he said, getting up and putting out his hand. "You'll soon be in the thick of the biggest job you ever had. No time for thinking then,—that's where you've got it on me at the start, though I expect to have a few troubles later!"

Todd shook his hand. "Cheerio, Colonel, I'll be moving. I want to be safe in my dressing station before the dirty work starts."

"Good luck, Joe."

"Good luck, Colonel."

Just as he was leaving the chalk pit, Fickler caught him. "Letter just come up for you, sir."

Todd stuck it in his pocket. Only when he had reached the dressing station and seen that all was ready, did he pull it out. The writing was strange, but the postmark was clear,—"Caster End," and he knew it could only be from Dorothy. He looked at the envelope feeling strange and unlike himself. It brought the melancholy memories into the glare of reality. It was the first message to pass between them since January, and the sensation which came with it was more like fear than anything else.

He started to rip it open, stopped, took out his pocketknife, slipped it in carefully, and slit the fold. Then he read it through, while the stretcher bearers and orderlies squatted against the walls of the dug-out, smoking and watching him stolidly. Only the first few lines registered on his mind,—then it wandered back to Bradderham Hall, and was full of

pictures and emotions which had nothing to do with the words he was looking at. And when he had finished reading, he had absorbed no single part of Dorothy's message except that Miss Page had told her that he was safe. He frowned, lit a cigarette, and read it through again,—carefully, and with his mind concentrated on its meaning, but even then he had to read the last few lines a third time,—so strong was the force which tugged at his spirit to draw it back to Caster End.

There was a sadness as well as comfort in what that last confused paragraph implied so clearly and avoided saying so strictly. He had been everything that was feeble and vacillating, but he hadn't deceived himself. Dorothy had suffered as he had. Cold comfort, that!

And now she asked his help. He re-read her plea for Mackell, and smiled grimly. A fine time for it!

Crash!

He started, looked at his watch. 4.20. It was the first gun,—and close! With a deafening roar the forward field guns opened the battle song and the deeper thunder of the heavies far behind joined in. The first line was over the top, and the Montreal Rifles,—with young Mackell,—were moving up through the inevitable counter-barrage to form the second wave.

He put Dorothy's letter carefully in his pocket-book. No indecisiveness now!

But he had two more personal decisions to make before his part in the great battles of Amiens and Arras was played, and the first came immediately. Just as the first casualties came in, one walking, the other carried on a stretcher, a messenger panted up from the rear.

It was Morton, the driver. "Captain Shuter sent me to get you back at H.Q. immediate, sir. Coup! a heavies landed in the chalk pit,—made a fair mess of it. Half a dozen's hit,—badly,—looks like a bloody slaughter house, no kidding, sir."

"The Colonel?"

"Copped it fair, sir. One o' them shells hit just outside his dug-out,—him and Fickler, and Shanks,—all messed up,—the Colonel's face warn't touched,—looked just the same as ever, sir, but the rest of him!—and the others,—you could hardly recognize 'em, sir! And they want you immediate, Stringer and Willis, and some of the others is bad hit."

Todd straightened up. The two casualties outside had grown to five. The chain which led from the bursting shells up in front to the quiet hospitals in England was forged, and he was the first link. Could he break it? He pulled out his handkerchief and thoughtfully wiped his moist hands.

"Listen, Morton. Take this message to Captain Shuter. I can't come. Look!" He pointed to the figures lying or sitting around the entrance to the dug-out, with his men working on them. Two more had just come in.

"We can't have a block here. Understand? Now, tell Shuter this: The Dressing Station is only half a mile to the rear of the chalk pit. It's on the road north of Brigade H.Q. He'll know where that is. Get the Medical Officer from there, and take the casualties there. Then they'll be going in the right direction. See? It'll be almost as quick, and they'll be better off in the end. Now hustle!

"Nott, take Archambault and go with Morton and give first aid, and hurry back as soon as they're on their way to the Dressing Station.

"Now then, Jackson,—the first man."

Of those three letters which had been written on that third day of August, only one had fulfilled its destiny,—the one which Captain Todd had placed so carefully in his breast pocket.

The other letter which Dorothy had posted with it,—the appeal which had flowed from Joan's heart and told her lover where to find her, lay buried under a foot of chalky earth, spattered with Colonel Markey's blood and charred by the fiery blast which had destroyed him.

Brian's short, censored note rested unheeded beside a circular inside the door of No. 5 Seaview Terrace.

"Put it in the letter-box," Polly Dyer had told Martin, the postman. "Can't do anything else, can we? I haven't seen either of 'em this last few days, nor's Mrs. Cobbin, but what of it? They always keeps to themselves. If they've gone on a holiday or something, we can't do anything about it. Nobody left me no forwarding address, did they? Rules is rules, Martin. Stick it in the box."

So Brian's letter lay derelict on the Reverend Hilary Page's doormat, while thirty miles away Mr. Page shuffled along between East Dereham and Swaffham in the performance of his mission.

In spite of the August heat he wore a rusty black broadcloth overcoat, and bore the same bag which Brian Mackell had carried for him on that day when his flimsy world of self-deception had shivered and fallen away and revealed him to himself a hypocrite, an abomination of drunkenness, impotent to serve, unworthy even to approach the temple of his Master.

The revelation had almost killed him. He had both feared and wanted to die,—until the Call came, and he knew that the Lord had caused him to pass through the fires in order to temper an instrument for His work.

Joan's decision to go away to their cousin had confirmed his conviction. It was a sign. For he would have found it impossible to explain to her what he himself could not define. The long years of uncommunicativeness could not be broken without a strain. Habit made it impossible to explain to her; habit made it seem impossible to leave her there alone. These impossibilities filled him with dread and a sort of weak frenzy, but his thoughts were too occupied with his mission to devise expedients. A vision filled his mind in all his waking moments, but it was never still; there were no outlines to define it, and no form within. Only the end was clear, where Peace reigned among the nations, and the beginning, where the chosen man overthrew his evil spirit, and walked out upon the highway to follow the guidance of his Master.

He had started on the road south, for there lay the centre of the conflict. He had trudged slowly and steadily, and rested often, for the sustained intensity of his slow conquest over the devil of drunkenness had enfeebled him. For the first two nights he had slept in wayside cottages, asking for shelter with cold humility, accepting it with inclination of the head, tendering payment with an open handful of coins from which his hosts might choose, and acknowledging their refusal with the familiar blessing: "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it."

But now the sun was high and hot, the white dust of the road was thick on his boots and black trousers. It was the third day, and no firm guidance had come to him. His vision remained formless, and seemed to recede as he went forward. Earlier in the morning he had rested in East Dereham Churchyard under the shadow of St. Withburga's Well. He had entered the church and said the Collects for the day, and had hoped for some direction. It had not been vouchsafed, and he walked on, his eyes lowered and his mind determinedly empty,—awaiting its message.

A motorist in a large, red car stopped to offer him a lift. He heard and stopped, looking up, considering a reply. But no reply came to him. What was there to say? Must he explain?—discuss? It came to him that his mission was not yet of this world. He must have further guidance before he could deal with worldly things, and in the meantime it behooved him to avoid entanglements with them. So thinking, he looked incuriously at the cheery young man in the car, turned, and went on his way in silence.

The red car whirled away, leaving a slow-drifting cloud of dust, and the Reverend Hilary Page followed slowly. The

dust enveloped him, drifted past the hedge and across the roadside fields, until it merged with golden wheat and green pastures and reed-fringed streams.

It was late in the afternoon when he came in sight of the church tower at Swaffham. He would rest there in the church. Unconsciously churches had become his milestones,—oases in the desert of meaningless things. In one of them, he was sure, he would receive his message. He passed the pillared dome in the market place, and the signposts, with perfect uninterest, except that on one of them the word "ELY" caught his eye. There came,—and passed, a momentary memory of the majestic old cathedral, and then he came to the church and sat down.

He knelt for a few minutes, then sat and rested, his eyes staring unseeingly into the dim light. It was cool and quiet. His body was aching, his feet sore, and his message was withheld.

If he could have heard the voice of reason he would have been discouraged, but he had built a wall about his spirit which that voice could not penetrate, and dwelt in an emptiness awaiting revelation.

He may have dozed. His head sank slightly, and as he jerked it upright his eyes came out of the distance and focussed on a memorial tablet on the wall,—on a name!

JOHN CHAPMAN

He sat rigid and straight, not breathing. The message?

Swiftly another clear panel of the great picture took form in his mind, the ancient buildings of Ely and the tall, stooping figure of John Chapman, hawk-nosed and gentle-eyed, standing beside him at their ordination.

It was the message! Now he had further guidance, and his heart was glad.

—2—

Father Howard Wriothesley, Superior of the Anglican Brotherhood of the Good Samaritan, looked at his strange visitor curiously. "I am deeply sorry," he said, "but your friend,—and my dear friend, Father Chapman died nearly five years ago."

Mr. Page did not move. He sat on the opposite side of the great oak table which, with some rush-bottomed chairs, was the only furniture of the reception room, his eyes steadily downcast, his coat and hat and bag on the floor beside him. His trousers were whitened almost to the knees with dust, and his black coat so covered that it was ashen gray.

Father Wriothesley fingered the crucifix which hung from the cord around his cassock, and wondered at the impassive calmness of the visitor. Could there be some deep agitation behind that immobility? He leaned forward. "Our friend is dead, Mr. Page," he said kindly, "but I am in his place. If you sought any service from him which I can do instead, I will be very happy."

Mr. Page looked up. He spoke clearly, slowly, impersonally. "I have a mission to perform," he said, "but since leaving my home a week ago I have found that my strength is not yet sufficient for the work, nor is the work yet fully manifest to me. I asked for guidance and was given the name of John Chapman. We were ordained together, but I have not seen him since. I had read that he was a member of this Brotherhood, but that was many years ago, and I had not heard that he was dead."

"Father Chapman has passed, but our Brotherhood remains, Mr. Page. What is your mission, and how can we further it?"

Mr. Page answered without raising his eyes. "It is impossible to explain the exact nature, because I am still awaiting direction. But what I would ask of you is a retreat, a few weeks to restore my strength and to attain by prayer and contemplation a fitting state to receive the rest of my message."

Father Wriothesley meditated. It was a natural request, though Mr. Page made it strangely. Probably when he was restored by rest and sympathy, he would become more natural and explain more definitely. "That we will gladly do for you, Mr. Page," he said at last, "—and more, when you choose to ask. We are all brothers here,—in more than name. If you will come with me, I will introduce you to our Guest-Master."

But when, after a little more than a month, Mr. Page gravely shook hands with the Superior, the Guest-Master and the two or three brothers who had come to the gate to say good-bye, they knew no more of his work,—and little more of himself, than when he came to them. And he left them as he had come, on foot, and carrying his bag in his hand. He was not wearing his overcoat, for the September sun was hot, but the pair of straps which now fastened it to his bag was the only amenity of travel which they had been able to persuade him to accept.

They watched him going down the narrow cobbled street. His clerical frock-coat was rather short and hardly reached his knees, his trousers too were not quite long enough, so that the tops of his boots showed, and his flat black hat was pressed firmly down, almost touching his ears. He was a lonely figure in the empty street, and incongruous in the shadow of the ancient walls and leaded casements.

"I don't feel quite comfortable about letting him go like that," the Guest-Master said doubtfully.

"Nor I," agreed Father Wriothesley. "But what could we do? We gave him all he wished,—rest and quiet. He did not care to consult us, and we could only respect his reticence. I would be happier if we knew more about his mission, but even if we knew, and if we judged it mistaken, have we such wisdom, such certainty, as to justify us in restraining him?"

He fingered his crucifix nervously. "We are uneasy, brothers," he went on, his tone suddenly different. "Why? Because we lack faith! Look at him!" He stretched out his arm, pointing at the black figure as it disappeared at the end of the street. "Grotesque! Weak! Perhaps deluded! A spectacle! All those things,—but what else? His soul may be fairer than that cathedral tower in the eyes of God,—for all we know. Or it may be darker than the lowest crypt beneath, and seeking some expiation to appease its Maker,—for all we know.

"If he is deluded,—to our notions, is not God aware? Is it not part of his plan? Will he not guide the poor man to the appointed end? And if the end should seem tragic to us, it is only because we forget that it is the beginning,—because we lack faith!"

Father Wriothesley turned away from the door, smiling cheerfully. "Our friend has left us a rich reward for our hospitality, brothers,—a lesson—in Faith! We will pray for him daily, that is all we can do. For the rest, I am well content to leave him in the hands of God."

—3—

Mr. Page left Ely on the western road, his pace slow but confident. A new panel of his picture had been defined for him while he rested with the Brotherhood. But it had been revealed gradually this time, the result of much anxious contemplation, and of such reasoning as was possible for him.

A chance description, by one of the Brothers, of a military camp near Huntingdon had kindled the first dim light. Certain large aspects of his task had seemed clear from the beginning, but where to start, and how? The camp at Huntingdon had been described, and it was the only one to be mentioned to him since his call. A message,—clearly. Huntingdon must be his first objective, and he plodded along the road thither with mind at rest.

It was early in the third evening when he came in sight of the brown rows of huts scarring the green slopes. Here was the opening scene of his work, but it bore little likeness to any of his dreams, and he paused doubtfully at the first large building, a Y.M.C.A. canteen and recreation hut.

It stood by itself, separated from the first row of smaller huts by a wide stretch of what had once been grass, but was now a desert of dust. Hundreds of khaki figures were crossing it or wandering aimlessly about, for it was the pleasant evening hour when the men were free to enjoy such coolness as the summer evening brought, before the bugles sent them back to the heat-soaked huts.

Mr. Page watched them vaguely. These were the men to whom his message must be given. But how? He crossed to the edge of the open space, where, a few yards from the end of the Y.M.C.A. hut, was a pole with a small electric globe on it. He had no need for lights yet, but the pole was a fixed point,—something definite, and he went to it because there was nowhere else to go, and he was conscious, for the first time since leaving Ely, of doubt. In his visions there had been a hiatus between a lonely journey and the mass of soldiers listening to the preaching.

He set down his bag and overcoat at the foot of the post and tried to think on a practical plane. Was this problem of

gathering the audience one that should be left in the hands of his Guide? Or was action required of him? He knew that a man chosen as a divine instrument must use his own practical abilities, but if now he must gather his hearers together, how should it be done? He stood, a grotesque figure of dusty, black loneliness, and pondered.

A laughing, talking group of soldiers strolled up. They might have passed him with nothing more than curious looks, but one of them, more good-natured or more curious than the rest, came up to him and asked civilly if he was looking for anyone, and the others followed their friend. One of the nearer groups of idlers, seeing the little knot of men with a dark figure in the centre, thought it must be an itinerant conjurer who sometimes hung about the camp. Any distraction was welcome. They gathered round.

A distant Military Policeman saw the growing cluster, and suspecting an illegal Crown and Anchor game hurried across.

Dozens of other groups, seeing a M.P. in a hurry, followed, hoping for excitement. The scene of idle aimlessness had changed to one of purpose. There was a focus. Scattered figures began to converge. Something was happening, and the crowds in the Y.M.C.A. hut, where nothing was happening, trickled out, drawn irresistibly by the tide.

There was audience aplenty now, and to Mr. Page it seemed that the hand which had led him thus far had swept across that open space and poured the scattered groups of soldiers at his feet.

His eyes passed across the ranks of stolidly expectant figures and he knew that this was the vision that he had seen. He raised his right arm straight above his head, for he had reasoned that, as the chosen mouthpiece, it was becoming to employ all the arts of oratory to enhance his message. So he raised his arm stiffly and spoke in a high pitched pulpit voice.

