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Countess Glika

and other Stories

By

WARWICK DEEPING

Author of "Sorrell and Son."

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NOVELS BY WARWICK DEEPING

Kitty
Doomsday
Sorrell and Son
Suvla John
Three Rooms
The Secret Sanctuary
Orchards
Lantern Lane
Second Youth
Countess Glika
Unrest
The Pride of Eve
The King Behind the King

The House of Spies
Sincerity
Fox Farm
Bess of the Woods
The Red Saint
The Slanderers
The Return of the Petticoat
A Woman's War
Valour
Bertrand of Brittany
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The House of Adventure
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COUNTESS GLIKA

And Other Stories

I

COUNTESS GLIKA

Jack Barrington was cutting corners at forty miles an hour on the Grand Corniche road, when he caught sight of that white landaulette in front of him. There was no mistaking this particular car, its white body picked out with black. Jack Barrington had been haunted by it for the last month, a mystery car that always travelled at a high speed, often with the blinds pulled down over the windows. Once he had seen it draw up outside a costumier's at Monte Carlo, and he had purposely loitered to see who would get out. His curiosity had not brought him any romantic satisfaction, for a swarthy old lady had emerged showing a very solid foot and ankle, and a harsh, equine face, decorated with a big brown mole over the right eyebrow.

Jack Barrington had loitered on, with a critical glance at the exquisite lines of the white car and the luxurious refinement of its fittings. He had caught a glimpse of a bouquet of red carnations in a silver vase, of a whole row of bijoux books bound in red morocco, of silver-topped scent bottles and a little mirror that hinted at legitimate and picturesque vanities. And in the exuberance of his vitality he had refused to believe that all these provoking details were wasted on the swarthy old lady with the brown mole and the stodgy ankles.

He had even made enquiries, and hunted up the registered lettering and numbering of the car. The latter had referred him to a big motor concern in Paris. Even the gossips and the habitués were dumb. They were not interested in the white landaulette; it did not appear to have haunted them as it had haunted Jack Barrington. All he had learnt was that it belonged to a hypothetical Countess Glika.

But that night Jack Barrington gave chase. He was an irresponsible youngster of eight-and-twenty, and being one of the richest commoners in England he could be as irresponsible as he pleased. There had been a splendid and rather restless virility in all his activities. He had climbed the Rockies, hunted his way through Central Africa, and nearly got himself shot in Persia. He had driven a car in the Grand Prix, and his latest achievement had been to fly to Corsica and back in a new 80 h.p. monoplane.

The white landaulette was travelling at a fast pace, but Barrington soon began to overhaul it. The Corniche is a road of interminable curves, winding as it does through wild and rocky country hundreds of feet above the sea, and for several minutes this chase of Barrington's was a game of hide and seek, the white car whisking out of sight round some sharp corner and coming into view again where the road straightened out for two or three hundred kilometres.

The landaulette had vanished round one of these curves. It was one of the most solitary portions of the road, without a house in sight. Northwards, a rocky hill-side dotted with stunted pines heaved up towards the sky; southwards, more rocks and pines fell away precipitously towards the sea. The road was a great dusty ribbon, winding between the cut surface of the rock on one side and a stone parapet on the other.

Barrington came round that corner at forty miles an hour. The next second his right hand shot out for the brake lever. He set his teeth hard, felt the big car ripping along the road. Her tail swung round, and missed the wall by inches before Barrington managed to straighten her out and pull up.

For he had seen an amazing thing just ahead of him round the corner. The trunk of a fir tree had been thrown across the road; the white landaulette had pulled up, and two nondescript-looking foreigners in dark coats and soft felt hats came scrambling down the bank and were covering the driver of the white landaulette with a couple of automatic pistols.

Barrington had no time to think. He did the thing that happened to come naturally to him; he sounded his exhaust whistle. It was a particularly strident, rending instrument, especially when at full blast with the throttle wide open.

The result might have appeared ridiculous under less thrilling circumstances, but the thing acted on the two gentlemen with pistols like a steamer's siren on the astonished aborigines of some lost island. They pocketed their pistols, turned and ran, and scrambling up the hillside, disappeared into the ewigkeit.

Jack Barrington climbed out of his car just as the driver of the white landaulette slid out from behind his steering wheel, swearing very creditably in French. He turned and saw Barrington, and snapped at him like an angry dog.

"The devil take these cinematograph swine, I suppose it seems funny to you, monsieur, eh? We are all in the picture! And putting a tree across the road round such a corner!"

Barrington stared at him, and answered him in fairly respectable French.

"That's an idea, certainly. But I'm not part of a cinema show; it struck me as rather too real. You had better push that tree out of the road in case another car comes round in a hurry. I'll keep an eye on the landscape."

The chauffeur saw the reasonableness of the suggestion, and directly he was busy removing the barricade, Barrington seized the opening he had played for. The window blinds were down as usual. He opened the near door, and stood there, hat in hand, outwardly solicitous, but most outrageously inquisitive.

Automatic pistols seemed to be the fashion, for at the same moment the mysterious occupant switched up the blinds and he found himself looking into the ugly muzzle of one of those deadly little weapons.

"Pardon me, madame, I only opened the door to reassure you."

The pistol was lowered. Instead of it a pair of dark eyes covered him, haughty, resolute eyes that showed no fear. He was conscious of a thrill of triumphant satisfaction. This was not the swarthy old lady with the mole over the right eyebrow. The car had its appropriate and mysterious occupant.

"I hope you have not been frightened."

She rebuffed him with perfect sang-froid.

"I am not frightened. I am much obliged to you. Be so good as to close the door."

But he did not close it, being provoked by the discovery that this woman of the mysterious car more than deserved all the curiosity he had lavished on her. She was young, and she had that indefinable air that betrays the grand dame. Barrington knew when a woman was perfectly dressed as a rich and distinguished woman should be dressed. Like her car, she was a study in black and white; he thought she looked Russian, but was not sure.

"Your man seems to think that it was part of the cinematograph show. Would you like me to make any inquiries?"

She looked at him as though his perseverance surprised her.

"Thank you, no."

"It is lucky that I happened to be behind you. Those fellows ran off when I sounded my whistle."

"So there were men?"

"Two, with pistols."

He fancied that her eyes darkened, and that those firm red lips of hers trembled slightly. Moreover, he suddenly became aware of the fact that though that pistol was lying in her lap, she had a hand on it, and the muzzle covered his body.

"Thank you. Will you tell Adolphe, my man, that I want to speak to him?"

"Certainly——"

"Wait."

She smiled, and the whole expression of her face was changed. The eyes softened; the mouth became humorous; there was an archness in the poise of her head.

"You are English, is that not so?"

"Yes."

"That explains so much. You are a very wonderful and eccentric nation."

She changed from French to English, and spoke it with the fluency of a diplomatist.

"I am very much obliged to you. Strange things happen, even on the Grand Corniche. Will you tell my man to drive me home?"

"Yes. And if you will pardon me—I think I ought to follow you in my car. It will make for safety."

"Please do not trouble. Nothing more will happen, Mr.——."

"Barrington, John Barrington."

"The Barringtons?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; I hope so."

"Of course. I see you are one of those men who must try and get killed! And now——"

"I really must insist on guarding you home."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It is quite unnecessary."

"But I shall regard it as a great pleasure."

"Very well. You English are so obstinate."

He closed the door, and found Adolphe waiting. He had managed to roll the tree out of the road.

"Madame wishes to go home."

"Certainly, monsieur."

"I will follow and keep an eye on the hill-side."

The two cars moved on, and other cars began to pass them, coming from the direction of Italy. There were no more sensational happenings. The white landaulette took a branch road that zigzagged towards the sea. Barrington saw Cap St. Pierre spread out below with its pines, a dark wedge thrusting out into the blue Mediterranean. Here and there a white villa showed amid the dusky masses of the trees.

Ten minutes later they were running between the pinewoods and the sea. Barrington saw Adolphe's arm stretched out, waving him to hold back. The white landaulette swung round, and passed in between two big stone pillars.

Barrington pulled up. And before he had decided whether to follow the white car farther, an old man emerged from a lodge, slammed the iron gates to and locked them.

Barrington hailed the old fellow.

"Hallo, monsieur, one moment."

The lodge-keeper stared at him through the bars like a sleepy ox.

"Does the Countess Glika live here?"

The man shook his head, pointed to his ears, and promptly returned to his lodge.

"If you are deaf, my friend, how was it you heard madame's car and rushed out to shut the gates? You can't see along the road from that lodge!"

Barrington drove on a little way, but the high wall and dense belt of pines balked his curiosity, and he could see nothing of the villa. He turned his car and drove back to Monte Carlo, thoroughly piqued by the adventure, and not at all inclined to remain outside those iron gates.

He was having tea next day in the lounge of the Hotel Glorieux. The place suited him, in spite of its name. It was cosmopolitan, and yet jealous of its reputation; irresponsible wealth was not suffered to roll in there as it pleased.

"I say, Pentherby—"

A white-haired old dandy, who was sitting stiffly in the chair next to him and reading *The Times* as though the paper had grossly insulted him, turned an eyeglass on Barrington.

"Well—well, what is it?"

"I want your advice."

"What's that? Advice! Who ever asks a man of my age for advice?"

"I do. Can you tell me who is the most scandalous person within two miles of the Casino?"

Sir John Pentherby sat up even more stiffly.

"Go and ask the police, my dear fellow."

"I have been told that you know more——"

"So I am the most scandalous party, am I?"

"Wait a minute. I want to get into touch with someone who knows everybody round here, and everybody's business. I am doing some social research work."

"Who's the woman?"

"I don't know."

"Well, go to another woman. The women seem to like you for some reason or other. Try the Baroness."

"What, old Bromberg?"

"I've heard it's her business to know everything, even to make herself *au fait* with the indiscretions of Crown Princes and Grand Dukes. Try her. She won't tell you anything of any importance, so you are quite safe."

The Baroness Bromberg was more than a woman; she was Germania personified. She was fat, with protuberant blue eyes and a double chin that hung down like a bag. She looked overfed and stupid, and this air of bland stupidity had been of great use to her on occasions.

The Baroness was a furious gambler, and notoriously mean. Barrington knew of this weakness of hers; three nights a week she was to be seen at the public gaming tables; she preferred to be one of the crowd, rather than pay the subscription that entitled the gambler to haunt the private rooms.

Barrington went to the Casino after dinner; he had a permanent ticket, and the attendants knew him well by sight. He was in search of the Baroness, and after drawing a blank at several tables, he discovered her sitting next a croupier, sucking a pencil and staring at the entries in the little notebook on the table in front of her. As usual, she was dressed in black, with a crowd of rings on her lumpy fingers.

It was obvious that the Baroness had been losing; her flabby face looked sullen; six five-franc pieces remained beside her, piled in a column.

Presently Barrington caught her vague eyes. He bowed and smiled, and for a moment she glared at him intently.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."

Suddenly he saw her face brighten. Her hand shot out, seized a rake, and pushed two five-franc pieces on to number ten.

And by some freak ten turned up. The Baroness's face grew beatific. She beamed across at Barrington.

He went and stood behind her.

"I hope it was I who brought you luck, Baroness."

Her laughter was like a sheep coughing.

"So. Is it not wonderful? I see you, I say to myself, Mr. Bon Ton—that is what I call you. Bon Ton becomes bon ten. I stake on ten and win. Ach! I like you."

Barrington was amused, but her good humour seemed opportune. Moreover, he knew that she would abandon play for the night now that she had won.

"Ach, I am so tired."

She gathered up her money with greedy fingers, pushed back her chair and rose.

Barrington constituted himself her cavalier, persuaded her into the restaurant, and fed her on sweet cakes and coffee. She was in excellent temper, like an old bear with a generous harvest of buns.

They chatted, gossiped, removed to one of the lounges, and Barrington smoked cigarettes. He did not want to be too eager and obvious.

"Strange, I have never seen Countess Gлика here."

The Bromberg gave him a blank stare.

"Who?"

"The Countess Gлика; I believe that is her name."

"Ach, no. She makes her parties at home."

Barrington put on the air of a very frivolous and rather foolish young man.

"I say, Baroness, I had quite a funny adventure with her—this afternoon. You know that white car?"

He described the incident of the afternoon to her, facetiously, as though it were an immense joke and he was in a mood to be amusing. The Baroness listened like a placid cow. She did not betray any great interest.

"And was it not for the cinematograph?" she asked him. "I do not believe in brigands."

"Oh, we may hear, see something in the papers. But really, Baroness, the Countess delighted me. I am going to follow up the adventure."

A queer glint flashed momentarily into the old lady's eyes, and vanished just as swiftly. Her face remained expressionless; no one could have looked more stupid.

"Ach, she is pretty, I suppose? Yes, I have seen her; she is handsome, but too thin, and I do not think she is married. You should never make love to unmarried women, my Barrington, it is too dangerous."

Barrington laughed as though he thought her wit immense.

"But I love danger, my dear Baroness. It excites me. The thing is—to approach the lady. You see, I know nothing about her."

She looked at him placidly, stupidly, with her heavy swollen eyes. No one would have imagined that a peculiarly cunning brain was on the alert behind that obese stolidity. She was studying Barrington, summing him up, nor had he any idea that she had discovered that he might be useful.

"What should I know, my friend? I believe she is from Borovia, that she is a widow. An old dragon, Madame Maclou, lives with her. She receives very few people, I am told."

"The more room for me, Baroness."

"Ach, so. You are a young madman; you English are all mad. Why not fly over her villa, fall into the grounds, and pretend yourself hurt?"

"An idea, Baroness, certainly. But it would be rather difficult in such a place to arrange how much one got hurt. I might present her with a corpse, and the affair would have no more interest for me."

She yawned, openly and without shame.

"I am so sleepy. You will find a way, my friend; the English are both mad and persevering. I think I will go home."

And Barrington saw her to her cab.

A full moon had risen, and far across the bay the pine-clad cape of St. Pierre looked like the snout of some huge crocodile lying asleep upon the water. A motor-boat had rounded the headland of Monaco. It passed the Casino with its thousand lights, and held on eastwards towards St. Pierre. The motor-boat had come from Nice.

In the garden of the Villa Biron a woman was walking to and fro between hedges of Banksia roses. Palm trees and pines were outlined against the moon; a row of cypresses made a screen of ebony through which the moonlight poured upon a stretch of grass. The villa itself with its cream white walls looked like a great casket of ivory.

The Countess Glika seemed in a restless mood. She was wearing a coat of sables, and a scarf of some gauzy stuff about her hair. The moonlight was so strong that she could tell the time by the watch strapped to her wrist. She glanced at it repeatedly as though she were waiting for someone who was late.

The night was very still, and the place where she was walking was not more than a hundred yards from the sea.

There was hardly a ripple against the rocks where the stone pines almost overhung the water.

She stopped and stood listening, her intent face turned towards the moon.

And suddenly a man appeared on the stretch of grass where the moonlight fell. He had come along a path through the pine woods, a path that led to the sea.

For a moment he stood there in the moonlight, and then, moving to where the cypresses threw a deep shadow, he became lost in the gloom.

The Countess walked down the path until she, too, was in the shadow of the cypresses. A dim figure was waiting there, a figure that put its heels together and saluted.

She started, and paused as though surprised.

"Who is it?"

"Captain Prague, madame."

"Ah, Prague, of course. But I was expecting——"

He bowed apologetically.

"Madame, I bring regrets, explanations. Monsieur has been unavoidably detained; he sends you passionate apologies. To-morrow or the day after he will drive over from Nice; he will dine with you. To-day it was not safe."

She gave a gesture of impatience; she was angry.

"Not safe! He is considerate. And to-day I was in danger of being shot."

Prague rocked on his heels.

"Shot, madame?"

"Ah—well, I have counted the cost. I am not afraid——"

"But monsieur will be in anguish."

"It may be good for him, Prague. How did you come?"

"By sea."

"Carry back my felicitations to monsieur, and tell him that I expect him."

"I am your servant, madame."

He bowed, and vanished down the path that led to the sea.

But Anna Countess Glika returned to the house, walking slowly, with the air of one who had received grave news. It was she—the woman—who had faced real danger that day; he—the man—had disappointed her, made excuses. Nor was it the first time that he had disappointed her. In bringing him into the world, Fate had intended him to take his place among the great ones of the earth, but Anna had doubted his greatness; sometimes she even doubted his courage.

She entered the house, and, passing up a flight of marble stairs, crossed a broad gallery decorated in the style of Louis Quinze, and unlocked the door of a room with a key that she wore fastened to her waist by a gold curb. The turn of a switch flooded the room with light. It was half boudoir, half library, a gem of a room, whose colour scheme was black, white, and old rose. The furniture was of ebony, inlaid with ivory; the walls white; the carpet, cushions, and hangings a

soft rose. There were pink and white carnations everywhere, masses of them in black porcelain bowls and vases.

Anna locked the door. A restlessness born of vague doubts was still upon her. She went to the ebony bureau, opened the flap, and pressed a spring that formed part of the ivory patterning of the inlay. A shallow drawer shot forward. She took papers from it, a photograph, and a packet of letters.

She sat down, glanced through the papers, read some of the letters, and then picked up the photo and studied it. It was the photo of a youngish man, round-headed, full-eyed, Germanic, with upturned, aggressive moustache, and an expression of forced arrogance. And yet, when analysed, especially by the subtle perceptions of a woman, the face was weak, for all its pride of caste. The mouth was sentimental and a little flabby, and those rather staring eyes: she had seen them fogged with fear. And this was the man who loved her, who had sought her love in turn, passionately and with a kind of fury. This was the man upon whom she counted to lead her country towards an ideal that to her was sacred, inspired. She had not given herself to him, because she desired to keep the subtle chain of her fascination strong and unstrained. In her heart of hearts she knew that she did not love him, but when he would pledge himself, take that irrevocable step that should bind him to the great Slav country that she loved, then she had determined to sacrifice herself in turn, to offer up her womanhood on the altar of a great ideal.

Presently she sighed, and put the papers and the portrait back into the drawer. She was in a mood that mistrusted her own fate. She knew, too, what merciless and cunning influences were arrayed against her, all the secret and unprincipled diplomacy of a great state—treacherous, greedy, cruel.

Had she possessed the gift of second sight, and been able to follow that boat westwards along the track of the moon, she would have had a further cause for doubt and unrest. For Captain Prague's launch did not re-pass the black headland of Monaco. It glided in nearer to the glitter of the casino, and, shooting into the harbour of Monaco, landed Prague at the western quay.

Prague told the men to wait. He went off with long strides along the quay, deigning to bend his military bearing into a civilian's slouch. He had turned up the collar of his overcoat, and pulled the brim of his hat down over his eyes.

Prague made his way up the hill towards the casino, but its lure was not for him that night. He passed the Café de Paris, walked up through the gardens, and in five minutes found himself at his destination, the vestibule of a big block of flats. The concierge was sitting reading a paper.

"Yes, monsieur?"

Prague walked past him as though the man did not exist.

"Excuse me, monsieur——"

Prague turned on him brusquely.

"The Baroness is at home?"

"She returned half an hour ago."

"Good."

The concierge watched him disappear up the stairs; he had seen this gentleman before, but he did not like him any the better for that. And one had to be careful at Monte Carlo. It was a strange place.

The Baroness's maid knew him as Herr Schmidt, and under that vague pseudonym he was admitted without demur. He found the old lady sitting by the radiator, and drinking cocoa and eating sweet cakes, in spite of the fact that she had dined and that Barrington had fed her a little more than an hour ago.

"I am glad to see you. Please open the door, my dear Schmidt. Ach—so that second room serves as a guard-room; no one can sneak in and listen while that door is open. Well, how is the Prince's heart?"

Prague sat down opposite her. He had high cheek bones, and a big flaxen moustache, and his eyes were humorous and shrewd, and none too honest.

"He did not come—to-day. I have been there to present his regrets.

"Himmel, what has happened?"

"Monsieur was a little nervous. I had presented a secret report. And she—the Glika—told me she had been in danger."

He laughed unpleasantly. The Baroness remained absolutely unmoved.

"It must have been that fool Bulow. I shall have to get him severely lectured. We have no need of those clumsy methods. Besides, such an adventure might give her more sentimental influence over the Prince. She is clever and knows how to handle him."

Prague nodded.

"If she would only compromise herself," he said.

The Baroness took a mouthful of cake, and washed it down with cocoa.

"It might be managed, my dear friend. I had an idea to-night; an English fool gave it me. He may prove of use, this Englishman, a young man who is for ever trying to get himself killed. The Glika has always been circumspect. If we can but get some mud to stick to her, monsieur will be disillusioned."

They talked on for an hour before Prague bowed over the Baroness's fat hand, kissed it, and made his way back to the harbour.

Jack Barrington scanned the papers next morning, but he could find nothing about the attack made on the Countess Glika's car on the Corniche road, but the fact did not surprise him. The police did their best to prevent such affairs being noised abroad. The papers refrained from publishing accounts of them. Such unpleasant incidents did not advertise the French Riviera in a way that was desirable.

No one had ever accused Jack Barrington of lack of enterprise. He spent the morning at the golf club up at La Turbie, and lunched at Ré's. He had ordered his car to be outside the Hotel Glorieux at three o'clock. At a quarter-past three he was sounding his hooter outside the gates of the Villa Biron.

The deaf lodge-keeper came rushing out. He appeared to have received very particular orders, for he unlocked the gates and flung them open without waiting to examine either the man or the car. And Barrington was throwing away no opportunities. His machine went in with a rush, and he was out of sight round a corner of the winding drive before the lodge-keeper began to wonder whether he had made a mistake or not.

Barrington drew up outside the great white porte-cochère of the Villa Biron. Masses of palms, oranges, conifers, and eucalyptus trees sheltered the place; the mimosa was in bloom. There were camellias in pots ranged along below the wall of the terrace.

He climbed out, and rang the bell. A manservant opened the door, a man with a discreet, stolid face and the look of a Russian. He eyed Barrington intently.

"Is the Countess at home?"

"I do not know, monsieur."

Barrington handed him a card.

"I have come to inquire for her good health after the affair of yesterday."

The man looked at the card, looked again at Barrington, and realised that he was English. For some reason or other the fact seemed to reassure him.

"Will monsieur wait, here, in the lounge. I will go and see."

Anna was in the blue saloon, a room that overlooked the garden, when the manservant brought her Barrington's card.

"What is it, Dmitri?"

"A gentleman, madame, English, to ask after your good health."

She took the card from the salver, read it, and for a moment she hesitated. It was a mere vague impulse that decided her, one of those seemingly wayward decisions that often prove of extraordinary significance.

"I will see him, Dmitri."

"Here, madame?"

"Here."

It was said that many women had been in love with Barrington, perhaps because he never appeared to care whether he was with women or with men. He was always at full gallop on some adventure; danger fascinated him; he loved a horse, or a car, or an aeroplane, the charge of a rhino, the thrill of some ticklish situation faced and tackled. Some women had said that he had no heart, that he was a big schoolboy playing games. But the one particular woman had never come his way as yet, the woman who could play a big game, and stake her all on the chance of triumph.

Countess Glika had her back turned as Dmitri showed him into the blue saloon. He did not realise that she was watching him in a mirror with an interest that might have been flattering.

"Monsieur Barrington, madame."

She turned, rose, and bowed to him, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I am grateful to you for your courtesy, Mr. Barrington."

He smiled at her frankly. Dmitri had closed the door.

"To be quite honest—I have seized an opportunity. I am always being told that I am an impudent beast. That car of yours has been haunting me for a long time."

Somehow his smile made her eyes brighten.

"Sit down. I was not conscious of having been at all conspicuous."

"I should not have dared to use so crude a word. That study in black and white kept passing me, and you know, as a rule, the blinds were down."

She laughed.

"A fatal lure to a man!"

"To me, at all events. I confess that I loitered one day on the pavement when your car stopped outside a shop. I wanted to see who would emerge."

"And then?"

"A very admirable gentlewoman stepped out. I have no doubt that she is charming, but——"

"It was poor old Maclou, Madame Maclou; she stays with me from time to time."

"Madame, let me hasten to say that I speak in no mocking spirit, but I must confess that I was disappointed. Your dear friend was an anti-climax; she did not live up to my idea of mystery. I was convinced that I had not seen the real woman who owned the car."

"Indeed! You must have a great deal of time to waste."

"I must dare to disagree with you. Yesterday I had my opportunity. I took it."

A sudden suspicion suggested itself to her.

"What—you had planned that affair? Hired those men——"

"Good heavens, no. I confess to having chased your car, and I confess to having opened the door in order to discover who was inside, Madame Maclou—or——" He paused, half apologetically.

"You must think me an impudent ass, but when I get into an adventure I must go along with it."

She smiled rallying.

"You must have had many adventures."

"A few—with machines and wild men, and beasts and things."

"Things! Does that not include the most dangerous thing of all?"

His eyes questioned her quite ingenuously.

"You mean——"

"Woman."

His sudden seriousness amused her, but made her like him the better.

"I don't know. I don't think so. Somehow, I always seem to have been too busy. I have come across good comrades——"

Then he seemed to realise the suggestiveness of all that he had said.

"Please turn me out if you think me impudent. Really—I am not a conceited fool; I did not come here to try and see you just to call it a joke. I am not that sort of beast. It is queer—but I had to come."

She, too, had grown serious. She knew something of men, but she had never met one quite like him. And she believed every word he said.

"I have not suspected you of that kind of impertinence. All this is very unusual—but I, for one, have led an unusual life. I do not feel it my duty to call Madame Maclou."

His keen face brightened somewhat at that.

"Thank you. I expect you are much cleverer than I am. I have always been busy doing things."

"I have heard of some of them."

But he was very English in that he diverged at once from any discussion of his own adventures. He attacked again in his frank, easy way, and she was not affected by the knowledge that she was being attacked. He had a kind of steel-bright courage that appealed to her; he reminded her of one or two notable English sailors whom she had met. A woman—as a woman—had nothing to fear from such a man.

"You never come out among our people."

"Hardly ever."

"At least I have never met you."

"No, I dare say not."

He was not the fool to hint that he would like to be told her reason. She had been extravagantly magnanimous already. That was his impression.

He smiled and rose.

"You have been very merciful to me, you know. I wish you knew some of my friends, Lady Bland and Grace Fortescue and their set. They are the very best that we can show."

She hesitated.

"I might know them if——"

"You mean you would?"

"I might."

"I say, that's splendid."

She laughed at his freshness, she who had seen so much of the sad and problematic side of the great world.

"You might suggest it."

"By George! I will."

An extraordinary melancholy descended on her when Jack Barrington had gone. It was as though he had taken the freshness of life away with him, and the blue saloon felt oppressive and exotic. She had to rally herself and to drive herself out into the garden where the cypresses were being bent by a crisp north wind; the sea was an intense blue and ridged with foam.

It was absurd, this sudden plunge into depression. What did it mean, what did it suggest? That she was growing old and a little cynical, yet sensitive enough to be saddened by the strenuous enthusiasm of youth. Good heavens! why should this rather extraordinary interview with an absolute stranger have affected her thus? Had he over-stimulated her vitality, and was this the reaction? She had to confess that he had come like this north wind, whipping a deeper blue into the sea, filling the world with a sense of swift movement and of adventure.

She remembered that monsieur would be with her in less than an hour. The thought left her cold, even repelled her. And she would have to be charming to him, to play up to his greatness, to remind herself that this thick-set man with the dull blue eyes and the weak mouth might be a maker of history. The mere glamour of his birth and power had fallen from him. She knew him, studied him as a man.

Jack Barrington and the Prince passed each other on the road, Barrington at the wheel of his own car, royalty muffled up in furs and looking at life with sulky eyes. The inevitable Prague accompanied his master, spruce, well-fleshed, cunning. He was a traitor to this royal romance, while pretending to be the obsequious servant.

Monsieur was in the sulks. He made no attempt to conceal the fact, and it is easy, when one is a person of singular importance, to vent one's temper impartially upon friends and subordinates.

"Well, here I am."

They were alone together in the blue saloon, and her first glance at him had warned her that he was in one of his sullen moods. How often had she to combat them, to put out all her brilliance and charm him into laughter! It was a dead, boorish weight, this temper of his, and he had never helped her to lift it; and to-day she felt an inclination to rebel, to refuse the labour of persuading a royal boor to behave as his own gentlemen were expected to behave.

"I expected you yesterday."

"I could not come."

For once she gave him no help, and, like a spoilt child, he felt the lack of it. He had traded on her desire to please him, to win him over to her visualising of the future.

"You expect me to explain, make excuses?"

She smiled, and her smile was a provocation.

"No; I should not presume. But I was in danger yesterday."

He started up and began to stamp about the room, setting his heels down heavily, a trick of his when he was angry.

"Thunder! you women are insatiable. You must have everything, you must not be thwarted! And I run no danger, eh, dangling after you, I, one of the best watched men in Europe? Was there ever a woman who was reasonable?"

She said nothing, and her silence was a prick of the goad to a bull. His short, thick neck reddened, his eyes began to glare.

"And what do I gain by it, mein Gott? It is like sitting at a table with flowers and silver and the plates ready, but no food and no wine. I am not going on living on airs and graces and the cut of a gown and just a glimpse of your white skin. You have got to give me more than that, Anna. Do you hear me? You have got to give me more than that."

He came and stood in front of her, and she looked at him steadily.

"And what do you promise in return?"

"Promise! You women are all bargains, you cannot love. And you do not consider what I am risking for your sake, and you ask me to smell the scent on your handkerchief, admire your dress and the curve of your foot. I'm a man, Anna; I want realities before I give——"

He threw himself on his knees and tried to seize her, but she was on the alert, and, slipping aside, rose and left him with open arms before an empty chair. He looked rather ridiculous, but a prince is not taught to suspect that his dignity can suffer.

"Let us go out and walk on the terrace. I have given to you what I have given to no other man—a promise. But I have a right to name my terms. Why should I give you the most precious thing a woman possesses, just as I would give you a glass of wine? How often have we spoken of this? You know that I shall keep my word."

He got up, and some of the anger had died out of him. He was a weakling, even in his physical passions, ever ready to pity himself, to demand sympathy, and to accuse her of withholding it.

"You have a heart of stone. You tantalise me with your prudery. As though I have not made sacrifices for your sake!"

She passed out by the French window on to the terrace.

"Believe me, Friedrich, I am not ungrateful."

"Then show your gratitude."

She turned and looked at him.

"We first met, I believe, in Bucharest. You remember it?"

"Perfectly."

"And I was not an obscure girl there, sire."

"No, no."

"Men admired me. I know what they said of me."

She had thrown a characteristic audacity into her attitude towards him; she had often succeeded in playing upon his vanity.

"What did they say of me, Friedrich?"

"Thunder! That you were the most fascinating woman in Europe!"

"Well?"

She looked at him proudly.

"Well, for your sake I renounced all that triumphant life. I had given myself to no man. And you—well, my friend, your romances have been legion. For your sake I have been living the life of a nun, nor have I ever taken your money. That is rare in a woman, is it not?"

His eyes scanned her longingly.

"Yes, yes, you are wonderful, Anna; almost too wonderful. I wish that you were more human."

"Like some of the fools whom you played with for a month, and tired of when they had given you everything! You must not count me among them, my friend. I demand more from you—I demand the utmost. I am a new sort of woman to you, Friedrich; you have not met my like before. I stand at your level, even above you. I do not stoop, I do not surrender. I treat as one proud nation treats with another."

The sentimental side of him was touched.

"You are incomparable! And what have I not dared for your sake, my Anna?"

"I ask you to dare still more."

"Yes, yes; you are a meteor; sometimes you terrify me."

She managed to charm the sulks out of him, but all his boorishness returned when he found that Madame Maclou and Prague were to dine with them. He waved Prague out of the room, and most royally and pettishly refused to sit down while old Maclou remained.

"Very well, my friend, we will dine, and you shall watch us."

She was as good as her word, and his high and mightiness fumed for a while, shocked and astonished. He withstood the soup, but the next course conquered him. He joined them; the dinner was exquisite, and he had all the greed of the Teuton. Warmed by champagne, he began to feel himself a rather fine and magnanimous fellow. He told droll stories

rather feebly; and Prague indulged in dutiful laughter.

Anna gave him a few minutes alone before he drove off.

"Have I not overwhelmed you? Did I not take it well?"

"You were hungry," she answered bluntly.

He fired up.

"And I sat down with that brown-faced gorilla of a Frenchwoman!"

"My Prince, do you never consider that I am a woman, that I may value my reputation?"

He stared. He was just a little vinous.

"Most of them have been proud—in a hurry."

And knowing herself as she did, she sat and wondered after he had gone whether she could face the ultimate sacrifice that might be required of her.

John Barrington had driven back to the Hotel Glorieux in a strangely serious mood. He had succeeded beyond his hopes, but the affair had suddenly refused to be bounded by the mere spirit of adventure. An irresponsible curiosity had come back chastened and silenced. He was more than a little ashamed of it, and he found that he had said things that he had never thought of saying when he had started out for the Villa Biron. He had never met such a woman before. In an hour she had become the mysterious and central figure round which all the varied and cosmopolitan life of the place revolved. Perhaps it dawned on him that he had fallen in love with her, that he had been half in love with the imagined woman hidden in that elusive white landaulette. He had been hunting a shadow. The shadow had materialised, and he was a little in awe of his own discovery.

But one thing he never suspected: that this visit of his to the Villa Biron would be of any interest to such a person as the Baroness Bromberg. Yet a rather shabby gentleman in an ulster and a battered hat left a note at the Baroness's flat. It was written in cipher, and the Baroness smiled when she read what the shabby man had written:

"Monsieur Barrington was at the Villa Biron this afternoon. He stayed there nearly an hour."

Barrington was popular; he had a genius for getting other people to do things for him, perhaps because he knew how to ask. He did not demand too much; he was not aggressive; and he had an air that suggested a delightful and flattering belief in the altruism of his victims.

"My dear Lady Bland, fate and coincidence have introduced me to the Countess Glika. She's charming, but I believe she's awfully lonely. If you'll call on her I'll drive you over."

The Countess Glika was a mystery, rather a problematical person. Perhaps that was why all these good ladies consented to call on her. They went to explore the personality of this mysterious Eve, and being women of the world, they came back fascinated, and yet a little alarmed.

As Grace Fortescue put it: "Jack Barrington always plunges for big risks. She's no ordinary woman. I'm rather worried."

The mistral was blowing one morning when Barrington drove over to the Villa Biron. The pine woods were making a great clamour, and on the hills the olives looked sad and grey, but the sea was an intense and strenuous blue, with foam

flecking it and flashing in the sunlight.

Dmitri smiled at Barrington. He was very wise was Dmitri; he trusted the Englishman, but he did not trust Captain Prague.

"Madame is in the woods, monsieur, out of the wind."

He took Barrington through the house and garden, and showed him the path.

"Go straight forward, monsieur." And again he smiled.

The tops of the pines were swaying overhead, but below in the shelter of their dark boles it was peaceful and very still. Masses of white heather were in bloom. The green boughs made a fretwork through which one saw the blue of the sky.

The path opened suddenly and surprisingly into a kind of glade in the thick of the pine woods. It was like a great green bowl, two hundred yards long and a hundred yards wide, fenced in by the trees. Purple Apennine anemones bloomed in the grass. The sky was a blue awning stretched from the tops of the pines.

Barrington caught sight of a long cane chair and a white sunshade. She was lying there in the sun, a book on her lap, her eyes closed.

He paused with the sunlight in his eyes, and perhaps he drew his breath more deeply. Then he went forward, came close to her, but she did not stir.

"Are you asleep?"

She opened her eyes with a start and sat up, the red cushion that had been under her head falling to the ground.

"You? How did you come here?"

"Dmitri sent me. I'm sorry. I've driven your dreams away. But Dmitri is a good fellow."

He picked up her cushion, and put it back in its place.

"May I stay a little while?"

"You have discovered the secret of my labyrinth."

"But I see no minotaur here. I should never have guessed there was a piece of grassland in the middle of these woods. I have brought a letter from Lady Bland."

He sat down on the grass beside her, and handed her a letter.

"There is to be a *bal masqué* at the Moscow. We want you to join our party."

She flushed slightly, and opened the letter.

"But that—that is impossible."

"Why?"

She lay back, and tilted her sunshade so that he could not see her face.

"It is impossible. You must not ask me to explain."

"What right have I to ask you to explain! And yet, no one would know you."

She still screened herself behind the sunshade.

"I have not danced for nearly a year. And dancing is in my blood."

"Be reckless."

She laughed.

"Oh, you do not know! You must think me a strange, mysterious creature. I have been taught to trust no one, to look on everybody as a spy."

"You can trust me."

"Are you not here—in my labyrinth!"

He was frowning; he wanted her to move that sunshade, to give him a glimpse not only of her face, but of her inner life—the life that baffled him.

"You need tell me nothing, Anna."

It was the first time that he had used that name, and yet she could not accuse him of presumption.

"Nothing! Then you assume me to be a mystery?"

"Perhaps."

She tilted the sunshade aside, and allowed him to see her face.

"True; I am a mystery. Are you content to look on me as a mystery?"

"I am content to do what pleases you."

"And still believe in me?"

He flushed, and his blue eyes were the eyes of a fighter.

"Of course. You might turn the world upside down, and I should believe you had some reason for it."

She regarded him fixedly.

"I believe you would. You are unusual. You are like Dmitri; you do not ask selfish questions and insist on having them answered. You are content to allow that other people may have to keep silence, that they can act honourably, without being talkative about it. Well, I will come to the ball."

He betrayed himself in the look he gave her.

"How will you be dressed? I must know."

She smiled at his ingenuous directness.

"I will come as Flame. And you?"

The corner of his mouth twitched humorously.

"As Ice? No, I think not. I will come as Icarus. Am I Greek enough for that?"

"You dare to fly near the sun," she said half sadly.

He was staring reflectively across the glade, with its smooth turf and its encircling wall of trees.

"I say, what a place for a landing. They are pretty rare along this coast."

"You mean—for an aeroplane?"

"Yes."

"But you could not land here. Surely there is not room."

He was measuring the ground with his eyes.

"Oh, yes—just enough. Of course, it would be a little ticklish, but a high-powered machine would get out again all right. My *Vampire* would do it. You see, one would have to get off the ground quickly in order to clear the tree-tops."

She watched his face, and its keenness and its virility delighted her. He was the man of action talking of what he knew.

"It would be too dangerous."

He turned with a smile.

"Now you are challenging me."

"No, no; I forbid you."

"Let me see, there is Dmitri and your chauffeur, and I believe you keep two gardeners. Just enough. Have you ever been up?"

"Never. But I absolutely forbid you to try and land here."

"But I might be here at five in the morning, before you were up. Don't forbid me; it's dangerous."

She laughed at his audacity; it was a trait in him that tempted her to be reckless.

"Very well. But I have promised to come to the *bal masqué*."

He scrambled up and bowed to her.

"It's a concession—an immense concession. I'm grateful. Now I must really be going. I have to lunch at Nice."

"Good-bye, Icarus. Be warned by me."

He smiled down at her.

"Sometimes one gets killed by being too cautious."

This glade in the pine wood might be sheltered from the wind, but it was no secure refuge from Mother Bromberg's German spies. A fat man, ridiculous and yet effective, had advanced on his paunch, with a kind of swimming motion, through a mass of heather, and he had lain there all the while, within hearing of what these two had said. It seemed an absurd attitude for a mature member of a great nation, but Germany has always been ready to crawl anywhere on its belly, and to shiver in its shirt listening at keyholes, thorough even in the slime of its secret service.

And the Bromberg heard all about that meeting in the pine wood, the masked ball that was to be held at the Hotel Moscow, and the costumes of the two persons concerned. She was exultant, and bit her finger-nails more assiduously than usual. Prague was wired for. He came, and there was a great pow-wow.

The Baroness gave him excellent advice.

"Never forget, my friend, that we are a sentimental nation. That wretched Nietzsche never understood us; he thought us beasts. This affair must be handled sentimentally. You must look very sorrowful, my Schmidt, and—and very troubled."

Prague grinned.

"He will ask me if I have overeaten myself."

"Ach! but for that you have a different expression. This must be Bavarian—soulful, moonlight and swan boats. He will ask you what is the matter; you will pretend to be surprised, you will appear embarrassed. You will confess unwillingly that you have discovered something that concerns his heart and his honour."

Prague understood.

"I will see that he has had champagne and music," he said, "then he will be in a mood to behave like one of Schiller's fools."

Prague went back to Nice, and in two days he had fallen into such a state of extreme melancholy that it forced itself upon monsieur's attention. It was the pander's abominable dullness that surprised and annoyed him. Prague did not laugh at his jokes, or tell those indecent and scandalous little tales of his. Monsieur thought he had indigestion.

"Go and see a doctor, Prague. You eat too much."

Prague looked grieved, denied that he was ill in body, and hinted at soul sickness, spiritual qualms. He contrived to pique the Prince's curiosity, and in a little while Prague disburdened himself of his doubts and sorrows.

Monsieur was not wholly unimpressed by Prague's sympathy, but the news threw him into a jealous rage.

"I shall go to this ball, Prague."

"It is private, sire."

"Himmel! I go anywhere—and everywhere."

"They will ask you for your ticket, sire, at the door, and will not let you enter. But I can provide you with a ticket."

He did.

That *bal masqué* at the Moscow was a very pretty affair. Barrington arrived early, shed a heavy coat, and stepped forth from the cloak-room as Icarus, winged with golden pinions, in a tunic of purple, his black mask fastened by a golden fillet. And the part suited him; he had a lean and youthful symmetry that could show itself gracefully naked to the knee and shoulder. He walked like an athlete, and he was not self-conscious.

He stood chatting to Grace Fortescue, who had come as Britannia, but though his tongue was busy his eyes and thoughts were elsewhere. The band had struck up, and was playing a wild, vibrant waltz. The masked figures began a swirling movement, but Barrington stood still and waited.

Then she came, a tall figure in a close-fitting dress the colour of flame. It was a mere sheath, sensuous, superbly modelled. On her forehead burnt a tongue of fire. She carried a mimic torch in her hand.

Barrington made his way round the room.

"Greetings. Icarus salutes you."

Her eyes smiled at him through the openings in her black mask.

"You know me—you are sure?"

"Your voice would be sufficient. Don't let us miss this waltz; it is gorgeous. May I take you?"

"Yes."

He laughed.

"I must leave these wings behind, or they will be scorched—so near to the sun."

He unbuckled them from his arms, and left them on a settee.

"Now—I know you can dance like fire."

"How do you know that?"

"One has only to see you move to guess it."

That dance was a great emotional experience for both of them. Their whole attitude towards each other seemed to change, to grow more intimate and subtly comprehensive. They moved together without effort, with the instinctive sympathy of two people who had danced many times together, not perfunctorily, but as lovers. They hardly spoke, but when the music ceased they felt the exultation of a mysterious understanding.

"I knew you would set fire to me."

"Go and find some cold Englishwoman to quench it."

"Perhaps I do not wish it quenched."

They danced a second waltz together, and then she ordered him to leave her; she was a little breathless, glowing under her flame-coloured dress.

"We are too conspicuous; return presently. Yes, and you may bring me some English partners."

Barrington was passing through into the card-room in search of one or two reliable acquaintances, when a man dressed as a Death's Head Hussar shouldered him rudely. It was done so clumsily, and with such aggressiveness, that it almost escaped appearing as an accident.

"Hallo, sir!"

He stared hard at the man, and saw a pair of sullen eyes behind the fellow's mask.

"Did you do that on purpose?"

"It is possible."

"Then you are a silly ass, whoever you are. Such things aren't done at a private dance. Good night!"

He walked on, picked out an English soldier, and carried him off to introduce him to Countess Glika. He himself was due to dance with Grace Fortescue. As they glided round he saw the hussar watching them.

"I say, do you know who that fellow is?"

"Which one?"

"The hussar."

"That robust-looking person? No. I don't think I can even guess."

"He shouldered me just now, as though I were his mortal enemy."

"Perhaps you are. You may have trodden on his toes—somewhere."

"Well, I hope I did. The fellow has the look of a Teuton."

Presently he found himself again with Countess Glika. They sat in an alcove behind some palms, while a few enthusiasts "tangoed" with infinite seriousness.

"You have not told me how you like my dress."

"I like it too much to say how much."

She laughed.

"What a dear, dull partner you found me."

"But then you said you did not want to be conspicuous. No woman could be conspicuous with Major Browne. They used to call him Reliability Browne."

"You funny English! If one is dull, one is good. I feel wicked, audacious to-night."

"Well, you look splendid."

He glanced up suddenly, and saw the Death's Head Hussar staring at them insolently as he passed across the opening of the alcove.

"I should like to kick that German," was Barrington's reflection.

For a while he had other partners to serve, and the Countess Glika chose to believe that she was tired. He left her half hidden behind the palms, watching the dancers, a symbolical figure with that flame upon her forehead.

A mood of sadness seized her. It was as though some joyous playfellow had taken her by the hand and drawn her out into the sunlight, and in looking back she discovered how sinister and problematical that other life of hers had been. And yet she could not escape from it without sacrificing a passionate and patriotic dream. She was a vowess; she had pledged herself; it was her fate to go forward through this land of intricate and treacherous hatreds and ambitions.

"So you enjoy yourself!"

She started and then sat rigid, staring up at a man whom she found standing beside her. It was the Death's Head Hussar, and in spite of his mask she knew him by his voice.

"You here!"

He bowed.

"You did not expect me! No. And yet it was only last week you declared that you were living the life of a nun."

"Well, it was true."

His eyes gleamed dully. There was greed in them, anger, the unrestrained passion of a man who had always satisfied his desires. He stretched out a hand and touched her shoulder.

"This is the dress of a nun, eh? Fire—and the flesh!"

She swept his hand aside with a gesture of proud distaste. She was cold as snow now, watchful, on her guard.

"You think I should not be here? And why?"

"If I had been warned I should have had no cause to reprimand you."

"Reprimand! Be careful what words you use to me. My pride can outmatch yours, sire. And have you forgotten that I am a woman and young? And do you straightway rush into dishonourable suspicions because I choose to laugh and enjoy myself for one night?"

He sat down beside her, and she noticed the whiteness of the knuckles of the hand that rested on his knee; it was clenched in a fury. For a moment he did not speak. He was trying to steady himself.

"You do not know what my pride is, Anna. To see you dancing with that bare-legged, bare-armed English fool!"

"Be careful."

"I am a man, and more than a man. I permit no subject, no stranger, to come within my circle, to touch the hand that I have honoured."

"Ah, the superman! Are you so great an egoist?"

"My blood is not the blood of these bourgeois English, that nation of brewers and shopkeepers."

She held her head high, looking straight in front of her.

"So you do not trust me? Very good. Let us say no more. I am not a woman who can deign to accept mistrust."

"Insolence is no answer," he retorted.

He found her smiling at him, and her smile was not comforting to his majesty.

"I hold a court of my own, sire. And I dismiss you—to-night; the audience is ended. Come to me in a less tyrannical spirit, and I will listen to you to-morrow. But do not dare to be jealous and to assault me with your jealousy. I will bid you good night."

She rose and walked away, leaving him behind the palms. And he did not follow her; he was a little dazed, astonished. No woman had ever dared to treat him as this woman treated him, and he could not understand it.

In the ballroom she met Barrington coming to take her to supper.

"Will you have my car sent round?"

"But you are not going! We have just arranged a table for supper."

"I have decided to go. Come down with me, Jack; I want to say something."

He was surprised, troubled, but wholly at her service.

"I'll have the car sent round at once."

He asked for no reasons, and she appreciated his delicacy. The lounge at the foot of the staircase was nearly deserted.

"Get my cloak for me; here is the number. I will wait here."

He called a porter, and sent him for the Countess Glika's car; and then went off to the cloakroom, wondering why

she was leaving so abruptly. When he returned to the lounge with a cloak of sable over his arm, he found her sitting in a chair that was screened from the staircase by a curtain.

"I'm terribly disappointed——"

She held up her hand.

"You had better know why I am going. Someone whom I know discovered me here, and made it impossible for me to stay. No, don't be angry. It has been splendid; that first dance of ours was a rhapsody. But—you may have suspected that I am a politician, a schemer, and here—I was being insulted by the suspicions of someone whom I have to regard as a friend."

"Insulted? You have been insulted here? But there is no one——"

"There is an unbidden, or rather, an unknown guest present. But I ask you to say nothing, do nothing. I trust you."

He stood looking down at her with sudden deep concern.

"I will do just what you ask me to do. But, Anna——"

She held up a hand.

"Be silent—be silent. The man is coming to say my car is at the door. I must go."

He helped her with her cloak, gave her his arm, and saw her into her car.

"I'm sorry."

She smiled as she gave him her hand.

"You have been so good tempered. Good night!"

"Good night!"

The white landaulette drove off, and he returned to the ballroom, puzzling himself by wondering who the unknown was who had been responsible for her leaving so abruptly. Was it a man or a woman? And that vague hint of hers as to some political intrigue!

Mystery still surrounded her, and mystery did not displease him. He was piqued, challenged by it. She seemed made for mystery and for adventure. Flame! He knew now that his blood had taken fire.

But Barrington was a sportsman and a cavalier. He laughed and talked through supper, was gallant to women to whom a little generous gallantry meant much, and danced to the end. He had forgotten all about the Death's Head Hussar, till he discovered that the gentleman had disappeared after causing some curiosity.

"Who was he?"

"He never danced, and he never spoke to anyone."

"Oh, but he did. I saw him talking to the Woman in that flame-coloured dress."

Barrington caught the remark, and found it infinitely suggestive. So it was that German beast who had insulted her; and there had been some reason for the fellow's shouldering him in that doorway.

Captain Prague had been in attendance on monsieur, and had spent a couple of hours at a famous restaurant, enjoying the most elaborate supper that could be obtained in Monte Carlo. Monsieur's car had been ordered to be in waiting at midnight outside the Moscow, and Prague, sleepy and surfeited, dozed inside it under a bearskin rug. He was roused by

the door being opened suddenly, and by somebody treading heavily on his foot.

"The devil!"

"Wake up, you fool!"

Prague woke up very thoroughly then.

"A thousand pardons, sire. I was tired, and had dropped off for a few seconds."

The Prince pulled the rug over his knees, and the chauffeur closed the door. In a few seconds they were moving away towards Nice.

The Prince was very silent. Once he smote the floor of the car with his heel. Prague was very much awake now, and bristling with curiosity.

"May I hope, sire, that your evening proved enjoyable?"

The Prince tore off his mask and threw it out of the window.

"Enjoyable, Prague—most enjoyable. My God! you were right. Never have I been spoken to as I was spoken to to-night."

"Was the Countess present, sire?"

"Prague, you will carry a letter to the Villa Biron to-morrow morning. I will give her a chance to apologise to me—to explain. She never expected to see me there to-night."

He laughed viciously.

"A cigar. I left my case at home."

Prague produced his, and monsieur smoked all the way to Nice; and Prague, who knew his moods, did not disturb him.

Now the Countess Glika took her coffee and rolls in bed next morning. She had slept but little, and had opened her eyes with a feeling of lassitude and of dreaminess, but it was not an unpleasant feeling. Something had happened—something of very peculiar significance, and she wanted to lie still and think. And through all the texture of her thoughts ran like a red thread the vibrant emotion of the waltz that she had danced with the Englishman. Nothing else seemed of great account. Her quarrel with monsieur made her smile, and yet it had been serious; she realised that; but the conviction lacked edge—it did not cut deep into her consciousness.

Her maid had just finished dressing her hair when Dmitri knocked at the door.

"Captain Prague, Madame. He has brought a letter."

"Bring it to me, Susette. Tell Captain Prague, Dmitri, that I will see him presently."

"He has gone, Madame. He did not wait."

She dismissed Susette, and, sitting before her dressing-table, opened and read the letter:

"ANNA,—You will see me this afternoon. I shall leave my car outside the sea-gate, and walk through the pine wood.

"You may wish to say certain things to me. I am sufficiently magnanimous to give you that opportunity.—F."

So His Highness was still high in the saddle. He would deign to come and grant her the chance of abasing herself, of throwing herself metaphorically at his Teutonic feet! She smiled. It was plain that he had not learnt his lesson. He wanted her to behave as other women had behaved. He had not realised that she was not as other women—that her empire was not to be a thing of the flesh, a mere incident that he could forget when it might no longer be pleasant for him to remember it.

And sitting there looking into her mirror she seemed to see beyond herself, beyond that pale face of hers, with its soul-troubling eyes. It was a moment of illumination. So many men had made love to her that she had grown a little jaded, inclined to look on love as a lure and a bauble. This morning she looked deeper into the glass of her fate, saw something that shocked her—something that made her pause.

Even if she surrendered herself in the end, could she count on this man's loyalty? He might repudiate her, repudiate her pledges, bribe right and left, even set others moving who would know how to create silence. Her eyes dilated. For these were no vain imaginings, no panic thoughts. Pistol and knife and poison lay beneath the soft folds of all this Germanic diplomacy. They had tried to frighten her, but she had refused to be frightened. They had not touched her yet, because monsieur had stood between.

She faced the afternoon calmly, determined to keep her pride in the air, and to make him respect it. She would judge him by the way he behaved to her after this quarrel. It should be the crisis, the knife edge on which she would balance the future.

She waited for him in the great clearing in the middle of the pine wood, lying on a *chaise longue*, a book in her lap, a vacant chair beside her. Overhead the sky was a flawless shield of blue. The day was very still; the tops of the trees absolutely motionless.

She heard a car coming down the road towards Cap St. Pierre. It stopped, and she guessed that it was his car. Suspense had gripped her. She wanted him to come, to speak, to show his true self. Then she could judge, decide, hold him in vassalage, or let him go.

Then he appeared where the path opened from the wood, and it struck her that he was too short and squat. She had seen him on horseback reviewing troops; he could ride, but he could not walk, and to-day his dignity was very martial and needed a horse.

She did not move, but just smiled at him and pointed to the empty chair.

"So we are to have a friendly talk. What could be better?"

He bowed, with rigid hauteur.

"As usual, you are very informal."

"Am I to get up and stand like a schoolgirl, and say: 'Yes, sir; no, sir'? Come, this is my villa. You are just Monsieur Friedrich, and I am Madame Anna."

His eyes were sullen. The aggressive tusks of his moustache annoyed her; they had no right to be so aggressive when the mouth under them was so weak.

"You know why I have come?"

"To give me an opportunity to throw myself at your feet!"

"You are frivolous; you have no sense of dignity."

"Oh, sire, but I have a sense of humour!"

She lay back and laughed, and even as she lay looking at the tops of the trees a queer, droning sound seemed to come from over the sea. For the moment she attached no significance to the sound; it is possible that she did not notice it.

Monsieur was sitting very stiff and square in his chair.

"May I suggest, madame, that I did not come here to be laughed at?"

"Well, shall I frown at you? It seems to me that you desire to be too exacting—too tyrannical."

"I demand, madame, what is due to me, what is due to my position and honour. I do not choose to share you with English brewers and French swine."

That whirring noise overhead grew so insistent that it could not be ignored. Countess Glika noticed a great shadow sweeping across the grassy space, like the shadow of a huge bird. She looked skywards, and her face was the face of one suddenly confronted with some desperate dilemma.

"An aeroplane!"

Monsieur stared upwards in a bored way. The thing was black against the sun, but it came sweeping round till its wings glistened in the blue sky. They could see the little dark figure of the pilot leaning forward slightly, as though he were scanning the country under him.

Anna held her breath. She had realised that Jack Barrington had come to prove to her that he could bring his machine to earth on that grassy arena in the thick of the pine wood.

But what a predicament!

She frowned and glanced at monsieur. He was watching the machine with the evident arrogance of a royal egoist, who attached a personal meaning to all the phenomena that life could offer.

"What does the fellow want to fly about over here for? Some precious spy."

The aeroplane circled overhead. Then the whir of the motor ceased abruptly.

"The devil—but he is going to descend! He will get smashed on the trees."

He started up excitedly.

"Look!"

She threw book and sunshade aside and stood up with a queer feeling of panic. She was trembling, almost unnerved.

The aeroplane was descending in a great spiral, gliding lower and lower along an aerial curve. The last loop of the spiral looked as though it must bring the machine crashing into the tops of the trees. But no such thing happened. It cleared them and ended its volplane with a beautiful little glide to the ground, and, running along the grass, came to a standstill about twenty yards from the fir boles at the farther end of the clearing.

The Countess Glika's eyes were smiling. In half a minute she had passed through a supreme experience, touched the realities of life, discovered what mattered and what did not matter. In that half-minute of suspense monsieur had ceased to be of infinite importance. She refused to be posed by a dilemma. Chance had taken the decision out of her hands.

"Anna!"

She roused herself and found his eyes fixed meaningly upon her face.

"Have I surprised you a second time?"

"It seems that my friend the Englishman has surprised us to-day. Do not vex yourself, Friedrich. If your temper cannot behave itself, why—go. It is very simple."

He almost shouted at her.

"Remember to whom you are speaking! No; I shall stay here. I shall know how to treat this fellow."

She gave him one look and then moved forward across the grass to meet Barrington, who had climbed out of his pilot's seat and was walking towards her. His blue eyes looked keen and adventurous. He smiled at her and saluted.

"My helmet will not take itself off. I hope Icarus has not got himself into disgrace? I told you I could do it."

"Oh, vainglorious man!"

For the first time Barrington noticed that she was not alone. The Prince was standing in the shadow of the trees, and Barrington had been absorbed in making that adventurous landing.

"I say, I hope I'm not in the way. I can clear out and come back for the machine presently."

She was watching his face, and she saw that it did not betray an egoist's impatience. His eyes remained clear and unclouded. He meant what he said.

"It is a friend of mine; he has driven over from Nice to see me. Strange that both of you should have come from Nice. Come and be introduced."

Her sense of humour carried her away. She was delightfully curious to see how monsieur would bear himself as man to man. And in her heart she was being tempted to draw comparisons.

"One word—he is just a little eccentric. Don't be surprised if he behaves rather queerly. He has held a very responsible post for years, and is just a little inflated."

"I see."

"Can you speak German?"

"Very little."

"Then let it be French."

She introduced the two men, referring to monsieur as Herr Weissmann. Barrington held out a hand, but the Prince stood stock still, his arms pressed stiffly against his sides, his head unbending. He stared at the Englishman. It was about as insolent an attitude as any man could have adopted.

Barrington's hand had to make a dignified retreat. He frowned slightly and then smiled.

Anna looked meaningly at monsieur. She returned to her *chaise longue*, and it was Barrington who picked up her sunshade and her cushion.

Then an absurd thing happened. Both men caught hold of the solitary chair at exactly the same moment. Both refused to let go.

"I have the right to sit, sir, while others stand."

Barrington's eyes beamed on him.

"I was about to offer you the chair, Herr Weissmann. Allow me to place it for you."

He gave a twist of the wrist and the chair was his. He placed it within a yard of the Countess and bowed to monsieur.

"It is yours, sir."

He threw himself on the grass on the other side of Anna's *chaise longue*, but the Prince remained standing. He had been worsted in the matter of manners. Dignity and a sulky temper refused to let him sit down.

Countess Glika held the centre of the balance between these two men. She had seen everything, appreciated everything. Barrington looked amused; monsieur had a face of thunder—thunder that lacked the lightning.

"So you flew from Nice. It is a perfect day—no wind."

"Perfect. I came along the coast, and the sea was quite still. I could see all the rocks patterned out under the water. It is a grand machine, that *Vampire*."

"Is it the one that took you to Corsica and back?"

"Yes."

She turned her head and had a side glance of a stiff and sulky figure standing with inflated chest and moustache bristling.

"Do you not wish that you could fly, Herr Weissmann?"

He appeared to swallow something.

"I do not do such things, madame. I pay men to do them for me."

Barrington glanced up at monsieur behind the Countess's sunshade, and then the truth dawned on him. This was the Death's Head Hussar, the man who had shouldered him in the doorway and spoilt the evening for Madame Flamme.

Barrington had been taught to think and act quickly. He had had to face round and meet a charging rhino, and keep his head and straighten out an aeroplane after it had flopped into an air pocket. He realised that he had dropped into a delicate situation, that he did not know how the wind blew, that he was flying in a fog. The humorous aspect of the affair vanished. He became conscious of a complex and mysterious atmosphere, a feeling of tension that held him on the alert.

He began to talk easily and with the frankness of a man who had fine manners. If he had been the cause of embarrassment, it was up to him to lift the dead weight off Anna's shoulders.

"I dare say you drive a car, sir? Well, it's the same thing, only a little more delicate, and you can't stop and sit still and admire the view. If you are staying at Nice I should be glad to take you up some day."

Monsieur was silent a moment.

"I have been forbidden to fly," he said.

"Oh, your doctor? Then you are quite right."

"No, sir; my life happens to be too precious."

"If one looks at it in that way, of course one stays on the ground. I happen to be an idiot with plenty of money and no wife; I can please myself as to taking risks."

Monsieur ceased to pay any attention. He looked bored, pulled out his watch, and glanced with venomous impatience at Barrington. His natural instinct was to hint very plainly to this commoner that he was in the way, that his presence could be dispensed with, but Herr Weissmann could not expect to be accorded the arbitrary authority of a royal personage. Elsewhere, it would have been so easy to order the fellow to get into his confounded machine and exhibit himself a few hundred feet nearer the sun.

He remarked on the time, ostentatiously and with emphasis. And he was astonished when the Countess Glika understood him to be suggesting that he must go.

"I know what a man of affairs you are. What a pity you will not let Mr. Barrington take you back to Nice."

That last thrust of hers was final. He bowed to her with a meaning glare in his eyes, and, ignoring the Englishman, marched off along the path that led through the pine wood.

For a moment neither Barrington nor the Countess Glika said a word. Barrington looked serious. He was wondering whether she was angry.

"Please say the severest things you can think of. I will take them without a murmur."

"Do you feel guilty?"

"I ought not to have dropped on you out of the skies. It annoyed your friend considerably. I soon realised that I had acted like an irresponsible fool. Are you angry?"

She was lying back, looking at the sky.

"No."

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

He moved round so that he was facing her.

"Still, the fact that you are generous does not clear my conscience."