"Brethren, I have a message for you of the utmost import. We are all living in an abomination of darkness, but whence it cometh, and how it shall be dispersed, none knoweth. For it comes not, as some say, from the clouds of war dividing this earth from Heaven. This darkness is not a mere shadow, it is the very negation of light. God has withdrawn the light of his countenance from us, and that is why there is darkness and war and hatred among the nations. He has made us to sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; being fast bound in misery and iron. And why? Because we rebelled against the words of the Lord!

"We have no excuse. His word is set forth in the Holy Bible, and lest we should mis-read it, his wisest servants have prepared for us a form of worship which all may understand,—which all are enjoined by the laws of this realm to use,—which all who are above the beasts of the field should use, even though there were no laws other than those implanted in our souls. For in what do we most differ from the beasts that perish?"

A pessimistic voice answered from the crowd, "We got regimental numbers!"

Mr. Page did not hear it, nor the ripple of the laughter. "It is that we have reason, and the spoken and written word which goes with it. The wisdom of the past is open to us, and that wisdom has concentrated the perfect worship of a perfect God in a perfect book which we know as the Book of Common Prayer.

"You are all familiar with that buttress of our religion, the famous Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer, 'Primo Elizabethde,' in which it is established and ordered that whosoever should refuse to use the same in such order and form as they be mentioned and set forth in the said book; or shall wilfully, or obstinately standing in the same, use any other rite, openly or privily, shall be deprived ipso facto of all his Spiritual Promotions, and further punished, even to imprisonment for life."

His right arm grew tired and numb. He dropped it and raised the left, as stiffly rigid.

Twilight wrapped the summer evening, and as the faces in front grew dim, his eyes fastened upon a bright star rising in the sapphire sky, and thenceforth remained upon it, rather than on those to whom he spoke.

For a time his words were of the Prayer Book, and its perfection. He presented abundant analogies between the nation's devotion to the Book of Common Prayer, and its material prosperity and prestige. From that premise he deduced the cause of their present chaos, and urged his listeners to turn to the strict letter of the perfect book, as the only means of inducing God to cause the war to cease.

"Remember, my friends," he ended, in the same high-pitched tone with which he had begun, "by turning to God's own

ordained forms for His Worship, the very humblest among you may hasten the hour when this Valley of the Shadow of Death shall be safely traversed, and happiness and prosperity be with each of you again."

He dropped a rigid arm for the last time. His eyes came down to the darkened earth. His chin sank on his chest, partly in weariness, partly in prayer, and the little electric globe glimmered feebly down upon him.

—4—

The Military Policeman glanced meaningly at a bespectacled Y.M.C.A. worker beside him, and tapped his head. For a quarter of an hour they had been the preacher's only audience, and now the policeman moved away, fearing to incur some responsibility for the old man; the young canteen worker remained for fear he might neglect it.

After standing motionless for several minutes, Mr. Page picked up his bag, and put on his hat. He looked about him doubtfully, put down his bag, pondered. The Y.M.C.A. worker realized that he did not know what to do next, and he came forward. "Can I help you at all, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Page seemed surprised and relieved, as if he had forgotten that his audience had disappeared, and had never noticed the only one who remained. "If you could guide me to a suitable lodging," he said, "I would be greatly obliged. It matters not how humble."

The young man hesitated, thinking. "No very suitable lodgings anywhere round here, I don't think. Where were you making for, if I may ask?"

"This camp; I had made no other plans."

His attitude clearly placed the onus of finding a lodging upon his hearer, and the young man accepted it humbly and cheerfully, as he accepted every duty. "As I said," he explained, "there's nowhere suitable near here, but if you'd care to share my little cabin tonight, I'm sure I'd be very honoured. There's a spare cot."

He led him into the little room with its two gray-blanketed cots, and told him to make himself at home. "We close up in less than an hour, then I'll be free. Just make yourself at home."

When he returned, Mr. Page was stretched on the bed looking at the cobwebbed ceiling boards. He had not even taken off his boots nor coat, and he sat up when his host came in. The young man washed and put on a pair of carpet slippers, comfortably tired after another long, hot day. "I was much impressed by your discourse, sir," he remarked companionably, hoping to initiate the kind of pleasant chat on religion which he liked, and also to find out something about this peculiar old preacher.

Mr. Page's eyes gleamed; he bent forward slightly. "Ah! I am glad. But I fear I was more instructive to myself than to my hearers. I have learned much tonight, Mr.——"

"'Banks' is the name, sir."

"Yes, I have learned much. I have been chosen to proclaim a message, Mr. Banks. But I see now that the message I gave tonight was not pure and undefiled. I had weighed the temporal aspects of what I believed the message to be, and studied the weaknesses of my hearers. But it was I who was weak. Instead of allowing God to speak directly through my lips, I defiled his message with my own crude reasonings.

"But the full truth came to me as I ceased to speak. For mark you, Mr. Banks! Did you note how, while I spoke of the all-sufficient perfection of our Liturgy, my hearers listened and were attentive, but when I entered upon the second part of my discourse, showing how a return to the old devotion would secure peace and prosperity, that great crowd melted away like mist before the wind?"

Mr. Banks of the Y.M.C.A. stared at him, but did not speak for a moment. He had been a very inexperienced young man when he had started this canteen work three years ago, and much in love with resounding words, and with all ideas which labeled themselves with Godliness. But he had gained some wisdom by association with thousands of frankly ungodly men, and with it more true Godliness for himself.

So he did not mention to the black-clad zealot that he himself was an ardent Methodist who abhorred all ritual; he did not

explain that the audience had started to melt away long before Mr. Page left the subject of the Prayer Book, and that it was only because he had raised his eyes from the crowd that he had not noticed it; he did not question the preacher's call, or point out the preposterous gap between the form of his message and the understanding of his hearers. Somehow he understood, as Father Wriothsesley had understood, that this man was in other hands than his.

So he merely looked interested, and waited to see what conclusion the old man drew from the behaviour of his audience.

"It is plain, Mr. Banks! It was the first part of the message which those men needed, not the last. I was preaching a mere grovelling expediency! I was saying, 'Turn to the Prayer Book and you shall have peace and prosperity' instead of 'Turn to the Prayer Book and the Grace of God will be upon you.'"

He leaned forward eagerly. "Do you see the chasm between those arguments! I should have known better, for I refuted my own logic when I instanced the glorious Elizabethan era, which was as distinguished for its military triumphs as for its spiritual; as notable for its defeat of the Spanish Armada as for the Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer.

"Henceforth my way is plain. I will go forth in the morning purged of the time-serving impurities which have blinded me, and unbending in Faith."

The young man listened, fascinated by the stern conviction of the words, forgetting to question the basis of the impressive logic. It was not until next morning when his guest was setting out after a good breakfast, that the spell lifted. "Where are you going next?" he asked.

The parchment face showed something almost approaching a smile. "I have no plans; I have what is far better,—guidance. I shall deliver my purified message to the soldiers wherever they may be encamped,—yea, to every camp in England if God gives me strength!

"I thank you for your charity, Mr. Banks, and more for your spiritual assistance in the hour of my enlightenment. May God requite you."

James Banks watched the Reverend Hilary Page growing smaller down the dusty road. The grotesque black figure so alien to it that it might have been a messenger from another world. The wrinkled trousers, flapping coat, the shapelessly strapped overcoat and bag,—and the glowing morning sun high over the towering roadside elms.

He was moved by the harsh, inexplicable conflict inherent in that contrast, but he returned to his thankless drudgery with a renewal of faith in the virtue of his work.

In France a harsher, simpler conflict had raged to its bloody climax. Another pilgrimage was surging relentlessly forward, and five hundred thousand faithful pilgrims carried their message of death to an unwilling audience,—which did not fail to attend them to the bitter end.

Brian Mackell, unshaven, exhausted, bloody with others' blood, had returned from the first phase of that pilgrimage in front of Amiens hoping, as far as his jaded brain could hope, that now respite would come.

Half of the Montreal Rifles had fallen during those twelve days among the green fields and smiling woods which stretched east of Hangard Wood. Colonel Markey had won his battle with disease; promotion had come to Corporal Fickler with swift finality, a bullet had saved Lieutenant Wentworth's gay heart from the dull rhythm of age; Spud Thompson's devotion to the soil had been consecrated among sugar beets spattered with his blood.

For these and many others of the Regiment, a far-sighted staff had prepared crosses long ago, each painted with excellent white paint. Some three hundred and forty-seven other men and officers who had not yet quite attained the apotheosis of white paint were straggled all the way from casualty clearing stations in Amiens to the hospitals in London. Some were in jolting ambulances, some in hospital trains, some were being carried up gang planks. Some were moaning for their wives; some were making fumbling signs to the nurses not to let their sweethearts see them.

In one end of a train sliding through the moon-lit Kentish hop fields, a cheerful face puffed a cigarette and smiled up at the bunk above,—that was Corporal Saxby Stainer, whom a clean bullet had made supremely happy; at the other end a Red Cross orderly steadied between his hands a thing like a gauze-swathed football with a rubber tube sticking out which bubbled,—that was Lieutenant Wells whose sneering lips had been blown into the muddy banks of the Luce.

In a gloomy ward of the 4th London General, a gray head, still glossily black in patches, bent over some queer pencil scrawls on a piece of paper,—that was Quartermaster Sergeant John Henry Stringer experimenting in writing news dispatches with the left hand. In another slightly less gloomy ward a pale, unwounded man who had been crying quietly for sixteen days since something had happened to him near Rosieres, was also writing on a pad,—that was Captain Blaikie triumphantly telling the Sister, by the only means at his disposal, that he had waked in the night and suddenly found himself able to say "Oh Christ" quite distinctly except for the final "t."

But there had still been some four hundred officers and men of the 2nd Montreal Rifles to finish their job and come out of the battle under their own power,—hoping, all of them, as Brian was hoping, for the re-fitting and long rest they had earned.

There was re-fitting in plenty, but only the illusion of rest. There was too much to be done, and too little time to do it in, although no one knew why there should be so much hurry. But Major Baxter, the new O.C., and Captain Thomas, the new, and now unsmiling Adjutant, drove them through inspections, marches, drillings, and more inspections, trying desperately to fit hundreds of new men and officers into the machine.

Brian, in whose mind at the opening of the battle, duty to Joan and duty as a soldier had fought as bitter, blind a conflict as the armies about him, had become nothing but a soldier soon after the advance began. No room was left for anything but war when responsibility was thrust upon him by deaths and emergencies. At the end of the second day, with Stainer and Lieutenant Wells wounded, and Sergeant Valentine promoted, Captain Thomas had made him Sergeant, and he had commanded No. 5 Platoon all next day, until Lieutenant Trent came up, a boy fresh from the base, who sensibly relied on Brian's meagre but superior experience.

He had not been able to discard his rank when the Regiment was withdrawn. He had asked Captain Thomas, fearing that it might tie him to the Company when others were getting leave, and his request had at least impressed the Adjutant with the urgency which Brian felt.

"I give you my word, Mackell," Thomas had said, "that you shall get that damned leave of yours just as soon as the Brigade allows anybody to get leave, if you do your part now. Take those stripes and help get your platoon into shape. We're in for another big strafe, and the Regiment's in a mess; it's up to you to help get it out."

With the stripes on his arm and a gleam of new hope in his heart, Brian had set to work to weld the veterans with the recruits, to help Lieutenant Trent learn his job, and incidentally to learn his own. There was no time during the days to think about himself and Joan, and no energy left at night to worry. And his sense of impotence was less oppressive now that he had the illusion of control of even such a minute thread of Destiny as the ordering of No. 5 Platoon. Doing well might possibly help him and Joan; doing badly might hurt them.

So he tried so hard to do well that he gained the distant approbation of the Adjutant, the cordial respect of Lieutenant Trent, and the hearty dislike of every man under him. He bullied, cajoled, lied to the new Quartermaster Sergeant, harried the cooks and transport men, invaded the rights of other Platoon Sergeants, and when the great barrage opened the Battle of Arras, trudged out behind what was one of the most completely equipped, drilled, and mutinous Platoons in the Canadian Corps.

To Brian that grim twenty-sixth of August seemed almost peaceful compared with the fever of preparation which preceded it. Their Brigade was not in the first wave. They herded prisoners, carried wounded, kept their eyes on their watches and maps, took shelter when fire became too heavy, advanced in artillery formation when it was light, and much of the time were not under fire at all. It was not a picnic! The hundreds of dead bodies,—some new, and some very, very old, would have been quite out of place at a picnic.

For this was very different country from that which the Battle of Amiens had shown them. It bore every sign of bitter warfare. It had been fought over several times, and the earth was churned and scarred and covered with crumbling trenches and rusting wire.

Brian calculated that ten days might see them out of the battle for good, and with a chance of leave. Then there was shouting on the right. Captain Scimold ran up. The Company was losing touch with the battalion on their right. There were orders, changes of direction. They trudged on. The sound of machine guns ahead grew louder as evening fell; there were more wounded; it was possible to catch glimpses of the actual fighting sometimes. Brian had no more opportunities for reflection.

With the darkness the Regiment moved quietly forward and relieved the exhausted and depleted ranks of the battalion which had fought in the front line that afternoon. Brian watched the weary, filthy scarecrows. Tomorrow night the Montreal Rifles would look like that, then there would be a couple of days out, some reinforcements, and back again. If only he could be sure of being one of those scarecrows when they came out the second time!

But there was nothing he could do about it. When a trench raid had been his worst experience, he had cherished schemes for avoiding death,—or exposing an arm or leg to get a blighty. But Amiens had showed him the irony of such ideas in a real battle. He had no such thoughts now,—no thoughts at all, except to follow his line, watch over his platoon, and when the advance ceased, to make sure that they had everything necessary to take up the battle in the morning.

The Regiment was sheltered in trenches which had been part of the British reserve system before the German advance that Spring. They were badly battered, and falling into decay. It was hard to find his way about, but he had to get acquainted with the lie of the land and the location of the other Companies. It was not until midnight that he and Trent had a chance to sleep.

At half past four, Billy Mackenzie, who was one of the picket, roused him. Brian had watched Billy's conscience growing whiter with extreme rapidity after the row, until, within twelve hours, it had attained perfection. The obvious next step would be to bear no malice against them that despitefully used him, and Brian was under the impression that he was doing just that during the battle of Amiens, but had not had much time to study the process. He had become much too busy to think of Billy. His stripes removed any possibility of the breach being embarrassing, since Billy became just one of forty men for whom he was largely responsible, and Brian had no time for resentment, and no taste for it.

He grunted, huddled his stiff shoulders upright, and rubbed his eyes disgustedly. Before he had taken those stripes he had usually got reasonable doses of sleep officially, as well as considerable unofficial accretions,—but never now. He yawned, stretched, groaned, cursed without conviction or benefit, woke Lieutenant Trent, and went out to rouse the Platoon.

As far as the eye could reach in the gray darkness the flicker and glimmer of bursting shells made a horizon of continuous lightning. But the noise was dulled by distance. It was merely preparatory, searching out emplacements, communications, and reserves along a forty mile front, so that the enemy should not know exactly where the new wave would break.

Five minutes to five! A crash! A whistle! An enormous bush shot up out of no man's land, spread its gigantic foliage of powdered earth, sank slowly, and was lost in the quick eruption of a hundred crackling volcanoes.