She sighed, but it was a sigh of relief, not of regret. A sensitive smile played about her mouth.

"Do not vex yourself, my friend. Perhaps I am grateful to you; perhaps you have done me a great service by sweeping down out of the skies."

"I can only say that I am glad. I was afraid that I had blundered in like a bumble-bee."

She sat up, clasped her hands about her knees and looked at him fixedly.

"Is it possible that you are devoid of curiosity?"

"On the contrary, I am one of the most inquisitive beasts that ever poked its nose into adventure."

"Then you have very fine manners. You can make yourself appear just like a blue-eyed boy, with no thoughts under the surface."

He flushed.

"Thank you. I take that as precious praise."

"But you have no desire to ask questions?"

"The desire is there, but I can plead no authority."

Her eyes looked at him in a way that made his blood run faster.

"Supposing I give you that authority?"

"I'll try to deserve it."

"Very well, ask any question you wish and I will answer it."

He said nothing for a moment, but just looked at her with an intense, blue-eyed seriousness.

"Anna, I am a man who can hold myself in, but if you once give me the right to rush into the wind, I warn you you will have trouble with me."

She met his steady gaze just as steadily.

"I give you that right; I am going to trust you. And I think I can tell you what your first question will be," she said.

"Well?"

"Who my friend—Herr Weissmann—is."

He nodded.

"He was at the Moscow, dressed as a hussar?"

"Yes."

"I'll ask that question," he said—"who is he?"

She turned right and left to see that they were alone, and then, bending slightly towards him, spoke in a whisper.

Barrington's head went up like the head of a boxer dodging a blow on the jaw.

"Good God! Prince Friedrich of——"

"S-s-sh! Now you understand why he behaved to you as he did. The arrogance of Empire! You English dog, eh?"

But Barrington's face looked like iron.

"Yes, I grasp all that. But this is amazing! It means——"

He hesitated.

"It means more questions?"

"Yes."

"Ask them."

He looked at her with kindling eyes.

"No, I'll not do it. It would be a kind of insolence towards you that I cannot possibly dream of. I'll ask nothing."

Her spirit mounted to him.

"I honour you for that. But is there no reason why I should not tell you?"

"There is one great reason, Anna."

"Ah! Perhaps—have I guessed it?—that might be to accuse me of arrogance. But I will tell you. For the last year it has been the heart's core of my life, and my heart is in Russia."

He did not speak, but waited for her to go on.

"Perhaps you English love England. You will realise it some day when the eagle plucks at the lion's heart. All Europe is one great maze, where men plot and whisper and try to delude each other. No doubt you have heard of our Prince?"

"Gossip."

"And what does gossip say?"

"That he is something of a mystery—that he is suspected of Slav sympathies."

"There you have the riddle. And can you not guess now who influenced him?"

He sat back and stared at her.

"Good God, Anna, what have I done?"

"You?"

"Yes, blundered like a fool of a wasp into your web and torn it."

She gave a queer, breathless laugh and stretched out her hands.

"No, no. You have saved me from making a mad sacrifice that I now see would have been useless. This man loved me. Did I love him in return? You can guess. I thought that I might inspire him, draw him away from that brutal and arrogant race that is ready to cry 'God' and 'Kultur,' and to stab humanity in the back. I weighed him, tried him, and doubted. And what have I found him?—a boor, selfish, none too brave, sometimes a sentimental fool, sometimes half a savage. He would have broken my heart. If I had given myself to him he would have taken my body and betrayed my soul."

He had the air of one under a spell, for all that calm, pale beauty of hers had blazed into a passionate splendour. And she was speaking to him, pouring all the fire of herself into his ears.

He spoke with a curious humility.

"I suppose I ought to thank God that this has happened. I know that I am very proud that you should have chosen to trust me."

She caught up those last words of his.

"Yes, why have I trusted you? Why have I told you things that no other living creature knows? Ah, well, I suppose I could not help myself. I was very lonely and you came, and you had the eyes of a sailor, the eyes of a man who had faced danger, a man whom danger has strengthened and made clean."

"You choose to think me better than I am. We men have a way of showing off. But if ever a man was in earnest——"

He sprang up and looked keenly into the wood. "I thought I heard something moving. Let's walk farther away from the trees."

She joined him, and they strolled in the direction of the aeroplane.

"Supposing our friend shows temper?"

"It is possible, but I do not fear it greatly. Besides, all those who were against me will be glad."

"True."

She glanced over her shoulder.

"Can you guess what it feels like to know that someone may shoot you in your own garden or when you are driving back from the theatre? I have lived with that fear. It is not pleasant."

He swung nearer to her suddenly as they walked. Her hand was hanging, and then he found himself holding it.

"Anna, I want to look after you. I want to stand between you and our friend's spite."

Her dark eyes met his; she did not attempt to withdraw her hand.

"I am a very worldly creature, Jack."

"I do not believe it."

"Yes, but I am. How do you know that I am not fooling you, using you to make another man jealous?"

"Because you could not do it."

"But how do you know that? Are we such old friends?"

He answered her with impressive simplicity.

"You are not that sort of woman. I have no reasons to give you. It is like believing in God; that's all."

They wandered through the pine woods to the sea, and the sun was low in the west before they returned. Dmitri had to be sent to find the two gardeners and the chauffeur to help Barrington turn his machine and to hold it while the engine got going.

Anna glanced anxiously at the tops of the firs.

"There looks so little room."

His eyes and voice reassured her.

"Do you think I would risk it now if I did not know that it was pretty safe?"

His amateur helpers served him well, and the *Vampire's* engine was in perfect fettle. Anna held her breath as the aeroplane went running towards the trees. Would it never rise? It looked as though it must go crashing straight into those brown trunks! Then the machine lifted swiftly and, soaring, cleared the tree-tops easily. She gave a sigh of relief. He was a man of action and a man of his word.

Captain Prague was asleep in a comfortable chair when Prince Friedrich's car drew up outside the villa that he had hired for the season. Prague could have slept through a bombardment, especially after one of those gargantuan lunches of his. He was roused by the sound of a door being slammed.

He yawned, blinked, and then started up, putting on his courtier's manner with eager alacrity. For the Prince was standing there, staring at him with a face of thunder.

"Himmel! Prague, you are like an old dog, always curling up and getting trodden on."

"I did not expect you so soon, sire."

Something had happened. It looked as though the Countess Glika and Herr Weissmann had quarrelled.

The Prince walked out on to the balcony and stood there, looking out over the sea. He brushed the points of his moustache and drummed irritably on the iron railing with his fingers. He appeared to be watching for something.

"Prague!"

"Sire."

"Come here."

Prague went. The Prince gripped his arm and pointed seawards.

"Look there!"

"An aeroplane, sire?"

"Yes. That dog of an Englishman. He has been at the Villa Biron. Prague, I have been grossly fooled, grossly insulted."

Prague looked shocked, incredulous.

"Impossible, sire!"

The Prince stamped on the stone floor of the balcony.

"It is true. The gossip you heard came from someone who is wiser than I am. That woman has been playing with me, Prague, playing with me! It is astounding!"

Prague appeared voiceless, but he was doing some subtle thinking.

"Are you sure, sire, that you are not mistaken?"

"Mistaken! Don't talk like a fool, Prague."

"But it is incredible that a woman like the Countess Glika should risk your favour, sire, for the sake of an English plutocrat!"

He reflected.

"You will pardon me, sire, but if you will suffer me to sift the matter, to approach certain people who can find out the truth——"

"Have them watched, my friend?"

"That is your right, sire. Your dignity must be guarded from designing enemies. No one must be allowed to laugh at you, sire."

"Laugh at me! How dare you suggest such a thing, Prague! It is unthinkable."

"It is, sire. But have I your permission——"

"Thunder! Yes, have them watched. And get me a cigar."

Three days passed. The Prince spent two of them at Monte Carlo and lost much money there, which did not glorify

his outlook on life. One whole day he sat in the *chaume* of his villa garden, smoking and watching Nice and the sea, He saw an aeroplane fly eastwards, and later he saw it return.

Captain Prague was busy, in spite of a love affair with a noted houri at Monte Carlo. He visited the Baroness Bromberg, and was also received by a very exalted personage who was spending a month in retirement on the Riviera. The exalted personage had the look of a lean, old, grey-feathered bird. His nose was as hard as a vulture's beak, his mouth a mere slit below it.

The exalted personage had a reputation for being laconic.

"Tell him the woman's a ——," he said. "And send him to see me."

And Prague admired the exalted personage immensely. He was one of those grey eagles who would tear Europe to pieces and give the Teutonic people the remnants to tag together into a new Empire.

On the fourth day Prague went to see the Bromberg, and found her vastly amused at life. She had photographs to show him, and she heaved and chortled over them.

"That fellow Müller of mine is a genius. Look at these, my dear friend. How he managed to get them puzzles me."

Prague examined the photographs, and gave way to fat laughter.

"Immense! The fellow must have been crawling about like a lizard!"

"Take them home with you, Prague. And here is a confidential report. The Prince may like to read it after he has looked at the pretty pictures."

"Himmel, he will go mad!"

Prague chuckled and rolled to and fro in his chair.

"Did Müller produce this?"

The Baroness's eyes lit up for a moment.

"I did, my friend. I amplified Müller's notes and gave them a touch of literary realism."

"Immense! The spell will be broken and the witch discredited."

"She must be more than discredited. The royal protection will be withdrawn, and then——"

"And then?"

"Something will happen to her, Prague. She will cease to be fascinating. How dared she try to thwart us?"

Prague took those photographs and the confidential report back to Nice and presented them to the Prince with an air of sympathetic depression. They were sealed up in a big envelope, and Prague pretended that he had not examined the contents; but he let it be understood that the hints he had received were not flattering to madame.

He expected an outburst, and he was not disappointed. Herr Weissmann's hands trembled as he examined those photographs and turned the pages of the report. His face went an earthy colour. It was not a pleasant face, with its vindictive eyes and weak, malicious mouth.

"My God! she shall pay for this. And that dog of an Englishman!"

He was beside himself, wild with an hysterical jealousy that clamoured for self-expression. He rushed to a bureau, took a revolver out of a drawer, and looked to see that it was loaded.

Prague threw himself in the way.

"Sire, calm yourself, calm yourself. If this woman has wronged you, you have friends who will wipe out the insult. It is beneath your dignity, sire, to chasten her with your own hands."

"I am going to kill her, Prague."

"My Prince, for God's sake, listen to me. It is impossible for you to soil your hands with such an affair. There are people whose business it is to do such things. It is a public necessity, and we honour the men and women who perform it. But for you, sire, no."

Prague had an anxious and an argumentative half-hour, but he knew his master and his master's temper. The Prince was a coward, and Prague was able to persuade him to be cruel. Moreover, there was that exalted personage to be considered. Prague was very anxious that the Prince should listen to the wise words of that Nestor.

The revolver was put away, and Prague spent ten minutes getting into touch on the telephone with the exalted personage.

"Bring him to dine with me," said the voice over the wire.

And at half-past seven the Prince entered his car and was driven to the exalted personage's villa.

It was a grand night, and after dinner the Prince and his host sat on the terrace under the palms, smoked, and chatted like father and son. A brilliant moon shone over the sea, but the exalted personage saw to it that romance did not shiver in the Prince's blood.

"I am indeed thankful," he said, "that your good sense has shown you what manner of woman this is, and how she has tried to use you. I was convinced that a man of your cleverness would in the end discover the truth for himself. The woman is a worthless adventuress. She is rotten with intrigue. And yet I admit that she is dangerous."

The Prince's mood was one of sullen and bitter vindictiveness, and the exalted personage diagnosed his temper and used it for his own ends.

"So long as you extended your favour to her we stood aside and spared this woman. But we cannot afford to be merciful to such enemies. For the sake of the Fatherland we have to silence them."

The Prince's face looked white and hard in the moonlight.

"I shall forget her," he said. "I surrender her to your wise justice."

"There speaks the true patriot. Another cigar, my son? We will set a heel on the head of this serpent."

The Prince lit a second cigar.

"It will please me to know that she has been punished," he said.

That night a professional-looking person in spectacles met the Baroness Bromberg as she left the gaming rooms. He bowed to her, beaming mildly, his face wrinkling like the face of an ape.

"May I present a letter to you, Baroness?"

Her staring eyes met his meaningly.

"It is permitted, Herr Schiller."

He handed her a letter, bowed, and went away smiling dreamily to himself, the most innocent looking creature imaginable, a Teutonic type that has contrived to impose itself on the more credulous believers in universal peace.

During those days Countess Glika ascended into heaven. Love flew out of the west, swooped upon that grassy space in the pine woods on Cap St. Pierre, snatched her up and carried her soaring into the blue. Somehow she had such faith in him that she was not afraid, though the physical part of her squirmed a little when, for the first time in her life, she felt the fierce pressure of the wind and saw the earth sliding below her. But it was a game that appealed to her audacity, and there was a subtle pleasure in feeling herself at his mercy. His air-mastery delighted her. She liked to watch his brown hands on the levers and that adventurous face of his gazing out over the world.

The blue of the sea bit into the grey and green of the land as they flew up and down the coast. White villas looked like blocks of freshly quarried stone lying amid herbage. Mentone, Monte Carlo, Nice were toy towns with red roofs and miniature trams and cars crawling along the threadlike streets. And through it all sounded the roar of the engine and the whirring of the propeller, while they seemed to force their way against the will of a stubborn wind.

He had flown over one afternoon, and was having tea with her, tea made in a samovar. Wistaria, masses of mauve bloom, covered the little Japanese shelter below the terrace. There was a scent of violets in the air, and the foliage of the orange and lemon trees seemed bathed in a mellow light.

They decided to fly together towards Nice, for it was a perfect evening, windless and warm. Anna went in to put on a heavy coat and to wrap her thick veil over her hair, while Barrington strolled on to the glade in the pine woods to make some trivial adjustment to his machine. And just where the path opened into the grassy space he found Dmitri waiting, leaning against a tree.

"Are the men coming, Dmitri?"

"Yes, monsieur."

But Dmitri looked at him in a queer way, and then nodded in the direction of the aeroplane.

"Will monsieur examine the machine?"

"Why, don't you trust it, Dmitri?"

"I ask monsieur to examine it, that is all."

They crossed the grass together, Dmitri silent, but with a glint of restlessness in his eyes. He stood and watched Barrington testing the controls and examining stays and wires.

"Hallo! what the——"

A subtle smile spread over Dmitri's face.

"You find something, monsieur?"

"I should think I do, Dmitri. Someone has been here with a hacksaw and a file and some white lead."

He turned, and his eyes were fierce.

"The machine has been tampered with. That wing would have buckled up and we should have been smashed."

Dmitri nodded.

"I am a suspicious soul, monsieur. I see more than other people. It so happened that I was inquisitive, and strolled down here—softly as the snow falls. And I saw a man busy at the machine. He did not see me, and when he had finished he slunk away into the wood."

"And you didn't follow him?"

Dmitri shrugged his shoulders.

"I knew what was of importance, and I had no pistol with me. They go armed, these Germans."

"Germans! What sort of man was it?"

"Just a little man, monsieur, with spectacles and a beard. I expect he changed his face in the wood."

Barrington's eyes looked ugly.

"Look here, Dmitri, you are to be trusted. What does this mean?"

"That they do not love my mistress, monsieur; that she is dangerous to them. And so they send their rats to come and nibble——"

For a moment Barrington almost doubted the whole business. It seemed so extraordinary, so damnable; but there was the machine with its cunningly weakened wing, and Dmitri's stolid and assured face to convince him.

"Good God! Look here, Dmitri, your mistress must know nothing of this. I'll tell her I have found a flaw in the machine, that it will not be safe to fly it till I have had the faulty parts replaced."

"As you wish, monsieur. They will try something else."

"What do you mean, man?"

"The Prince has not been here, monsieur, for many days."

"Then you know——"

Dmitri nodded.

"He is her enemy now. He will not defend her. They can do as they please."

"Do you mean to tell me, Dmitri, that there are people near us who are bent on deliberate murder?"

"Of course, monsieur. You are English, you do not live with such things. But in our countries people disappear, or they commit suicide, or they are found robbed and dead in the river. It is not the little criminals who do these things, but the great political criminals, monsieur."

Barrington stood stock still, thinking. And in those moments of thought he realised that it was he who had brought this peril into the life of the woman he loved. And he looked into Dmitri's stolid, loyal face and knew in his heart that the man had spoken the truth.

"Then there is only one thing to be done, Dmitri—madame will disappear."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And there seems to be only one country where these scoundrels cannot do as they please. Would you trust yourself in a train, Dmitri, if they had marked you down?"

"No, monsieur, I should not."

"Very well. I shall come to-night in my car. After all, it is better that madame should be told the truth about that machine. I will tell her, Dmitri."

"Yes, monsieur, I will be ready. And she is coming, monsieur; she is here."

Dmitri had taught himself the art of self-effacement, and there was much delicacy and discretion beneath that stolid surface. He watched his mistress with the eyes of a dog as she came out from the shadow of the pines.

"We shall need Adolphe and Etienne, Dmitri. Are they coming?"

He bowed and seized his chance..

"I will go and bring them, madame."

He disappeared, but he did not go more than fifty yards. He wanted to make sure that no one was in the wood, and so he patrolled it, keeping out of sight of the two in the clearing.

Now, it may have been that Barrington could not hide what was in his heart, for she came to him smiling, her dark hair all swathed up in a soft pink veil, and the thought flashed over him that in an hour she might have been lying dead, all that beauty of hers desecrated, but for Dmitri's shrewdness. A great anger gave a grim intensity to his love.

The smile dried out of her eyes.

"Oh, *mon ami*, why do you look so fierce?"

"I will show you."

He led her to the machine and pointed out to her how the wing supports had been tampered with.

"We owe our lives to Dmitri. He saw some scoundrel at this while I was out of the way. That wing might have buckled up at any moment, just when we were wanting to clear the tops of the trees, or perhaps when we were five hundred feet up and a puff of wind struck us."

She was white, silent, staring at him with tragic eyes.

"Oh, my God! And it is not enough that they wish me dead. They would have killed you too! Jack, forgive me!"

She held out her hands.

"Am I, then, one of those fatal women who bring disaster and madness to men? For myself I did not fear; I had counted the cost. I thought that you were in no danger, and I was happy. I wanted to live, were it for a week or a month _____"

He caught her hands and drew her close to him. She felt the muscles of his arms all tense and rigid.

"Anna, why did you not tell me your life was in danger?"

"Because I hoped that they would no longer trouble about me; because I believed that you would be safe, whatever their devil's mood might be."

"Safe! Do I ask for safety for myself? Yes, Dmitri has opened my eyes; Dmitri is a man to be trusted. And by God! Anna, I'm the savage now, the savage with the club in his fist. I love you, and I'm going to keep you. And by God! if anything happens to you, in spite of me, I'll drag our friend the Prince out into his own garden and put a bullet through him."

She drew nearer still and put her face up to his.

"No, no, Jack. I know that these people have no mercy. They have put their mark against me and I'll face them alone. You have made me very happy, dear. Kiss me and go. Yes; I mean it."

His arms went round her. Their lips met. And then he held her at arm's length, his hand-set firmly upon her shoulders. His eyes were full of a grim yet laughing tenderness.

"You let me kiss you and tell me to go. And what a poor fool I should be! I would rather get into that machine and smash myself up somewhere between here and Nice. And am I going to give you up, leave you to be poisoned or shot by

these infernal Germans? I think not. We are going to fool them, Anna. We shall be half across France by to-morrow morning."

She shook her head.

"I love you, but I'll not let you risk your life."

He laughed.

"Oh, very well, then. I'll call Dmitri and your men and I'll go up in that machine. I mean it, Anna; I'm not bluffing. Do you think I am going to let you make me a coward?"

"You are no coward, but——"

"But I'm in love with you. That's a very serious consideration. Now, then, am I to go up in that machine?"

She looked into his eyes, faltered, and then clung to him with sudden passion.

"Well, take me. Do what you will, I'm yours. And yet——"

"Listen, Anna. Your man will drive me back to Nice. By ten o'clock I shall be here with my car. Be ready. We'll drive through the night and straight on to Calais. There is not a machine in Nice that can catch us, even if they have the pluck to try it. Wrap up well, and get Dmitri to have a hamper of food ready. We'll take our meals on the road."

That English cheeriness of his, the spirit that dares and laughs, was like a stirrup-cup before a gallop. Her natural audacity returned to her. She was no longer afraid.

"What recklessness! Am I to leave everything here and run away with you to England all in one night?"

He slipped an arm about her and swung her round.

"What a mate I have won! What won't we do together, you and I! You have such pluck."

"Have I? Perhaps; but you will have to be less reckless."

"Well, I'm in love with you, dear; I shall not be in a hurry to break my neck."

In twenty minutes he was being driven along the Nice road in the white landaulette, nor did Barrington ever forget that drive. The whole atmosphere of it remained with him vividly—the blue sea, the grey mountains blackening in the west against the redness of a rather stormy sky, the villas perched upon the hill-side, the white dust of the winding road.

But he missed one detail that would have had a sinister significance. It was the rusty figure of a hairy little man in spectacles leaning over the parapet where the road skirted the sea, and staring towards Cap St. Pierre as though he were waiting to see the moon rise over the pines. Barrington did not notice him as they whirled past, nor did the little man glance up at the car. He was watching for an aeroplane, an aeroplane that had been tampered with.

Barrington had temporary quarters in a hotel at Nice. His big car was in the hotel garage. He tipped Adolphe, sent the white landaulette back to the Villa Biron, and went to his room to change.

The manager of the hotel was a German Swiss, a dapper, polite and rather insinuating little man. Barrington met him in the lounge as he came downstairs after packing his own kit bag. He had left his valet at the Glorieux.

The Swiss made conversation.

"Monsieur has had a good day? He did not return on his aeroplane?"

The average Englishman is a confident and trusting person. He does not go about the world suspecting every

foreigner he meets of being a secret agent. The Swiss had been very polite, very obliging.

"No; I drove back. You might let me have my bill, Herr Zwingli. I have to be back in Monte Carlo to-night."

"Certainly, monsieur, certainly."

Barrington made his way to the garage that was at the back of the hotel, and found a sallow man in blue overalls polishing the brasswork of his car.

"Hallo, Pierre, I want twenty cans of spirit."

"Twenty, monsieur?"

"Yes; fill up the tank and pack the rest away in the tonneau. And put in a couple of gallons of oil."

"Monsieur is going far?"

"I may have to meet a friend at Marseilles."

Within ten minutes the Swiss manager had heard that Barrington had loaded up twenty cans of petrol and was making ready for a long run. Herr Zwingli shut himself in the telephone-box, called up somebody, and held a significant conversation.

"Herr B. Yes, yes. Leaving to-night. Is taking twenty cans of spirit on his car. Speaks of Marseilles. Yes, yes. Italy? Very likely. Genoa. He returned here in a white car."

Herr Zwingli came out of the telephone-box smiling. He, too, was one of the tiny cogs in the great wheel.

Barrington dined at Nice, drove on to Monte Carlo, paid his bill at the Glorieux, and packed up some of his luggage. It was about half-past nine when he left Monte Carlo, and following the curves of the coast road, saw the full moon rising across the bay above the pine woods of St. Pierre. He could hardly bring himself to believe that there was any danger in the adventure, with the moon shining so calmly on the sea and all those villa lights twinkling on the hillsides. Even the steady purr of the powerful engine seemed to suggest a civilised and well-balanced security. Yet he had an automatic pistol in the pocket of his leather-lined coat, a coward's weapon to his way of thinking, but essential when one might have to deal with political fanatics who were out for murder.

When he left the main road for the one that led along the Cape, Barrington switched off all his lights and slowed the car up to an almost noiseless glide. The shadow of the pine woods covered the road here and there. Barrington found the lodge gates open, and the deaf lodge-keeper standing in the doorway of his lodge.

Dmitri was waiting on the steps when Barrington pulled up outside the villa.

"All well, Dmitri?"

"All well, monsieur."

"We shall leave you in charge here, Dmitri. Have you any objection to that? Things must be looked after. I shall write to the English Consul and get him to put matters through for us."

"I will do what you wish, monsieur. But madame has been very good to me, and——"

"You will follow us to England, Dmitri, of course. We are not going to lose you. Is madame ready?"

"Yes; this way, monsieur."

She was in the blue salon sipping coffee and smoking a Russian cigarette. A magnificent black fur coat lined with ermine lay over the back of the sofa. She had more colour than usual, and her eyes were very bright.

Dmitri left them and went to stand guard over the car. As he reached the top of the steps something crawled away across the drive, keeping behind the car, and Dmitri did not see it. The crawling figure squirmed its way in between the shrubs and trees lining the road. It was the little bearded man with spectacles. He sat down, tucked a folding rule back into the breast-pocket of his coat, and seemed to be making calculations. He had been measuring the height of Barrington's car. So much depended on the height of the wind-screen and the slope of the seats. In the blue salon Barrington was bending over the couch; his hands held Anna's, and he was looking into her eyes.

"So you are not afraid, dear heart? I know what it means—a new life and a new country."

She smiled up at him dearly.

"I am only afraid that you will not take care of yourself. I shall make you promise that your adventures shall be my adventures."

"Even if we rough it in Central Africa?"

"I want to go all over the world with you."

They kissed with passion.

"Come along, playmate. We must be moving."

He picked up a cerise-coloured woollen coat that lay over the back of a chair.

"This first. You have got to wrap up as though we were going on an Arctic expedition or into Siberia. Fancy yourself in a troika for twenty-four hours. It will be bitterly cold when we get towards Avignon, and we are going full speed all night."

He made her wrap her throat and head up in a woollen shawl. The coat had a hood that could be turned forward.

"That's splendid, nothing but two eyes and a nose and a red mouth."

He kissed her.

"You have got fur gauntlets? Good. Now for our dash through the night."

He had turned the car before entering the villa, and left the engine running dead slow. Dmitri was lifting a big luncheon basket in on top of the petrol cans. Susette stood waiting with fur rugs and cushions.

Barrington took his place at the steering wheel.

"Settle yourself down comfortably. That's it, the cushions are behind you; draw those rugs well up. And sit low, I'm going to drop the wind-screen a bit for the first twenty miles. Loose that nut, will you, Dmitri? That's it. I like to see over the top—till it gets too cold."

Dmitri kissed his mistress's hands.

"May the good God watch over you."

"We shall see you in England, Dmitri," she said in a whisper.

He turned away and started running down the drive.

"I will see that François has the gates open."

The drive to the Villa Biron was about two hundred yards long and shaped like an S. Dmitri had covered about a hundred yards, when something caught him across the forehead and flung him heavily on his back.

Dazed for a moment, he scrambled up, flung out his arms, and struck something tense and metallic, something that quivered and hummed like a harp string. And suddenly he heard the car behind him, coming at a fair speed down the drive.

He tore at the wire, but could not break it; it only cut his hands.

Then he turned and ran, waving his arms and shouting, "Stop—stop!"

Barrington had switched on the electric headlights, and they showed him Dmitri running like a madman straight at the car. He threw out the clutch and jammed on both brakes, and stopped within five yards of the death-trap with Dmitri sprawling over the bonnet.

"Down, dear, down!"

He thrust her unceremoniously into the bottom of the car.

"What is it, Dmitri?"

"A wire—a wire across the road! Wait, monsieur. If I force it upwards with my hands you can pass underneath."

"The devil! We should have had our heads off!"

Dmitri sprang back, and Barrington saw him thrusting something upwards with his hands. He let the car glide forward very slowly, and, bending his head, found that he could just pass under the wire.

"Wait, monsieur."

Barrington had pulled the pistol out of his pocket, and he drove with one hand on the wheel. Dmitri was running towards the lodge with his arms stretched up and out before him.

Barrington spoke softly to Anna.

"Keep down, dear, keep out of sight."

He saw Dmitri standing in the moonlight by the open gates.

"Come, monsieur."

Dmitri ran out into the road, peering right and left, a pistol ready in his fist. He waved Barrington forward, seized hold of the hood-brackets as the car glided out, and, jumping on the running-board, swarmed over on to the back seat.

"Quick, monsieur, they may shoot, and I will shoot back."

There was no chance of the wire trick being played on them now they were beyond the lodge, for there were trees on only one side of the road, a low stone wall and the sea on the other. Barrington opened the throttle wide, and the powerful car went speeding under the shadows of the pines, while Dmitri knelt on the back seat, ready to fire at any threatening figure or at the red flash of a pistol.

Nothing happened. They reached the main road, but Barrington still kept the car going at a high speed. The electric headlights threw a brilliant stream of light; they were strong enough to blind anyone meeting them till the car had passed.

Barrington slackened up as they reached the outskirts of Monte Carlo. Anna had refused to remain crouching in the bottom of the car. She sat there beside him with a certain proud air, muffled up in her black furs.

"What is yours is mine," she said; "is not this our first adventure?"

At the top of the casino gardens Barrington slowed the car up, and Dmitri opened the door and jumped out.

"Bon voyage!"

He waved a hand.

"Au revoir, Dmitri; take care of yourself."

They left Dmitri hatless and smiling.

"I am quite safe, monsieur. They will hope to persuade me with money."

All through the night Barrington drove the car, watchful, imperturbable, but very happy. And Anna fell asleep at his side, and her head rested on his shoulder. They had begun the great adventure of life together.

II

THE RED SHIRT

Young Sandro Sommariva came running up the lane that led between high walls to the garden of the Villa Sabina. It was growing dark, though a yellow sky still hung like a great curtain behind the cypresses on the hill. This dying radiance from the west played upon Sommariva's face as it struggled up out of the dusk. His red shirt was torn and grimed with powder, and his eyes still had a wild light in them, fierce, patriot eyes set in a lean and haggard face.

He reached the gate in the wall, the gate that opened into the villa garden, and he stood a moment, breathing hard, and looking down upon the city. Night was falling upon Rome, a tragic darkness, as though the city had covered her face with a veil of despair. The white walls of the lane ended in a kind of blue gloom, and out of the gloom rose the dome of St. Peter's, solemn, gigantic, vaguely symbolical. The sunset lingered over the bloody and war-scarred Janiculum. They were still burying the dead over yonder, Garibaldi's dead, the brave men who had fallen for a dream.

Sommariva stretched out a hand towards the city.

"Roma—Roma——"

He choked. His eyes filled with tears, yet there was exultation in his heart. What a fight they had fought! They had lit a torch of glory that nothing could quench.

He pushed the gate open and entered the garden. It was dark and still, a little world of quiet shadows, a pool of gloom lying about the white walls of the villa. She would be waiting for him, waiting to say good-bye.

He passed through an opening in a box hedge, and up a grass walk that led to the white pillared garden-house. Suddenly he paused; his body seemed to stiffen; he stood with head thrown back, listening. Voices came to him out of the darkness, the voices of a woman and a man. The woman was speaking; he heard her laugh.

"Oh, yes, it has been a great spectacle. But I am tired, my friend, tired of being heroic. It has amused me; it has been like playing in an opera, with all these noble fellows shouting for death or liberty."

The man's voice answered her, a thin, sarcastic voice.

"And here I am again, thanks to our good friends the French! A reactionary, one of 'Bomba's' men. It is laughable. What tales you will have to tell us—of the great Garibaldi and his rascals. And you have been wearing a red dress."