Lieutenant Trent shouted something, but only the lip motion showed it, then he was over the top and the men after him. Scrambling along the trench Brian gave a leg up to the less active men, and followed. This was different from the first day. They were in the front line, the enemy would not be taken by surprise. His barrage fell almost with the opening British gun. Brian trudged after the men, or ran along the line shouting and waving to keep it headed straight. He had little time to think, but enough to realize wonderingly the miracle of being alive in that storm of metal. Machine gun bullets, fragments of high explosive shells, shrapnel, sang and whistled and screamed around him. It seemed as if the air were as full of erratically flying metal as a blizzard was full of snow-flakes,—as if every cubic foot of space through which he walked had its own flying, whistling splinters,—as if it were a mathematical impossibility for a body the size of his own to exist in that space without being pock-marked with the crowded whizzing hail. He could not help lowering his head as he would have done in any other storm, and managed to smile grimly at himself for doing it.

Wire! He hurried, but there was little of it left, the men were scrambling through, and he with them. Down into a trench recklessly, wildly, but there was no living man in it. A swift impression of gray patches among the yellow soil, and they were scrambling out on the other side. The man beside him swung round suddenly as they got to their feet. Brian braced himself to meet cowardice, but there was death not panic in the man's eyes as he crumpled crookedly on his face. Billings pitched forward. Another man slumped suddenly. Young Brotherton screamed and ran sideways, his hands against his face. Jock Scott was down on his knees. Another fell,—another,—and another. They were being wiped out by a concealed machine gun. Brian and Trent were close together now, and a little ahead. Trent's face was white as he looked at his Sergeant, but he gave no order. He did not know what order to give. He was new, poor devil, and heroic. He was going on, but Brian knew better. "Down!" he screamed, waving his arm, and those who had not already taken shelter dropped gratefully among the shell holes, and Trent with them,—no less gladly.

"No good, sir!" Brian shouted in his ear. "We're through the barrage, but that machine gun will finish us. Better get back into the trench and find a communication that'll get us ahead."

Trent nodded. Hitched his haversack, jumped to his feet, waved the men back, and led them scrambling along the trench. Brian had no idea where the flanking platoons were now,—ahead somewhere,—they had escaped that enfilading gun. At last they found a trench that led forward. With Trent and himself leading, and Laski and Red Hibbert just behind with bombs, they made their way up it.

Suddenly there was a rattle from close above. They stopped, Trent looked at him. "That's the damn gun," Brian explained. "We'll have to rush it. They're enfilading 'C' Company now, I expect." He did not wait for a reply, but hurriedly explained to Laski and Hibbard. They picked a spot where their trench was blown in, and wormed their way up to the edge. It was almost light now. Just ahead was the camouflaged top of a sunken pill-box. "Aim at that dark patch," he whispered, "it's the top of the door, I think. Then rush. Now!" The three bombs flew. A moment's wait, and with the explosions they were up and tearing across the open. The dark patch was an embrasure, a white face showed like a flash, there were muffled shouts, a black muzzle suddenly projected, but before it could spit, three more bombs flew at it, and two went through the hole. They threw themselves down, waited, and again jumped forward with the explosions. The gun had disappeared.

They crouched by the weathered concrete dome, suddenly at a loss. There was no entrance except the three embrasures now billowing smoke. "Come out!" yelled Brian. "Surrender! Kamerad!" But there was no answer but the smoke. He took another bomb. His blood was cooler now. He felt a blackguard, but he tossed it in. "Can't take chances," he muttered apologetically. "C'mon boys."

Trent looked relieved when they slid into the trench again. "Good work!" he said. "And now hurry, we've got to catch up."

But the trench which the pill-box had been protecting was empty when they reached it. Brian stopped. "Listen, sir!"

Sounds of bombing were clear some way ahead and to their left. A hundred yards ahead was another trench, and from part of it the explosions were coming, and little spouts of smoke and earth.

"We'd better hustle and give them a hand, eh?" Trent suggested.

Brian nodded. At the whistle the men poured out and advanced at a shambling trot across the open. There was no shell nor machine gun fire, but as they approached the parapet, bombs began to fly over, and they covered the rest of the way at top speed, and again leapt, crazily shouting, into the trench. Luckily for the remnants of No. 5 Platoon, the defenders had been busily occupied with "B" Company's efforts to bomb its way along, but Brian's jump landed him almost on top of a man whose arm was raised to throw, and although his lowered bayonet had missed as he jumped, the upraised arm left the German open and unbalanced.

They sprawled together in the mud, Brian frantically striking with fists, knees, boots, his rifle dropped and forgotten. He was underneath—on top—he was up—there was a din and shouting. He reached sideways, grabbed his rifle, thrust the bayonet in the gray body struggling up, and whirled round. More gray figures, shouting hoarse gutturals. Brian retreated to the first bay. Hibbert was picking himself out of the mud and limping; Laski, with the butt of his rifle raised, was looking surprised at the bloody face of a German who lay gasping on the fire step. "Come on! This way!" Brian yelled. The smoking nozzle of a revolver appeared round the corner of the bay,—an arm. It was Trent. Brian pointed at the other corner, and they rushed.

It was like the crash of scrimmage lines. His bayonet sank into something, and left him helpless, pressed tight against a heaving body. The lock of a rifle ground against his face as he struggled, twisting sideways to get his rifle and bayonet clear. There was a roar at his ear, a scorching, the fierce eyes almost touching his were suddenly distorted, and the face dropped somewhere under his feet. His bayonet was free, room to thrust,—the bayonet,—the butt. A clubbed rifle swung over his head, but he got under it,—and his knee crushed into a groin, he was past,—treading,—drawing back his rifle ready to thrust again. The butt hit something behind. "Damn!" It was Trent's voice,—gasping. Brian hardly heard, jumped forward with bayonet ready, stopped. There was nobody in front of him! He drew a deep breath, wiped the blood from his eyes, dropped his rifle butt to the ground. All over,—for the moment!

He turned. The trench was crowded with the rest of the platoon, beside and behind him. They all looked breathless and taut and surprised, and Brian felt exactly as they looked. Each had been fighting as if he were the only Canadian soldier in the trench! There had been no time to think of anybody else, no chance to remember anybody else. Trent was still gasping a little from Brian's butt.

"Sorry, sir," Brian apologized sheepishly.

Trent grinned. "That's that!" he panted.

Shouts came from farther along. "Surrender! Kamerad! Quick!" It was Captain Scimold's voice.

"O.K.," yelled Trent. "It's number Five,—Trent."

Khaki figures crowded in. The trench was cleared. Scimold and Trent hurriedly got out maps. Brian and the other N.C.O.s sorted out their men and checked losses. Bombs and ammunition were collected from the casualties and re-distributed, wounds roughly bandaged. Messengers shouldered their way along from the other companies. The Regiment was in touch again all along the line. One main objective was taken. One more, and their day's work would be done.

Brian finished his check-up and stumbled along to find a place to sit down. He felt suddenly exhausted. Scimold stopped him. He was sitting on the steps of a dug-out with Morin, Trent, and Valentine,—now Company Sergeant Major. Captain Thomas was standing beside them. Their maps were open but they seemed to have finished with them. "What's the matter with your face?" asked Scimold.

Brian had forgotten his face, now that the blood had ceased to get in his eyes. "Nothing, sir,—a blighter had his rifle in the way, I think."

Trent stood up. "Now you know what it feels like!" he grinned, examining Brian's face as he spoke. "We'd better swab a drop of iodine on this, Mac. Those bruises and scratches aren't deep, but they might get infected." He pulled out a nickel-plated first aid case. "Now stand still a moment."

"Wow-ee!" Brian jerked his head back, at the sudden bite of iodine on his raw flesh, and looked foolish as the group laughed.

"Lucky those snags weren't a bit deeper, Mackell," said Thomas, giving him a cigarette, "or you'd have lost your beauty."

Brian looked at him, and a sudden depression filled him. The last time he had spoken to Thomas it had been about getting leave. He'd hardly thought of Joan all day. He frowned. What rotten luck! "If they'd been a bit deeper," he said wearily, "I'd have been on my way to England by now."

The advance got under way again after an hour's rest. The ground was open, the deathly wilderness of old and new trenches behind them. Shrapnel was bursting, but it seemed harmless compared to what they had been through. He watched his men, watched Trent, and watched the Platoons on each side.

For a time the battalion on their left was held up, and they waited in an uncomfortably shelterless field. Then they started again. He could see a little stream winding through a belt of greener grass which looked like marsh. That would be the Sensee. Once across that and they would be nearly at their objective. That must be the trenches they were after, where occasional shells were bursting,—the old guns were on the job again, thank God, but they'd have to do better than that! And the German guns were on the job too. The shrapnel was heavier, they advanced by quick rushes, dropping on their faces between each one. It was hard keeping the Platoon's diamond formation, but they had practised it so often that everyone knew his business, and the advance went forward strictly according to regulations. It was comfortably like a day's drill,—except that here and there a man dropped, and that the erratic activities of the stretcher-bearers spoiled the symmetry.

As they came to the marshy edges of the Sensee the fire increased, with the rattle of machine guns adding to the noise. Their artillery was putting more shells into the trench across the river, but it was far from being an impressive barrage.

The barrage lifted, Captain Scimold shouted, and the men, fiercely anxious to escape the bare exposure of the level valley, waded across and rushed the trench.

Once more the Montreal Rifles paused and re-formed,—but there was to be only half an hour this time. Their objective for the day was two hundred yards up the gentle slope, where another trench system crowned the slight rise and gave good visibility to the East. Those trenches must be captured tonight in order to gain an advantageous jumping-off line for the troops who would carry on the attack tomorrow.

Brian, with everybody else in the Regiment, heartily wished they were going to stay where they were. There was a perilous look about that two hundred yards of green slope. They were almost at the end of their tether, whether judged by the distance they had come, or by the numerical and physical strength that remained to them. The support of the guns seemed to be weaker now than at any time during the last part of the advance, and enemy fire stronger. It would be a tough proposition bucking over the line from here. He squatted in the bottom of the trench for a minute's rest, and smoked. He had done everything he could think of, Trent could look after zipping up the morale, that was his job. Brian puffed contentedly, exhausted and almost dozing.

—2—

Captain Todd, on his way to locate a new aid station, found him there and stared at him for a moment before recognition came. The bruises and scratches, and the liberal area of orange-brown iodine made him look more like something out of the dissecting room than a living soldier.

He motioned to Nott, who was following him with a large tin box strapped across his shoulder. Nott very willingly lowered it to the ground and sat on it. He had carried it for over a mile, since they had packed up for the third time that day and moved on to keep touch with the Regiment. And now they seemed to have got into the front line! No place for a dressing station, in Nott's opinion.

"Hello, Mackell!" said Todd, stirring him with his foot. "What's the trouble with you? You look like a Red Indian!"

Brian looked up as Todd stopped. He grinned but did not explain.

Todd examined the abrasions carefully. Dorothy had asked him so urgently to help this man get back to England. Would these scratches serve? One man more or less would make no odds at this stage. The racket of shells, the deep, drab walls of the trench, faded out as he studied the weary, freakish face. How different it had looked when he and Mackell and Dorothy and that beautiful Page girl had stood in the narrow hallway consulting about the old clergyman's breakdown! That should really have been a miserable scene, yet there had been an undercurrent of warm comfort in it. Each of them

had a cause for personal contentment then, whatever tragedies might be happening to others. None of them had come to the bitter dregs at the bottom of the cup they had been sipping.

Was it possible that the cup should be filled again? His mind passed to that part of Dorothy's letter which had said so little and meant so much. Was it possible,—could some new circumstance arise which would make it possible? Could —? He frowned, angry at himself for such musings,—here. That was not the business in hand. Nothing could be done about that—now. But what he could do,—what Dorothy had asked of him was to help these other two. Dorothy had done her part, but as yet he had done nothing, and it might be the only thing he would ever be able to do for her.

But those scratches were so little to work on. With the iodine they looked impressive, but they would never get him out of France without something to back them up. What? He searched his memory for drugs, symptoms, expedients, something which would pass the eye of Base Hospital authorities. Yes, there might be a chance, but there was no time now. He would have to wait until that night, when the Regiment had established its new line. He had expected it to be over the top of the rise long before he got to this trench. He was much too close to the front for the comfort of his casualties. But he would have to find a safe dug-out here—there was no other shelter for a long way back.

He straightened up and beckoned Nott. "Mackell," he said before he moved off, "that face of yours needs more attention. See me the moment you get consolidated up there, understand? I'm going to get you down the line tonight, see?"

Brian sat up quickly, his eyes shining, and Todd trudged along to find his dug-out. That look in the boy's eyes warmed him. To Hell with the war! Those young people would be happy, and Dorothy would be grateful, when the war was only a memory!

He was busy enough for a time, collecting his men, laying out his gauze and bandages and instruments and syringes and injections. Everything must be ready for anything. That last lap was not going to be a walk-over according to Thomas, and Baxter had been almost gloomy about it.

Deep in the dug-out he could hear the racket above grow swiftly into a dull roar. The boys had gone over. That barrage must be pretty tough,—they could hardly be expecting that at the end of the day, with the Huns supposed to be on the run.

The first stretcher was lowered down the step. He set to work. Faster and faster they came, faster and faster he worked. The dug-out was full, the stairs clogged, and sweat ran down his face in the warm, fetid atmosphere. He sent Nott to investigate. "It's nobbut a massacre, sir," he reported glumly. "The trench is full of 'em. We'll never get 'em down here."

Todd straightened, and wiped his hands. "I'll have a look. Help Archambault bring the stuff up."

Twenty—thirty—he could not tell how many wounded men were lying, sitting, squatting along the trench at the top of the steps. Shrapnel was whistling overhead, and the ground was quivering with explosions, but he was less conscious of distractions than he would have been in an operating theatre at home. He took the worst cases first, and Archambault moved ahead, slitting tunics and baring wounds in readiness. He swabbed blood, closed veins, probed, trimmed flesh, fixed splints, and bandaged the most difficult wounds, leaving the injections to Nott, and the minor dressings to his Corporal. For two hours he worked swiftly and efficiently in a world which consisted only of his eyes, his hands, and the small areas of quivering bodies on which they were concentrated.

"That's the last, sir."

His knees were aching. He had spent most of his time on them for the last two hours, and he got up stiffly as Thomas came hurrying along with an orderly.

"How's things?" he asked, stopping him.

"Rotten! Stopped us before we were half way. They've got this front covered with a barrage like a blanket. Those damned gunners of ours seemed to have punched the clock and called it a day. I've sent half the Regiment back with messages! And not a tank in sight! We're going to try and synchronize another go with the battalions on our flanks."

Todd watched the preparations. All the Regiment's machine guns had been mounted in hastily constructed positions to try and keep down opposing rifle and machine gun fire, but they could do nothing about the barrage. Todd peered over the parapet beside Captain Scimold. There was hardly a sign of twilight yet.

"Well, our turn!" growled Scimold, his craggy face breaking into a sarcastic grin. "'A' and 'B' Companies will now rush in alone, where the whole regiment just got it in the neck!"

"Why don't they wait till dark?"

"We're away behind the right flank; those blighters are enfilading the brigade on our right as well as potting us." He looked at his watch, the machine guns began to clatter. "So long," he grunted.

"Good luck," said Todd, and watched him clamber up and join the running men. But the barrage broke sooner now, and the men had already taken a bad beating. They wavered, strung out, a few groups kept on, but more dropped on their faces wherever the ground gave a slight promise of shelter.

He could see Trent and Mackell and the remains of their Platoon pushing ahead, a few other groups further along kept level with them, but the rest of the two Companies had disappeared in that strange manner of beaten troops which leads enemy and friend alike to believe that they have been wiped out,—until the attack is over and the roll is called.

Scimold was on his feet again, blowing his whistle and waving his men back. Scattered figures rose all over the ground, running at full speed down the slope to the trench they had just left. Suddenly Trent's little group began to drop one by one as a machine gun swept them. Most of them turned with the rest, but a few dashed for some shelter on their right which he could not see. They seemed to be jumping down into it,—and just in time apparently, for a spout of earth rose beside them as they disappeared,—the last unwounded men in sight.

It was over, and he turned to the new stream of casualties, more nearly sickened by what he had seen than by all the butcher work he had done that day. There were not so many casualties this time. The men had had their bellies well filled in the first attack. They had known the second was impossible. They had not gone as far, and they had come back faster.

As he finished what he thought was the last case, two of his own stretcher-bearers plodded along the trench. One, with blood streaming down his own arm, was supporting Red Hibbert, the other, helped by a Lance Corporal, carried a stretcher with Billy Mackenzie lying on it, motionless and face downwards. The back of his tunic seemed to have been sheared off, and part of his naked back showed, bloody and blackened.

Todd motioned to Nott. The saving, weary, bloody work went on.

"How did you get this, Bell?" he asked the wounded stretcher-bearer, when he had finished with the unconscious Mackenzie, and the almost fainting Hibbert.

Bell jerked his head over his shoulder. "Right out in front, sir. There's a listening post there. These two, and Mackell and Mr. Trent, they dived for it, thinking the machine gun would get 'em if they tried to get back to the trench,—so Red says. Then he thinks a heavy must 'a burst beside 'em and blown the pit in. They was half buried. We tried to get the other two out, but not a chance!—there ain't enough shelter, and I got this one trying to get Mac out. He's chewed up for fair, sir. We couldn't move him,—about a ton of earth on him from the waist down, and Mr. Trent's son of half underneath him again, like. We couldn't do a thing, except put what bandages we got on Mac, but they ain't half what he needs! Tim's going after him, when it gets a bit darker, with some men and trenching tools, but he won't last, sir,—all chewed up he is round his neck and shoulder, and them bandages were soaked through before we got 'em on."

Todd finished bandaging Bell's arm, and for the first time without complete concentration. "There, that's a nice blighty for you, Bell. Now show me where they are,—Mackell and Mr. Trent, I mean. Can we see the place from here?"

"Sure, sir." He raised his head cautiously over the sand-bags. "There you are, sir, where that black bit is, just this side of the tree stump."

"O.K. Everything straight, Corporal?"

"Yep, we're just hustling 'em into any dug-out we can find, sir."

"Well, go ahead with it, Corporal." He slung a case across his shoulder, went down into the dug-out and stuffed some bandages and packets in his pocket, then he trudged along the trench until he met Scimold, looking like a scarecrow, and with the lines in his face showing so deeply that they seemed to go down to the bone itself.

"Finished, Doc?" he asked in a voice that was little more than a harsh scraping.

"Just about, Scimold. What's next?"

"Consolidate. Baxter sees we can't move. He's going to wait till dark, if he can get some artillery support then; otherwise, leave it for the next crowd in the morning. He hasn't had a word from the Brigade yet."

"I thought so. Look here, Scimold. Trent and Sergeant Mackell were left out there. They can't be got back till dark. Bell tells me that Mackell won't last that long,—bleeding too fast. But if I get to him right away and fix him up, he may do. He's a friend of mine,—McGill and all that, you know, so there you have it!

"See that the boys don't fire on me, will you? In case—I stay out there, send that party to dig them out as soon as it's dark. Bell's hit, but his pal, Tim Millhouse, will act as guide." Scimold opened his mouth to speak, but Todd had turned away. He had noted where the trench wall was broken down conveniently a little way back. That was the place to start.

He squirmed over and began to crawl, almost on his belly, keeping the tree stump as a mark. There was enough curvature in the slope to hide him while he was flat on his face, so he stayed that way very carefully, in spite of the slow progress.

His weariness had gone. This was for Dorothy. Every time his chest rested on his hands, he could feel the pocket-book containing her letter. He was exultantly happy. This was easy! This was straightforward! No indecision here! He merely had to do what he wanted to do. A pity the world wasn't always like that!

Slowly he wormed his way forward, until he reached a ridge of new brown earth which must be the result of that shell. A quiet moaning told him that it was his objective.

He tried to push some of the earth aside with his hands, but it was too slow, and he desisted and wormed his way over it and down into the hole, gooseflesh running up and down his spine.

Yes,—there they were.

"Mackell!" he said, quietly.

There was a louder groan. Mackell's face was turned away from him, and he could not move,—with that neck and shoulder! He raised himself enough to look down in the face, hardly recognizable now, with more blood and earth plastered over the old scratches and iodine.

"Mackell, can you hear me?"

The eyes opened,—with recognition, screwed tight again, and opened wider. "Thank God, sir! I thought I was seeing things." His voice was only a whisper, but there was strength in it.

"I'm no hallucination! Nothing to worry about now. I'll fix you up in no time. Hurting much?"

"Not too bad, sir,—now."

"Well, it'll be better soon. I'm giving you a shot of morphine, but I'll have to fix this shoulder right away, so watch out, and don't yell. If you can't stand it, tell me."

"O.K., sir."

While Todd had been speaking, his hand had been feeling over the face of Lieutenant Trent, who lay, completely buried except for the head, underneath Mackell. There was no need to try and find the pulse,—the face was cold.

With absorbent and water from his bottle, he started to reveal the exact damage. Coagulation had stopped most of the superficial bleeding, but from a ragged gash at the base of the neck, thick blood was welling slowly through the clots. He worked carefully and slowly, telling Mackell what he was doing in a half-whisper. For a fellow with some medical training,—and gumption, that would make it easier to bear. With some difficulty he got at the deep vein which was still bleeding, and closed the ends. For once there was ample time to do a real job. Some temporary stitches, a liberal swabbing with antiseptic, all his wadding and bandage tape, an anti-tetanus injection, and that part of the job was done.

But from the lower part of the chest down, Mackell was buried. At his chest the earth was loose and shallow, but then it

sloped up steeply to what must have been the edge of the original pit, so that his legs lay under four or five feet of soil.

"Mackell!"

There was a perceptible pause. "Yes, sir?"

"Can you remember,—do you know, if there's anything the matter with the lower part of your body, or your legs? I can't see them; they're buried."

Another long pause. "Don't think so. They didn't hurt at first; sort of numb and stiff now. But back's all right, sir,—I think. I was bending my right foot—hard—a while ago,—loose soil. Back's all right."

"Then everything's all right!" Todd said, much pleased. "The boys will have you out of here in no time after dark. The wounds will be O.K. Clavicle and humerus broken and maybe a rib or two, but they're pretty well in place. They won't bother you till you can be looked after."

"Think I'll get through?" Brian asked feebly, as the morphine began to take hold.

"Sure! Easily! Your pulse was fine, considering."

"I've got to get back, sir." He frowned weakly as he tried to pierce the deadness in his brain. "I promised. But if—I don't—would you tell—write—that I couldn't help it—Joan Page—you remember—Caster End?"

"I remember, Mackell. I know about it. Don't worry. I'll do it, but you're going to get back. You're safer here than I'll be,—on my word of honour. And now I've got to hustle along,—the boys will be needing me sure, by now. I'll send out for you just as soon as it's dark, so don't worry."

The eyes closed dully. "Thank you, Doc,—coming out—'r a prince. I'll get back, now."

Todd, collecting the remains of his kit, felt a deep gratitude within him for the mumbled words. He'd done a good job for the young lovers,—and for Dorothy. "Good luck, Mackell," he murmured kindly, and straightened his stiff knees to worm his way out over the edge.

The first Verey light of the dusk rose and flooded the crumbled pit with clear radiance. Captain Todd was not used to no man's land. He kept on. There was a quick clatter. He grunted, gasped, slipped back. The evening was still again.

Something was choking him,—gurgling in his throat. He coughed a spout of blood, shivered, willed the crowding terror into subjection, and thought coldly. His lungs,—both—blood welling from his chest,—two places. Behind? He managed to get one hand behind his back, withdrew it, peered,—blood! No bandage! Couldn't use it anyhow! No good! Finished now, Joe! Good end! Dorothy—proud of this.

He gulped a breath of blood and air, forced himself the few feet to Mackell's side, groped for his pocket-book, put it in Brian's uninjured hand. "Mackell!" He tried to speak loudly, and the effort spattered more blood on the prone face, but his trachea was momentarily cleared. "Mackell!"

"Sir?" came the dozy answer.

"Your hand—feel!"

The fingers closed on the blood-soaked leather. "Give—Miss—Brador. Hear?"

Brian, hardly understanding, repeated: "Give—Miss—Brador."

"Yes. Tell—" He choked again. "Dorothy Brador. Tell—tell."

"Tell—Dorothy—Brador," repeated Brian slowly and carefully.

Captain Joe Todd allowed his head to rest back on the earth. Comfortable! Tired! Good end, Joe! Dorothy will like this, Joe! Oh—sweet—that smile!

"Tell—Miss—Brador," murmured Brian dutifully in a fading monotone. "Tell—Miss—Brador."

The words flickered out on his relaxing lips. There was silence—except for the shells bursting along a forty mile front.

Few places in England could have seemed farther from the battlefields of Arras than the tiny hamlet of Gretmanby. Yet no woman in England was bound to them more closely than Joan Page. Her love, her unborn child, her repute, her happiness,—all were tied to the struggling armies by threads as strong as steel and sensitive as dissected nerves.

Sitting in a wicker chair out on the edge of the lawn, she watched the road south, sewed for a little while, looked up the long hill again, and once more bent over her work. She watched for Brian or his letter, she sewed for his child, and this seemed to be almost all that was real in her life.

The evening shadows from the oak trees were creeping towards her chair. She grudged their swift advance, hoping that darkness would hold until the old postman rode down the hill with the newspaper and—the letter,—the letter which she had been longing for ever since she came to Gretmanby, and which had never come.

Far away, beside the Sensee River, that same twilight was creeping over a trench, and six grimy men with shovels and trenching tools were chafing at its continuance, watching a rim of dark earth out on the green slope, and cursing the slow advance of night.

Captain Scimold's anxiety to hasten the twilight was as ineffective as Joan's to delay it, but the anxiety of old Jason Ackroyd the postman, to get his glass of beer in the Vicarage kitchen did result in some relief for her. She watched the top of the hill intently for a moment, as the tiny figure came in sight. It was riding a bicycle—it was Jason,—and he was early. The pang was brief,—it was too much to hope that Brian should come this evening. It was only Jason, but that was something. She would get whatever he was bringing, out here on the lawn where she was alone. Her hope and disappointment and fears would not be complicated by Jessie Barton's sympathetic kindness.

In the past month Joan had found in herself a reserve of strength,—a deep common sense which was close kin to wisdom. It had enabled her to bridle the terrifying forebodings and devastating sense of helplessness which had sometimes swept her to the border of hysteria. She had resolutely excluded any doubt of Brian's love and loyalty from her heart. She allowed her mind to turn upon the war only under strictest discipline. She turned her memory upon the past days with Brian, her imagination upon even lovelier future years, and rigorously repressed the perpetual reaching of her thoughts towards the searing present.

Her days were the days of a student preparing for an all-important examination,—her will driving her brain to its appointed task during every minute of the day, on guard against its insidious tendency to wander, directing it always into the consciously chosen channels. She concentrated on each simple task in hand,—her sewing, her reading, her lessons in housekeeping with Mrs. Barton, her dreams of the past and the future.

But this was the hardest hour of the day, when the newspaper forced the present upon her. Death screamed at her from the headlines,—and no letter came from Brian.

The postman swerved into the gate, dismounted, and propped his bicycle against the wall. She put down the little piece of white flannel which she was hemming. "Here's t'paper, Missus, and a letter,—least ah thowt there wor a letter." He fumbled in his bag, so short-sighted that his face was almost in it. Joan braced herself. It was always the same when there was a letter,—this fumbling and uncertainty. If only he would be sure about it from the start, or have it ready, instead of this doddering, exasperating delay!

At last he found it. "Ay! Ah knowed it wor there. Here 'tis, and t'paper, and nobbut good news in 'em!"

Joan's eyes were fixed on the dark mouth of his post-bag. As the first corner of the envelope appeared, she forced back the racking sigh which always seemed to be lying in wait. The envelope was neither buff nor green. It was not from Brian. It was gray,—from Dorothy.

The old postman touched his cap and rode on. Joan read her letter with the concentration necessary to prevent its meaning from being submerged by her disappointment.

There was sympathy in Dorothy's words, hopefulness, and humorous passages which could not quite disguise the strain and over-work which she was undergoing, and she wrote with tact and did not stress the endless convoys of wounded men which kept the staff so busy.

Joan put the letter on the table. Ambulances driving up to the door,—orderlies sliding out the stretchers and carrying them into the wards,—doctors examining, straightening up, shaking their heads. The whole picture was vivid in her mind, although she had never seen a military hospital. Somewhere, in some hospital, Brian might be on one of those stretchers, or—

She must watch herself! She picked up the flannel and fixed her mind on the familiar work for a few stitches. Then she opened the newspaper. Yesterday it had told her with obscure brevity that the Canadians were in action in front of Arras. Today there was more, and it read like the earlier accounts of the battle of Amiens, when her misery—and the battle, had been drawn out for so many days. But she read every word which could possibly throw light on what was happening to the Canadian Corps. It hurt—but it would be worse not reading all there was.

As she finished, she heard a footstep on the gravel of the drive, and looked up. It was Mr. Walsingham, the Vicar, an old, old man,—the oldest man she had ever known, and for once she welcomed the interruption of her evening hour.

After each daily visit of the postman the task of regaining her disciplined serenity grew more difficult. Her will seemed to labour more heavily in controlling her thoughts. It made her wonder; it had introduced the germ of a new fear, a foreboding quite different from others which she understood. There were minutes just before she fell asleep at night, and after she awoke in the morning, when her spirit shivered in a cold breath from eternity. For those minutes her will did not obey her. It made her wonder—

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Mackell. You are busy? I am not interrupting anything of—er—supreme importance?" He smiled playfully at her sewing, and sat down as she touched the empty chair. "I'm afraid there's nothing to interrupt, Mr. Walsingham,—except thoughts, and the more they are interrupted the better—I think."

"I wonder," he said doubtfully.

The phrase touched the note which had been in her mind, and she turned to him, looking into his pale eyes almost eagerly. He was kind, he was so old, he knew so much. "Mr. Walsingham," she said seriously, "I was wondering too. I was glad you came and stopped me, but now—" She paused. "I was wondering if the will was the real—originating force in a person's mind, or—It's hard to explain what I mean; but—is your will really the master, or is there something below which could—somehow distort it,—strangle it?"

In spite of the deep chiseled lines which seemed to set a seal of permanence on his expression, she noted a subtle change. "You ask me a question which has not yet been answered very satisfactorily, Mrs. Mackell. If you had not allowed me to understand that your views were—open on matters of religion, I would have suggested that you might find the answer there,—even though I do not myself find quite such an explicit answer in the Bible and the Prayer Book—now, as I once did,—and yet—"

He tapped his fingers on the little table thoughtfully. "You said, if I remember, that when you sit and rest in the church there, you sometimes pray, and that it does you good?"

"Yes, Mr. Walsingham,—and yet I can't feel that I am really affecting what is going to happen, or—or influencing anybody."

"—Except yourself, Mrs. Mackell. You have said that it does influence you yourself. Could you be touching something deeper than your will—there?"

"But—" She hesitated, trying to see what was so dark. "But it is my will which makes me pray,—and do everything else that I do. If I—lost—What is it that makes my will—move? If it lost the power to make me do things, what—?"