"It amused me. And one little fellow fell in love with me; a patriot, a poet, a fire-eater. Such eyes, and such noble sentiments! Poor boy—he thought me wonderful!"

The man chuckled.

"You are very heartless, Lisa."

"No; I was very kind to him. He made love like a Sicilian. It passed the time."

Sandro Sommariva stood and listened, and his face was dead white in the dusk. He had crept into the garden to kiss a woman's hands, to take a dear leave of her, even though his heart remained in Rome. So she had been playing with him, amusing herself while Rome fought and suffered, perhaps selling their secrets to the enemy outside the walls.

He drew the bayonet from his belt and crouched as though he meant to steal upon those two. He knew where they were sitting, on the stone seat under the ilexes, where he had sat and talked of Italy Redeemed. Certainly he had thought her wonderful, but now——

He hesitated, and then jerked the bayonet back into his belt, straightened himself like a soldier, and turned away. If the woman had fooled him should he betray his wound? Good God! but the end was bitter, for he was young, and this love had been part of a sacred fire.

Sandro Sommariva, of the Garibaldini, left the Villa Sabina behind him, and in leaving it he abandoned something of his beliefs and of his idealism. The reaction was fierce and impetuous. He had been betrayed; all Rome had been betrayed; no woman was to be trusted; they had all been dreaming dreams.

He was very miserable, very contemptuous.

"Ah, the men—the men. I will die with the men. They are good comrades."

Now and again he broke into a run, his bayonet clapping against his thigh, as he held towards the Lateran gate. Other figures were moving in the same direction, figures that slid swiftly under the battered brown houses and under the shadows of the walls. The city itself was silent, grievously silent, as the stars began to blink in the summer sky. Now and again a carriage clattered over the stones, or a couple of Papal dragoons cantered past.

Sandro ran, urged on by the sudden fear that he might be late for that last muster. The outline of the Lateran Palace rose against the sky. He came out upon the open space, and saw in the dim light the red shirts of the Legionaries like a great pool of blood staining the ground.

What a picture! Sandro Sommariva stopped to gaze it in. Four thousand heroes gathered there, the men who had fought for Italy and Rome, a little army of exultation and despair. There were the Red Legionaries, the Lombard bersaglieri with their dark plumes, a few of Massina's lancers, and a crowd of Papal dragoons. People were standing up in carriages or crowding round the troops. Garibaldi sat there upon his white horse, with Ugo Bassi, the friar, his hair falling upon his shoulders, his crucifix in his hand.

Tears came into Sommariva's eyes, the proud and pathetic tears of the soldier. He loved them all, these comrades of his, staunch men, patriots, good friends, martyrs. It was good to be among them once more, to forget that woman over yonder who had mocked him in playing, with his love. Never again would he trust a woman.

He dashed across and pushed into the familiar red ranks.

"Luigi—Luigi!"

"Here—here I am."

"My musket—you have got it?"

"Yes. I was afraid you would be late."

"No; not when Garibaldi leads."

He took his musket, and gripped it passionately as though the thing of wood and iron would not fail him.

"Better than a woman."

Luigi said nothing.

In half an hour they had taken their leave of Rome, marching out to the sound of the weeping of women. It was to be a night march, secret, mysterious, a dash for liberty across the desolate Campagna. Enemies had to be tricked; the men tramped in silence, no one smoked; in Rome the secret was well kept.

Sandro swung along with Luigi, his good comrade, at his side, and Sandro was thinking the thoughts of a young man who had lost some of his illusions. He went with his head bowed as though he were weary, even the beloved musket on his shoulder was not carried with any pride.

Luigi watched him like a brother, big Luigi with the long black beard.

Presently he spoke in a whisper that was smothered by the tramp of the marching men.

"Cheer up, comrade; some day you will see her again."

Sandro's head jerked itself to attention.

"Enough; I have done with women."

"Why, what's amiss?"

"They are treacherous beasts. There is only one woman in the world to be trusted—Anita yonder, Garibaldi's wife."

Luigi laid a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Ah, she has treated you badly. Never mind; we will march together, you and I, and we will love no one but Italy."

They marched on with linked arms.

"To the end of the world, Luigi, if needs be, we two with Italy in our hearts."

It was at Arezzo that the first disaster overtook the little army that was threading its way with desperate audacity through the many enemies that hunted it on every side. The rearguard went astray in the retreat, got itself lost in the darkness and the suburbs of the town, and so fell into the arms of the Austrians who were in pursuit. There was desperate skirmishing and confused hand-to-hand fighting in the gardens and the vineyards. Men got scattered in the darkness. The "White Coats" seemed everywhere, eager to kill.

A peasant driving his donkey down a path that ran along the edge of a chestnut wood came upon a little Red Shirt sitting under a tree with another Legionary stretched full length beside him. The sun was just rising, and the blue gloom of the woods was changing to a deep green. The peasant scowled, crossed himself, and hurried on. He might meet the White Coats down yonder, and they would give him money if he told them of the two Garibaldini who were waiting to be captured in that chestnut wood.

Sandro's face had lost all his youth. He sat there, staring at nothing, holding big Luigi's hand, a hand that was growing cold. For big Luigi was dead; a chance bullet had struck him; that coal black beard of his contrasted with the grey pallor of his face. He had lain down and died, holding Sandro's hand.

Sandro's world was in ruins. He had lost the woman he had loved, he had lost Rome, the Legion, Garibaldi, and now an Austrian bullet had taken away his comrade in arms. What was life but a mass of mockery and injustice? What were a man's ideals worth? Was there such a thing as Providence when a bullet fired by some pig of a German buried itself in such a heart?

Even that peasant, an Italian, had gone by scowling.

Sandro Sommariva freed his hand from the dead man's grasp and jumped up in a passion. His eyes lit up in his white, fagged face.

"Oh! very good, very good. Why should one trouble one's head about anything? As for life—it is an abomination!"

He looked at dead Luigi.

"And I cannot even bury you, my friend. Some pigs of peasants will come along and tumble you into a hole. I have a mind to go down into the town and give myself up. I can spit in the faces of the Austrians before they shoot me."

He stood irresolute, tragically hesitating. Then a flash of his natural audacity leapt up in him. He took off his plumed hat and stared skywards as though he were looking the Supreme Being in the face.

"Tell me, Eternal One, am I to believe in anything? Listen to me—a little fellow in a red shirt. I am not afraid to die, but I'll fling a challenge to life. Up in the north, in Piedmont, there are men who can call themselves free. Very well, Supreme One, I, Sandro Sommariva, will set out for Piedmont—openly—on foot."

He laughed.

"It is a jest, Eternal One! Bring me safe into Piedmont, if you can, and I will believe that there is a God who cares. Of course, I count on the Austrians catching me, but there you are, You can do as You please."

He put on his hat, stood a moment looking at his dead comrade in arms, and then strolled up the path with an air of boyish insouciance. He had become a fatalist; he had thrown down a challenge to the Supreme One; he no longer felt any responsibility; life was an absurd affair to be put upon its trial once and for all. He had left his beloved musket lying beside dead Luigi, such a toy had become superfluous when one had challenged the Creator to a game of hazard.

Yet it must be confessed that Sandro Sommariva started that mad pilgrimage of his as a pronounced sceptic.

"I shall be caught and shot before sunset," that was his conviction; "another spark gone up the chimney! Who cares?"

So he marched on, going straight across country, walking with a kind of insolent resignation, ready for any trick that Fate might choose to play upon him.

About noon he came upon a little old farmhouse standing among vineyards on the side of a hill. A stream blinked at the end of a strip of brown pasture, and there were willows growing along the stream. A couple of goats were browsing at the end of their tether ropes; they were the only live things Sandro could see.

He walked boldly up to the farmhouse and into the yard. An old woman was sitting on a stool in the rough loggia roofed with vines; she was patching some good fellow's shirt, and her crabbed hands were the colour of leather.

She dropped her work and stared at Sandro Sommariva as though he were one risen from the dead. And he took off his hat to her and calmly asked for food.

"Holy Mother! but what manner of fool are you, my child?"

She was staring at his red shirt. He explained himself with perfect serenity.

"Yes, I am one of Garibaldi's men. Some of us got lost outside Arezzo, and my comrade was killed by an Austrian bullet. I am going through Tuscany on foot, Austrians or no Austrians."

The old lady brought him food and drink into the loggia, some black bread and olives, and a flask of Chianti. She sat down beside him, and went on with her mending.

"There are no Austrians here," she said; "you can eat in peace."

Sandro thanked her. The wine was good, and the old woman's kindness gave the lie to his new cynicism.

"So you are going through Tuscany?"

"I am."

"Then I will give you another shirt, or the one you are wearing will indeed be the colour of blood."

Sandro drank his wine, and explained the challenge he had thrown out to the Omnipotent One.

"It is God's affair. I have given Him an opportunity. I wash my hands of the business."

The old lady had shrewd things to say.

"You are too proud, young man. God may have sent you here in order that I might give you a shirt."

This was a new reading of the text, and Sandro had to acknowledge that there was some reason in it.

"But I was wearing a red shirt when I challenged the Eternal One to get me safely into Piedmont."

"You must not make it too difficult for God," said the old lady reprovingly.

The wine warmed him so pleasantly that he abated some of his high and mightiness, and even consented to take off that red shirt of his and to wear the one she gave him. They came near to quarrelling over the price of it, the farmer's wife protesting that she would take nothing, Sandro being ready to pay her twice its value.

They struck a bargain at last, and to clinch it the old lady stuffed half a loaf of bread into his knapsack. Sandro was touched.

"Truly, it was God's affair to send me this way," he said. "Will you give me a kiss, mother?"

She kissed him, and he marched off, feeling that there were some good people left in the world.

His subsequent adventures were less fortunate, and the Almighty appeared to be supervising the pilgrimage with very indifferent attention. At one farm the churls turned the dogs on him, and that new shirt of his suffered. Later he found himself in country that was infested by the White Coats, and on one critical occasion he had to spend half a day hiding at the bottom of a dry well. In one small Tuscan town certain busybodies came and cross-questioned him, and even threatened to have him arrested. Sandro's blood got heated. He pulled the red shirt out of his knapsack and flaunted it before their eyes.

"There you are, gentlemen, fine patriots, and brave Italians! Now run away and tell the Tedeschi that one of Garibaldi's men has been drinking wine in your town."

That red shirt proved a spark to tinder. The local democrats rallied to him; there was something like a free fight outside the inn where Sandro had been drinking his wine. His friends prevailed; they rushed him out of the town, and one of them shepherded him safely out of the district.

"Make for the sea coast," said this guide on taking leave of him; "you may be able to pick up a fishing boat that will carry you north."

Sandro took the democrat's advice, and that evening he saw the sun set over the sea.

He passed the night sleeping under a stone pine in the thick of a wood of evergreens, an armful of dry grass serving as a pillow. God Pan in the guise of a white goat pushed through the underwood and woke him soon after dawn. Sandro sat up with a shout, thinking the White Coats were upon him.

"Roma—Garibaldi!"

It was an heroic cry, and the goat, greatly disconcerted, fled away down the cliff.

Sandro Sommariva stretched himself and laughed.

"If one could but frighten the Germans away as easily. The swine are too fond of our country. Some day I may have the pleasure of running a bayonet into them."

When he had made a meal he continued that amazing pilgrimage of his, trudging along the coast and keeping an eye open for a sail at sea. He spent three days in that scrambling advance northwards, but though he saw no Austrians, he was out of luck in the matter of winning a passage by water. He passed through the Pisan country, avoiding Pisa itself, hiding by day and pushing on at night. The Duchy of Lucca lay before him; he entered it, and began to have glimpses of the Carrara mountains in the north. The Ligurian coast called to him; he began to believe that he would succeed.

Then the Supreme One had a fit of inattention. His eye was removed momentarily from the little trudging figure that plodded northwards towards Piedmont. Sandro had sighted White Coats during the day, and he had taken to the wild paths that climbed hither and thither along the coast. He was scrambling down one of these paths just as dusk was falling, when a loose stone rolled under his foot, and Sandro rolled with it. He went over and over down a half-precipice, crashing through thyme and broom, and clutching at the branches of the arbutus trees that grew in the stony soil. It was an abrupt descent into Hades, but he was brought up at last against the trunk of a dwarf pine with all the breath knocked out of his body. Moreover, when he tried to scramble up he found that his right foot would not carry him. He had either broken a bone or strained his ankle so badly that he could not walk.

Sandro Sommariva passed a very miserable night. He had to spend it where he lay with his back against the tree that had saved him. And when the daylight came he saw how very nearly the Supreme One had lost the game through that moment of preoccupation. Three yards beyond the pine tree the cliff broke and dropped bleakly to the blue sea below.

Sandro shivered. He discovered that life was precious to him in spite of his new-found cynicism. He wanted to live, to cheat these Austrians, and to follow Garibaldi again on some splendid adventure.

But that useless foot of his! What an execrable piece of luck just when he was within a day's march of Piedmontese territory! And he had no food in his knapsack, nothing but a piece of dry bread.

He ate part of the bread, and then decided that since the Supreme One had blundered so badly, he would have to extricate himself from this misfortune. Nothing useful could happen so long as he sat on the edge of this precipice with his back against the trunk of the pine tree, so he elected to crawl back up the hill and regain the path that he had abandoned so hurriedly. It took him half an hour to reach the path, and he was cursing that ankle of his wholeheartedly, and the rolling stone that had thrown him.

He made his way along the path. It descended gradually, curving away from the sea, and Sandro found himself in a wild and narrow valley cutting deep into the hills. A stream ran in a rocky channel at the bottom of the valley, a stream that had become a mere string of isolated pools. The sides of the valley rose steeply towards the blue of the sky; they were covered with a dense growth of arbutus, dwarf pine, heather, broom, and wild herbs, such as rosemary and thyme.

The place had a wild beauty of its own, with its glimpses of blue sea seen between the dark and twisted trunks of the pines, its masses of evergreen foliage glimmering in the sunlight. The pools in the rocky bed of the stream were green as grass and clear as crystal. The cliffs themselves thrusting out great bosses of grey stone in the midst of the foliage had a grandeur that was tranquil and unstudied. Landwards the narrow V of the valley was filled with the purple of the mountains.

All this was very pleasant and romantic, but utterly unpromising to a man with an empty knapsack and a wrenched ankle. The one thing the valley offered him was clean water, and Sandro made a crab-like descent into the bed of the stream, and drank from one of the pools, scooping the water up in his palms. The pool also served him as a mirror, and he could study the incipient black beard that was making a very virile growth upon his chin. He looked quite a picturesque ruffian, with that battered hat of his and a Bohemian head of hair.

Well, he would have to bind up that wretched ankle and make the best of the misadventure. He crawled along to

another pool, took off his boot and sock, and plunged his foot into the cold water. As for a bandage, his shirt would have to provide it, that heroic red shirt that had seen the fall of Rome. He drew it out of the knapsack, held it up at arm's length, and surveyed that garment of glory with tragic regret. Plop! A stone had rolled from somewhere, leapt the bank of the stream, and landed in the pool at Sandro's feet. The green water expanded into widening ripples that flicked the rocks scattered about the margin.

Sandro's chin went up. His eyes saw something that astonished him. He sat and stared at this new apparition, still holding that red shirt at arm's length as though he were a pedlar offering it for sale.

A girl was looking down at him from the rough path that skirted the stream, a young girl with hair the colour of honey and eyes of intense blue. She belonged to the fair-haired Italian type, but her colouring was a peasant's colouring, and not the blonde pallor of a Venetian aristocrat. Her skin was tanned, but with the beautiful, radiant warmth of youth, as though the sunlight had covered it with a golden bloom. She was dressed in some white stuff dusted over with little red flowers; a red scarf was crossed over her bosom; her stockings were of sky blue.

Sandro stared at her, and she stared back at him as he sat with one naked foot in the water. Perhaps the Genius of the place had appeared in the sinister shape of a beautiful young girl.

It was she who spoke first.

"So you have come from Rome?"

Sandro fell into an immediate wilful distrust of her. Here was woman, the incipient feminine devil challenging him in this veritable wilderness. What did she know of Rome, and what business had she to come spying on him like this?

He considered her with cynical attention, and did not hurry to reply, and she accepted this reticence of his as an answer.

"You need not be afraid. I shall not betray you."

The male pride in Sandro Sommariva felt itself challenged.

"You overwhelm me, signorina. No doubt I was filled with terror when I looked up and saw you standing there. And perhaps you will permit me to breathe again."

His irony blew over and past her unnoticed, and those blue eyes of hers continued to regard him with supreme interest.

"You are one of Garibaldi's men."

She spoke with such naïve conviction that Sandro had no answer to give her for the moment.

"Indeed! You know many things. Assuredly—you are infallible."

"The red shirt betrays you."

He struck an attitude.

"Great Cæsar! is a man to be known by the colour of an old shirt? If there are any White Coats in the neighbourhood go and tell them that you have seen a man preparing to tear up an old red shirt in order to bandage his ankle."

She flushed sensitively.

"How dare you hint that I would betray you to the Austrians."

"My child!"—and he smiled at his own sententiousness—"a man of my experience can dare anything. Women have no terrors for me. I detest them."

She laughed, and prepared to come down into the bed of the stream.

"How you talk! Of course you have come from Rome. We know more than you imagine; news comes across the sea. And my brother Carlo was with Garibaldi."

She swooped down, jumping from rock to rock, her yellow hair dancing in the sunlight. And Sandro Sommariva stiffened himself suddenly. He had no intention of being made a fool of by a girl.

"There were three hundred and twenty-seven Carols in the Legion," he said.

"My brother is Carlo Roselli. Of course, you knew him."

Sandro shook his head. He had a vague idea that he had known a Carlo Roselli, but he was not going to confess to anything and give the girl encouragement.

"There were four thousand men in the Legion. I knew no Carlo Roselli."

She looked incredulous, a little disappointed.

"How strange! And we have been longing for news. My name is Cesca; we live in the farmhouse up there in the valley, my mother and I. Carlo could not stay at home when he heard what was happening in Rome. Oh, if he has been killed!"

She gazed at him so appealingly that Sandro felt embarrassed. But his fanatical distrust of anything in petticoats came to his assistance; he refused to be melted by her distress, or to be persuaded by those eyes of hers.

"No doubt he is safe enough. I lost the Legion at Arezzo—where the Austrians tumbled upon some of us. The rest have gone with Garibaldi—where, God alone knows! Leave dear Carlo with Garibaldi."

"You are a strange man."

"Not at all. I have sprained my ankle; I am in a bad temper; I have a crust of bread left, and I want to get into Piedmont. Execrable luck! I fell down the cliff last night. I think I told you that I detest women."

She was puzzled, and she sat down on a flat stone, refusing to be driven away.

"Why do you hate women?"

"Because they deserve it."

"Oh, come, that is silly."

He looked at her with eloquent pity, and began to tear his red shirt into strips.

"You are very innocent, my child, and innocence is a very dangerous companion. Now—for a more serious matter."

He prepared to bandage his ankle, and the girl saw that he was making a fumbling job of it. He seemed to be annoyed by the fact that she was sitting there watching him.

"Let me bind it up for you."

"On no account——"

But she was on her knees, authoritative, and she pushed his hands aside.

"Men are so clumsy."

Most certainly she bandaged his ankle better than he could have bandaged it, and Sandro watched her hands at work, and moralised upon the sympathetic officiousness of the feminine soul. He refused to recognise the girl's impulsive sincerity. She was a minx, a little Circe, playing those inevitable, feminine tricks. The lady of the Villa Sabina had cured him of any belief in such pretty, bubbling froth.

"There!"

She knelt back, very pleased With her work, and Sandro studied it with uncompromising candour.

"Not so bad, my child. I expect it will come undone in half an hour, but no matter. It is time for me to push on a little towards Piedmont."

"The paths are very steep and rough."

"Life is like that."

"And the Austrians are guarding the roads. Some of them keep watch at the coastguard station on the cape."

Sandro shrugged his shoulders.

"I have left thousands of White Coats behind me; I can cheat the rest of them. Now let us see how this ankle of mine will behave."

He stood with a certain swaggering confidence, put his weight upon his bandaged foot, and promptly subsided on the rocks with a little yelp of pain. His pride turned that involuntary cry into a string of full-flavoured and picturesque imprecations.

"Bones of Jupiter—toe of the Pope, the infernal thing is red-hot!"

"There, you see, I was right."

"Of course. Was woman ever in the wrong? It began with Eve."

"You will have to rest—for days and days."

"Like John in the wilderness. Thank you. But where are the locusts and the honey?"

She looked at him with intensely serious blue eyes.

"I know; the very place. There is a little cave up there, it used to be a hermit's cave; it is all hidden by shrubs. You can live there till your foot is strong enough to carry you. As for food—I can see to that."

He sat on a flat stone, rubbing that bandaged ankle of his and reviewing the whole situation with an air of sulky resignation. Certain facts could not be denied. He was crippled; he had no food; the Austrians were in the neighbourhood; he was at the mercy of this girl's tongue.

"Signorina," and he bowed to her as he sat, "it seems to me that I shall have to trust you."

"Of course you will trust me."

"It is my necessity. I promise you I have no desire to be set up in front of a row of Austrian muskets or to see the inside of an Austrian prison, pure prejudice if you like. As to this cave of yours——"

"I will show it you. You will have to let me help you. Put your arm over my shoulder; I will serve as a crutch."

He gave her a flash of his dark eyes.

"Oh, insidious one! Well, I will dare it."

He hoisted himself up, and she came and stood beside him, her sun-kissed face close to his shoulder.

"Lean your weight on me. You know you are quite a little fellow, and I am very strong."

"A little fellow! Thank you. I have marched my thirty miles in a day——"

"It seems so easy to offend you."

"Offend me! I am incapable of being offended by anything in petticoats."

She laughed.

"Now, put your arm over my shoulder."

He obeyed her, and she seemed to mould her supple figure to his, putting one arm about him and bracing herself to take his weight.

"It will be easy when we reach the path."

She helped him from rock to rock, holding him firmly, her honey-coloured hair lying on his shoulder. She was very strong and wonderfully surefooted, and Sandro Sommariva found himself leaning his weight on her with a confidence that surprised his cynical mistrust.

They reached the path.

"There—we managed that splendidly!"

She was triumphant. He glanced at her flushed face, and into her eyes that were so near to his, and a most human thrill went through him. There seemed to be a wild perfume in that hair of hers; her red lips were like ripe, fresh fruit.

He smothered this sentimental impulse, and forced upon himself an attitude of cynical and world-wise severity. Nature was the supreme trickster. The Apple of the Garden of Eden was no more than a girl's cheek warmed and tinted by the sun.

They made their way along the path till they reached a group of stone pines.

"This way."

She swung him aside along a still narrower path that disappeared into a thicket of evergreens.

"Mind your face."

They pushed through myrtle and arbutus and came suddenly on an upstanding face of rock bearded with ivy and climbing plants. A hole that had been squared up with rough stones served as a doorway, and two loopholes squinted like half-closed eyes on either side of the main entry. In front of the cave there was a stretch of short, sweet turf that had been kept green by the shade of the cliff and the ooings of a spring; one could get a glimpse of the sea from this little green platform, but the cave itself was screened by the underwood from anyone climbing the path on the opposite side of the valley.

Cesca left Sandro sitting on the grass and went to explore the cave.

"It is quite dry in here. If I fetch you some grass you can make yourself a bed."

She acted on the inspiration, and, adventuring forth, returned again and again with her arms full of a dry grass that grew on the hillside. Her labours on his behalf became an embarrassment to Sandro Sommariva. He began to wish she

would make an end to it.

"There. I have furnished your house for you."

He looked at her with a certain whimsical impatience.

"Assuredly you are the good Samaritan. But why should you trouble yourself on my account?"

Her blue eyes met his frankly.

"Why? I do not know. I never asked myself such a question. Do we ask ourselves why we eat when we are hungry?"

He smiled.

"Just innocent and unconscious benevolence! I take off my hat to you, signorina; you bear fruit like an olive tree, because you cannot help it. Most of us ask ourselves how much money or fame the fruit will fetch if we trouble to produce it. You see, I am a philosopher. Well, go home to your good mother and tell her that there is a ragged rogue, one of Garibaldi's men, playing the wolf in this cave of yours. Perhaps she will send a boy with some polenta and a bottle of wine, and I will bless her. And so—good-bye to you."

She answered him instantly.

"I shall bring the food. There will be less danger for you."

Sandro nodded his head with sceptical resignation.

"Less danger! Oh, very good; it is God's affair. I leave it to Him."

When she had gone Sandro Sommariva crawled into the cave and explored his new refuge. It was just a rough, box-like chamber carved out of the rock by Nature and by man, with a rude stone seat running along one wall, and its floor covered with fine sand. Cesca had thrown her armfuls of grass down in a corner, and there was enough of the stuff to make a luxurious bed.

Sandro still had his bayonet with him; he had carried it hidden under his shirt; he pulled it out and thrust its point into a crack in the rock wall.

He stared at the pile of grass.

"What an adventure! Why on earth should she be taking so much trouble? I suppose it is a new sort of excitement. Women must have their fingers in everything."

The cave might be romantic, packed full of holy memories, and of the sanctity of the old gentleman who had mortified the flesh therein, but Sandro preferred the sunlight and the open sky. He crawled out, and sat with his back against the rock where the grass spread itself like a green carpet, and the arbutus leaves glistened in the sunlight. Lizards were sunning themselves and scuttling in and out of the ivy and creeping plants, and Sandro sat so still that one green fellow ran round his shoulders and down his arm to the ground.

It was a long day, but Sandro shortened it somewhat by curling himself up and going to sleep. When he opened his eyes again the sun had swung well into the west, and the full blaze of light was pouring down over the ridge of the opposite hill, and making the fringe of arbutus boughs blaze like silver.

A stone went rattling down the hillside below him. He heard a rustling in the bushes; the boughs were put back, and Cesca appeared with that glowing face of hers mysteriously exultant.

"You see, I have come."

She had a flask of wine under one arm, and she carried a basket covered with a white cloth. Sandro nodded his

head gravely.

"I both see you," he said, "and realise that you are a solid body, and that you have wine in that flask and food in that basket. Of course, I am supremely grateful."

She went on her knees, put the flask of wine on the grass, and began to unpack the basket.

"White Coats have been at our farm. I had to be very careful, but they have gone back to Monte Celio."

Sandro persisted in behaving like a severe philosopher.

"And does your good mother know, my child, that you have come here to bring that wine and food to a scamp of a patriot?"

Her eyes held his.

"Of course. What a strange fellow you are! If my brother Carlo is a fugitive and in hiding somewhere, we know that there are Italian women who will take him food in spite of all the White Coats."

She uttered the words so simply, looking him straight in the eyes, that Sandro Sommariva's sententious scepticism crumbled into a sudden sensitive humility. The hot blood rose to his face. The half-sneering lines about his mouth melted away like shadows under the more generous glow of a chivalrous compassion.

He stretched out a hand.

"You call me a strange fellow. I have not given you a word of gratitude. Listen to me, little sister. I am so grateful that I forbid you to come here again, to put yourself in danger of being caught by the accursed Austrians. In a day or two I shall be well enough to hobble along somehow. I shall take my chance. But you are going to promise me not to come here again."

She knelt and gazed at him with a new expression in her eyes.

"No; I shall not promise that. I am not afraid."

"It is I, Cesca, who have the right to be afraid. Now, you will leave the wine and food with me and run home, and never come back again."

His man's eyes looked into hers, and she saw that his eyes had changed. There was a new passion, too, in his voice, and his face had softened, lost its harsh audacity.

"What has happened to you?" Cesca asked him.

"That might take long in the telling. Go home, Cesca, and promise not to come here again."

She shook her head, and her hair glimmered in the sunlight.

"No. You must stay here till your foot is well. I could send Giovanni, but I would rather trust myself. Besides, it is quite safe. The Austrians never trouble to come down this valley."

"Very well, I shall be angry with you."

"Then be angry with me. I shall not be afraid of you even if you are angry."

He reasoned with her, appealed to her, even threatened to crawl away in the night and risk capture, but when she left him it was with a provoking and frank faith in her right to help a man who had fought under Garibaldi.

Sandro Sommariva made a bed of the grass that Cesca had carried into the cave, and the sweet smell of it made him

think of her drifting, yellow hair. He lay awake a long while, with the stars blinking at him through the black square of the open doorway. He had forbidden her to come again to the cave, but there was a secret hope in him that she would come.

And come she did, bringing her mother with her, a big woman with a soft voice and mild eyes.

Carlotta Roselli seemed amused at the adventure. She had that quiet sort of courage that does not rush excitedly to meet imaginary disasters. She talked to Sandro Sommariva as though he were her son, and Sandro threw all his male pretentiousness aside, and allowed himself to be mothered by her.

"I would have you brought to my house, but you are safer here. Cesca can bring you food."

The mother's eyes swept him appraisingly, and Sandro understood the look.

"You shall never regret it. But it would be safer to send a boy or a man."

"Our Giovanni has a foolish tongue. Women can keep a secret, even better than men can. Trust to us, my son, and we will trust you."

Sandro glanced at Cesca.

"She will not be in danger from me—but because of me."

"The danger is trifling. There are paths that no Austrian has ever trodden."

For a week Sandro Sommariva lived in that cave in the valley by the sea, and Cesca Roselli brought him his food. Sometimes she came when the dew was still on the grass, sometimes when the sun was sinking behind the hills, but to Sandro Sommariva her coming became the one and only event of the day.

She brought him a new mystery, something more potent than wine and bread. Her yellow hair flashed in his thoughts, and into her blue eyes he dreamed a new belief in the worth of women.

And very suddenly she became shy of him. The arbutus boughs seemed to pass less boldly; she would pause and call to him: "Sandro, are you there?"

He would answer her, raise himself up, and stand, hat in hand, waiting for her to come stealing out of the green shadows of the thickets. She would set her basket on the grass, and look at him with eyes that betrayed a new self-consciousness. Sandro always kissed her hand, a brown hand with long slim fingers.

A certain grave politeness characterised these meetings. Sandro behaved to her as though she were a great lady visiting him at his country villa. He brought out a bundle of dry grass for her to sit upon; his manners were the manners of an aristocratic young cardinal.

"It has been very hot to-day. How is the signora?"

She would answer him with equal gravity.

"Mother is in the best of health, but she is worrying about my brother Carlo."

"I begin to remember your brother, a tall fellow with a little pointed beard."

"Yes, that is Carlo."

"He went with us on the retreat. He is with Garibaldi, which is as good as being with God."

They would sit there talking in this solemn fashion, and looking at each other with solemn eyes. The wild valley was full of a new mystery, and Sandro had forgotten the lady of the Villa Sabina.

That ankle of his was nearly able to bear him, but he was much less eager now to reach Piedmont and liberty. He even temporised most shamelessly. The valley was wild and deserted; no one wandered along the cliff paths save an occasional goatherd with his goats; the Austrians, when they came down from the town of Monte Celio, followed the roads in the richer valleys where wine was to be had.