"Then you would be—" He stopped abruptly, smiling slightly. "You must forgive me, Mrs. Mackell. I should have given you the true answer to your question at the outset. And that answer is simply that I do not know! I seem to know so much less than I did sixty-five years ago," he explained with wistful humour. "Perhaps it is that my memory is too good!"

"But there are certain things which I do know. They are also due to a memory which allows me to profit by my experience of men and women. I know this, Mrs. Mackell,—definitely,—that *you* will never find that your will has lost its power of control."

He smiled cheerfully. "And that is the point of practical importance, isn't it?"

Joan was heartened by his emphatic certainty,—he must have watched so many people right from the cradle to the grave. He must know how different kinds of people would turn out.

"That is better," he said, with a note of benignant triumph. "I see—from your expression—that you are like myself, a hardheaded realist!—it is the practical that counts."

His description fitted his appearance so ill that she felt like laughing. "I didn't mean my expression to change so much," she said.

"Ah! Your will played you false there, Mrs. Mackell! You clenched your teeth."

She had not realized it, and looked surprised.

He nodded wisely. "Yes,—and it is an excellent practice,—especially when done unconsciously. The teeth can be very helpful spiritual aids, as well as—er—digestive."

He rose, but did not go. He was thinking,—of something new. Age seemed to have made his face transparent, rather than inscrutable. Already she could generally tell the kind of thing that was going on in his mind.

"Unfortunately," he went on after a pause, "my own teeth are not as useful,—for either purpose as in past days, and my eyes too are not very serviceable. I have some difficulty in reading, Mrs. Mackell, and as there are no very—er—satisfying readers in Gretmanby—"

He hesitated, passing his hand under his chin slowly and thoughtfully, and gazing at the oak trees.

Joan felt a sudden warmth. Perhaps she could help him! She broke in eagerly, "Mr. Walsingham, couldn't I read to you sometimes? I'm not very good, but I'd try my best. I would like to,—if—"

His face was more transparent than ever now. Surprise—delight—doubt,—but only a very little doubt. "It would not be too much trouble?"

"Of course not! I'd like to—really, Mr. Walsingham."

"Well, in that case—it's really very kind of you, Mrs. Mackell, very kind indeed. We'll arrange a convenient hour—tomorrow, shall we?"

He went off down the drive, rubbing his palms slowly together. He was pleased! And Joan too was pleased. She collected her things and went in to tea, almost happy.

She used the back door, for she and the Bartons occupied only a few rooms of the servants' quarters. The rest was closed, except for a daily tour, and regular dusting and cleaning during which she spent some of her pleasantest hours. Brian must not think her way of living and her housekeeping methods strange, when they were married; so she learnt from Mrs. Barton everything which she thought might possibly help her.

"Here's the paper, Mrs. Barton," she said, putting it on the blue and white chequered kitchen tablecloth. "Mr. Walsingham came and sat with me for a while. I'm going to read to him sometimes. And I think I might go across to the church after supper," she added.

The stout, kindly woman turned quickly from the stove, and Joan smiled reassuringly. "It's all right, Mrs. Barton. There was only a letter from Dorothy,—no bad news."

"You'll nivver have any of that," Mrs. Barton beamed confidently, "and there's no better place to make you sure of it than i' the church."

Joan knew, even as she crossed the road after tea, that she might have done better to sit in her room, or with the Bartons, than in the silent, empty church. But sometimes the labour of disciplining every thought weighed on her so heavily, that from sheer weariness she had to rest her will,—and the church was best for that. There was a peacefulness and solid dignity about the dim stone pillars and dark pews, which—helped.

He might be anywhere, why had she not heard a word from him since nearly two weeks before that last battle. He must be wounded, he must be somewhere where he couldn't write, or in the middle of this new attack, but then why had she

not heard from him after Amiens? Could they have been moving about so much that he had no time to write even a field service postcard? It was too long a time. If only they had thought to arrange that she should be notified—if—anything—

She pushed open the oak door, tears already in her eyes, fear settling darkly on her, and sank to her knees in the last pew. Oh God! Oh God!

Some twenty years before the war, the late Webster Lorrimer had consummated one of the largest dairying operations of Canadian history, by skimming the cream off three huge railway contracts and an industrial merger, and retiring to England to live like an English gentleman,—as far as he could acquire the technique.

He had built a house in Surrey, some five miles from Kingston, containing a quite un-English and un-gentlemanly profusion of tiled bathrooms, and a central heating and lighting plant. He had named it "Spruce Grove" after the Scotch Firs around it, but before the error could be pointed out to him, he died from a disease of the hardest, toughest thing which ever came out of Nova Scotia,—his heart.

He left a widow, who had never quite managed to keep up with him, and a sixteen-year-old son, Webster, who had inherited his father's ill-adjusted heart so excessively that he would never be able to test how many of the more rugged qualities had descended to him.

When the widow at last caught up to her forceful husband, young Webster Lorrimer lived alone at Spruce Grove, with a modest staff of servants, and a butler-valet who had served the father just long enough to appreciate a position with the son.

The war broke out. Webster Lorrimer interviewed his doctor, and the doctor laughed,—sympathetically, and patted him on the shoulder. He drove up to town and called on his heart specialist, and the specialist also laughed,—sympathetically, and patted him on the shoulder. On leaving Wimpole Street, he ordered Briggs to drive him to the Canadian High Commissioner's Office, made some suggestions, was told to put them in writing, and drove home again.

In due course Sister Mackenzie arrived, and Spruce Grove became a convalescent hospital for Canadian Tommies. Webster Lorrimer and Bartlett took up their quarters in a self-contained bachelor suite which old Lorrimer had used sometimes when the process of acquiring the technique became too wearing.

The back-wash of the war soon filled the bright house with wounded men in baggy blue overalls. Before a battle they would be few, and cheerfully ready for any occupation their host could devise. After a battle they would be many, and unable to do much more than walk or sit about the terrace and lawns.

The months wore on; Webster Lorrimer installed elaborate electrical machines, orthopaedic apparatus, a second billiard table, and a moving picture projector; Sister Mackenzie learnt many things which the Montreal General Hospital had never taught her, and passed on what knowledge she could to her V.A.D.s.

Briggs left, both the cars were turned over for the use of the patients, elderly orderlies were provided to drive them and do the heavier work, and an elderly Sergeant to direct them and attend to discipline. Webster Lorrimer looked after office details with perfect precision, and when the second car was given over to the patients added an extra period of quiet pacing on the terrace, to his routine schedule. He seldom laughed, for that was a luxury for him, but his pale smile was ready and frequent. He would have been intensely interested in the happiness of every man in his house, if intensity of any sort had not been another forbidden luxury.

He talked with them quietly, advised them diffidently, and helped them liberally to the cream which his father had stored. They all liked him, but only Sister Mackenzie really understood him. They admired the smooth perfection of his tailoring, and the more intelligent found that he rather enjoyed their banter on the subject, provided that comparisons with their own blue overalls were not obtruded. Many of these left Spruce Grove with a couple of short notes in their pockets, which they presented to Maggs the Saville Row tailors, and Hickson & Son, the Piccadilly hosiers, and appeared later in their New Brunswick or Alberta villages arrayed for the first and last time in their lives with immaculate and complete perfection.

Sergeant Raggett alone of the Grove's inmates disliked the owner. Many years ago his ambition to be a lawyer had been so high that when poverty drove him into school-teaching,—and kept him in it, he lost the faculty to like people. Eighteen years as a school-master developed a compensatory faculty to dislike them,—especially rich ones. Age had sent him back from France invalided, although un-wounded, and luck had sent him to Spruce Grove to represent the army and its

discipline. The authority was gratifying, and he resented the unobtrusive presence of a civilian who, by virtue of his position, cast a shadow across his own preeminence. He was inclined to be touchy and irritable, and his particular brand of high-school discipline might have made difficulties even among tired convalescents, if it had not been for the influence of the buxom, cheery Matron, and the imperturbable owner of the house.

On this bright morning at the end of October, Raggett had just left them after the unofficial morning conference. "Isn't he ridiculous!" said Sister Mackenzie in her strident, expressive voice.

"He is used to having his discipline ready-made, I think, Sister. The process of manufacturing it for himself is a little beyond him. He manages with the men, but when it comes to recalcitrant Sergeants—!"

Her laugh pealed heartily, wrinkling her plump face into lines which were much deeper than they had been four years ago. She had laughed much during those years, and the habit had grown, so that now she often laughed when there was hardly sufficient cause, and that habit too had grown. "Better too much than too little," would have been her dictum,—if she had ever thought of it.

"It's a terribly delicate problem, Mr. Lorrimer!"

"Which is the—ah—criminal?"

"It's one of the men who came in last night from the 4th London General,—you remember? The one Charters said refused to drive down in the car and nearly cried when they forced him in. He'd wanted to come by train or something silly."

"I remember, Sister,—Mackell. But I must say I never saw a man who looked less capable of being recalcitrant! If we had any other Matron, I'd say he ought never to have been sent to a convalescent home like this."

Sister Mackenzie laughed cheerfully at the compliment. "Oh, go on with you, Mr. Lorrimer! But you're right; I don't know what's come over those people at the 4th." She was very indignant for a moment. "We've been getting far too many cases who ought to be kept in a regular hospital much longer. It's disgraceful! That poor boy's wounds will have to be dressed twice a day at least, and a nice time it takes too! I did it this morning."

Her indignation evaporated swiftly. "Oh, well! It's a compliment, as you say. Better here than some convalescent homes we know of, eh, Mr. Lorrimer?"

He nodded, strolling with her to the big window. "I expect the flood of casualties from these last battles has just about reached high tide in London. They're trying to make more room."

Sister Mackenzie's attention had wandered to something outside. "What on earth's the man doing now? I told him to sit perfectly still."

Lorrimer watched her hurry out to the terrace. Sergeant Mackell had got out of his wicker chair, dropped the blanket from his knees, and was hobbling slowly up and down the terrace, stopping at each turn to flex his foot half a dozen times.

Sister Mackenzie sailed down on him like a benevolent whirlwind. Lorrimer heard snatches of her expostulations, and watched Mackell smile apologetically and sit down while she tucked the rug over his knees. But when she had gone in again, he also saw the bitter frown which settled on the man's thin, bloodless face.

"Wanted to 'exercise his foot' if you please!" Sister Mackenzie informed him, sticking her head in the door. "Did you ever hear the like of it! And him with all the time in the world to exercise his foot, and hardly strong enough to walk, even if he hadn't got a foot!"

He turned to the window again, as she closed the door. Mackell had turned to look behind him, shifting his whole body round to do so, for his arm and shoulder were tightly strapped right up to the neck. When he saw that the Sister had disappeared for good, his free hand began fumbling with the blanket again, pulling it from under his knees until it dropped to the stone flags.

Webster Lorrimer strolled into the hall and out onto the terrace. "Can I help you, Sergeant Mackell?" he said politely.

Brian swiveled slowly round in his chair, and looked up. "No, thanks."

"I'll just fix the rug for you."

"It's all right, thanks, I was just going to—" He stopped abruptly. "Are you the doctor—or what?"

Lorrimer smiled. "No, nothing like that. I am afraid I have no official capacity whatever."

Mackell seemed relieved, but puzzled. "Then—"

"I have the rather anomalous position of—ah—owner, Sergeant, that's all. I live here, you know, and I have kept on living here, as there has really seemed very little I could do, except—ah—add to the amenities of the patients a little, and so on." Now the stubborn fellow was getting up again!

"Just a moment, just a moment, Sergeant. Sister Mackenzie laid her commands on you, you know, and I assure you, from four years experience, that she is terrible when roused!"

The flicker of a smile acknowledged his hyperbole, but it did not change the stubborn set of the lips. "Yes, sir, she seemed a good sort, but I want to get my foot exercised a bit. I know exactly what's good for me," he added impatiently, "I was a medical student,—and I've learnt plenty about wounds since then. I've got to exercise this foot now."

Lorrimer grew more curious. This was an intelligent chap, with some medical knowledge, but he was acting like a fool, and, from the expression of his face and the gleam of his eyes, like a desperate fool. And yet he was so weak that he had to pause between sentences and rest. "If you don't mind my asking, Sergeant,—I might be able to help you, you know,—exactly what is your difficulty?"

Mackell misunderstood him. "Some bright stretcher-bearers stuck my leg in front of a bullet when they were taking me down the line. I've had it in a cast, and it's stiff,—and I need it to walk with—right now."

"But why, Sergeant? If you don't mind my asking. Raggett mentioned that you were asking for leave,—insisting on it—before the doctor had even seen you."

"If the doctor sees me, he won't give me leave,—that's why, if you want to know."

"That would seem the best of reasons for waiting, wouldn't it? However much you want leave, it is hardly worth risking some serious—"

Brian broke in fiercely. "I'd risk any damned thing in the world, if—" His voice trailed off, his eyes closed. "Oh hell!" he groaned weakly. "What's the good of talking? What's the use? If it hadn't been for that damned car—what luck—what luck! I might be under a curse!"

Lorrimer was mystified. He would have been moved, if he had not learned to avoid too strong emotions. If this young fellow was sane,—and in spite of his weak intensity he seemed sane, there must be some quite serious trouble hanging over him to make him act this way. If he could get to the bottom of it, it might prove to be something which money—or sympathy—or both, could help.

"I don't want to intrude on your affairs, Sergeant, but I might be able to help you in some way—if you need help. Was there some particular reason why you objected to driving here in our car?"

The eyes opened. "Reason!" He sat up straight. "Reason! I lie in that filthy ward for weeks,—like a lamb,—doing everything to help them heal me up quickly. When I know that I can at least move about, I lie to them, fool the Sisters, fool the doctors, even fake my temperature,—anything to get them to send me out a few days earlier. And then, instead of sending me by train, they put me in that damned car,—shut up like a police wagon,—and not a chance,—not one—single—chance,—like a rat in a trap!"

He sank back in the chair, closing his eyes again.

Lorrimer reflected. The disconnected outburst had made one thing clear; the man was desperately anxious to get somewhere, and ready to take any risk. That explained his demand for leave, his exercising of his foot, the "rat in a trap" sensation. He had hoped to be put in a train, and undoubtedly had meant to slip out of it promptly.

He remembered his own "rat in a trap" sensations when he had first had to adapt himself to the rigid limitation of his

physical and mental activities. Depressing thoughts! He pushed them out of his mind, but they had been in it long enough to bring an emotion of sympathy,—of subconsciously renewed rebellion which was much stronger than he usually allowed himself.

He sat down in a wicker chair beside Mackell. He had given many patients much wise and kind advice of an objective kind. It struck him as a little cold-blooded now, perhaps this boy needed something different. His heart went out to him as he saw the relaxed features tighten, the furrows appear, the unconscious tightening of the jaws, and heard the harassed sigh.

He would let himself be a little bit warm-blooded for a change,—he needn't overdo it. He'd spent a lot of money on the wounded men who had come his way, and done what he could for them up to a point. But that point had been nicely circumscribed by his own welfare! A little fatuous advice—a little money—a few Piccadilly clothes!

If he let himself get mixed up in this man's problem, would it mean trouble?—effort?—everything which he lived to avoid. A fine reason to live, that!

"Sergeant," he said, touching his arm.

Brian's eyes opened, his frown relaxed again. "Yes, sir? Sorry if I was rude. Didn't mean to complain about—this." His eyes wandered from the lawns and firs to the bright, comfortable house, "—Everything you've given up for us."