But someone else had discovered that there was a strange man hiding in the cave, a man to whom Cesca Roselli took food. Jealousy had prompted the lad Giovanni to spy upon the girl; he was but a labourer in Signora Carlotta's garden and vineyards, but he was a male thing with the hot dreams of youth in him.

The lad was cunning. On two evenings he shadowed Cesca down the valley, but it was not easy for him to get a glimpse of the stranger without betraying himself, yet his jealous curiosity discovered how it could be done. He made his way along the ridge of the hill and crawled down silently till he reached the edge of the cliff above the cave. By lying flat and craning his head forward he saw all that he had come to see.

Giovanni was sent to Monte Celio next day with an ass, whose panniers were laden with vegetables and fruit. Such stuff found a ready sale in the hill town, and Giovanni was tempted to play the Judas. An Austrian sergeant sat drinking wine outside the little wine-shop on the piazza, and Giovanni blabbed to the White Coat about the man hiding in the hermit's cave, but he said nothing about Cesca.

Cesca did not go to the cave that morning, she had brought Sandro food overnight, and he did not expect her till the evening. She had taught him to plait straw, and he spent the day plaiting some of the coarse grass into a pair of sandals to wear on the steep hill paths along the coast.

There was a strong wind from the sea, a wind that set the pines rocking on the hillside, and the massed foliage of the myrtle and arbutus rolling like green waves. The narrow valley was full of the sound of the rustling of the foliage, the whispering of the sun-dried grass, and the deeper roar of the pines. The sea itself had white flecks of foam chasing each other, and Sandro could hear the waves breaking upon the rocks.

The wind had made him restless, though there was no reason for his restlessness. He kept listening for the sound of footsteps in the path, and the rustling of the green boughs tantalised him by making him fancy that he heard Cesca pushing her way through them.

He had finished plaiting his sandals, and had tossed them into the cave when he heard a cry that seemed to rise out of the bushes like the cry of a wounded bird.

Sandro scrambled to his feet and stood listening. Vague sounds came from the path below, but they were half smothered by the rustling of the leaves. He cursed the wind.

"Let me go—let me go!"

It was Cesca's voice, quick and appealing.

"No, no; not that! Have pity!"

Other voices answered her, harsh, Germanic voices that bullied and threatened. They spoke in broken Italian, blurting out words as though they were hurling stones at her.

"You know where this cave is. Show us."

"What cave, signore?"

"No nonsense, you little witch! There is a man hiding there, and you know it."

"I know of no man."

"Then why do you carry food in a basket?"

Sandro heard them jeering and laughing.

"Come, be quick, where is the path?"

Cesca did not answer. Her silence was a refusal to betray him and an attempt to gain time, so that Sandro might slip away into the bushes and escape. But thought of escape did not enter Sandro Sommariva's head. He had a vision of Cesca struggling in the hands of those Austrians, those German brutes who could behave like devils out of hell.

"Hallo, Fritz, she is sulky, is she? A man can amuse himself with a girl who does not know how to behave."

They laughed.

"A fine young heifer. Tie her up!"

"We can report on her to the captain."

Sandro heard Cesca cry out like a bird caught in a snare. An unthinking fury seized him. He dashed into the cave, caught up his bayonet, and, rushing out, went beating through the bushes towards the path.

Those Austrians—there were but three of them—saw a little man with a stark, pale face and shining eyes come thrusting out of the green gloom. He had a bayonet in his right fist, and one foot was all muffled up in red bandages.

He paused, like a wild beast gathering itself to spring. One of the Austrians had Cesca in his arms. The girl's body was bent back, her face straining away from him, but he was kissing her brown throat with a kind of savage zest.

Sandro's bayonet flashed, but two muskets were swung forward, covering him, and he saw the grinning faces behind the black circles of those menacing muzzles.

"Hallo! we've tempted Master Boar out of his cave."

"Stand fast, my little one. That bayonet of yours is out of date."

"Gently with the girl, Fritz. The fellow heard you smacking your lips, and that was too much for him. Leave something for the captain."

Corporal Fritz let the girl go, pushing her from him with rough impatience, but he kept himself between her and the man with the bayonet.

"Hallo! Who the devil are you?"

Sandro had halted in the middle of the path, white with rage, and yet not too furious to realise the folly of rushing blindly against those muskets. The corporal looked him over, and grinned when he saw the red bandages round his foot.

"One of Garibaldi's rascals, the first we have laid our hands on. Don't pretend, my lad, that you are a beggar."

Sandro's patriot fire flared up, and blazed into fierce irony.

"I am one of Garibaldi's men, gentlemen; I shall boast of it to the day of my death. Do you think that I am going to snivel and tell lies to you Tedeschi? Let the girl go and send her home. She has nothing to do with this business. You can arrest me, and that will settle it."

They laughed.

"Just listen to the little cockerel."

"Hand over your toothpick."

Sandro was looking meaningfully at Cesca. His eyes said, "Run, vanish, take yourself out of the way. This is my affair. I will talk to the soldiers."

She was trembling. Her face flushed a sudden crimson; she turned to the man who had kissed her.

"You will let him go. Why should you take him prisoner? What harm has he done you?"

They laughed. The corporal twirled the ends of his moustache and leered complacently.

"Come now, that is better. In a minute you will be running to kiss me."

"Cesca!"

Sandro's voice made her start and turn pale. His eyes frightened her, there was so fierce a light in them.

"Listen, and obey me. I never told you that I had been with Garibaldi; I deceived you and your mother; I traded upon your pity; I am sorry. Now go; leave me with these fine fellows. I can take care of myself without being whimpered over by a lot of women."

He turned sharply to the corporal and threw his bayonet at the man's feet.

"There you are. You are decent fellows; don't interfere with the girl. I told her and her mother that I was a wandering beggar of a student, and they brought me food; they knew nothing; leave them alone. Run home, child; this foot of mine will carry me; in fact, I shall enjoy the walk with these gentlemen."

Cesca seemed dominated by those eyes of his. "Go," they said, "and pretend that I am telling the truth."

She faltered, her lips quivering. Then she turned away; the Austrians stood aside and let her pass up the stony path.

Sandro saluted them, and his eyes shone.

"Thank you, gentlemen. Who wants to drag a slip of a girl into such an affair? A soldier of the Legion can stand on his own feet."

Two hours later Sandro Sommariva was climbing the mule path to Monte Celio, a grey, stone-paved path that hurt that stiff ankle of his. The corporal marched in front, the two privates behind, and the peasants they passed on the way stopped and stared at their ragamuffin of a prisoner.

Sandro carried his head high, and looked into the brown faces of these peasants.

"Viva Italia!" he said. "I am one of the red fellows, one of Garibaldi's children."

But the corporal turned on him, and the two soldiers behind prodded him persuasively with the butts of their muskets.

"Basta, basta, do you think these fools want to hear about Garibaldi? Perhaps the captain will let you make a speech when we put you up against a wall and shoot you to-morrow morning."

Monte Celio was a white town, but Sandro Sommariva saw it black against the sunset, its campanile soaring against a yellow sky. They marched in at the east gate of the town and up the narrow street between the pale-walled houses to the piazza below the castle. The castle was a rambling place with one grim, battlemented tower standing out against the sky. A few soldiers lounged at the gate. They bantered Corporal Fritz, and asked him if he had caught Garibaldi.

Sandro was taken across the courtyard, up a flight of steps, along an open walk at the top of a curtain wall. The corporal unlocked a door, and with a thrust of the foot introduced Sandro to his lodging for the night. It was a bare cell, not much bigger than the inside of a coach, and the iron bars of its narrow window cut the sunset into three red panels.

Sandro Sommariva sat on a straw pallet in a corner of this cell and watched the colour fade behind the iron bars.

"So this is the end of it all," he thought; "most certainly they will shoot me."

Then he smiled.

"They let the girl go. I am glad I told those lies."

But at the valley farm Carlotta Roselli sat in the vine-covered loggia and looked into the eyes of a child's tragedy. For Cesca had come running up the path between the cypresses, and had thrown herself at her mother's knees.

"They have taken him; the Austrians have taken him!"

Her hair trailed like a golden light over her mother's knees, and her blue eyes were wet with tears.

"He was so brave. He would have fought with them, only they pointed their muskets at him. What could he do? And then he told lies to shield us, and swore that we did not know that he had been with Garibaldi."

It was a child's tragedy, for Sandro Sommariva himself was little more than a boy. And Cesca wept out this newly discovered love of hers, holding her mother's hands, while Carlotta Roselli stared at the blue hills floating in a haze of gold, and thought of her own son who had challenged fate in this great adventure.

"They have taken him to Monte Celio, mother. Someone must have betrayed us."

Carlotta Roselli frowned.

"The good God makes us bear many bitter burdens. Why should our country be cursed with these Austrians? Some day Italy will be free."

Behind the loggia wall a boy lay flat on his stomach, listening. He had crawled there, noiseless as a lizard. And as he listened the grin of triumph left his face; his eyes darkened, his lips closed sullenly over his white teeth. Giovanni had ridden his jealousy, and it had brought him to shame.

Captain Goltz, who commanded the White Coats at Monte Celio, was at supper when the corporal went to make his report, a thick-set square-headed man with a brutal mouth and narrow eyes. Corporal Fritz stood at attention, waiting for his officer to speak.

"Got the fellow?"

"Yes, captain."

"Good."

Goltz was one of those men who eat savagely, as though his plate had insulted him and he were attacking it with his knife and fork. He made a great clatter, his elbows cocked well above the table, and he thrust out his lower lip whenever he raised a piece of food to his mouth.

"What is the fellow?"

"One of Garibaldi's rascals! Boasted of it, captain."

"More fool he; save us trouble. Locked him up, Fritz?"

"Yes, captain. The people have been helping him on the sly."

"What people?"

The corporal gave his version of the affair, dragging in Cesca Roselli and describing her as a "golden pippin." Captain Goltz's great jaw seemed to move more slowly, and his little eyes twinkled.

"An accessory, eh? Pretty wench, is she? Have her brought up here to-morrow, Fritz."

"Yes, captain. And will you see the fellow to-night?"

"Good God, man, no! To-morrow will do. I'll have the two of them up together."

It was Giovanni who caught sight of the White Coats coming along the road that led to the valley farm. He was driving a couple of cows down to the river pastures, and he left the beasts and raced for the farm with naked brown feet, sending up little spurts of dust.

"White Coats are coming!"

His excitement betrayed a guilty conscience and too personal a knowledge of the whole affair, but the women asked no questions. It was enough for them to know that the Tedeschi were so near.

Carlotta Roselli met them in the loggia. Corporal Fritz had been sent with six men to fetch the "golden pippin" to Monte Celio.

"What is it you want, sirs?"

Her placidity was well assumed; she carried herself as though she had nothing to fear.

Corporal Fritz spat on the stones.

"That girl of yours. Bring her out. The captain has sent for her."

Carlotta stared at him.

"But I do not understand."

"That's nothing, old lady. We have taken a prisoner, that fellow who was hiding in a cave, and this girl of yours with the yellow hair was feeding him and helping him to lie low. Women should not meddle. Fetch the girl out. The captain wants her as a witness."

Carlotta Roselli knew her own helplessness, and she knew the Austrians. It did not do to anger the beasts.

"I will bring her. I will come with her myself."

The corporal laughed.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "you might have made a fool of the captain."

Mother and daughter rode to Monte Celio, mounted on a couple of black donkeys, with the soldiers sweating behind them up the steep path under the glare of the summer sun. It was noon when they reached the hill town, and just within the eastern gate they passed Big Tommaso watering his mule at the stone cistern.

Now many years ago Big Tommaso had been Carlotta's lover. They had quarrelled, and Carlotta had married another man, but time had made them very good friends again, and Big Tommaso, now that his hair was grizzled, had some tenderness left for the love of his youth.

He stood forward, a big man, with his brown chest showing between the flaps of his unbuttoned shirt, his fine throat the colour of leather, his black eyes looking questioningly at Carlotta Roselli.

"What's amiss, neighbour?"

But Corporal Fritz jabbed at him with the butt of his musket.

"Out of the way. It's no business of yours."

Big Tommaso took the blow and the taunt with stolid patience. His eyes gleamed momentarily, but he did not speak.

When they reached the piazza Corporal Fritz called a halt.

"We will leave you the donkeys, old lady. Go and drink some wine at the inn, and then get off home. You are not wanted yonder."

"I am going to stay with the child."

Fritz grinned.

"I'll be a father to her. No, no, you are not coming with us; it is against orders."

Carlotta's face darkened.

"I shall not leave the town till I leave it with my daughter."

"Bless you, please yourself. You may have to stay here a few days. Do you think we keep a nunnery up yonder? You will have her back again when the captain has made up his mind that the little patriot shall be shot."

Carlotta tried to follow them through the castle gate, but the guard turned her back, and she and Cesca were parted. A small crowd had gathered in the piazza, and Big Tommaso was there, holding his mule by the halter. Carlotta led her two donkeys to the inn under the arcade; the crowd followed her, sympathetically inquisitive.

Captain Goltz was dining, and a siesta was not to be lost because the "golden pippin" had been brought to Monte Celio. Cesca was taken into the hall of the castle and left there quite alone. There was a sentry outside the door; she heard him humming a tune and rattling his heels on the stone floor.

The hall of the castle was a great, bleak vault of a place, with a barrel roof and narrow windows cut in the thickness of the stonework. Its whitewashed walls were all stained and peeling. A long table, hacked and worm-eaten, stood in the centre; there were benches along the walls, and another and smaller table at the far end with a leather-padded chair set behind it.

Cesca sat there on one of those long, empty benches, like a fairy in a giant's castle. The place chilled her; mere strands of yellow light entered the narrow windows; the silence was massive, sullen, threatening. For two hours she sat there, wondering what would happen, what they desired of her, whether she would see Sandro.

Presently she heard heavy footsteps and voices in the gallery. Corporal Fritz and several soldiers appeared, and they stood and stared at her as though she were a thing in a cage. Their eyes frightened her; they were the eyes of men who were brutally amused.

"Attention! The captain."

Captain Goltz strolled in, smothering a yawn. He paused, stared fixedly at Cesca, like a slave merchant appraising a slave.

She stood up.

"So this is the girl, corporal?"

"Yes, captain."

"Golden pippin! Not a bad name, eh? Bring the man in."

He walked on, and sat down in the leathern chair behind the small table at the end of the hall.

Cesca's eyes were watching the doorway. In a minute she saw Sandro brought in, Sandro who carried himself with the pride of a patriot. He was pale, and he limped as he walked, but the indomitable and divine fire in him had not been quenched.

He caught sight of Cesca, and instantly his whole face changed. He had striven to put fear out of his heart, but a new fear attacked him at the sight of this girl.

Captain Goltz was watching them with those narrow, cynical eyes of his.

"Well, my friend, what have you to say for yourself?"

They had marched Sandro up the hall, and he found himself standing between two soldiers and looking across the table into the hard face of the Austrian. It was a clashing of temperaments.

"Everything—and nothing."

"Very clever, very clever! Begin."

"I am an Italian. What more is there to be said?"

Captain Goltz smiled at him.

"So you were with Garibaldi?"

"True."

"A rebel, an adventurer, a traitor?"

Sandro shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, what you please! I expect neither justice nor mercy; I do not ask for them. Some day the white swine will be driven out of Italy; till then—you can root at your pleasure."

The Austrian nodded with an air of cynical tolerance.

"Very fine, my friend, but mere bombast. You accuse yourself; you condemn yourself; I can see no reason why we should not shoot you. But before we put you up against a wall there is another matter to be looked into. You were planning to escape into Piedmont; you were helped by certain persons; they have rendered themselves liable to punishment."

Sandro rocked slightly on his heels.

"Let me confess, sir, that I told lies to these good people. I pretended to be a wandering student. They did not know that I had served with Garibaldi."

Goltz thrust out his lower lip.

"Bring that girl here; put them face to face."

It was done. They stood there within a yard of each other. Cesca's face had a mysterious, tragic radiance, but Sandro Sommariva betrayed no emotion.

"You can tell the officer, child, that I deceived you and your mother. I said nothing about Garibaldi."

His eyes willed her to bear him out, to carry the pretence through. He wanted to save her, to help her to save

herself, but those trembling lips of hers yearned to tell the truth.

"Don't be afraid, Cesca; it is very simple. You brought me food, thinking that I was just a mad student on a pilgrimage, and that I had slipped and hurt my ankle."

She looked at him mutely. Then her lips moved; she spoke in a whisper.

"Yes; I did not know."

"Speak up, speak up! You did not know this fellow was a Red Shirt?" Goltz asked, harshly.

"No, sir."

Captain Goltz sat back in his chair and looked at them with half-closed eyes. He had a brutal sense of humour, had this Austrian; his astuteness had detected a situation that piqued his appetite for sensual things, and to open the comedy he pretended to be convinced.

"Very good. I suppose I must take the girl's word. And no doubt you young people would like to speak to each other. Take your men away, corporal. I have letters to write in my room. We will give these children half an hour."

They were alone in that great, gaunt room, with its bare benches and tables, and its walls that were like the human skin after a fever. Sandro did not move. He kept his place by the table, and his look betrayed a listening distrust.

"Sandro!"

She drew nearer, and in that dark place the sheen of her hair troubled him.

"Stay where you are, child."

"Why did you not let me tell the truth?"

"S-sh! Do you think I trust these fellows? That bully behind the table has something in that square head of his. Go and sit down on that bench—and say nothing."

"You are angry with me."

"Angry? How you dream! It is better to be hard—sometimes; softness may be treachery."

She stretched out her hands.

"But there is no one here. These walls are solid, and we can speak in whispers. You have been so brave—for our sakes."

He struck the floor angrily with his heel, but his mouth was quivering.

"Little temptress! Why will women make things so difficult? Go and sit down over there, and keep quiet——"

She turned from him, and burst into tears, yet for one moment Sandro's stoicism held. He shrugged his shoulders and began to walk up and down the hall, his hands in his pockets, his lips puckered up as though he were about to whistle a tune.

"Oh, you do not care! You despise me—because I let you tell lies and shield us."

She confronted him, her wet eyes passionately reproachful, and Sandro's stoicism was undone. He threw one quick glance at the two doors that opened into the hall, and then turned to her with a face that was transfigured.

"Cesca. I shall be shot to-morrow. Come and kiss me."

Her brown arms went round his neck, and her hair smothered his face.

"It is horrible. Perhaps they will not shoot you. Why should these Austrian brutes have the right to shoot you? If only Garibaldi had thousands and thousands of men, men like you and Carlo——"

He put her hair back with one hand and looked at her dearly.

"Oh, some day, some day! Perhaps you will see it, little sweetheart."

"But I want you to see it too. You are not cross with me, now, Sandro? Do you remember how cross you were that morning when I found you at that pool, and saw that red-shirt of yours?"

"Dear, not so loud."

"You said you hated all women."

"I had had cause to then. I do not hate you, Cesca."

"No!"

"By my soul—give me a piece of your hair. I will put it over my heart, and the sunlight shall go with me over the dark river."

One of the doors had been, opened cautiously, and Captain Goltz was standing there in the shadow, rubbing his chin, and smiling.

"Can I lend you a knife, Mr. Patriot?"

Sandro thrust Cesca from him as though she were Goltz's wife. He drew himself up, and his face was like a white flame.

"Come in, sir. It is better to stand in the open than to listen behind doors."

Captain Goltz walked towards them, his face smeared with a gleam of cynical complacency.

"So you knew all the time, my innocent, that this fellow had been with Garibaldi?"

He looked mockingly at Sandro.

"Very noble of you, my friend. You drove me to play the Solomon; you began very well, but the girl spoilt it all. Do not reproach yourself."

He stamped his heel on the floor, and his men came crowding in.

"You can take the fellow back to his cell, corporal. You will have a firing party ready at six o'clock to-morrow morning. Shall I send you a priest, man? Yes, I had better allow you that. I will see to it that you receive the last consolation."

The corporal laid a hand on Sandro's arm and swung him round.

"Come on."

"You can leave the girl, corporal; I have something to say to her. Come back for orders in half an hour."

Sandro was marched off with a man on either side of him gripping his arm. His last glance of Cesca left him with a picture of her standing like a cataleptic, her arms hanging limply, her eyes staring at him with a kind of incredulous anguish. His own helplessness maddened him; he had to set his teeth to save himself from breaking into an impotent

frenzy of curses.

Captain Goltz sat down in his leather-backed chair. He looked at Cesca under drooping eyelids, that lower lip of his thrust out.

"Well, my dear, let us have a little talk together. Stand there by the table. Now I am going to be very kind to you, though you have been a bad girl. Do you understand?"

She stared at him in a dazed way.

"No, sir."

"I can put you in prison."

She said nothing.

"I can put your mother in prison."

"Yes."

"Very well, then. I am going to be very kind to you. Mr. Sandro is to have someone to console him; I am going to send you to him. Now listen—very carefully."

He leant forward with his elbows resting on the table, the forefinger of his right hand pointing at her like the muzzle of a pistol, and spoke with an incisive and threatening directness. At first she failed to catch his meaning; her innocence prevented her understanding him to the full. Goltz had to repeat himself, and his face seemed to grow harder and more brutal. He left her no chance of misunderstanding his meaning. Her eyes dilated. She looked at him with horror.

Words seemed to fail her. What could she say to this man, how could she appeal to him?

Goltz leant back in his chair.

"So you will obey me; you understand? In three days you will be at home with your mother, and I shall not trouble to have either of you punished."

Her lips moved, but no words came. She was as white as milk.

Captain Goltz stamped on the floor, and Corporal Fritz appeared.

"Take this girl and put her in one of the cells. At sunset you will move her to that fellow's cell. You will lock them in together for the night."

"Yes, captain."

"Post a sentry on the wall."

"Yes, captain."

The soldier on guard at the gate lost his temper with the woman; she had pestered him for half an hour and had refused to be driven away.

He called to a comrade who was sitting in the doorway of the guardhouse cleaning his musket.

"Kurt, hallo there! Send Fritz along; this is his affair. This fool will go on talking till midnight."

Kurt went for the corporal, and Fritz appeared in a full-blooded rage. The lieutenant had been sent to a neighbouring town with half the company; Fritz's sergeant was in hospital; he was the small man in authority, badgered to death.

"The devil, but what's wrong now?"

"The woman here wants her daughter."

The corporal discovered a victim.

"Thunder, you old fool, get home with you, and leave well alone. The baggage will be sent back to you in three days."

Carlotta Roselli flushed at his insolence.

"What right have you to keep her here?"

"What right! Haven't both of you been hiding and feeding that fellow? Well, he is to be shot to-morrow morning. To-morrow, the captain will have something to say to her, and when he has finished—she will be sent back to you. Don't grumble when a gentleman has his joke and lets you off so easily."

Carlotta Roselli said nothing. She looked at the Austrian with helpless scorn, crossed herself, turned, and made her way back to the wine-shop under the arcade.

Big Tommaso sat there at one of the tables, an impassive, mahogany-faced man with dreamy eyes.

All the passionate anger in Carlotta Roselli's heart seemed to flame up at the sight of him.

"If the Italians were men these things would not happen to us. Oh, my God! to have to bear it, while our men slink round the street corners or shrug their shoulders. I shall sell the farm and go to a new country."

Big Tommaso looked at her patiently, good-temperedly.

"What has happened?"

She told him, resting her hands on the table and looking at him as though she accused him and every man in Italy of being a shirker and a coward.

Tommaso drew patterns on the table with a straw that he dipped into his wine.

"Have patience, Lotta," he said; "wine for a hundred years is not gained at one vintage."

"Patience! That is how you men talk. The Piedmontese have had more courage. Why did not all Italy rush to Garibaldi? Patience! And my girl is over there—at the mercy of those German devils, and the boy is to be shot to-morrow because he had the courage to call himself a true Italian!"

"Pain makes you bitter, Lotta. I am neither a fool nor a coward. You shall come to my house. It may be possible to do something."

"What can you do?"

"And yet you rail at me. One has to think, to consider, and not kick out blindly like a mule."

His patience and his calmness had their effect upon her, and her face softened.

"Old friend, my heart is sore."

He nodded his big head.

"Follow me—presently. They had better not see us together. Take the steps leading up from the lane by the big water cistern."

Now Monte Celio was a hill town that had flowed over and about a world of rocks and stony plateaux. It was irregular, circuitous, ascending steeply or descending with picturesque abruptness. Some of the houses were fitted like bits of mosaic into the solid rock. Its lanes and streets wound up and down and in and out, and flights of interminable steps went climbing like stone ladders into the blue of the sky.

The tiled roof of Big Tommaso's house was on the same level as his garden, that was how things settled themselves in Monte Celio. Moreover, his garden, with its clump of cypresses, its fig and fruit trees and vines, all crowded together with quaint compactness, lay at the foot of the castle wall, and this wall was not more than twenty feet high. Big Tommaso knew a great deal more about the castle of Monte Celio than the Austrians suspected. A man cannot work in his garden, and sit under his vine trellis, year in year out, without learning something about his neighbours on the other side of the wall.

Big Tommaso was a bachelor; a very old woman, who was stone deaf, kept house for him, and when Carlotta Roselli knocked at his door he opened it himself, and led the way to a room, or parlour, that overlooked the red roofs of the town. He pointed to a chair.

"You can rest there, Lotta. Do not show yourself at the window. I have work to do in my garden."

"Is that how you help me, by working in your garden?"

"The Austrians and I are near neighbours. Sometimes I hear things from up above. I am a quiet fellow, but I keep my ears open."

"Ah! Of course; I had forgotten. Forgive me, Tommaso. The wine has turned sour in me to-day."

He left her there and climbed the steep steps that led up to his garden. He did not raise his head or lift his eyes to look up at the castle wall, but went straight to the shed where he kept his tools, took off his coat, brought out a spade, and started to dig a strip of ground with the methodical purposefulness of a man who had no thoughts above the work in hand. He kept on with his digging for an hour or more, sometimes stopping to rest, leaning on his spade. Once or twice he threw a cautious side glance at the top of the castle wall, and Big Tommaso saw something that was distinctly suggestive. A soldier's shako, and the barrel of a musket kept going to and fro above the parapet. A sentry there, and that was significant.

As the sun sank low in the west Tommaso put on his coat, and went and sat in the vine arbour that he had built at the foot of the wall.

Presently the dream died out of Big Tommaso's eyes. Voices came from above, and they brought him back to practical and mundane things. He sat and listened. It was a still evening, and the words from the top of the wall came down to him quite clearly. There were other sounds to help him to a conclusion, the grounding of musket butts on the stones, the grating squeak of rusty hinges, a rough voice making a mock of someone, and then the slamming and locking of a door.

Big Tommaso remained in the arbour till it was dark. He did not want the sentry fellow up above to see him cross the garden to his house. In an hour or so a moon would be rising, and the moon might prove either an enemy or a friend.

Hanging on the wall of Big Tommaso's house were two light ladders that he used for fruit picking and pruning his trees. He lifted them down, carried them up into the garden, and screened behind the group of cypresses he lashed the two ladders firmly together with a length of rope.

Then Big Tommaso returned to the house to tell Carlotta Roselli what might be done by a man of craft and courage.

Sandro Sommariva was sitting on the pallet bed in his room staring at the window, whose black bars cut the sunset into lengths of gold. The colour made him think of Cesca's hair, and the thought of Cesca tortured him. What would they do with her?

So they were going to shoot him to-morrow morning. He realised it in a kind of muffled, impersonal way; and he was surprised that he did not fear death more, that lonely death with no zest of battle to hearten it. He would look those Austrians straight in the eyes; he would refuse to be blindfolded; he would teach them to respect a man who had followed Garibaldi.

The sentry was tramping to and fro along the wall outside his door. The light began to pale beyond the bars of the window.

Sandro straightened as he sat. He heard voices, a jeering laugh. Footsteps approached; a key was pushed into the lock, and the door thrust open.

Corporal Fritz stood there.

"Hallo! You wanted a priest. Here's something better. You can confess all right, and make her give you absolution."

The corporal was holding a strand of yellow hair. Laughing, he drew Cesca towards him, thrust her into the cell, and locked the door.

"Good night, you Red Shirt. Enjoy yourself. We will come for you at dawn."

Sandro had started up from his bed, and his eyes looked questioningly at Cesca. What did it mean?

"Cesca!"

She stood just within the door, leaning against the wall, mute and dazed. Her eyes avoided his. All that frank innocence of hers seemed to have left her; she had become conscious of some possible shame.

"Why have they brought you here?"

She covered her face with her hands, and would not answer him. He began to understand.

"Cesca!"

He had her in his arms, her head resting upon his shoulder, but she was limp and lifeless, as though all the pride had gone out of her heart.

"These devils! They have been frightening you. If only we had the power to be revenged."

She clung to him with sudden passion.

"How can I tell you! He is a devil—that captain. It amuses him to torture us."

"Tell me. I love you, child. And all this has happened because of me."

She hid her face against his shoulder and whispered to him between deep, tragic breaths. Sandro's arms tightened about her; his face grew grim; the pupils of his eyes showed red.

"The devil! If I could get at that fellow! The devil!"

His fury was followed by a surge of tenderness.

"Cesca, forgive me for this."

He lifted her face and kissed her mouth and closed lids.

"Sandro, I do not want to live. If only we had a knife."

"Cesca!"

"Here—here—I have a scarf. Put it round my neck. It will soon be over; don't be afraid."

He shook at the knees, and there was horror in his eyes.

"Do that? My God, child! I cannot."

"Yes—yes."

"One stroke of a knife—that might be easy. But to choke you! I cannot."

"But you love me?"

"Cesca—have pity."

It was she who had to comfort him.

"Poor Sandro, I am cruel. No, no, I will not ask you to do it. I will bear everything; I will go back to my mother, perhaps that will show more courage."

He led her to the pallet bed, and they sat there like children, holding each other close, speaking in whispers. The light died out of the cell; the window changed from gold to the colour of steel. Their faces grew dim and grey in the dusk.

Cesca put up a hand and began to stroke Sandra's face. He was miserable, heart-broken, holding himself to be responsible for all that had happened.

"Poor Sandro. You take it so to heart. But was it not my fault in the beginning? You tried to send me away. You tried to deceive them. Do you think of me; but I shall think of you always."

"Oh, my God! if we could only cheat these White Coats, you and I. Just that locked door—and a prowling sentry between us—and life! Does one want to die when love has come?"

He jumped up and raged about the cell, threw himself against the door, hammered at it with his fists. The noise he made brought the sentry to the spot.

"Hallo, in there! What's all this row?"

"You Austrian pig, open the door and I will choke you."

The man laughed derisively.

"Has the little cat shown her claws?"

Cesca glided up to Sandro, put an arm about him, and laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"Don't—don't! They only mock at us. I will stand by you to-morrow, Sandro—if they will let me—and hold your hand."

He turned and caught her to him fiercely.

"Yes. What a fool I am to lose my temper with these savages. I'll carry my head high; I'll smile in their faces; they shall not have the pleasure of seeing me flinch."

They went and stood together at the open window; they could see nothing but the sky, for Monte Celio fell away so steeply, and the window was high up in the wall. A few stars throbbed in the blue blackness of the summer night; as yet the moon had not risen; the cell was very dark.

Cesca's hand stole into Sandro's.

"If only we could forget to-morrow."

Her warm touch troubled him, made him draw his breath more deeply.