"I haven't given up a thing," Lorrimer said impatiently, "and I can see that this place is worse than useless to help you,—whatever your trouble is. But if you will tell me what it is, I'll try and help you, because—well—I don't like to see a 'rat in a trap.' I know what it feels like,—a little. I don't want to go into details, only to make you feel that I am sincere in wanting to help you,—whatever it may entail."

Brian looked at him, hope dawning in his eyes, and struggling with doubt. He closed his eyes, thought for a minute, opened them, and sat up scrutinizing Lorrimer anxiously. "You said you had no—official position here, sir, didn't you? You're not responsible for me to anybody, or anything like that?"

"I'm not responsible for you to anyone except myself, Sergeant. But somehow that responsibility—ah—weighs on me. But I can only judge what it is, if you choose to tell me what you want."

Brian's face clouded, his brows knit, his fingers gripped and loosened on the chair arm. "I'll have to—or you won't know—understand why I need to get out so badly, but I—oh, I don't know *what* to do."

He hesitated. "Look, sir, will you—would you—give me your word not to mention—ever, what I'll have to tell you,—even if you decide you can't do anything?"

"I think I can promise that."

As Webster Lorrimer listened to the hurried, disconnected story, his mind filled many of the gaps, but what was left,—the simple urgent phrases, the look of Mackell when he lay with his eyes closed, as if gathering energy for the next effort to force belief and help, all convinced and moved him strongly. He was thinking of how best to tackle the problem, by the time Brian finished his story with a last appeal.

"For God's sake, help me get away, Mr. Lorrimer! I've got to get up there—now. I promised—I said I'd never let her down, and I have,—in the worst way. I haven't heard a word since before Amiens, and she wanted me badly even then, and I've been moving around so fast, and these damned battles and hospitals and everything, there are probably letters following me all over France and England, but I haven't got a single one. And I ought to, because I was in that last hospital for a month, and there was plenty of time to get an answer, because I wrote a week after I got in, and twice since,—and I've wired, and I can't get an answer, and the wire wasn't delivered. She must be away, or in some trouble I don't know about, or—or—God knows what."

He sighed wearily. "Can you beat it!—nine months—nothing happening half the time, but always something turning up to keep me in the trap. And now—in England—so near—and I can't do anything even now,—unless you help me,—and so damn weak I—I could cry!"

He closed his eyes, but opened them quickly again. "But it's nothing but plain weakness, Mr. Lorrimer,—loss of blood,

and operations and all that. There's not a thing the matter with me except that. This shoulder's done fine,—only some drainage wounds to be dressed; and there was nothing the matter with my foot, except stiffness from the cast. I was only getting in shape in case—I had to make a dash for it. You'd have nothing on your conscience, if you help me. Three days couldn't possibly do any real harm. Help me to get out, Mr. Lorrimer, and I'll swear to be back in three days,—I've got the license and everything in my pocket. But I must get to her—now."

His head sank back on the cushion, but only for a moment.

"It's now, Mr. Lorrimer. You understand? The child—may be born any time. It may have come already! Oh God, this is awful! She trusted me,—I promised,—I didn't need to, she trusted me so much. I must get to her first, Mr. Lorrimer. It doesn't mean anything—sometimes, but for us it does. It's everything in the world to me,—the way we've felt,—the way she trusted me."

Webster Lorrimer laid a soothing hand on his knee. "That's enough, Sergeant, I'll help you. I promise,—but let me think a minute." He studied the obstacles, and the means of overcoming them, but he could not think coolly. He was almost excited, and the sense of urgency had infected him. Trains were out of the question. Miles to the station—at both ends. Two changes, at least. Connections to make,—delays. The boy was too weak for that sort of thing. And the district was full of camps, including an internment depot. There were too many military police suspicious about passes. That young convalescent, what was his name?—Beddoes,—hailed out of the train at Waterloo, as a result of Raggett's telegrams, and Raggett; he was too spiteful to be squared. If only Briggs had still been here! If only Norfolk wasn't so far. If only Bardett could drive a car! If—if—if—!

It was inevitable. Mackell must be driven, and the owner of the car, possessed of all sorts of impressive credentials and passes, was the only person who could be sure of going through without question, or of meeting questions effectively if Raggett made trouble. And he wanted to do it,—and damn the consequences! He had often driven forty—even fifty miles, without harmful effects, when Briggs had been with him; he could surely last for a hundred and forty or fifty,—if he were careful.

"It's settled, Sergeant," he said at last, leaning forward. "Tonight—I'll drive you myself. But don't say a word about it. There will be the deuce to pay,—but if we don't pay until after that license has been used, we needn't bother, eh what?"

Brian looked at him with wide-open eyes. "I'd spend a year in clink—willingly,—two years,—I don't care what they do to me. But you—" His eyes were pathetic in their gratitude. He began to stammer it out, but Lorrimer stopped him quickly.

"Never mind about that. What you must do now is to tell Sister Mackenzie that you're tired, and lie up quietly until ten thirty tonight,—lights out at ten here, you know. Get all the strength you can in that time. I'll send my man to help you dress and so on when the time comes."

—2—

Brian was taut and quivering as the big limousine crept slowly out of the garage. He held his breath as Bartlett noiselessly slid the door closed, locked it, and climbed into the back of the car. Not until they had rolled silently down the drive and were droning along the highway did he really draw a full breath.

He turned stiffly to Mr. Lorrimer. "I can hardly believe it, sir!" he said exultantly.

Mr. Lorrimer's expression did not change, nor his eyes move from the road ahead. "I find it a little difficult to believe myself!" he admitted. "Really, you know, I feel—ah—rather like a schoolboy, Mackell. Most unusual sensation! But neither of us has surplus energy for talking. I suggest you get those cushions comfortable under your shoulder, and—ah—settle down, what?"

Brian was glad of the suggestion. He did not want to talk. He was full of happy excitement, but he was tired and weak. He listened to the drone of the motor, watched the shadowy fields give place to rows of murky houses, saw the darkened London streetlights pass in monotonous procession, caught a gleam of reflected moonlight from the Thames as they crossed a bridge, and before they were out of the endless gray streets again had fallen into a doze.

Something roused him. He opened his eyes drowsily. The car had stopped. Bartlett had opened the window and was

leaning out. The headlights showed a confused crowd of khaki figures on the road in front. Electric torches flashed among them, but it was impossible to see clearly.

"Better get out and see what's blocking us, Bartlett," said Mr. Lorrimer.

Bartlett went forward, and was lost among the crowd. Mr. Lorrimer offered Brian a cigarette, and lit one himself. He seemed as unperturbed as ever, but Brian's stomach was playing him chilly tricks. Was the trap going to close on him again? Had that cursed Raggett discovered his absence already and sent out his wires so cleverly that they were being stopped within a few miles of London?

It couldn't be that,—it would be too wickedly tragic! He waited, sweating, forgetting to smoke his cigarette, but as time passed with no sign that their car was interesting anybody in the crowd, his hope grew strong again. It must be something else,—someone run over or something. He was feeling safe again even before Bartlett came back and climbed in the car. The crowd was thinning, fraying away at the edges, as crowds always did when the excitement was over. A couple of men were walking slowly down the road toward them, and an officer. A stretcher,—they had somebody on a stretcher.

"There is nothing we can do, sir," Bartlett reported. "Apparently someone was found in the ditch, sir,—dead. Not one of the soldiers,—a stranger. They had brought a stretcher before we arrived, and a medical officer. I took the liberty of speaking to him, sir, and he said he really didn't know what the trouble was, but he thought perhaps pneumonia, or something of the kind, due to exposure. It was quite an old man, according to what I heard. I did not—" Bartlett appeared to be swallowing something. "I—did actually look at him myself, sir. There is a hospital hut in the camp close by, and I understand they are taking him there now."

The slow-moving stretcher was almost opposite them. It was on the other side of the car from Brian's seat, and he could only catch a glimpse of the black-clothed figure, and notice the familiar perfunctory gravity of the stretcher-bearers, before it had passed.

Some of the men straggled along behind, and through the open window he caught snatches of their subdued but excited talk.

". . . dying in a bleeding ditch, right outside the camp. You couldn't do wuss in France! I'll tell you what . . ."

". . . was not, I tell yer. Wouldn't I 'ave smelt 'is breaf,—when I was 'elping lift 'im? 'Sides, 'he was a clergyman or . . ."

". . . preachin' ahtside the canteen after tea, and I sez to Benny, I sez, 'e looks 'arf wy to 'eaven right now,' I sez. Blimey, if he weren't the sickest looking . . ."

Bartlett closed the window. Mr. Lorrimer started the car. Brian leaned back on the cushions and inhaled his cigarette blissfully. He could still almost feel that horrible, sickening chill in his stomach when they had been stopped and the trap had threatened to close. Oh boy! What a sweet relief!

The dawn was streaking the sky when he opened his eyes. He must have had a long doze this time,—more like a good sound sleep!

It was Bartlett who had roused him—accidentally. He was leaning forward and speaking anxiously to his master. Brian turned himself a little. The dawn and the light from the dashboard gave Mr. Lorrimer's face a sickly, bloodless look which would have been frightening if it had been real. But he was driving steadily, his face expressionless, and taking no notice of Bartlett.

The murmured words took on significance as Brian's drowsiness passed. Bartlett was frightened. Bartlett had no doubt of the reality of that pallor. He was expostulating respectfully, urging a stop. Brian grew more and more uneasy. Mr. Lorrimer was ill, how could he have doubted it? He looked white—with much more than his ordinary paleness, and his eyes were sunken and shadowed. But he drove on at the same moderate but unvarying speed which they had maintained whenever Brian had been awake to notice it.

"You annoy me, Bartlett," Mr. Lorrimer told his servant at last, as the man continued to murmur in his ear. "I tell you I am going on to Caster End,—and there is no possible chance of finding another driver here,—at this hour."

"But, sir!" pleaded Bartlett. "At least stop for half an hour while I make some hot Bovril. That and some sandwiches may make all the difference. Half an hour can't make any difference, sir. At this rate we will arrive before seven. That's rather early, sir. People will be in bed. Surely you wouldn't mind getting in half an hour later, sir?"

Mr. Lorrimer slowed down, drew in to the side of the road, and turned and smiled faintly at Brian. "There's something in that, eh, Mackell? Not much sense getting in before people are awake, what?"

Brian agreed eagerly, for his conscience was asking unpleasant questions about this drive,—asking him how often he had thought of the danger to his great-hearted friend since that first offer of assistance.

"Very well, but quick, Bartlett. I don't want to—ah—relax too much at present. And give me a mouthful of whiskey before you get the Bovril.

"Better get out and stretch yourself for a few minutes, Mackell, if you feel like it. I'll stay here, I think."

Brian was stiff, very stiff, and his shoulder and neck were aching, but as he walked slowly up and down the road he was glad to find that he could use his foot. He could get about now, anyway. With the growing dawn he could see a lonely, level country, with many ditches between the fields. It was certainly no place to pick up a new driver! He wondered how the country could be so different from Caster End, if they were only fifteen miles away.

When they started again, he was relieved. The Bovril and whiskey did not seem to have improved Mr. Lorrimer's appearance at all, and the sooner he was in Caster End, within reach of Dr. Beringer and a bed at the Bull, the better.

His anxiety grew deeper as the miles passed. Mr. Lorrimer was driving more slowly now, his face was deathly, although as imperturbable as ever. No, it was more than that,—it was set! And when he suddenly spoke,—the first time since they had stopped, his words came with a slight gasp. "How far,—now?"

Bartlett's head was close to his master's. For several miles he had not been sitting at all, but half leaning half kneeling against the back of the driver's seat. He stretched behind him and got the map. It was light enough to read now. "I make it about five miles, sir. I think that was the Bure we crossed, soon after we stopped."

"The tablets!"

With an effort he swallowed the pill Bartlett gave him, never taking his eyes off the road ahead. But the car swerved slightly as he took his left hand off the wheel. Brian watched him apprehensively. He would have begged him to stop,—made him stop, if the road had not been so lonely. The moment they came to any fair-sized village, he would insist on ending the journey there. But if there weren't any, there was nothing for it but to get to Caster End and the doctor as soon as they could. He had his serviceable hand ready all the time now to grasp the wheel if anything happened. Mr. Lorrimer's face was wet, and he seemed hardly able to breathe. His mouth was open and he was panting,—it would have been gasping,—except that gasping men do not drive high-powered cars on lonely roads.

They hummed up a long slope, Brian's eyes searching for something recognizable which would show that they were near Caster End. At the top of the hill a longer vista opened. The pines! He leaned forward. Surely—yes—Joan's pines on the upper slope of Caster Head! And that was the church tower! They were nearly there!

"We're almost in, Mr. Lorrimer," he said jubilantly, "less than a mile! There's the church. Only half a mile from there to the Inn,—and there's a good doctor. It's only a few minutes now, sir."

A sickly trace of a smile twitched Mr. Lorrimer's bloodless lips, but he made no other sign. As they passed the church and came opposite the post office, Brian's hand was definitely on the wheel. He had not been able to keep it off. It had seemed that the driver's strength was beyond even the light effort of steering. It was not—quite, but Brian's hand helped the feeble motions, and he spoke encouragingly all the time and kept his eyes on the sunken eyes, so that he did not even see the row of ugly villas which for nine long months had seemed the loveliest sight that all of lovely England could show him.

At last,—the Bull! The car, almost crawling for the last few hundred yards, came to a stop,—but it was Brian who jammed on the brake, for as he had cried, "We're here!" Mr. Lorrimer had sagged back into corner.

For the second time in one morning Polly Dyer had had to confess complete ignorance. It was unprecedented. But she had not felt it to be a slur upon her reputation for omniscience. On the contrary, the very completeness of her own and everybody else's ignorance of the Pages' whereabouts was more exciting than even the juiciest rumors.

Miss Brador had rather dampened it by saying quite casually, as if it were a matter of common knowledge, that Joan Page was staying with her cousin in Yorkshire, but even she had wanted to know about Mr. Page.

"Not a word else do I know, Miss Brador," she concluded, "nor nobody else. Disappeared like a shadow, he did, and weeks before anybody knew for certain that he wasn't coming back immediate. I'd a'most forgot about him till this morning, not ten minutes ago, when in comes one of them Canadians that was here in January, you remember? and asks the same thing. It was the one that was billeted with them, and all wounded, too."

Dorothy stopped short at the door. "Really? Quite a coincidence!" She took pains to show only mild interest. "Which way did he go?"

"He went toward the church, Miss, I think."

"Then I may meet him, I'm walking that way myself. Great relief, this good fresh air, after the hospital."

Dorothy strolled out, but quickened her step as soon as she was outside the range of the post office window. Brian Mackell? She could not understand it all. Why had he come here instead of to Gretmanby? What had happened to Mr. Page? Joan's letters had shown that she had not heard from him, that she was puzzled about him, so she could not know that he had gone away. Perhaps she had sent Brian to find out what was the matter. That would mean that he had been to Gretmanby and that they were safely married now. But she had received a letter from Joan dated only three days ago, and Brian's long silence had not been broken then.

It was confusing! In her private heart Dorothy had thought that Brian must have been killed. Nothing else could explain his silence from the beginning of August, when she had driven Joan to Gretmanby, up to nearly the end of October. Yet here he was! But where? She looked down the empty road. Could he have gone into the churchyard? She walked on quickly and had almost passed the side road up to the Hall, when a glimpse of blue caught the corner of her eye, and she turned. There by the stile leading across the fields to the Vicarage,—a blue figure sitting on the bank!

He did not hear her until she came quite close. His head was bent and resting in his hand. She was not sure that it was Brian Mackell until he looked up, and even then she had to stare, so changed was he.