"Perhaps I love you better because of to-morrow."

Her warm touch troubled him.

"I am yours, Sandro. I want to think of myself always as belonging to you."

Just before the moon rose a figure crossed Big Tommaso's garden, a figure carrying something that looked like a long beam on its shoulder.

Big Tommaso laid his double ladder down at the foot of the wall, and at the same moment the sentry up above thrust his head and shoulders through an embrasure and yawned as though he meant to swallow the whole town.

Tommaso kept very still.

"That's right," he thought, "if only that fellow will go to sleep I shall be able to do something."

When the sentry drew back, and began to patrol the wall again, Big Tommaso slipped into his arbour and sat down on the bench to wait.

The night was very still, though down in the lower vineyards a couple of dogs were baying the moon. Big Tommaso had made himself a loophole through which he could keep a watch on the sharp, black outline of the top of the wall, but in this adventure his ears carried the chief responsibility. It was a matter of patient and cautious waiting for a chance that might never come.

For an hour or more the sentry up above continued to give signs of animation by occasional paces to and fro, prodigious yawns, or the whistling of a song. Then these sounds ceased. For fully half an hour Big Tommaso remained hidden in his shelter, listening like a cat for the nibblings of a mouse.

He had stuck a narrow-bladed pruning saw, a big auger, and a hatchet into his belt, and he was no more than a gliding shadow as he slipped out of the vine arbour. For a minute he stood listening. Then he lifted the ladder, and here his great strength served him, and placed it noiselessly against the wall. The top reached just below the edge of the parapet.

Big Tommaso climbed it, his naked feet making no sound upon the rungs, and paused when his eyes reached the level of the parapet. His right hand went to his girdle and pulled out the short axe, a useful club in a strong hand.

He could hear nothing, see nothing. Very cautiously he mounted the parapet, straddled it, and, leaning over, peered along the walk that ran along the top of the wall. Two legs thrust out of an embrasure not three yards from him were wholly suggestive. The sentry had put his musket against the wall, stretched himself in the embrasure and gone to sleep.

Big Tommaso came down from the wall like a cat, crept along in the shadow, and thrust a hand into the embrasure. That axe of his went up; he used the hammer end and not the edge, being a merciful man, content to stun his enemy and put him out of the way of interference. And Big Tommaso did the job cleanly and well; there was a momentary jerking of

the sentry's legs, but he did not utter a sound.

It was Cesca who heard a cautious knocking at the door, and someone whispering through the keyhole:

"Sandro, Sandro Sommariva!"

She ran to the door and answered.

"Who is it?"

"Big Tommaso."

Cesca gave a low cry.

"We are here—Sandro and I. Oh, save us, Tommaso!"

"That's what I am here for," he answered softly.

Big Tommaso set to work with that auger of his and bored two holes in the woodwork so that he could use his narrow-bladed saw. Sandro and Cesca knew what the sound of sawing meant. They stood close together, gripping hands, tantalised by hope.

Now and again Big Tommaso stopped to listen, and to dash olive oil from a flask he carried over the woodwork and the saw. In a few minutes he had cut out the lock, and a shaft of moonlight streamed through and touched Cesca's dress.

Big Tommaso thrust the door open, and Cesca's arms went round his neck.

"Tommaso, you have saved us."

"Quick, come along, youngsters. I guessed you might be in here, child. Now, no talking."

He led the way along the wall, and when he came to where the ladder stood, he picked Cesca up and set her on the wall. Straddling the parapet beside her, he helped her on to the ladder, and then steadied it with one hand.

"Now, friend Sandro."

Sandro followed the girl. They found themselves in Big Tommaso's garden, and Big Tommaso joined them like a giant out of the sky. He lowered the ladder, balanced it on his shoulder, and led the way towards the house.

Someone was waiting at the foot of the steps, and Cesca ran into her mother's arms. They clung to each other, while Sandro helped Tommaso to lower the ladder into the deep passage at the back of the house.

But Big Tommaso was a man of action when once that dreamy brain of his had begun to work; he had thought things out, and had made his preparations; nor was there any time to be lost. He clapped Sandro on the shoulder.

"We must get you and the girl out of Monte Celio. Come. Cesca knows the paths. You must make for Piedmont along the coast."

"But what will happen to you, my friend?"

"Why should anything happen to me? Why should the Austrians find out who has fooled them? And even if they discover the truth—I am not so young as I was—I should shrug my shoulders. God will have no quarrel with me."

His old deaf housekeeper was asleep in the attic, and Big Tommaso shepherded the two women out of the house, telling them to wait in the lane and keep in the shadow.

"Come here, Sandro Sommariva."

They had to grope their way in the darkness, but Big Tommaso had laid everything ready on the table in his living-room. There was a clinking of coins. Sandro felt a little bag of money pressed into his hand.

"Take it; I have plenty."

"You are too generous, Tommaso. I shall not forget."

"And these; they might be useful."

He passed Sandro a pistol and a stiletto.

"Good. And here is a bundle of food and my coil of rope. Come along."

He locked the door, and they joined the women. Tommaso made a gesture with his hand; they understood that they were to follow him and to keep in the shadow of the houses. Monte Celio was asleep; the moonlight alone lit the windows.

Tommaso led them to the little piazza, in front of the church of Santa Maria that stood on the town wall. A lane ran at the bottom of the wall, with chestnut woods beyond it.

Tommaso uncoiled the rope, knotted one end and threw it over.

"Now, child, you are not afraid?"

Cesca threw her arms round his neck.

"No, no. I love you—brave Tommaso."

Mother and child kissed each other.

"Sandro will take care of me."

"Yes; I will trust you to Sandro. I shall sell the farm and follow you."

"And perhaps Tommaso will come too."

Big Tommaso smiled.

"Perhaps," he said.

Cesca went down the rope as glibly as a boy; Sandro followed her, after kissing Carlotta Roselli.

"Trust her to me, mother. I love her better than life."

Big Tommaso and Carlotta were left standing alone in the moonlight that flooded the piazza. He looked at her dreamily.

She stretched out a hand to him.

"Am I forgiven, Tommaso, for my bitter words?"

"I have forgotten them."

"You are generous. If I sell the farm and follow those two children——"

"I dare say I could go with you, if you will have me," he answered.

There was a short silence. Then Tommaso spoke.

"You must go home to-night, Lotta. It is better that they should not find you in Monte Celio to-morrow."

"I am not too old to do what Cesca has done. God bless you, Tommaso," she said.

Big Tommaso went back to his house, a romantic old fellow with his head full of dreams.

The amazing thing was that Sandro Sommariva forgot all about that sprained ankle of his, and made a night march that would have filled the Legion itself with complacency. Cesca was at his side, a Cesca all tremulous with hope and eagerness, her eyes and hair shining in the light of the moon. All night they pressed on towards the north-east.

Dawn came, and caught them in the trough of a great green valley, where a white campanile rose above the chestnut woods and the groves of olives. The hills were all purple about them, and down the midst of the valley a river flashed.

They threw themselves down in a wood, weary, but very happy.

They made a meal, blessing Tommaso for his forethought, and then Sandro fell asleep with his head in Cesca's lap, and Cesca herself went to sleep, leaning against the trunk of a chestnut tree.

It was broad day when Cesca woke. She yawned, tossed her hair back, and then bent half laughingly over Sandro, who had opened his eyes and was looking up into her face.

"Hallo!"

He scrambled up, and knelt, holding her hands. They kissed.

"To march all night and sleep half the day. Where are we, I wonder?"

A road ran beside the river down there in the valley, and Cesca saw a column of dark figures moving along the road.

"See, there is a procession—or a funeral."

He stood up, shading his eyes with his hand. His face sharpened; then he gave a kind of triumphant and astonished laugh.

"A funeral! Those are soldiers."

"Soldiers! But they are not White Coats?"

"White Coats—White Coats! They are Italians—Piedmontese! We are over the Border, we are free!"

She jumped up and threw her arms about his neck.

"Oh, if all Italy were like this. Not a White Coat to be seen."

He kissed her red mouth and her warm, sun-browned face.

"Why, here we are, in Arcady, you and I, in a valley, a piece of Italy. Listen to the bells too. And look at that white campanile down there. Surely that church was built for us to be married in! Let us go at once—like good children—and ask the good padre to help us."

She looked at him shyly through her hair.

"It will be a beggars' wedding, Sandro."

"Why, bless me, are not beggars the happiest people in the world? Besides, you don't know what a clever fellow you are marrying. Some day people will speak of me as Il Maestro."

Nor was this an idle boast, for the new Italy was to thrill to Sandro Sommariva's songs.

III

THE GIRL ON THE MOUNTAIN

It was hot on the steep mule-path that zigzagged up the southern slope of Monte Verde to the sanctuary of Santa Maria in Montorio, and David Flemming, with all his artist's gear upon his back, paused every hundred yards or so to catch the sea breeze, and to look back upon Villadoro, that pleasant, frivolous, and rather artificial little town lying white at the edge of its blue bay. There was shade here and there where the grey, stone-paved path ran under old ilexes and stone pines. The olive terraces were purpled with violets. Ever and again the white pinnacles of Santa Maria glimmered above the rocks and trees.

David Flemming broke the climb to drink a glass of vermouth at the little green-shuttered osteria lying half-way up the mountain. He sat under a pergola covered with roses and vines, and his lean and rather humorous face was sad. For even the pleasant comedies of life were tinged with pathos, and Flemming's laughter was often tempted to end in tears. He had discovered the utter loneliness of life, the loneliness that overtakes a man when death has snatched from him the other half of his soul. It was more than a year since his wife had died. The first anguish had passed, but the loneliness remained. They had been comrades; life had been an intimate interweaving of the sensitive threads of two personalities. Then fate had torn the fabric of life asunder, and left Flemming's career all loose and ravelled. Moving on again, he reached at last the broad walk between huge ilexes that led to the soaring steps and the white façade of Santa Maria. But Flemming did not stop at the sanctuary; he crossed the forecourt, passed round under an arch, and struck a path that climbed to the top of Monte Verde, three hundred feet nearer the clouds.

The path was steep, mere flat rocks and stones piled together, and it ran through a pine wood where the wind made a plaintive murmuring. And more than once, as he climbed through sunlight and shadow, Flemming fancied that he heard the sound of someone singing. It was just a voice that came and went, uttering a few wayward notes, like the deep throat notes of a bird.

Then the sanctuary bells started jangling just as Flemming saw the blue summit sky through the trees. There would be all the glory of the view up yonder, the snow peaks, the turquoise sea, the wooded headlands, the rocky valley black with shadows. Moreover, lunch and a bottle of wine were not to be scoffed at after such a scramble.

The summit came suddenly, a smooth cap of turf with a big flat stone perched in the centre like some primitive altar. All around the sky seemed to hang like a blue tent, but that grey stone on the top of Monte Verde was coloured red, as though someone had lit a sacrificial fire.

Flemming stopped dead. Here was the unexpected on the top of a mountain, a woman kneeling by the great stone, her body flung forward over it, her head hidden in her arms. She was wearing some loose sort of red jacket, and her skirt was of white linen, short, and showing bare ankles. A mass of black hair was stirred by the wind, but she herself was absolutely motionless, save for the slight fluttering of her white skirt.

Flemming was posed. He took her to be a peasant girl who had climbed to the top of Monte Verde to cry her heart out over some love affair. Her back was towards him, and the choice seemed to be his, the choice of leaving her in

possession, and losing the crown of the morning's climb.

But chance saved him that. The girl raised herself, turned, saw him, and started to her feet. And Flemming, if he had been surprised at finding her there on the top of Monte Verde, was doubly astonished when he saw her face.

For she was the child of another hemisphere, an islander, dark skinned, with a mass of dusky hair, large eyes, and a splendid throat. And Flemming, in his astonishment, was conscious of two things—that he had surprised her in some tragic moment, and that her eyes were empty of tears.

He was conscious of having blundered, conscious of a kind of resentfulness in her expression, and with an Englishman's habit of blurting out things in his own language, he tried to put her and himself at ease.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know anyone would be on the top of Monte Verde."

He realised instantly that the chances were against her knowing English, and that a man of more poise would have strolled to the edge of the plateau and admired the view.

"Monte Verde does not belong to me. The mountains should be free to us all, should they not?"

She answered him in English; spoke it, indeed, as though it were her natural tongue. And she smiled slightly, perhaps at his most obvious astonishment.

"No doubt you have come from Villadoro, and you have come to paint."

Again Flemming was shocked by the discovery that it was the girl who was smoothing away the embarrassment of the moment and putting him at his ease. Her voice sounded very deep and rich, and though she was quite young there was a maturity about her that hinted at the woman of the world. Flemming, a "sensitive" himself, was aware of the palpable breed in her, a frank and gracious ease of manner that could keep its dignity in the face of such a coincidence. He awoke to the fact that here was something amazing and unique, a mere child who could carry off all the bizzarrie of her clothes, of her loose, black hair and her bare ankles, and remain convincing, natural, absolutely herself.

"It is a long climb from Villadoro," he said, "and I wanted to try and make a rather unique sketch."

By way of settling the situation, he began to unload himself, to pull out the legs of his collapsible easel, and to prepare ostentatiously for work. The way lay open for the girl to smile at him and retreat. But she did nothing of the kind. She sat herself down on the flat stone and watched him with perfect composure.

"Is it not funny, I met an English girl up here one day, two of us on the top of the mountain, and we did not speak? Two intelligent creatures with tongues! And yet—I like the English."

He glanced at her and was struck by the soft charm of her manner. She seemed to have put some sad thing behind her; her face had cleared, and for the first time he realised her beauty. There was nothing negroid about her. Her skin had a dusky pallor; her face was refined in spite of its breadth; her eyes were a clear blue and heavily lashed. But it was the physical perfection of her that appealed to the artist in him, the splendid throat, the modelling of the forearm and ankle, the generous grace of her very feminine figure. And she seemed quite unconscious of it all, a kind of dusky island queen, with all the subtle charm of a fine culture added to the simple insouciance of her southern nature.

She was amazing. The loose hair, the bare ankles, the red and white of her clothes seemed inevitable. Somehow he could not imagine her in a Paris frock, and yet he had an idea that she wore such creations.

"I think we are two very sensible people," he said suddenly.

He was recovering his poise, his sympathetic sense of humour.

Her eyes brightened to his.

"Well—perhaps. And I am glad you came. I wanted some distraction."

He saw a tremor as of pain pass over her face, but it cleared instantly.

"Oh, the sun—the sun—and the sea! I was born on an island, a surf child."

"Is it rude to be curious?"

"Why should it be? Isn't life worth living as long as one remains inquisitive? I was born at Hawaii."

He nodded. His little easel was set up, and he had rolled a round stone forward from the edge of the plateau to serve as a seat.

"I say, I am going to be very forward. But there is only one really inevitable thing for me to do."

"And that?"

"Paint you—there—on that rock. May I?"

She gave a charming lift of the head.

"Why not? And may I talk? It is such a silent world sometimes. I chatter to the mountains, but they cannot answer me back."

So Flemming painted her, while the bells of Santa Maria in Montorio began their midday chiming. It was a merry sanctuary, and the bells seemed to dance in the mountain air, riotously, and with gay abandonment. The Lady of the Mountain was no joyless prude, and seemed to love laughter rather than melancholy.

The chiming came to an end with one long, deep-tongued boom of the big bell.

"And I have kept still through it all. Now, listen; it is noon."

She held up her hand, and through the silence they heard all the mountain and valley bells striking, like so many distant voices. Each white campanile for miles around took up the cry, and the echoes seemed to tremble in the deep valleys between the mountains.

Not only did Flemming paint her portrait, but he discovered her name and where she lived. She had been christened Eulalie, and the name had been changed to Lalia by her Hawaiian playmates. She lived at Acqua Dolce, a rather famous little villa in the river valley below, and Flemming remembered that Acqua Dolce was let to one Fenton Bale. He noticed that she was wearing a plain gold ring, and the obvious inference was that she was Bale's wife.

He seized a chance thought that suggested itself.

"I have wanted to paint in the gardens of Acqua Dolce. I am wondering if I can get leave."

She was silent a moment and her face became overclouded.

"My husband is not fond of strangers. I will ask him."

"But I am not going to thrust myself in——"

"I will ask him. Where are you staying?"

"At the Hotel Regina, Villadoro—David Flemming."

She smiled at him rather wistfully, and in a short while he was alone on the summit of Monte Verde.

David Flemming went and sat on the big stone where he had seen her prostrate, her head in her arms. That there was some great sorrow in her life he felt convinced. Her courage had set it aside for the moment, and she had faced him as though life hid no tragedy, no sinister shadows that darkened the sun.

Why had she come to such a lonely place? And how strange the whole business seemed—a Hawaiian girl on the summit of an Italian mountain!

If the great stone could have spoken it might have startled Flemming with strange words, the words of a woman in anguish, who had fled to some solitary place where passions might cool themselves.

"O God, I shall kill him. Help me, or I shall kill him!"

While Flemming ate his lunch and looked at the snow peaks and the sea, Lalia Bale raced down the mule-path, her string-soled shoes giving her a grip of the stones. She moved like a wild thing, agile, graceful, and with all the suppleness of an island child taught to swim through the surf. It was an hour after noon when she reached the bridge across the stream in the valley, and found herself at the iron gates of Acqua Dolce. An avenue of cypresses led up towards the villa hidden in its gardens which were full of the sound of running water.

"Hallo! Where the devil have you been?"

A man was leaning over the balustrade at the top of a terrace where clipped box trees grew in huge stone jars. He was a thin, yellow-faced man, with sunken cheeks and dull eyes. The muscles showed in his throat, and there was something about him that suggested a predaceous and hungry bird. His face was not the face of a healthy man; it was unwholesome, irritable, violent, with shadows under his eyes, and a kind of loose and cynical cruelty hanging about the mouth.

The girl answered him very quietly, though his voice had sent a shiver of anger through her, that discordant voice like the harsh cry of a bird.

"I have been up Monte Verde."

"Damn it—what rot! I've been waiting an hour for lunch——"

"You need not have waited."

She knew that he had done it to gain a grievance against her. That was Fenton Bale's way. He would spite himself in order to scold at her—and worse.

She climbed the steps leading to the terrace, and his panama hat moved along above the balustrade. Her pallor had increased. She was holding herself in, clenching her hands till the nails hurt her palms.

That jeering profile of his waited at the top of the steps.

"Come on!"

His eyes flared.

"You've been out again in that get-up. Why don't you dress like a Christian? You might be doing a cinema show."

She knew the man was ill, that he had drugged himself into evil decrepitude. And once she had thought she had loved him, in those Hawaiian days when he could swim and sail a boat.

"Don't, Fenton. I am so tired of it all."

"Tired!"

He laughed.

"Tired! And what have I spent on you? Paris, London, Vienna—damn it, and you cannot dress to please me. Here, I'll settle it——"

He snatched at the sleeve of her loose red jacket, and his thin fingers pinched the flesh of her arm. She twisted away, but she did not cry out, though her lips went white. The sleeve gave at the seam, and he continued to drag at it, laughing like a malicious child.

"I'll settle the thing."

The whole sleeve came away in his hand, leaving her full white arm showing, with the marks of his fingers upon it. For a moment there was a kind of madness in her eyes, but she mastered herself and turned towards the house.

"You will be rough with me once too often, Fenton," she said. "I am not one of your soft Englishwomen—my blood is hotter than theirs."

Three days later David Flemming went down from the Regina Hotel to a dance at a little casino that was built on a headland that jutted into the bay. The night was superb, warm, and ablaze with stars, and the sea made no more than a moist murmur among the rocks. The casino gardens were brightly lit; the string band was playing in the rotunda; the cosmopolitan crowd had scattered itself round the little tables in the alcoves; only a few couples were dancing.

A gay little German widow was chattering in the vestibule. She nodded and smiled at David Flemming, for he was a favourite of hers.

"Ach, Mr. Flemming, I have a quarrel with you. You did not dance with me last week."

"Why, Baroness, then it was I who was the loser."

"So you have a smooth tongue, you wicked prevaricator. I was here—you not ask me."

She shrugged her plump shoulders and looked up at him provokingly, but found that Flemming was staring over her head with a surprised and innocent intentness that could not be quarrelled with. For, seated at one of the little tables in one of the recesses leading from the ball-room were Lalia Bale and her husband. The girl was wearing a brilliant wine-coloured gown and a string of pearls in her hair. She was no longer the child of the mountain, but a woman of the world, a Parisian creature, cosmopolitan and yet unique.

The German lady turned her smile upon someone else, and Flemming went to leave his hat and coat in the cloakroom. And here a tall man, bald, clean-shaven, with ironical blue eyes, was stuffing a white scarf into an overcoat pocket.

"Hallo, Flemming!"

"You here, as usual, Locker?"

"Part of my business. I prescribe dancing for some of my patients, and I have to be here to see that they take it. Have you seen the sensation of the evening?"

"No."

"Come along, I'll show you."

He took Flemming by the arm, and so piloted him that one of the doorways leading from the vestibule served as a picture frame to Lalia and the man seated at the table.

"There's a problem for you, Flemming! What do you make of it?"

Flemming's eyes were studying the man. Fenton Bale was lounging in his chair, his dress shirt bulging forward, his yellow face lined and haggard, his right hand twirling a liqueur glass by the stem. He seemed to be sneering at life, a

malicious decadent, whose restless eyes saw little that was good, but very much that was evil.

"Who is the man, Locker?"

"Fenton Bale, and that bit of milk and charcoal is his wife."

Flemming's mouth hardened.

"Yes, I have met her, but I have not met the man. What is he?"

Locker was pulling on a pair of white gloves.

"A polyglot gentleman, a cosmopolitan—a bit of American, a bit of English and a bit of French mixed up into a very nasty mess, my dear Flemming. Plenty of money, a liver, and a devilish temper. Excuse me, there's the Marchesa; I must go and pay my respects."

Flemming was left alone in the doorway, where he was partly screened by a palm. Lalia Bale had not seen him, so he felt no guilt in remaining there for a while to watch her and the man who was her husband.

Lalia looked splendid, but it was a mute and haughty splendour that scornfully suffered some ordeal. She did not speak to Bale, did not look at him; her eyes seemed to be gazing at something a long way off; she was there, and she was not there. The soul of the woman had withdrawn itself to some inaccessible proud height where no one could follow.

Flemming was puzzled, but in a little while he understood. That Hawaiian girl was the dominant figure in the room; a glowing thing with an ice-cold face, a woman who drew men and rebuffed them when they sought her. Her beauty was like no other kind of beauty that Flemming had ever seen. She was the sex spirit idealised, mysterious, strangely pure.

The casino etiquette was easy; introductions were not demanded, and Flemming saw several men go up to the girl, bow, and ask her to dance. And each time she refused, and each time a yellow gleam of mocking self-satisfaction seemed to light up Fenton Bale's face. He had brought his wife there to show her off, like some rare gem that he flashed in the eyes of other men, boastfully, and with an ironical sneer. He had forbidden her to dance. She should sit there—and be his.

David Flemming understood, and the man in him was angered. Bale's gloating sense of possession was so patent, so offensive, that no one could have watched him without appreciating the truth. And Flemming felt a sudden disgust at the sight of this wreck of a man flashing this child's beauty in the eyes of the world, like some Jew dog mocking the Gentiles with the yellow leer of his own wealth.

There was more than anger in Flemming's mood. He was touched, stirred to an imaginative pity, able to feel the supreme humiliation that was being laid upon the woman.

Then their eyes met across the length of the long room. Lalia's face seemed to float for a moment in a tremulous haze of hesitation. Then she smiled. It was as though she asked to be rescued.

The band had struck up a waltz. Couples floated out and began to circle the room. Flemming made his way round, and found himself bowing to Lalia Bale.

"Will you dance with me?"

Her eyes flashed a rebellious "yes." As they glided away to the music Flemming caught a glimpse of Fenton Bale's face, and for the moment he was sorry that he had tempted Lalia to rebel. She would be made to suffer for it; Fenton Bale would see to that.

But there were other things besides the music to carry him away—to make him forget that shrivelled, yellow-cheeked man by the window. For the girl had risen to him with a rush of recklessness; her warm blood was afire, her supple body thrilling to the sinuous moan of the violins. Her eyes looked into his; her throat seemed full of laughter and

joy; if he was to match her physical exultation he would have no leisure to brood over the vicious jealousy of a sick and decadent man. Flemming was a fine dancer, but he had never danced with such a partner as this. She moved like a rhapsody, and Flemming's blood took fire. He was young again. He was the movement to her music, though some wild devil piped the tune.

They did not speak. There was an exultation in the flowing of their steps, and mere words would have marred the rhythm. People stopped to watch them, though it was doubtful whether they were conscious of anything but the music and their two selves. Then it became a *danse à deux*, the red and the black figure holding the room.

It was over. The leader of the band stood up, bowing in answer to a burst of applause. People began to talk; waiters came hurrying to take orders; the rooms and galleries were full of the shifting colours of the feminine crowd.

"That was splendid."

Her arm was resting in his and her eyes shone. He was about to lead her back to that table in the window recess.

"How hot it is in here!"

He changed his mind of a sudden, though there was more than a mere sensuous drift in the impulse that prompted him.

"It would be cooler in the gardens."

"Yes, let's go out. I don't want to dance again."

They passed through the crowded vestibule and down the steps into the garden. Men and women watched them, and then smiled at each other. A waiter came hurrying, a little round-eyed man with a worried, deprecating smile.

"Monsieur, monsieur, please! Ze gen'leman wish me to say——"

Flemming turned sharply.

"What is it?"

"Ze gen'leman wish me to say he go home, sir, and will madame put on her cloak."

Flemming glanced at Lalia. She looked pale and uncompromising.

"I shall not go yet. Tell Signor Bale that I will come later, *plus tard*, you understand?"

"Yes, madame."

She withdrew her arm from Flemming's, and there was the light of revolt in her eyes.

"Let him wait for me. I will please myself—for once."

Flemming was sobered. The waltz tune had changed to a sadder and more sinister movement. The glare of the casino had given place to the shadows of pines, cypresses, ilexes, and palms. Winding paths disappeared into the shadows. Here and there a light flickered, and they could hear the soft wash of the sea.

She put her head back, and seemed to draw in deep breaths, as though the night air cooled some inward flame within her. Her white throat showed. To Flemming there was something tragic in the poise of her head.

"Let's go down to the sea."

She swept on, and he followed; the path was narrow, so that they could not walk abreast.

"I am afraid the blame is mine."

She answered him quickly over her shoulder.

"What blame? Did you not see—you must have seen."

"You mean——"

"Oh, I must talk—I must talk, and somehow I feel that I know you—that I have known you for years. What fools we humans are—what cowards! But I saw by your eyes that you understood. How gross and hateful life can be made!"

She turned suddenly and faced him under the overspreading canopy of a pine.

"I can talk to you—I must talk to you. And you are not afraid of me? I am not like those women in there—who feed on a man's folly."

He answered her impulsively.

"I know that. We are children, you and I; we can understand each other."

She turned and walked on.

"The other day—on Monte Verde—what did you think?"

"That you were suffering."

He saw her put her hand to her throat.

"Oh, my God! is a woman to have no pride? Is she to be bullied, exposed like a tame beast—shown off before other men, to be made the creature of a man's evil whims? I was just a child when he married me. I did not know then. And he is clever; he has taken care to keep me at his mercy. Men are like that, but one might bear it from some men."

Flemming was mute for a moment. This passionate outburst of hers, so poignantly sincere, so vital, smote him like a wave of the sea. Its salt strength smothered him, lifted him away from the familiar rock of a man's habitual outlook upon life. He had a feeling of breathlessness, of being seized on and possessed by a rush of emotion that no amount of cool and selfish reasoning could withstand.

The path broadened out, and ended in a rough terrace built up on the rocks where the Italians bathed in spring and summer. The sea was very calm, with just a soft heaving that fringed each black rock with a little circle of foam. Across the bay the lights of the old town glittered in a clustering fringe that spread and thinned and died away upon the mountains. A couple of sailing boats were gliding in towards the harbour, mere grey ghosts upon the water.

Lalia and Flemming were quite alone. They stood and leant upon the parapet and watched each heave of the sea pouring a gush of foam into each little pothole and crevasse in the rocks below.

"How calm it is here! It makes me think of Hawaii."

He was silent awhile.

"Why not go back?"

By the way she glanced at him he knew that he had said a foolish thing.

"That is what makes life so difficult; one cannot go back. I should not be happy there; I have learnt too much, seen too much. I should seem a stranger to them, and they would seem strange to me. Besides, there are the Americans; I do not love them. What is more, I have no money."

She laughed suddenly and rested her chin on her hands.

"Do you know, I never have more than a franc in my purse. No, my friend, I am not going to ask you for money."

He answered hotly.

"It never crossed my mind."

"I believe you. He keeps me without money, so that I am tied to him by a golden rope. Oh, but it is hateful, talking like this; it sounds mean, horribly mean. Let's be just ourselves. Tell me about yourself. I feel—somehow—that you have suffered, that you are not a beast of prey—like other men."

He betrayed a gleam of humour.

"I don't know that I am so interested in myself."

"No? But I may be. Shall I read your character? I am rather good at reading people."

"Try."

"Let me feel one of your hands."

He gave her his left hand, and she ran the tips of her fingers over it, touching it lightly here and there.

"Sensitive, rather diffident, reserved—and a little obstinate."

"Oh, come!"

"An artist; I know that, and yet you are not an egoist. Not good at business; inclined to be too generous. That's strange; I feel you have lost someone who was very dear to you."

He answered her quietly.

"I lost my wife. Oh, about a year ago or more. I haven't been quite alive since then. Marriages are happy sometimes, you know."

And then she showed him another aspect of herself, a phase that proved that she was not a devourer, that she could give—as well as take.

"Won't you tell me about her?"

"I don't know. I have never talked about her to anybody."

"Perhaps it hurts too much?"

"It is not that. There are parts of one's life into which one never takes a third person."

She stretched out a hand and touched his arm.

"Oh, but I never asked for that. I would never desire to pry into the sacred things that belonged to another woman. But now I know why your voice sounds lonely. It struck me that way up on Monte Verde; it was like the voice of someone who was always remembering in the middle of saying something—that there was no one to listen, no one—I mean—who mattered. The one who mattered was no longer there."

He looked over the sea.

"That's true, utterly true. In the middle of doing things even now—painting a picture, for instance—I suddenly

realise she is not here, and life seems to break in the middle. Things do not seem worth while. I was ambitious. Yes, I suppose we were everything to each other."

"I can picture her. May I try?"

"Yes."

"She was rather fragile, pale, with large eyes and dark hair. But she had plenty of spirit, plenty of fun. She did not talk very much, but she was full of cleverness, understanding. She was one of those fragile, graceful women who make a man feel very protective, very tender. And yet she had an immense courage, more courage than you have. She helped you."

He turned to her in astonishment.

"How do you know all that?"

"How? It is what you make me feel, that is all I can say. Perhaps your loneliness paints a thought picture, for you were very lonely."

"Lonely? Good God! no one knows how awful that loneliness can be till they have been through it. I didn't want to go on living."

"But you did go on living."

"Somehow. I was very near ending it once or twice."

She sighed.

"Oh, I know. But perhaps it is worse to have to go on living with the dead body of the past in the same house with one. I think I know what loneliness means—a loneliness that has even no dreams left to it."

Flemming looked at her, and as he watched her pale face a strange thing happened to him. For suddenly his dead wife seemed to rise before him and to enter into the body of this island girl. The two women seemed to become mysteriously mingled. All the old poignant tenderness awoke in him and reached out towards the living as well as towards the dead.

"You and I seem to have drunk of the same cup. I am going to be your friend, Lalia. You can say things to me that you would say to your own self."

She remained motionless, brooding.

"Would she mind—if she knew?"

"I think not. She was always generous. And somehow I feel her—the eternal woman—in you."

Again she sighed.

"I cannot help hating him. And sometimes he drives me mad, for I am not like your passive white women; I have fire in my blood, and there are times when I feel that I shall do some desperate thing."

"You mean——"

"Kill myself—or kill him."

She uttered the words with the quietness of one who knew that she was uttering the truth. And Flemming looked at her with a sense of helplessness, feeling that he had been drawn into some inevitable and tragic current that was life itself, remorseless yet pathetic.

He turned and leant slightly towards her, resting his right arm along the wall.

"I should be a prig and a fool if I doubted that. But is he worth it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, he is a devil, an ingenious, tormenting devil. Whisky—and drugs. I try to think of him as he was, to realise that the thing that lives is a kind of caricature of the thing that is dead. And yet there is a horrible likeness in the caricature. He was always cruel, a little unscrupulous, but, then, it seemed a natural audacity, a masterfulness that appealed to a mere girl. I misread it all then; now I am wiser."

Suddenly they heard a harsh voice calling, the voice of a man who had lost all self-restraint.

"Lalia! Are you there? Where the devil are you?"

They looked at each other meaningly.

"I had better go. It maddens him to be kept waiting."

"I've been responsible. I am coming with you. I want you to introduce me."

"He will be rude to you."

"Let him be rude. What does it matter?"

She called to her husband.

"Is that you, Fenton? Where are you?"

"Up here, of course. Hurry along."

They found him at the top of the path that led down the cliff to the terrace above the bathing place. A solitary lamp burnt here, and a few iron chairs were ranged in a half-circle under a stone pine, and Fenton Bale was sitting on one of these iron chairs, the lamplight making his face look all shadowy and haggard.

He started up jerkily, unsteadily.

"Where the devil have you been? Didn't you get that message?"

"Yes, I got it, Fenton, but I meant to stay on a little longer. I want to introduce you to Mr. Flemming."

"Oh! And who the——"

He glared at Flemming, and for an instant these two men stood face to face, eyeing each other, measuring each other. Then Flemming held out a hand.

"Glad to meet you, sir. I must confess that I am the sinner. I'm an artist, and you have to make allowances for artists. We're infernal fools, of course."

He was easy, debonair, but that facile politeness of his was a grip laid on the throat of Bale's evil temper. He was determined that the fellow should behave himself, and not fall to snarling like a spoilt dog.

"You've kept me waiting, anyway. I'm an invalid, a sick man, sir."

"I'm sorry. Your wife and I have met before, and the casino was so confoundedly hot that we strolled down here. Are you driving back?"

"We shouldn't be walking, should we?"

"Hardly. Shall I get hold of a carriage for you?"

"Much obliged; the porter fellow's paid for that."

Flemming laughed, but there was an edge to his laughter.

"Your husband won't let me be officious, Mrs. Bale. Shall I lead the way? I know all these winding paths."

"Oh, there's my cloak. I left it in the cloak-room."

"Give me your number and I'll get it for you."

Flemming found them waiting at the entrance gates when he walked across the garden with Lalia's black velvet cloak over his arm. A powerful electric light hung from the iron arch over the gates, throwing a pale glare that made the foliage of the palms and the grass look a hard, metallic green. There were other people waiting, and there appeared to be a shortage of carriages, for Fenton Bale was kicking up a row with the concierge and not gaining in dignity thereby.

"Didn't I tell you to reserve me a carriage? Well, and why the blazes isn't there a carriage here? You won't get the ghost of a tip out of me."

The concierge was a big Frenchman who spoke English, and who had no intention of being bullied.

"Monsieur must wait his turn. The carriage is coming."

"Look here, my man, I don't want any impertinence. I ordered a carriage to be here at eleven; other people have got their carriages."

"That is so, monsieur." And the concierge's tone suggested that the other people had better manners, and that Mr. Bale might wait till midnight so far as he was concerned.

Flemming was helping Lalia with her cloak. His hands touched hers. She looked at him over her shoulder.

"Oh, I am used to this. Try if you can get us away."

Bale had pounced on a carriage that had driven up and was attempting to annex it, but a bearded Austrian with two ladies refused to be hustled out of his rights. He was very polite, but very determined. It was his private carriage; he managed to make Fenton Bale appreciate the fact.

People were smiling. Lalia drew aside under one of the palms and stood there haughtily. Flemming tackled the concierge, and dropped a two-lire piece into the man's hand.

He spoke to him in French and tapped his forehead suggestively.

"Monsieur is a little—— You understand. I apologise for him; you were quite in the right."

The concierge smiled.

"I am ready to oblige monsieur. He shall have the third carriage."

Flemming turned, and discovered that Bale had rejoined his wife and was making a further exhibition of himself by scolding at her.

"It's all your damned fault. What did you want to go gallivanting off for? You know it knocks me up to be out late."

Flemming felt very much tempted to take Bale by the scruff of the neck and shake him. The fellow seemed to have

no self-control, no sense of the fitness of things. He let himself be carried away by any animal impulse. The whole thing was absurd; but, like many absurd things, it was tragic.

"All right, sir, a carriage is coming."

He caught a flash of Lalia's eyes, a flash of gratitude and of appeal, and he went and stood, by her, looking at Fenton Bale with mesmeric intentness. He would stare the little cad into behaving himself, and his attitude succeeded.

In another moment he was handing Lalia into a carriage, though Bale had made a move to get in first.

"Good-night."

She had pressed his hand, and her eyes looked for a moment into his.

"Good-night."

"Acqua Dolce, cocchiere."

The carriage moved away, and Flemming stood under one of the palms, watching it. The band was still playing in the casino, Chaminade's "Autumn," and the music seemed to entangle itself with the emotions of the moment. How would that little beast behave now that he had her alone with him? And Flemming found that he had no delusions as to Fenton Bale's most probable attitude towards his wife.

What a monstrous thing it was that she should be made the victim of a decadent sot's vile humours! He was angry, generously angry, and mingled with his anger was a compassion that was not content to stand and philosophise. The vehemence and the drive of life had come back to David Flemming. The spirit of his dead wife seemed to have spoken to him by the mouth of Lalia Bale.

The carriage was rattling along the road that skirted the bay. There was the moist swish of the sea upon the shingle. From the windows of a tall house came the sound of laughter and the shrilling of a mandoline. The ilexes that lined the road met overhead and made a black tunnel.

Lalia was leaning back in her corner. Bale had begun before they had driven thirty yards, and she had let him snarl at her and given him not a word in return. He could rave like an hysterical woman, fling the most monstrous taunts at her, show all that malignant unreason that drives the most patient of mortals to despair.

"A nice fool you made of me. I suppose you think I'm a yellow dog, done for, a blasted corpse in trousers. Damn it, I'm not dead yet. I'm not going to die for a long time. You keep away from the men."

She did not answer, and her silence exasperated him.

"Who's this artist chap, anyway? Short of money, is he? You haven't given him those pearls, have you, to raise money on? Don't you try that game; I'm not going to be boobied into passing out the shekels for some other chap to pocket. Where are those pearls?"

She twisted the rope out of her hair and tossed them to him.

"Take them. But be very careful, Fenton, or some day you may discover that I have taken you at your word."

"Ah, would you? Yes, get yourself into the gutter, my dear. You know where those sort of adventures end."

"Fenton, do you know the kind of woman I am? No, I think not."

"Women—they're all alike; toss a man over when they've dragged all the fun out of him."

"Silence!"

She leant towards him and spoke so fiercely that he crumpled in his corner.

"Fenton, I shall kill you—some day; yes, kill you, if you talk to me like this."

David Flemming had not seen Lalia Bale for days, though he had climbed Monte Verde and wandered along the valley paths on the steep hillsides above the river. The image of her did not fade; it was no day's fancy, no momentary infatuation. On the contrary, it grew more distinct and compelling; he began to feel very lonely, and in his loneliness his thoughts turned to her.

Vineyards and olive groves surrounded Acqua Dolce, and grey stone walls shut in the villa grounds. The road ran along the eastern boundary, and there were paths that went up through the terraces where the olives grew. And Flemming began to haunt these paths, innocently enough. He would take his sketch-book with him and make studies of olives and cypresses and the river running in its rocky bed below. Only once did he see Lalia or have speech with her. Things were going badly; Bale had developed a new mania; he would hardly let her out of his sight.

Flemming was cutting down close to the wall one morning when he heard someone hailing him. It was a sneering and ironical voice, and had the same effect on Flemming as the sound of a file grating upon steel.

"Hallo! Mr. Gamboge. You seem to find a dashed lot of material round here."

Flemming glanced up and saw Bale looking down at him under the shade of a loquat tree.

"Good morning, sir."

Bale mimicked him.

"Good morning, sir. I'm not so damned polite as you are, sir. In fact, I see a dashed sight too much of you, sir."

Flemming smiled.

"Is that so?" he said.

"That is so, Mr. Gamboge. And my wife isn't on view—see. And if you try climbing over my wall you may get a jolly lot more than you bargain for."

It was not the face of a sane man that looked down at Flemming from under the shade of the loquat tree. It was all lined and yellow, with a cunning leer in the eyes, the face of a malicious faun.

Bale's insolence was ridiculous and vulgar, and Flemming was inclined to ignore it.

"You seem to have got some sort of prejudiced idea into your head."

Bale grinned at him.

"Look here, Mr. Juan; I'll show you what I carry in my pocket."

He dangled a nickel-plated revolver over the wall, and pointed it half-playfully at Flemming.

"I used to be a dead shot, old sport."

Flemming looked at him steadily.

"If you go walking about with toys like that you'll get yourself into trouble, Mr. Fenton Bale. I should lock it up if I were you."

"Not me. You haven't lived out West, in Mexico, and in some of those dirty republics. You dress with your pistol; it's part of the costume—see?"

He waved his hat.

"Good-bye, Gamboge. You keep on the right side of my wall, old fellow."

Flemming left him and walked on, but his face was a little grim. Bale's antics struck him as serious.

"The man's mad. He ought to be watched. Good God! he might take it into his brain to shoot her!"

Flemming took one of the mule-paths back to Villadoro, and on reaching the town he went straight to a little white villa that stood amid palms and camellias and mimosa on the hillside just above the Regina Hotel. Here James Locker and his wife lived for eight months of the year, two very popular healers, without whom the English who wintered at Villadoro would have to pour out their woes in German or Italian.

Dr. Locker was at home, rolling a supply of cigarettes as he sat in the loggia that overlooked the sea.

"Hallo, Leonardo! Stay to lunch? Glad to see you. Sit down."

"I have got a problem for you, Locker."

"Oh, good heavens! What is it, the disappearance of Mona Lisa?"

"I'll tell you."

Locker was no fool, though he sauntered through life rather like a pierrot. He listened seriously enough, rolling his cigarettes, and glancing now and again at Flemming with a kind of affectionate irony.

"You have got to look into this, Locker. No; I'm not a sentimental fool. You know something of Bale."

"Quite enough. He tried to choke me once in one of his riots. The man's a degenerate beast. I told him that he would drink and drug himself into Bedlam."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

Locker got up.

"Call Grace in," he said dryly. "It's a case for consultation. You didn't know that Grace ran the practice, did you, Leonardo?"

"I have a great admiration for your wife, Locker."

"She deserves it, my friend. Try rolling a few cigarettes while I go and explain things. I think she is writing letters in that room of hers under the tiles."

Grace Locker was an exceptional woman, a woman whose appearance made strangers imagine that she spent all her time and energy elaborating new dresses, putting a superfine polish upon her nails, and massaging that smooth and handsome face of hers in a triumphant revolt against wrinkles. She contrived to be immensely busy without ever appearing in a hurry. Her very charm owed much to its suggestion of leisureliness. She was amazingly efficient, that was the secret of it all. She contrived to be both the busiest and the best-dressed woman in Villadoro, simply because she knew what to do—and did it—while other women were talking.

"What a sensible man you are, David. Of course, you were thinking of me when you came to appeal to Jim."

She sat down in a basket chair, looking, fresh and delightfully young for a woman of forty. She was a fair woman, but she could still wear white in the morning without it making her look faded.

Flemming smiled at her.

"Of course, I had you in my thoughts. But I'm serious, Grace."

"Don't be a prig and assume that I'm frivolous because I don't moan. Jim has told me. I have been interested in that girl all the winter. She's one of the most fascinating things I have ever seen."

"And David wants to rescue her."

Flemming stared between the stone pillars of the loggia at the blue of the sea.

"Anyone would think, Locker, that you just trifled through life, and that you couldn't be in earnest about anything. I happen to know you. Grace couldn't have married a fool. I want you to go up to Acqua Dolce——"

"But I'm not going, David."

"But—look here——"

"I'm leaving it to Grace."

Flemming turned eagerly to Grace Locker.

"Will you go?"

"Of course. I've been thinking things over. The girl wants rescuing, bringing out among people; it is enough to make her morbid, being shut up with a man like Bale. He may be only a whimsical curmudgeon. People have cut him; a little human flattery might work wonders with the man. I'll try it; I'll just be charming to him, and get him to let the girl come and help with that fête of ours at the Villa Scala. That can serve as an excuse, and I can see what's to be made of Mr. Fenton Bale."

Flemming looked grateful but troubled.

"I suppose it's safe—for you——"

Locker laughed shrewdly.

"Grace would be safe anywhere. You need not picture Bale threatening her with a revolver. I'd trust her to manage a case of homicidal mania."

"If you think it's all right—"

"Of course, it's all right. Grace has struck an idea. Let her try her cunning on Mr. Fenton Bale."

So Grace Locker drove up the winding valley round to Acqua Dolce and called on the Bales.

She found herself in a long salon paved with marble, its windows opening upon a loggia all overgrown with vines and bougainvillea and Banksia roses. A little Italian garden lay below the loggia, with two fountains throwing plumes of water into the sunlight. The salon was full of fine old furniture; it was plain that Fenton Bale had money.

And then Lalia came in, dressed in a simple white dress with a red rose and a scarf of the same colour. She looked depressed and tired, for even her superb physique could not carry her through such a life as she was leading without betraying signs of strain.

The two women looked at each other interestedly. They were such utter contrasts—Grace Locker with her slim, fair elegance; Lalia with her rich and dusky comeliness and her sad eyes. They were attracted to each other, and Grace Locker knew how to make the most of such a tendency.

"What a lovely place you have here! Of course, you know its history. I have often felt that I should like to live here—in a house of actual romance."

"I suppose they were happy——"

"I have always heard so. I know an old padre who knew them, and he said they were like a pair of children, even when they had grown grey. I have come to ask you if you will do something for me."

"Oh!"

"We are getting up a fête for the Italian hospital; it is going to be held in the grounds of the Villa Scala. I am wondering if you would help me."

Lalia hesitated.

"I should love to, but——"

"Put the 'buts' on one side."

She seemed to force herself to speak.

"Mrs. Locker, my husband is an invalid—with queer whims and prejudices——"

"Well, let me ask him."

"You might try. I should love to help."

"I am quite ready to be importunate."

Her opportunity was on the threshold, for Fenton Bale came in, looking shrunken and yellow, a sloven who had not been shaved. He glanced sulkily at Mrs. Locker, and gave her a curt nod when Lalia introduced him.

Bale was not a promising subject, but Grace Locker attacked him with all her delightful guile. Very few men could withstand her, but Bale had become something less than a man, and this refined and clever woman seemed to irritate him, even while she was being charming. The brute in him refused to be fascinated, and in asserting its independence contrived to be insolent.

"I suppose it's a question of money, isn't it? All right. I'll give you a subscription—if that's what you want."

"It's your wife I want, Mr. Bale."

He grinned maliciously.

"Then you won't get her, ma'am. The fact is, my wife doesn't know how to behave, so I keep her at home, except when I go out myself."

Grace Locker flushed slightly. She glanced at Lalia, and felt humiliated for the girl's sake.

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Bale. In fact——"

He interrupted her rudely.

"What's that matter, anyhow? My wife's not going to swank round at your show, but I'll give you a hundred francs and leave it at that. I don't want to be in with the Villadoro crowd."

It was Lalia who rose with a meaning look at Grace Locker.

"You see," her eyes said, "he will only insult us both. He is quite impossible."

Grace rose also. She looked steadily at Fenton Bale, but she was too wise, too much herself, to squabble with such

a man. He was what he had made himself, a shrunk and bedrugged thing, a rotten apple ready to drop from the tree.

"I cannot take money that is given in such a spirit."

He laughed, showing his teeth.

"Oh, all right. Then I save a hundred francs."

She shook hands with Lalia, gave her a compassionate smile, and walked back to the carriage.

But she was angry. Grace Locker was not the woman to be pleased at being balked by a little blackguard, even though he might not be responsible for his actions.

She had reached the flight of steps leading down to the iron gates when she heard someone behind her.

"Mrs. Locker!"

Grace turned and saw Lalia in her white dress, the sunlight striking through the olives and making a patterning of shadow all about her.

"I wanted to say I'm sorry. I couldn't help him being rude to you."

Grace's eyes lit up.

"My dear, of course I understand that. And really—I'm very angry with that husband of yours. I like you."

Lalia's lips quivered, and she seemed to be struggling to hide her emotion.

"And I like you—too. Somehow—you made me feel good directly I saw you."

"Well, see more of me; I should welcome it. Why let your husband tyrannise?"

Lalia shrugged her shoulders.

"He is not reasonable; it is impossible to argue with him. And if I anger him—I know that I shall be afraid—not of him, but of myself. I have to set my teeth and keep my patience. Good-bye, I must go now."

She turned abruptly and made her way back towards the house, leaving Grace Locker full of a new compassion.

"The little beast! Why doesn't he poison himself or shoot himself, and have done with it?"

But she was in a serious mood when she described her experiences to her husband.

"David Flemming is right," she confessed. "I am half afraid of something tragic happening at Acqua Dolce."

The same evening David Flemming heard the result of the attempt to rescue Lalia. He was sitting in the loggia of the Lockers' villa, with the lights of Villadoro strung across the bay, and Grace Locker a dim figure in white lying back in a cane chair beside him. Locker had been called out to see a patient at one of the hotels, an athletic lady who had broken her ankle on the steep path to Monte Cavallo.

Close to Flemming a big camellia growing in a stone vase was starred with white flowers that looked like snowy rosettes on a cloak of black velvet. The night was supremely still. They could hear the band playing in the casino gardens.

"What can one do in such a case, my friend? You cannot rush up, take the little wretch by the scruff of the neck and threaten to shake the life out of him if he doesn't mend his ways. Besides, I don't think Fenton Bale is capable of changing. He is just one of those wretched, fateful little figures that go bobbing through life, exasperating everybody and

causing endless trouble. It's sordid and tragic and utterly puzzling."

Flemming was leaning forward, his hands clasped between his knees.

"Would one keep a leopardess and some miserable and depraved ape in the same cage? And yet we humans persist in such inhumanity."

"You cannot reason on those lines, David. We are not mere animals. There are some things that have to be borne, and sometimes we are the better for bearing them."

"The old moral, that because a thing is nasty it helps to build up character. Let's get down to the tragic facts. Do you think that girl can go on living with that little blackguard and not revolt? She is not English; she is prouder, cleaner than most Englishwomen."

"What do you mean, David?"

"Oh—well, she may kill him. That's what I mean."

Grace Locker raised herself in her chair.

"Then you, too, have felt that?"

"I have."

"And what can one do? I don't want to persuade you, my friend, into thrusting yourself into a tragedy."

"Do you know that she reminds me of Norah?"

"What—this girl?"

"Yes. There is the same impulsiveness, the same naïveté, the same psychical colour. Strange, isn't it? Something has been reawakened in me. It was as though Norah were alive and married to that little beast."

Grace Locker looked at him in the dusk.

"David, don't be mad. You may make things worse."

He answered her with quiet passion:

"No, I am not that selfish sort of scoundrel. But I am not going to stand aside and do nothing. Surely I can be a friend to her, a comrade."

"Oh, be very careful. Where do such friendships end—in many cases? No; I'm not an opportunist and a cynic, but people get hurt when trying to be heroic. And yet——"

"Well?"

"You must follow your own calling. The fact is, I like you, David; you are my very good friend; I'm quite a motherly person. Why not let things drift a little, and wait in patience?"

"Because," and his voice was solemn, "I am afraid of what might happen—while I waited."

When Flemming left the Lockers' villa he did not turn straight towards his hotel, but took the road that crossed to the old Roman bridge and led beside the river towards Acqua Dolce. He felt irresistibly drawn towards the white house among the palms and cypresses, with its garden full of the noise of running water and olive trees softening the grey walled terraces. Compassion possessed him, and something deeper than compassion. He was re-dreaming the dreams of fifteen years ago.

The villa gates were locked, but he climbed one of the rough walls and went wandering about the garden with its dusky alleyways and its turf walks between rose hedges and trellised vines. There was a light in one of the upper windows, but Flemming dared not go too near the house, though his imagination set that light in Lalia's room and made him think of her as wakeful and very lonely. He greeted her in his heart, this child of the south nurtured in London, Rome, Paris, and Vienna.

If Flemming gained anything by that midnight ramble—he gained a certain decision, and the sulky stare of the porter who had to let him into the hotel. Nor did the morning put an end to the night's mood. He took his artist's baggage under his arm and started for the woods on the hill slope above Acqua Dolce.

So steep was the hillside that Flemming was able to see down into the villa garden; in fact, it was set out like a toy stage below him, with its terraces and statues, its groves of cypresses, its rose walks and stone fish ponds, its little Grecian theatre partly hidden by the encircling mystery of the towering trees. Acqua Dolce had been a house of romance. Love had planned all those quaint and formal terraces, those fountains and pools, those secret paths through green glooms, that little classic theatre open to the blue heaven. Flemming found himself thinking of the woman who had danced in that theatre, that wonderful woman who had set half Italy afire.

And then he saw Lalia, a little white figure moving along one of the terraces where orange trees grew in stone pots. He saw her pause and bend over one of the pools, and then disappear up a stone stairway under a smother of roses. For a while he lost sight of that thread of white, but suddenly she appeared within the grey curve of the Grecian theatre. He could see her above and between the cypresses, a figure that moved to no rhythmic music, but a figure that went hither and thither restlessly, pausing now and again to lean against the balustrade and look up at Monte Verde and the woods upon the hills.

Flemming stood up and willed her to see him. And presently she turned and stared fixedly in his direction. He had chosen a place where he was screened from the windows of the villa.

For fully half a minute the distant figure did not move.

He waved his arm. She waved back. Then she appeared to be pointing towards the top of the cypresses, and Flemming guessed what he wished to guess.

They met at the low stone wall that shut off the garden from the woods above. A row of cypresses threw a mass of shadow here, their sharp spires motionless against the blue of the sky.

"I wondered whether I should see you again."

She was wearing a red camellia in her white dress, and the flower was the colour of blood.

"Well, I had to come."

Her eyes met his with perfect frankness. There was no guile in her attitude towards him, none of the self-conscious cunning of the feminine intriguer.

"You can trust me, Lalia. I should not be here—but for that."

She smiled at him.

"Trust you! Of course I trust you. I am quick in such things. Do you think I should have let you paint me that day on Monte Verde if I had not known instantly what sort of man you were? Should I have danced with you that night? Should we have talked—as we talked—down there by the sea?"

"Do you know—I began to live again—that night? We seemed to come together out of our two lonely lives. I want to know how things are with you."

A swift change came over her face. She rested her arms on the top of the wall and stared up at the pinewoods.

"I feel that I can talk to you as I might talk to myself."

"Talking helps us. You saw Grace Lockyer yesterday?"

"You sent her? I guessed it."

"I thought she might get you out into the life down yonder. She is a sort of queen in Villadoro."

Lalia rested her chin on her wrists.

"It was good of you, David. But, then—he is mad, and yet most horribly sane. It is like living with a cunning and malicious devil, to whom nothing is too petty or too monstrous. He is asleep—now. I am trying to be patient."

"I know."

"You must have no will of your own. Every maddening freak of his has to be humoured. It would be funny if it weren't horrible. One moment he is in an absurd rage about nothing, the next he is trying to be affectionate. Oh, my God; it is that which is so difficult to bear!"

She hid her face suddenly in her arms, as though ashamed and utterly humiliated. It was a mute anguish, poignant, silent, motionless. Her woman's pride, all the intimate delicacies of life were in voiceless revolt.

And Flemming was stirred to the deeps. This was no melodrama, no piece of play-acting, no pretty tale dreamed in a dreamer's brain. The figure in the white dress was terribly real, terribly appealing. He wanted to touch her, to feel his hand smoothing that dark brown hair of hers, to raise her head and make her look into his eyes.

"Lalia, I have got to help you—somehow."

She lifted her head.

"No one can help me. I have taken a fate and I must live it through. And yet you do help me."

She stretched out a hand and he held it fast.

"You can talk to me; tell me everything. I understand. I don't ask for anything. I'll just come here, and you shall talk. It is something to have a listener."

"But I don't know whether I shall let you come here. It will be utter selfishness on my part."

"Then I am guilty of selfishness."

"Yes, but you don't realise——"

It was Flemming who saw Bale's grinning face appear from behind one of the cypresses, and by an effort he restrained himself and did not let go of Lalia's hand.

"What the devil are you two playing at—anyhow?"

Lalia went white as her dress. She glanced over her shoulder and tried to withdraw her hand. But there was a touch of the divine madness in David Flemming, a spirit that rebelled at the thought of compromise or of shrinking from a crisis in which the enemy was so contemptible. He found himself refusing to feel embarrassed or to confess that Fenton Bale had any right to mouth at him.

"If you want to know the truth, sir, I came here with the express purpose of seeing your wife. She did not know that I was coming."

Fenton Bale flourished his arms.

"I like your infernal insolence."

Flemming put Lalia's hand away and, leaning over the wall, looked steadily at Fenton Bale.

"You happen to have a very charming wife, Mr. Bale. Other men realise it—if you do not. And supposing I were to tell you that I had just asked her to leave you—and that she had refused."

Bale stared at him, like a dog who has made up his mind to bite an intruder and is astonished by the intruder attacking instead of waiting to be attacked. His yellow face looked flat, inept and puzzled.

"Well, this is the funniest darned situation I ever fell into—anyway!"

He glanced rancorously at Lalia.

"Let's have no more of this fooling. I'm not the sort of child to stand it—see? I've lived in rough countries——"

Lalia turned to Flemming:

"Please leave it to me."

Her eyes appealed to him, willed him to go. The whole situation seemed so impossible, for there were no hidden generosities in Fenton Bale that could be aroused by rivalry. He was not sane; he was not even human in any reasonable sense, and Lalia knew him better than David Flemming did.

Bale's hand went into the side pocket of his coat; he was grinning.

"I've got something here that can talk, old sport."

Flemming seemed to hesitate, but a glance from Lalia warned him against meddling.

"Oh, run away, Mr. Flemming, or my husband will be taking all this seriously. What an innocent you are, Fenton, not to see that Mr. Flemming has been ragging you!"

She laughed quite merrily, and caught Bale by the arm.

"Good-bye. Next time please come in by the gate."

Bale had begun to mutter something, but that shrunken, bedrugged body of his was incapable of much physical independence. This girl from the south could have lifted him in her arms and carried him off like a child. She pushed him through the cypresses, laughing, and calling back to Flemming:

"Good-bye. It really was wrong of you to try and hold my hand."

Flemming did not move, but stood leaning against the wall and staring at the row of cypresses through which those two had disappeared. He had more than a suspicion that he had blundered on to the edge of a tragedy, and that the steel-bright thing that lay in Bale's pocket might have spoken with irresponsible violence. He had seen a momentary panic in Lalia's eyes. He realised that he had been at the mercy of a morphi-maniac's savage whim.

But Lalia! It was monstrous that she should have to live on the edge of a possible fatality. The man was irresponsible. He might shoot her, shoot himself. He was like so much dynamite, with a candle burning close by.

For a moment he felt tempted to climb the wall and follow them, but saner thoughts prevailed. She knew Bale, she knew how to handle him. He had only made things more difficult for her by trying to thrust a chivalrous sympathy into her life. And so he climbed back into the woods to get a view of the villa garden. No one was to be seen there save a man in bright blue trousers hoeing one of the lower terraces where olives grew.

All that evening Fenton Bale sat brooding in the loggia like a little yellow god staring at nothing with sullen and

expressionless eyes. His face was a mere wrinkled mask. He neither moved nor spoke nor took notice of anything. Coffee, liqueurs, his Russian cigarettes were left untouched on the ebony and mother of pearl table beside him. He just stared and stared like a corpse propped in a chair.

Lalia had brought a book and a reading-lamp out into the loggia, but he had repulsed her sullenly when she had suggested that she should read to him.

"Put that dashed light out. I don't want to hear that sort of twaddle."

And so they sat on together while the darkness fell, and the green leaves of the vines on the trellises turned black. Stars glittered above the mountains. They could hear the river in the valley rushing over its rocky bed.

To Lalia this silence became charged with a feeling of fatality. She could not escape from a strange sense of impending dread. The man in the chair had become a vague blur, but his grey face was like the dim face of a ghost. There was something frightening in his immobility, in his utter silence. She wondered what was passing in his mind, whether this mood was the last sinister phase of his soul's madness.

They had not spoken of the affair of the morning. She had just laughed it aside, and her laughter seemed to have dominated him, though she had caught him watching her with a kind of sinister and secret interest.

She yawned and stretched out her arms.

"You are not gay company, Fenton."

He did not answer her for a moment.

"Not like your artist friend."

"Why worry about that? Am I never to speak to a living creature?"

"Go to bed," he said laconically.

And she left him there sunk in his chair,

Lalia's room communicated with her husband's, but she locked both doors that night. She was brushing her hair when she heard him come upstairs, and she remained motionless, expecting him to speak to her. But he passed her door without pausing and went to his room, and for a long while she heard him moving restlessly to and fro. Roberts, his English servant, had been fastening the shutters and locking the doors downstairs. Bale was still moving about his room when she got into bed, but presently his restlessness seemed to come to an end. The sense of tension relaxed, and she fell asleep.

This sleep of hers was not to last through the night, and she awoke from it suddenly with a sense of clamour in her brain. Someone had been calling, calling, and the voice had tangled itself up in the bizarrerie of a restless dream.

She sat up, chilled, vaguely disturbed. For the moment the house seemed silent; a full moon was shining; there was no wind to rattle the shutters. And then she understood.

A sudden outcry came from her husband's room, and the voice was like the voice of a frightened child terrified by some dream. It was shrill, querulous and insistent, suggestive of panic.

Lalia slipped out of bed, put on a dressing-jacket, lit a candle, and went out into the passage. The childish outcry continued. She tried the door and found it unlocked.