But there was no mistaking the recognition in his eyes. "Miss Brador!" There was huge relief in his voice. "I was on my way to see you. I had to rest."

She had already noticed the empty sleeve and heavy bandages, and that he had made no polite demonstration of rising, as he had when he was having his foot bandaged that day in the Page's sitting-room. He must have been terribly badly hit,—his thin, pale cheeks were sufficient proof of that.

She sat down on the bank beside him, hardly knowing what to say. The thing she wanted most of all to know, she could not ask,—yet, but next in importance was Joan.

"Have you—"

"I—"

They both stopped. "Go ahead, Mr. Mackell. You were coming to see me. What was it about?"

"I thought there was a chance you might know where the Pages were, Miss Brador. Nobody else in this place seems to. I can't understand it. I'm beginning to think I've been dreaming things, or something. They seem to have just vanished. I thought—" He paused, and started again, evidently feeling that some explanation was necessary. "You see, Miss Brador, they were so kind to me when I was billeted there, that I thought I ought to—"

Dorothy stopped him, putting her hand on his arm. "Before you go on, I want you to understand,—if you don't know

already, that I am Joan Page's friend, that she told me everything about you—and herself, and that when it—became necessary, I was able to help her. Didn't she tell you? Oh,—but you can't have seen her then,—but she wrote you saying where she was. I posted the letter myself."

His eyes stared into hers wildly. "Of course I haven't seen her, Miss Brador,—or heard. That's why I came here,—to see her. And she's gone! And—But you must know where she is," he broke off eagerly, "if you helped her. For God's sake tell me,—and how she is. Why—"

His arm was trembling under her hand, and she hurried to tell him all she knew. She would have to wait for his own explanation. He listened intently, but the strained, almost dazed expression left his face as soon as he learned that Joan was safe and comfortable, and that her child had not been born.

She had been careful not to allow anything of reproach to creep into her account, for his manner had convinced her that whatever had happened was not due to his indifference. But the mere facts themselves were a harsh reproach. "You must think I'm a fine sort of blackguard, Miss Brador, but I hope—I know Joan won't. But—oh, it's awful!

"Miss Brador,—we were going to be married on my very first leave. I got the license and ring the first place we stopped for a day. But it was the last,—we were only there two days,—and no leave, and then—France. And ever since,—all these months, I've been trying, begging to get back,—just for a day,—just for time to get married. But I seem to have been haunted,—or cursed, or something. And not a word from Joan since July. Not a word. I didn't know she'd left here. I didn't know anything. I've never been in the same place for two weeks since before Amiens, until this last time in hospital. But I wrote from there,—three times. I ought to have got an answer there,—and I wired, and it came back. And when I got to the convalescent home I was nearly crazy, and then the owner, a man called Lorrimer, turned out to be—"

He paused for a moment, and swallowed, and Dorothy noticed that his eyes were moist.

"—to be—a prince! He brought me here. He's got heart trouble,—valvular disease, but he drove me himself. I'd never have got away otherwise. And he just lasted until we got to the Bull, and then he slumped. His servant's with him, and I got Dr. Beringer, but he's terribly ill,—he may die,—all to do a good turn to a man he'd never seen in his life before.

"So as soon as the doctor was with him and I'd done everything I could, I went to Joan's house and knocked, and rang,—and there was no answer,—and nobody knew anything!

"It was the last straw, Miss Brador! I felt as if I was going to sag down right there on the steps, as if I'd been made of water. But—I've had so many last straws, all these months,—I was all right in a minute, and I began to think, and realized that Joan would have wanted to go away, and probably her father had gone too. But nobody knew where—or anything else, so I thought of you—and then you came.

"And it must have been far worse for poor Joan. It's awful to think of—awful! But now I'm free, I'll get to her—somehow. And you've been so good to her,—I want you to understand,—you *must* understand. I never dreamt of anything but marrying her, Miss Brador,—long before I thought she'd think of marrying me. It was the thing I wanted more than anything in the world,—before she even hinted that she loved me. And we'd decided to get married on my first leave for certain, long before—before there was any reason,—except that we wanted to."

He began fumbling at his tunic. "Look, Miss Brador, will you try and get my wallet,—in the inside pocket here?" He raised his arm. "I'll show you the license, and the ring. I want to,—I want you to *know*."

To humor him she felt in his pocket, rather than explain that she needed no proofs. There were two pocket-books, and she held them in front of him. "Which is it?" she asked.

"Oh God! I'd forgotten!" He snatched them out of her hand, and, seemingly exhausted by the effort, leaned back, his head against the bars of the stile, his eyes closed.

"Sorry, Miss Brador," he said at last, "I'm still so darned weak,—I have to sort of conserve what strength I've got. This is the one, if you care to look."

She took it, although all the eagerness had gone out of his voice, and unfolded the worn paper,—blood-stained, with the bullet hole in the centre, which Joan had told her about. She did not open the other little packet, for the shape of the ring was clearly outlined by the grime of nine months in France.

Dorothy's heart was full of compassion. She liked him better than she had ever done. Poor children! And yet—even now she could almost envy them. Their tragedy would end in happiness, and it had come upon them from outside themselves. Their problem had been harsh, but they had always been able to fight to solve it,—actively or passively. They had known what the solution was, and been able to try to reach it, even if Fate had defeated them. And this boy was still trying,—loyally, and Joan still waiting,—faithfully, knowing that nothing but death would prevent his coming.

Their happiness loomed more important than ever as something which might dull the pain of her own failure. Poor Joe! What was he thinking now? Had anything like—this happened to him? Why hadn't he answered her letter.

"Are you feeling better now?" she asked after a few minutes had passed, and he had not moved.

He sat up slowly. "I'm fine, Miss Brador,—honestly. I'm much better than I look,—I was just resting."

"Because," she went on, "there is something I would like to ask you. But before I do, just so you won't worry any more, I am going to look after you and Joan myself, now. I'm going to drive you up to Gretmanby—today, if you are strong enough, and we'll get these—," she nodded at the pocket-book, which she still held "—into action right away,—this evening."

She had expected the same warm gratitude which he had showed before, but his expression had grown even more miserable than when he had first looked up at her,—before he had realized who she was. She wondered if he was hesitant about leaving that Mr. Lorrimer. If so, he must get the idea out of his head.

"Listen, Mr. Mackell," she said firmly, "if you are doubtful because of Mr. Lorrimer. Your first duty is to Joan. You can do nothing in the world for Mr. Lorrimer, if he has his man here, and Dr. Beringer, and you can do everything for Joan. I appreciate how much you owe him, but—"

"It isn't that," Brian broke in. "I know that. It seems a dirty trick to leave him, but he understands,—it was almost the last thing he said. It isn't that, it's—it's—this." He was sitting up again now. She followed his glance to the brown leather pocket-book which he had snatched from her, and kept.

"Do you want me to—" she began, but he interrupted quickly.

"I've got a message for you, Miss Brador. I should have told you before,—but it all seems so long ago,—and I was—I guess I was just selfish. It's from Captain Todd."

Joy flashed in her heart for a brief moment—and died.

She understood. That pocket-book,—Mackell's miserable look! She stared at the dusty hawthorn hedge across the road. Her chest was constricted, and she straightened her back and breathed deeply. She stared at the hedge, and the empty sky above it,—so wide and pale. If only she could get some of that illimitable space into her poor lungs,—it would be easier to breathe. Could—could she be wrong? Mackell might have been clumsy,—given a wrong impression.

No! A glance at his face was enough. Misery and sympathy were written on it. She stood up, walked across to the other side of the road, poked at the bank aimlessly with her stick, and came back to sit down beside him again. She could breathe properly now.

"Is Captain Todd dead?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, Miss Brador. I'm sorry—because—though I couldn't help it, it was my fault,—like everything else that's happened. He came out—into the open—in that battle—and saved my life when I was bleeding to death, and—they got him."

"Would you mind telling me—all about it? Because I was—I liked Captain Todd very much when he was here."

"I know, Miss Brador, And—I know it's private, but—I ought to tell you that—from what he said,—his message, I know that he must—think an awful lot of you."

She could breathe now, easily,—too easily. She could even smile wanly. The boy was trying to be so kind, and he understood, and he was the only person in the world that she would want to have that understanding. It was a relief that somebody,—somebody who was so closely bound to both of them, should know. "Tell me everything, please," she said simply, "—all the things Joan would want to hear, if it were you. You understand?"

She liked him for taking her hand, for his piteous attempt to say something for which he had no words, for the tears in his eyes, but above all she wanted to hear,—everything,—every little detail of Joe's death,—to have a full, true picture to cherish and remember, and then—never to speak of it again. "Tell me all about it," she said again, and with the comfort of his hand on hers she listened to his halting, fervent story.

Not until he had finished did she take up Joe's pocket-book from the grassy bank between them. There were two letters in it, secured from falling out by a rubber band. One was her own. She touched it lightly with her fingers,—and put it back. Why, oh why had she not said more? "I would like you to know about this letter, even though it may hurt you a little, Brian,—I am going to call you Brian, if you don't mind. You will be glad to know about it—later. I wrote Joe, telling him how badly Joan needed you, and asking him to try and get you leave,—for my sake. He must have got the letter just before the battles began. So you see, when he went out to—save you, it wasn't just ordinary heroism, he was doing it to save you for Joan,—I want you to tell her that, Brian,—he was doing it, most of all, for me. You and Joan must never speak of this to anybody else, but it's nice to feel that you two will understand, with me, the kind of man Joe was."

She felt normal now, deeply, deeply sad, but inexpressibly grateful for the manner of Joe's end,—so painless, quick, and fine,—yet thinking of her, loving her, and able to speak to her, through this boy, with his last breath.

She was glad that Brian's story had brought her no resentment against him. She felt only grateful. They had all been helpless. She and Joe had been too weak,—or too wise. Unhappiness had haunted their love; something had been the matter with it; something had been the matter with them; it was destined for failure,—somehow. Only this—this sublime sacrifice of Joe's,—for her, could have raised it again,—and forever, to the heights it had reached when they had walked so silently together among the beeches.

Sometime in the future she would feel everything which now she could only think. At present—She sighed, long and deeply. But it was no time for weakness. She had to finish the work which Joe had begun. Their love would be consummated in happiness,—for Joan and Brian.

She rose, taking his hand and helping him to his feet. "Don't be too sad, Brian. I want you to be a little sad,—you and Joan, but you should understand that Joe and I would not have been married, even if he had lived. Sometime, it may seem that Fate was more kind than cruel. But now—I am going home for a while—to rest, and then we will do what Joe gave his life for. Be ready by noon."

He nodded, and she saw that he was unable to speak. "Then I will call for you at the Bull. Goodbye,—and thank you."

She turned away, holding Joe's pocket-book tightly. There was a letter in it for her—unposted.

An old, black motor car was standing outside the post office when Dorothy drove down the village street to call for Brian. As she passed, Polly Dyer ran out and waved to her to stop. "There's a gentleman in here asking for the Pages, Miss Brador. I don't know what's come over everybody today—with them Pages! Wants to know where they live,—but I ain't had time to ask him why, yet. And seeing that you know all about his daughter, I thought you wouldn't mind speaking to him."

Dorothy had no wish to speak to him—or anyone else, but it was possible that he might have some clue as to what had happened to Mr. Page, and it had weighed heavily on her that she must go to Joan with nothing about her father except the disquieting news of his disappearance.

"Very well, Polly, I'll wait."

A tall man came out of the post office, a clergyman, with a kind, ascetic face. He bowed gravely as he came to the side of the old Vauxhall. "Miss Brador? I am Howard Wriothsley, Superior of the Brotherhood of the Good Samaritan, in Ely. You will excuse me for troubling you, but the post-mistress tells me you are a friend of Mr. Page, who lived here."

"Of his daughter, Father Wriothsley. I have hardly spoken to Mr. Page. He is a very—retiring man."

"I have bad news of him, Miss Brador, and I did not know to whom I could give it. I did not even know that he had a daughter,—or any family. Is there anyone else here to whom I should speak?"

Dorothy shook her head. "There is nobody else here,—or anywhere else, except a cousin, whom they don't like and haven't seen for years. Please tell me what the trouble is, Father Wriothesley. I'm on my way up to Yorkshire now, to see his daughter."

"I had a telegram this morning, Miss Brador, from the Officer Commanding Wanfleet Camp in Essex, to say that Mr. Page had been found late last night,—dead. His name was in his pocket-book, but there was no address,—except that of our Brotherhood, which was on a set of straps we gave him for his overcoat when he left us. Naturally they communicated with us, and fortunately Mr. Page had told us that he came from Caster End. That was all we knew, and I judged it better to drive over, to inform his family—decently, or if I found no one,—to make other arrangements."

"Did you know him, Father? How long had he been with you,—and what was he doing so far away as Wanfleet?"

"I know little beyond what I have told you, Miss Brador,—except that he had been preaching outside the Wanfleet Camp the night he died. Brother Wencelaus tells me that it had been Mr. Page's intention to seek a certain camp at Huntingdon when he left us, and he believes that he intended to preach there. Mr. Page told me that he had been called by God to perform some mission, although he did not tell any of us its nature. From all these circumstances I deduce that his purpose was to preach his special message to the soldiers, and that since he left us in the first week of September, he has been going from camp to camp, preaching. If his final aim was London, and his course haphazard, he might well come to Wanfleet."

Dorothy thought deeply, her elbow on the edge of the car, her chin on her hand. It was sad, but—in the end it would be easier for Joan. But she must not be told now. "Father Wriothesley," she said, at last, "Mr. Page's daughter is in Yorkshire, and she is going to have a child,—within a few days,—perhaps tomorrow. Her husband is just back from France, so seriously wounded that he can do little more than walk. He is waiting for me now to drive him to his wife. Neither of them can grapple with this situation at present. Joan should not even be told about it yet, and in that case it would be better that her husband should not know either. Mr. Page has no friends,—hardly even acquaintances in the village,—you will have realized what a solitary man he was. I would,—I will do what I can, but today I must drive to Yorkshire, without fail. As soon as I come back, I will attend to everything. There will be an inquest, I suppose?"

"I imagine so, Miss Brador. But what you have told me has shown me very clearly where my duty lies. I may say my inclination also, for my heart went out to that poor man when he came to us, and we have prayed for him daily since he left. You will allow us to see to these necessary formalities, Miss Brador? That is part of our work surely. And then there is the matter of his burial—?"

"I—don't—know. I think—"

"There is no obviously desirable place? Here, for instance?"

She shook her head.

Father Wriothesley smiled cheerfully. "Then, if you see fit, he shall rest among our own people in Ely,—close to his old friend, Father John Chapman, whom he really sought when he came to us. I feel—strongly that it would be fitting. A very lonely, overburdened man, and without the qualities to create those human ties which happier men acquire,—I understand well, Miss Brador. His body shall rest retired, but not solitary, among others who were ill-adapted to our modern world. As for his soul, I am well assured that God will care for that,—for this poor man had Faith."

He took her hand, bowed low, and covered his white head. "This has been a happy morning for me, Miss Brador. It is not often that I am privileged to—help so actively, and as you are one of those who find happiness in serving, you will understand my feeling. I will communicate with you as soon as necessary,—not with his daughter. Is that right?"

"Yes, Father, and I am so grateful to you,—and his daughter will be, when she knows. She,—all of us, are in a position where your kindness is of—untold help. I—"

He shook his head smilingly. "Not a word, Miss Brador! I understand. I will write you promptly." He bowed again, and turned away to his car.

Dorothy, grateful, and heartened by his serene composure, drove on towards the Bull.

There was a small room in Gretmanby Manor House, which was known as the "Library" because in it were the only books the house contained. There Joan had discovered, about a month ago, a volume which she had always passed over in her previous searches for something to read. It had looked too dull for what she wanted most of all,—something which would preoccupy her mind by force. It was called "The Art and Craft of Prosody," and one reason why she had first taken it to her room was her desire to know exactly what "Prosody" meant.

She had satisfied her curiosity, but in this last month of anguished, lonely waiting,—for Brian and for their child, she had also found that the craft of prosody could bring her the mercy of peace. For, since she had stopped writing to Brian, certain that her letters did not reach him, there had been no outlet for her love and longing, except in dreams.

Dreams had always been as important to her as reality, but since his letters had ceased, the veil across the future had become too menacing to touch, and the shadows over the shining past too dark. Hardly any dreams of the past or future were safe, and for sometime thoughts of the present had been most dangerous of all. Her will was exhausted, holding her mind so rigorously in check. The constant building of little bridges to cross each sluggishly flowing hour, each morass of despondency, became too hard a task when the materials for their construction gradually disappeared.

"The Art and Craft of Prosody" had come to her aid. Her dreams and all the loving things she craved to say to Brian had become safe and pliant under the stern laws and discipline laid down in that shabby old book.

With its aid she could write to Brian now, and spend days instead of hours doing it, for she never relaxed the letter of its laws, wisely ignoring references to poetic license. She did not want to write poetry. It was the discipline which brought her peace, which kept her mind occupied and built safe bridges with even her most dangerous dreams.

She could dwell with love, taking a single safe fragment at a time, working and moulding it so carefully to fit its ordained Spenserian stanzas, or Petrarchan sonnet, that there was no room for foreboding in the frame. She could dream, and there was a narrow channel dug ready for the dream, so strictly bounded by pentameters and rhymes, that it had no chance to flood.

She read what she had written with affection, and sometimes with quiet tears, but it never brought her anguish, or lured her spirit into despair. "The Art and Craft of Prosody" had bled those grasping, ungovernable emotions to pale restraint.

She laid down her pencil that afternoon with relief. The mental effort, while pleasant, became more and more fatiguing. She was glad that it was time for tea.

Their meals were not as silent as at first. Barton seldom spoke and was too deaf to hear anything that was said, but Jessie, for whom a listener was a luxury, had such a reservoir of conversation that Joan could not possibly have remained thoughtful and silent under its pressure. Merely answering "yes" or "no" or "I don't know," when necessary was quite a vocal achievement in itself.

But she was always solicitous for Joan's comfort, and having borne three children, and officiated at the birth of several others, her very presence was the greatest comfort of all.

"Is there ought else you'd fancy, Mrs. Mackell?" she asked as they finished tea.

"No, thank you." Joan glanced down at the table. "I seem to eat an awful lot, don't I, Jessie?"

"You couldn't do better,—you're eating for two! But I do wish you'd do as I bid and sup i' the armchair. It's but a day or two now; you should be careful."

Joan smiled gratefully. It had been a daily admonition for the last week. Jessie was determined that she should look after herself. A similar admonition always came when she strolled across to the church in the evenings, and another when she insisted upon going without her hat. But she liked the hard chairs, the open air, the quiet exercise, the evening breeze threading through her thick hair. They gave her a feeling of freedom, of escape from the shut-in sensation which oppressed her so much. She had lived so many years with herself for her only friend, that there was sometimes a sort of duality in her attitude towards her body,—as if her mind were herself, and her body her friend,—to be considered objectively, to be loved or admonished, to be proud of,—or even to be talked to.

A sense of her beauty had been no part of that relation until Brian's coming. She had not understood its perfection, and it had been important chiefly as a sign of strength and health,—the most valued qualities in her friend.

But now a new life depended on her,—a life which might prove all that was left to her of Brian, and even his almost humble adoration, of her beauty had not made her as proud of it as the feeling that it made her a fitting mother for his child.

So, always before smiling off any of Jessie's warnings or advice, she talked it over with Dr. Bentley, the brusque old physician who had become almost a friend since she came to Gretmanby.

He was nearly as old as Mr. Walsingham, and both of them were past their work and knew it, and were glad. They were only waiting for the end of the war, to retire and settle down together in the little house outside the village, which they planned to share. Both of them had told her about it,—many times.

But in spite of his age, Joan liked and trusted him and was well content to be in his hands,—and Jessie's, when her time came.

She allowed Jessie to help her on with her coat, refused the hat as usual, and went out. The moon was shining as she came round the corner of the house on to the drive. It seemed warm and yellow, and its cool light softened the bareness which autumn had brought to trees and garden.

Although she had reasoned that any relaxation of her spiritual discipline undermined the whole careful system of protection which she had built up, sometimes she could not resist it.

All this protected present was superficial,—a little stage on which she played her part among painted furniture and well-drilled actors. Beyond the lowered curtain was the dark auditorium crowded with miseries or joys, hopes or fears, which she never saw. The curtain was her shield, but sometimes she raised it,—driven by some weakness within her which yielded, or by some strength which forced her to face the untempered Truth, and mingle unprotected with the crowd.

There was relief as well as anguish in those minutes, there were some hopes, as well as many fears. So in spite of the new occupation she had found, her readings to the old Vicar, and her strictly formalized "writing to Brian," she still walked across to the church each evening for a little interval of wordless prayer, and sometimes a brief communion with Reality.

She sank down in the corner of the last pew, drawing her coat closer to her, and listlessly resting from the strain. Then the curtain slowly rose and the dim crowds surged in upon her.

A motor throbbed on the road. She held her breath, listening,—it passed on. Even when the curtain was lowered, it was far too flimsy to shield her from such sounds.

The motor throbbed again, and stopped,—outside. She turned, looking at the dark archway of the door. Her heart was pounding horribly,—she must be sensible,—it was nothing.

"Dorothy!" Her heart was normal again, but she could not keep back the tears. "I am so glad you've come, Dorothy."

"Then why are you crying, Joan, dear?" Dorothy came over and kissed her kindly. "Is there anything wrong,—especially?"

"It's just that—that I can't help hoping that everybody who comes will be Brian,—and when they're not,—I'm silly! I'm sorry, Dorothy. There's nobody else in the world that I'd rather see than you. It's good of you to come all this way, when it's your first leave for so long. And I *am* so glad. Everyone has been as kind to me as they could possibly be, but now —"

"When is it, Joan?"

"Within a few days, Dr. Bentley thinks,—tomorrow perhaps. And I've been so well, Dorothy, and happier for this last month. Are you going to stay—a little while?" she added wistfully.

Dorothy did not answer. She was still standing in the aisle, looking down. There was something in her strong, kind face

which Joan could not quite understand. She stood firmly erect, as always, her square shoulders and mannish tweeds giving her an air of solid reliability and self-confidence which at times could become so kind and tender,—as it had been a moment ago. But now—?

Joan stood up. "I didn't mean to be selfish, Dorothy—really. I don't really need you—though I'd like you to stay. I'll have everything I could possibly need. You've given me such a perfect home, although," she added smiling, "the church isn't the most cheerful part of it! We'll go back to the house, shall we?" She made a move toward the aisle, but Dorothy abruptly came out of her brooding silence and stopped her.

"Not a bit of it," she said decisively. "The church is as good a place as any,—in fact it's the best place. My mind was wandering! I'd like to stay, Joan, and I will—if you feel you really do need me—later. But I really ought to go tomorrow. There are several things I—must look after." She paused, and her smile was a little wry.

"But that's not the point now. Sit down, and I think I will too. That's right. I've got one little bit of good news for you, Joan. I've found out that your Brian is safe." Joan looked at her. She could not speak. Her breast and throat seemed too tight,—and there were no words,—only this sweet flood of happiness. She felt for Dorothy's hand, inhaling deep breaths of happiness. At last she managed to speak. "Oh, Dorothy,—that's all I wanted. I didn't know—I'd forgotten I could be so happy. Oh Dorothy! Tell me—how—"

"Well, to get the worst over, he was wounded. He's completely out of danger now but it was serious enough to keep him in hospitals for a long time and prevent him coming to you, and as his Regiment was in all those battles from the beginning, your letter telling him this address never reached him, nor any of the later ones."

"But Dorothy, if he was writing to Caster End, why—?"

"That's another thing," Dorothy interrupted. "Your father left the house a day or so after you did, and went to stay with a Brotherhood at Ely, where an old friend of his had been the Superior. He left no instructions at the post office, Polly says, so Brian's letters have just been going there, and staying."

It was another burden removed from her spirit. "I was troubled about Father, Dorothy. I'm so happy. You've made me feel like the Pilgrim's Progress,—when all the burdens fell from his back. You've taken them all away at once,—except Brian's coming soon, and other things were so much more important that I haven't worried about that at all lately. And now I'm so happy I feel it doesn't matter—much."

"Oh yes it does," Dorothy affirmed vehemently.

There was something new in her voice. Joan felt—she did not know how she felt,—as if her mind had been numbed with happiness, and this new hope could find no outlet, except to make her feel faint. She drew a quick breath, and with it came a sudden cramping pain which brought another gasp.

"You've seen him?"

"Yes, I have. But what's the matter, Joan? Have—?"

"Nothing, nothing." She was burning with impatience. "Is he coming, Dorothy? Is he coming?"

Dorothy put her arm gently round her shoulders. "Yes, he's coming,—immediately. I found him in Caster End, and brought him along with me. He will be here in a few minutes. Are you all right, Joan?"

Joan's eyes groped through the dimness. Once more she could not speak. She bent her head until her brow rested on Dorothy's shoulder for a moment. The faintness passed, and she raised her head again, smiling gloriously, suddenly strong. "I'm all right, Dorothy,—for a little while. I want to say things to you, to thank you, but I can't. You must understand. When—?"

Dorothy patted her hand. "That's a good girl. I was afraid things might have been too much for you. He's waiting,—but be gentle with him, dear, he's been very badly wounded."

"I will,—but he will have to be gentle with me, too! Oh, I'm so happy, Dorothy!"

Dorothy kissed her tenderly and rose. "I'll send him in. Then I'm going round for Mr. Walsingham. I'll explain everything

to him. He'll be pleased, if I know anything about him,—because of the extra happiness he'll be giving when he marries you and Brian. Tonight?"

Joan nodded. "Splendid! We'll allow you half an hour, then we'll come straight here, and nobody will know about anything except ourselves."

She went out. Brian was waiting, with the door of the car already opened. Triumph was her only feeling as she saw him. "Joan's all right, Brian. I've kept you waiting rather cruelly, but—as she is now, I had to be careful. And you must be careful,—and very gentle. The child is due—almost any time. I've told her that I'll be back with the Vicar in half an hour, so—"

She stopped, a little embarrassed by the pathetic, dog-like silence with which he was gazing at her. His eyes were steady, honest, loving,—like Joe's.

"Come along," she said brusquely, and held out her hand to help him. He needed no help, but he took her hand, pressed it to his lips quickly, got out, and walked up the gravel path. He had not spoken since she came out.

He pushed open the big door with his left hand, carefully rattling the wrought iron handle as he did so. He was fiercely determined to spare Joan any slightest shock, to be as gentle—

But every thought fled as he saw her standing there at the end of the pew, her face turned to him radiantly, her eyes shining, her arms slowly rising—opening—

"Brian!"

"Joan!"

Their lips were together, the scent of her hair in his nostrils, the hard strong hand pressing on her back, dark gray eyes close to his, glowing with love—and faith, honest blue eyes close to hers, pouring out a message of love—and loyalty.

Then both remembered, and both were suddenly gentle. She drew him down into the seat beside her, and his hand loosened and caressed her shoulder with apology. She understood the helplessness of his right arm, and put hers round him as he used to put his round her, and held him—gently, and they whispered to each other in the quiet church.

EPILOGUE

Twilight had shrouded the little room at Number 5 before Lieutenant Joe Mackell and Sergeant Sam Thomas rose, profuse in their apologies to Miss Brador.

"It's just been too comfortable, Miss Brador," Joe confessed. "We're worse than Dad! He told me he came here for a one night billet and stayed ten! We've been here two hours and I'm just remembering that you were on your way out somewhere when we stopped you!"

Dorothy Brador did not move. The flickering firelight illumined her white hair, still and quiet on the dark cushion. "I suppose you've got to go," she said regretfully, "there's only one train. How you've taken me back to when those other Canadians marched into this village,—only twenty-eight years ago,—but it seems like a lifetime!" She sighed. Then slapping her hands on the arms of the leather chair, got up. "But it's better to live in the present," she said briskly. "At least, that's what I've done since the last war. It's safer. Now you boys want to get to Brantham Junction. It shouldn't take you more than an hour and a half. You're bound to get a lift, and there's a train to town at 7.50."

"Don't worry, we'll make it easily," Sam Thomas assured her. "No motorist can resist us, and if he does, we knock his block off!"

"You've inherited your irresistibility from your fathers, no doubt. It's been pleasant to find that I knew your father as well as Joe's, Sam. Of course I don't remember him very well except that he was quite the life of the party that was billeted on us up at the Hall; but he and Captain Todd were the ones I knew best." She paused and looked at Joe. "I was so glad when your parents decided to call you 'Joe' after Captain Todd."

"Couldn't do anything else very well, after what he did," Joe asserted. "If it hadn't been for him, I'd have been the only child of a lone, lorn widow,—not to mention having to support her, instead of being number one of five, and living comfortably on the old man!" He laughed buoyantly. "And it's lucky I wasn't number two or I'd have been called Dorothy Brador Mackell, like Dot. You see it was a bit of a mouthful," he explained, "so we shortened her to 'Dot'."

"Nobody ever abbreviated me. I think,—I think I must have intimidated them too much!" The idea did not seem to amuse her and she broke off. "Anyhow, my Goddaughter doesn't seem to have suffered much, judging by the last picture your mother sent me."

"She gets by," Joe admitted. "In fact, all the Mackells seem to get by,—we're just lucky! It's funny," he added seriously, "Dad's almost superstitious about that. He claims that all Captain Todd's luck passed to him. And that the reason we've always been such a happy, healthy bunch of kids is that we inherited all the luck that Captain Todd's kids would have had if he'd lived,—and had any. Sounds a bit nutty, doesn't it?"

Dorothy Brador put her hand on his shoulder quietly. "I don't think it's altogether—'nutty', as you call it," she said, "and it's rather a pleasant thought to me. But now it's time you boys got started."

She led them along the little passage and down to the tiny gate.

"Good-bye, boys," she said. "Remember me to your father, Sam, and my love to both your parents, Joe. You can't miss the way if you go along past the church and then keep to the road south."

Transcriber's Notes:

hyphenation, spelling and grammar have been preserved as in the original

Page 2, a day. bronchitis ==> a day. Bronchitis

Page 9, than Coloney Markey ==> than Colonel Markey

Page 17, there was a page tear in sentence starting with 'She looked at him', and used best guess

Page 34, downs to to the top ==> downs to the top

Page 51, froth off his moutache ==> froth off his moustache

Page 59, question, you know, ==> question, you know.

Page 73, Captain Todd me that ==> Captain Todd told me that

Page 101, even your's ==> even yours

Page 141, love would he happy ==> love would be happy

Page 147, "Spud" Thompson ==> "Spud" Thompson

Page 148, read beween the lines ==> read between the lines

Page 191, Brunt say's you've got ==> Brunt says you've got

Page 192, not going to, Mac ==> not going too, Mac

Page 229, for the numbled words ==> for the mumbled words

Page 244, Raggett's telegrams. ==> Raggett's telegrams,

Page 262, Althought she had reasoned ==> Although she had reasoned

[The end of *The Road South* by Roderick Stuart Kennedy]