"Fenton, what is it?"

"I'm dying—I'm dying."

She closed the door, set the candle on a table and sat down on the edge of the bed. For the first few seconds she was confused and not a little frightened, for he was breathing jerkily and tossing his arms to and fro, his jacket wide open, the muscles showing in his throat. She laid a hand over his heart; it was beating rapidly, but not like the heart of a dying man.

Her intuition helped her to sum up the situation. The man was hysterical—something had thrown him into a panic.

"What has frightened you, Fenton?"

He bleated the same cry.

"I'm dying."

"No, no, lie still; you have had nightmare."

He gave her one queer, half-cunning, half-agonized look, and then burst into tears. His hands came clutching at her; he dragged himself round in the bed and tried to snuggle his face into her bosom.

"I was choking; I woke up choking. I was dying—and no one cares. Why don't you send for a doctor? You don't care—you'll be glad——"

He clung to her, convulsed, pitiable, like a scared child. And the first spasm of repulsion quivered out of her throat; she held him in her arms—this little wreck of a man who sobbed and complained.

"There—there, I'm here; I'll stay with you. You're frightened, that's all. I'll stay here with you."

"It was awful. I couldn't breathe. You won't leave me—you won't run away——"

"No, no."

"I've been a beast sometimes. I'm so cold, I'm shivering."

She made him lie down.

"There—get warm. I'll sit here—and hold your hand. You'll feel better soon."

Hers was no affectation of compassion. She had no love for the man, but his terror, the very misery of his cowardice, even his pitiable selfishness, called to the woman in her. Some primitive instinct answered his child's wail. She laid a hand on his forehead.

"You've been dreaming. Doesn't that feel cool and soft? I'll sit here with you and you must go to sleep. Try and go to sleep. I'll frighten the bad dreams away."

Her presence seemed to soothe him, and presently he fell asleep, clutching her hand tightly so that she could not move without awaking him. She decided not to leave him, but to sit the night out beside him, and her compassion carried her through.

That vigil brought her new thoughts and a new inspiration as she listened to her husband's breathing, and to the rushing of the river over the rocks below. She had a vision of a further effort, of a further struggle to bear with this man. Life had meant a renunciation of all that youth desires. She would still strive to play her part, to humour him, to save him from his meaner self.

So the dawn came; yellow light slanted through the shutters; a mule team went up the road with a jingling of bells. The sanctuary on Monte Verde sent out a morning chime.

When Fenton Bale awoke he found himself holding Lalia's hand. For a moment he did not remember the scene he had made in the night. He blinked at her as though bemused and puzzled.

"So you slept after all, Fenton? I kept the dreams away."

"Slept! Did I call you up?"

"I have been sitting here for about five hours."

"Good Lord!"

She saw by his eyes that he remembered.

"I've been thinking, Fenton; thinking hard."

"What, all the night?"

"Part of it."

She freed her hand and went and opened one of the shutters. The morning sun poured in, and the white walls of the villa seemed washed by a sea of green.

"It is a wonderful morning, Fenton. The olives are all blue and there is not a cloud in the sky."

He lay there apathetically and did not answer her.

"Just the morning to start on a holiday. Why shouldn't we start on a holiday?"

"What sort of a holiday do you think I'm fit for? I don't want to go gallivanting about."

She sat on the window-ledge and the sunlight played in her hair.

"I don't mean an actual holiday, Fenton. Why shouldn't we make a new beginning—start a new bit of life? It's possible."

He pulled himself up in bed.

"What d'you mean?"

"We haven't been very happy—have we, Fenton? I'm ready to let bygones be bygones and to start afresh. Let us try."

"So I'm to blame, am I?"

"I never spoke of blame. Everybody has something to forgive. My quarrel is with that thing—over there."

She pointed to a little rosewood cabinet that stood on the top of a chest of drawers. Bale's eyes followed the pointing of her hand. He grunted.

"Can't do without it—now."

She went and stood facing him.

"Don't you realise that you have got to choose—to choose between me—and the stuff in that cabinet? Make a fight for it. I'll help; I'll do all that I can."

"It's no use," he said sullenly; "you can't fight against a thing that has become a food."

But she would not let him surrender, and she set out to make a last effort to save her husband from the curse of the crave he had created. Perhaps the man's better self shone out momentarily through the fog of opium; perhaps her pleading proved even more powerful than a potent drug. At all events she won him over, though he joined her sullenly like a man

who misdoubted his own strength.

"All right. Chuck it away. The key's in my purse—there—on the table."

She found the key and unlocked the rosewood cabinet. In it were rows of little bottles, a pile of chip boxes, and a couple of hypodermic syringes in gilt cases. She gathered all the plunder in a fold of her night-dress, and stood looking compassionately at her husband.

"Promise me that is all, Fenton."

"Yes; that's the lot."

"I will make it up to you. I am going to throw these into the river."

In half an hour she was standing on a rocky bank above one of the deep pools in the valley. The stream foamed into it from above, but where the rush had spent itself the pool was wonderfully clear and the colour of green glass. She had brought a little bright-coloured leather bag with her, and she stood on an outjutting rock and tossed bottles and syringes into the water. She was very solemn over it, and her eyes looked sad; perhaps she doubted the permanence of her triumph.

Climbing back to the road and rounding the corner where the terrace wall jutted out, she walked straight into David Flemming. He was standing in the shade of an overhanging pine and looking up towards the house whose red roof showed through the foliage.

"You are out early."

She noticed at once how serious his eyes were.

"I was worried; I admit it."

"Yes, but I have news for you. I must not stay more than two minutes. He is waiting for me, and he is just like a child this morning."

She told him all that she had to tell, but Flemming's eyes did not brighten to hers. He, too, misdoubted the value of this victory.

"He has let you throw all his drugs away?"

"Yes. I mean to stand by him and help him to fight through."

He looked at her gravely, compassionately, for there was an air of sadness and resignation about her, as though she were none too sanguine, but had made up her mind to go through with it to the end.

"It's splendid of you."

"Oh, no, it's nothing of the kind. Perhaps it's despair. Good-bye. I must go. I'll—I'll write to you sometimes."

"I shall be down at Villadoro. Send for me—if——"

She gave him one look and hurried on as though she could not trust herself to say more.

"Good-bye. I shan't forget you."

Dr. Locker, driving along the sea-front of his smart carrozza, sighted a man leaning over the parapet and watching the waves playing over the rocks below. Locker ordered the driver to stop and, jumping out, crossed the footpath and

leant over the parapet close to Flemming, but the artist was so absorbed in some thoughts of his own that he did not glance at the man at his side.

Locker looked at him shrewdly.

"Hallo! Leonardo."

Flemming turned sharply.

"Hallo! I didn't realise who it was. In a way you are opportune."

"Thanks. Get in and drive; I have to go to San Pietro."

They went bowling along the dusty road overhung by pines and ilexes and mimosa trees, with villa gardens on one side and the blue of the sea on the other. For a while they chatted about the Villa Scala bazaar, the tennis tournament in the casino gardens, and the expected visit of the English Mediterranean fleet. But this was mere dust so far as David Flemming was concerned, though he was shy with the shyness of a man who is fiercely in earnest.

"I say, Locker, I want to ask you something."

"Well, ask away."

"When a man who has the drug craving has the drug suddenly taken away from him, what happens?"

"Sometimes he collapses, even dies."

"Yes?"

"Or goes off his head and does something violent."

"That's what I thought. I may as well tell you the truth, Locker. Mrs. Bale has persuaded her husband to let her throw all the stuff away, and I tell you—I'm worried."

Locker was in a cynical mood.

"I shouldn't worry. He has another hoard hidden away somewhere. That is always the way. They are very cunning—the poor devils."

"Then you think he only made a pretence——"

"I'd swear to it. The only way to make sure that such a man as Bale does not get his particular drug is to shut him up in a nursing-home with people he can't bribe round him. I expect there is morphia hidden in every corner of that house."

"You may be right."

"My dear man, I have had to deal with a good many drug-maniacs in my time."

Flemming might be outreasoned, but he was not reassured. A peculiar restlessness took possession of him that day; it was as though telepathic suggestion were at work, beating a mysterious warning into his brain. Towards evening it grew more imperious, more suggestive. He dined as usual at his hotel, took his coffee under a palm in the garden; chatted to a couple of American women, and then broke away. Something was driving him up towards Acqua Dolce, something born of a restless imagination, or of a mysterious sympathy that no mechanical theory could explain.

It was a rare night; a full moon was shining, and the road lay white between dark walls and gardens. The mountains were sharp ridged and black against a sky of steel. The river running in the valley made a noise like thunder.

It took Flemming half an hour to reach Acqua Dolce. The white walls of the house gleamed between the palms,

cypresses, and ilexes; the iron gates were closed.

On the opposite side of the road rose a grass bank topped by a few old olive trees, whose delicate foliage caught the moonlight and made a lacework of silver and jet. Flemming climbed the bank, and sat down on a gnarled root of one of the trees. He could see the upper windows of the villa; the shutters were not closed, and the moonlight played upon the glass. Here and there a stone figure on the balustrades of the terrace walks shone white amid the gloom of shrubs and trees. The river thundered below, but no wind stirred the leaves of the olives.

Was it a mere superstitious whim that had brought him here—a mysterious voice speaking in the air? He wondered. Nothing could have seemed more peaceful than this Italian valley, sleeping in the moonlight. It suggested no possible tragedy. And the sound of the bells ringing in the campaniles on the hills shivered through it with a thrill of mystery and of awe.

Flemming's eyes fixed themselves suddenly on a path that came winding down through the garden from one of the upper terraces. He thought he had seen something move there, gliding along the curves that were sometimes in the shadow, sometimes in the moonlight.

He sat at gaze, his face sharpening. The path ended in a formal walk along the terrace at the top of the boundary wall. A figure appeared there—a figure in a white dress, with hair black as the shadows under the trees. It was Lalia.

She threw a hurried glance up and down the road below, but she did not notice the man sitting under the olive tree, for he kept quite still, and his dark clothes merged into the outlines of the tree trunks. Flemming saw her climb the low wall, and let herself down by her hands. There was a drop of some five feet, but she landed lightly in the road below.

Flemming did not move. A kind of intuitive and tragic curiosity possessed him. What was she about to do?

Lalia did not hesitate. Some very definite purpose seemed to possess her, for she started up the road with quick, silent steps. She had come out barefooted—that was why her feet made no sound.

As she disappeared round the curve of the road Flemming sprang down the bank and followed her. He had realised with sudden vividness what this escapade of hers might mean.

Lalia had heard him. He had a glimpse of her looking back as he came in view, her face white in the moonlight. He shouted to reassure her.

"It's Flemming. I want to speak to you."

But she gave a strange cry, turned, and started running up the road away from him.

Flemming went in pursuit. He had been something of an athlete as a youngster, but he found himself being left behind by this child of the Pacific. Never had he seen a girl run as she ran—beautifully, like a wild thing, lissome and very strong. Her short, loose skirt did not hinder her, and her bare feet seemed to give her grip and speed.

He hailed her once more:

"Lalia—stop!"

But she paid no heed, and he saved his breath to make a race of it, a race that hinted at some tragic goal. He began to gain on her a little along one of the straight grey stretches of the mountain road.

Suddenly he saw her swerve to one side and take a path that led downwards through a plantation of olives. Flemming knew that path, and whither it led. Someone had built a rough stone belvedere at the top of a precipice that overhung the river, where a magnificent view could be had right down the valley, with Villadoro lying white on the edge of the sea.

He had been running like a man; now he ran as a desperate lover. It was to be a battle of wills, and of bodies. He

was racing her for her life.

The path ran about two hundred yards before it reached the plateau overhanging the river, and Flemming was some thirty yards behind the figure in the white dress. Yet Lalia looked like beating him in that death race, for her bare feet seemed to give her a better grip.

"Thank God!"

She had stumbled and fallen forward, and the cry burst from him impulsively. But she was up again before he could reach her.

"Go back—go back!"

"Lalia—give in!"

She dashed on, with Flemming after her. He gained, and caught her at the bottom of the short flight of rough steps that led down to the platform.

"Lalia!"

She struggled with him, and her strength almost overmatched his.

"Let me go, David—let me go!"

"No—no!"

He had his arms around her and she tried to break his grip, her hair clouding in his face.

"Let me go—do let me go!"

"I cannot!"

She panted:

"I cannot bear it! I must kill myself before he drives me to madness."

"You shall not kill yourself; neither shall he drive you mad."

"David—I shall kill him."

"No. Give in to me, dear. I am stronger than death."

The despair seemed to go out of her quite suddenly. She surrendered, and he felt her limp in his arms. He had to hold her. Her arms went round his neck; her head lay on his shoulder.

"Oh—my dear—what shall I do?"

She broke down, and all her passionate soul seemed to dissolve in anguish. He held her close and smoothed her hair. He was touching a woman and a child.

"Tell me——"

She shivered.

"Oh, I was wrong. A devil seemed to seize him when he had lost his drugs. I cannot tell you, David. I cannot go on living with him. He fell asleep, and I seized my chance."

Flemming was deeply moved.

"Lalia, you and I are strangers to each other, and yet somehow you have given me back the will to live. Sit down here with me, and let us see what we can make out of this tangle."

He led her to the belvedere overlooking the valley. They could see Villadoro shining white in the moonlight and the river flashing and foaming in the valley below. Fleming kept hold of her hand, and held it so firmly that she smiled at him with her wet eyes.

"I shan't throw myself over, David. That mood has gone."

He did not let her hand go, nor did she try to withdraw it.

"We must face things, Lalia. You cannot go on living this life."

"But what am I to do?"

He was silent for some while, thinking.

"Listen to me. I happen to be fairly well off, so far as money goes. I am going to ask you to let me give you what you need. I'm not making a bargain; I'm not asking for anything in return. You must go away and live your own life, and I can help you to begin it."

She looked at him with shining eyes.

"But I can't take your money."

"Why not?"

"Because it is yours."

"Oh, nonsense!" he broke out passionately. "Of course you can take it. I'm not making any cad's bargain with you. What is money for but to be used, and I have more than I know what to do with. I might send it to a charity, or write a cheque for some relative I don't care twopence about. Lalia, you'll take it?"

"No."

"Yes. Because I shall know that you don't trust me if you refuse."

She covered her eyes with her hand.

"Oh, what problems! But to escape! Yes, I'll take it, David. I'll go to Vienna. I had friends there. I'm not afraid to work. I can speak four languages, and I could teach. But how shall I go?"

He thought a moment.

"Go back to-night; bear one more night there. Then to-morrow morning come down to Villadoro; I will meet you in the Casino gardens at eleven. I can manage things; you shall have enough to carry you along for the moment. Go to Genoa, buy a trunk and some clothes, and then go on to Milan and Vienna. Write to me from there, and I will arrange to have more money sent to you. Is not that very simple?"

She sighed.

"It sounds so simple. I will go back to-night and think it over. I promise to meet you in the morning and tell you what I have decided."

She rose, hesitated, and then looked straight into his eyes as he stood beside her.

"You have willed me to live, David. You have been very good to me. And there is nothing that I can do in return."

"But there is, Lalia. Go on living, and so helping me to live. A month ago I did not care whether I lived or died; in fact, I think I would rather have had death. But I do care now."

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

"And I care, too. Do you doubt it? Something sang in my heart that night when we danced together. But there, we must just be comrades, and I must be going back."

They wandered slowly through the olive groves, where the moonlight sifted through and made delicate patterns on the ground. Silence had fallen upon them—a silence that was intimate and mysterious. Now and again they looked into each other's eyes and smiled.

The road lay white and empty before them, with a black shadow falling across it here and there where a pine or a cypress intercepted the moonlight. They reached the wall where Lalia had let herself drop from the terrace below.

"The gates are locked."

"Then I must help you up."

An old fig tree hung down in one place. Flemming took Lalia in his arms and lifted her up till she could get a grip of the tree. He made a stirrup with his hands for one of her bare feet. She drew herself up, stood for a moment on his shoulder, and then scrambled to the top of the wall.

Flemming was looking at one of his hands.

"I say, you have cut your foot."

"Have I? It can't be very much. I did not feel it. I must creep in now. Good night."

She leant over to him, her hair hanging down.

"I trust you, David."

"Till to-morrow," he answered her.

She disappeared, and he stood there at the foot of the wall, listening, determined to stay there till he was sure that she had succeeded in getting back into the house. If Bale had fallen into a drugged sleep, well and good; but if the little beast——

He threw his head back sharply like a man challenged, for a cry came from the direction of the villa. He heard a man shouting angrily, and with a shrill and almost screaming self-abandonment. Another voice answered him—also a man's voice—scared and appealing.

Flemming made a leap for the fig tree, pulled himself up, and was over the wall like a man scaling a redoubt. He took the first path that showed in the moonlight; it led him uphill and towards the villa, and that was all he desired. And suddenly he found himself in the main way from the iron gates to the house, with a broad flight of steps going up under the shade of cypresses and firs.

A revolver-shot rang out, the sound echoing across the valley.

"Good God! he's shot her!"

Flemming ran on, and as he reached the flight of steps a man came blundering down them. It was Roberts, Bale's English valet, unnerved and in a panic.

He swerved to one side when he saw Flemming, and threw up his hands dramatically.

"Help! Help!"

"What has happened, man? Are you hurt?"

He stared into the valet's white face.

"No, sir. I was running for assistance, sir. He's up there with a revolver, and she's with him. He shot at me."

"Come along, then! Come on!"

Flemming raced up the steps, and the valet followed him, flustered and out of breath, but ready to follow when there was another man in front.

"Be careful, sir. He's clean mad."

"All right."

Flemming had reached the last steps leading to the main terrace in front of the villa. He came to a sudden halt, stood staring, and then turned to the valet and signalled to him to hold back, for Flemming had seen enough in that one glance to realise that any meddling would mean death for the woman whom he loved.

On the terrace Lalia and her husband were facing each other in the moonlight, the woman absolutely motionless, the man wagging a revolver up and down as though he were wagging a monster forefinger. Then Fenton Bale began to shuffle round in a circle, and as he moved Lalia turned also, but more slowly, so that her eyes never left his face. Flemming had crouched down so that he could just see over the top step. He knew that if he made a dash for Bale the fellow would fire at Lalia.

It was a dumb show that Flemming watched—a play of mutes in the moonlight—and yet he could size up the tragic horror of the thing, and realise how disastrously it might end. Fenton Bale had nothing to say. He just grinned, and went shuffling round and round with that revolver of his, possessed by all the cunning ferocity of his madness, determined to kill, yet gloating over the prospect, and holding his hand for a while. And Lalia kept pace with him while he circled round her, so that he had to meet her eyes and look into her white face.

It had become a battle of wills, silent and problematical. When Bale's back was towards him Flemming could see Lalia's face. There seemed to be no fear upon it, but a kind of intense and youthful vitality that challenged Bale's idiot spite and dared it to act. She held her head high and her throat showed, and as she moved she looked like a statue turning on a pedestal.

Flemming was in a savage dilemma. He longed to jump up, make a dash for Bale, and risk the consequences so far as he himself was concerned, but he had an uncanny feeling that the madman's first shot would be fired at Lalia.

The valet came crawling up behind him and started to whisper. Flemming silenced him with a jab of the foot.

For Fenton Bale had stopped his shuffling round in a circle, and was standing staring at his wife as though the clock of madness in his brain had struck the hour.

Their profiles were turned towards Flemming. He heard Lalia speaking.

"Put that thing away, Fenton. It does not frighten me."

He gave a sort of chuckle.

"I can see a little hole in your head, and there will be a bigger hole at the back to match it. Gosh! I can shoot; I could shoot the moon."

She went three steps towards him.

"I dare you to shoot me, Fenton. I am not afraid of you."

The devil of madness in him mocked her.

"You wait. I'll make a pretty white angel of you. Don't you hear the bells ringing?"

He stooped and leered at her, the revolver pointed.

"There's nobody here but you and me, no one at all. Isn't it quiet? We are going away together; I shan't stay behind you, my dear; I'll lie down and hold your hand. Then, bang, and I shall be with you again. I wonder whether it will be cold."

She faced him as though he were some wild beast that had to be magnetised.

"No, you are going to bed, Fenton, and you are going to give me——"

Flemming sprang up with a fierce cry, for he saw Bale poked his hand forward and a jet of flame start from the black muzzle. Lalia went swaying back, but Flemming's first business was with Bale. He made a wild dash across the terrace, and Bale, catching sight of him, stood faltering with an idiot indecision, the hand that held the revolver swaying like a bough in a wind. Then, with a gesture of impatience, he thrust the muzzle into his own face and fired.

Flemming saw Bale fall forward and crumple up in a heap, the revolver striking the stones. But when he looked towards Lalia; she was still erect, a white figure in the moonlight.

"Lalia——"

He went towards her as though he expected to see her totter and fall.

She stretched out her hands to him.

"Oh, dear God! I'm not touched. It went by me."

Flemming and the man Roberts carried Fenton Bale into the house and laid him on a sofa in one of the ground floor rooms. He was dead, with a bullet in his brain.

A couple of scared Italian servants were whispering on the stairs. Flemming spoke to them, told them that "il signor" had shot himself, that he would go down to Villadoro for a doctor, and that the best thing they could do was to go back to bed.

Flemming found Lalia sitting on a stone seat at the edge of the terrace. She turned a dazed white face to him, and her eyes had a shadowy and lost look. The place seemed strangely still, with the mountains clear and sharp under the full moon, the hillsides brilliantly lit or lost in deep shadows. Not a leaf stirred. The trees and shrubs might have been obelisks cut out of black marble.

Flemming went and stood beside her.

"He is dead."

She echoed the last words as though her brain had been numbed by the shock.

"Dead! But how strange."

"I don't want you to stay here, Lalia."

"Not stay here? Where shall I go?"

He realised how the tragedy had shocked her, that she was dazed, that she had no power for the moment either to choose or to will.

"I am going to take you back to Villadoro. I have friends there, Mrs. Locker; you remember her. She will be very kind."

Lalia rose like a child, holding out a hand to him.

"Yes, take me away from here, David. I will do just what you wish."

"I'll tell your husband's man."

He returned to the house and found Roberts waiting in the vestibule.

"I'm taking Mrs. Bale to Dr. Locker's. She ought not to stay here."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall ask Dr. Locker to come up to see the body. You will stay here, of course?"

Flemming and Lalia did not remember that the iron gates were locked till Roberts came running after them with the key. He had been somewhat officious and familiar as Fenton Bale's servant, but he had taken Flemming's measure and stepped into his proper place.

"Leave the gates unlocked and wait up for Dr. Locker."

"Yes, sir."

Flemming was never likely to forget that walk down to Villadoro in the moonlight, for Lalia took his hand like a child, and seemed to give her fate into his keeping. And all that is admirable in a man's love realised itself in Flemming's heart that night. Had his dead wife come back from the grave to walk with them, he could have looked in her eyes, and spoken: "Dear, you will not condemn me because of this child. She will give me much that I lost when you were taken from me."

The lights of Villadoro began to glimmer in the valley.

Flemming felt Lalia's hand stir in his.

"They will not be cross with you for bringing me?"

"You don't know Grace Locker as I do. Put such thoughts out of your head, dear."

She drew closer to him.

"I should feel so lost without you, David. My soul seems to have dried up. I can't think of things."

"Keep hold of my hand," he said simply, "and leave life to me."

Lights were still burning in the Lockers' villa when Flemming and Lalia came up through the garden to the stone loggia running along the front of the house. A chair had been left in the loggia, and Flemming made Lalia sit down there.

"Wait. I'll go and tell them."

He found Grace writing letters, and her husband rolling cigarettes. They just looked at him, and waited after the first words, for his face had news graven upon it.

"Fenton Bale has shot himself. He tried to shoot his wife first, but missed her. I wonder if you will go up to Acqua

Dolce, Locker?"

Locker jumped up.

"Of course. Is he badly hurt?"

"He's dead."

"Good God!"

"I came really to see Grace. I've brought Lalia Bale down here. I'm wondering whether you could take her in?"

Grace Locker left her bureau.

"David, you are a man of sense. Of course. Where is she?"

"I left her sitting in the loggia. The shock has dazed her. She was worrying about being a bother to you."

Grace glanced at her husband.

"We can dispense with you, Jim. You had better run up to Acqua Dolce. I'll go to her, David."

Flemming's eyes thanked her.

"You see, I knew who to come to. She will want you, Grace. I'll walk up with your man."

"Yes. I shall be glad to have both of you out of the way."

She hurried out into the loggia where Lalia's white figure showed in the gloom.

"You poor dear, come in at once; come up to my room."

"David said that you would be kind to me."

"That shows that he is a very sensible man."

In half an hour Grace Locker had Lalia in bed, and had given her a dose of veronal to make her sleep.

Flemming was out early next day buying flowers at the little stall under the church wall in the market square. Grace Locker was taking her café au lait in the loggia when he arrived. She noticed his flowers and smiled brightly.

"Jim wants to see you. He's in the study. I'll take those flowers for you."

Locker had news for Fleming.

"That's a fine girl, Leonardo. She has sent us on a mission, though I fail to see why she should want to be generous to that beggar's reputation."

"What do you mean?"

"She wants to hide the fact that he tried to shoot her. If that valet has not been gossiping, and if we get in before the good Italian officials——"

"That's generous of her, Locker. Come along, we'll get hold of Roberts and persuade him to forget a few details. Bale shot himself; that's enough for anybody."

They started for Acqua Dolce together, and found that the police had not yet put in an appearance, and that the man

Roberts was to be persuaded to forget that Fenton Bale had attempted murder.

"I've been with him five years, gentlemen, and he was generous to me—in his way. The drugs did it. God knows I've pitied his wife and I've pitied him. Well, he was mad, clean mad. It's good of her to want to cover it up."

Meanwhile, Lalia lay abed in a little room whose window overlooked the sea, that blue sea upon whose edge little white towns glistened. And between the blue of the sea and the blue of the sky the soft purple of the distant Appennines hung like a mysterious cloud.

But Lalia lay in a kind of daze, with eyes half closed, and her breathing hardly perceptible. The reaction had come upon her, and she felt weary with the weariness of one whose heart has been heavy for many a long month.

Her eyes looked at the flowers in the vase on a table beside her. Grace Locker had put them there, and Lalia knew that Flemming had brought them. She smiled, but there was a questioning wistfulness in the smile, for this lethargy of her brought with it a mood of doubt and of sensitive self-abasement. No doubt he pitied her, but then, she would not let him sacrifice himself. And a sudden fear of love itself seized her. She felt herself a child of tragedy. Supposing she brought unhappiness into his life?

Grace Locker came in and found her lying there mute, and still, and sorrowful.

"I wonder if you will see someone?"

There was a start of fear in Lalia's eyes.

"Who is it?"

"Why, the sender of those flowers."

She turned her face away.

"No—no, not yet. I'm—I'm thinking. I'm afraid of myself. It may mean so much to me—and to him."

Three weeks later David Flemming arrived at the little town of Felice, and, hiring a carriage outside the station, ordered the man to drive to the Villa Merula.

But Mrs. Locker was not at the Villa Merula when Flemming pulled the iron bell-handle. Yet a neat, black-eyed Italian maid seemed to have expected him.

"The ladies have gone to the Capo, sir."

Flemming's Italian was fairly serviceable. He asked to be directed to the Capo.

"Follow the road, sir, and take the first path on the left. It will take you to the Capo. You cannot miss your way."

In the midst of a thicket of wild rosemary he met Grace Locker, and her kind eyes lit up under the shade of her white parasol.

"I was coming back to the villa. I thought my letter would bring you."

She gave him her hand.

"What a friend you have been. How is she?"

"I left her there at the end of the Capo, under a big fir. Oh, she is happier, I think. There were days when she thought that she never ought to see you again—for your sake, not hers."

"I think I am a judge of that. May we come back to lunch?"

"Better still. I will make up a picnic basket for two, and send it out to you."

"No, you must join us."

"Very well. But I shall not hurry back."

She smiled as she left him to go upon his way.

The path ran under the wall of a garden that was smothered with passion flower, roses, and climbing geranium. The whole headland smelt with rosemary, and thyme, and the resinous pines. And in a short while Flemming came to a place where the path ended in a little plateau of grass screened by rocks, and shaded by two or three old pines.

Lalia was sitting there with her back against one of the trees, her hands locked about her knees.

"So I have found you."

She started round, her hands dropping from her knees.

"David!"

"And what a tyrant you have been to me. I had begun to wonder whether I should have to rebel."

He threw himself down beside her on the grass, and for the moment her eyes seemed afraid to meet his. She was breathing deeply, her fine throat quivering with emotion.

"It was Grace who persuaded me. She said she knew you so well, and that——"

He reached out and took one of her hands.

"Grace is splendid, but I can speak for myself. I want to forget everything but these pines, that bit of blue sea and sky, the foam down yonder, and you."

She turned and looked at him with grave and appealing eyes.

"David, do you mean——"

"I want you to want me. Why, dear heart, you can give me back life. I see colour, and joy, and sunlight again. You can teach me to work. You don't know what a hell of loneliness I have been through."

"I know. But am I the mate for you? Some of your good English think me half a savage."

"Oh, good God! let them think what they please. Am I asking for a little colourless, bloodless girl with no ideas beyond what is supposed to be nice and pretty? I want someone to share life with me, someone who is just a little wild and adventurous, and impulsive. What do most of the English know about you island people, you who are natural aristocrats? Look at the blue sea, and the mountains, and smell these pines, and tell me that we are not born comrades. Lalia, I love you, love you, and nothing is going to stop me loving you."

She looked at him with head thrown back, eyes half closed. And suddenly her eyes seemed to open and to fill with tawny light.

"I can't help it, David. You will have to take me. I'm a wild girl, in spite of Paris and Vienna."

"I want the surf child, the girl with the red flowers in her hair."

IV

THE LADY OF THE TERRACE

The lane had promised well from the moment that it had lured Quentin North through that ruinous archway near the church of Santa Maria. It was a tortuous and elusive alley, refusing to surrender itself to one bold glance, but playing its part behind the star-bright veil of the Roman night. High walls shut it in, walls that were covered with ivy and flowers, but here and there it, rewarded a romantic soul with the glimpse of a garden or a vineyard, a grove of cypresses or the bell-tower of a church. It went gently up-hill with persuasive persistence, like a woman beckoning a man on.

"I wonder if you are fooling me."

He paused, glanced at the stars, and then strolled on again.

"I'll put up with your tricks till I have seen round the next corner."

The lane might have laughed softly to itself. It had played upon his patience, but at the next corner it was ready to justify itself, to uncover something with a dramatic gesture.

"Hallo!"

North stopped dead. A great black cloud seemed to glide across the stars, a cloud built of ilexes, cypresses and stone-pines towering above the white retaining wall of a terrace. The wall was a smother of creepers that hung like shadows, and the lane looked like a narrow gorge running at the foot of a cliff. The black trees, the white stonework and the silver gleam of the stars made North draw a deep and half exultant breath.

"And I thought I knew all Rome!"

Quentin North strolled on till he was under the wall, and then stood looking up at the trees above. He had a great love for trees, and these Roman cypresses and pines made noble outlines against the stars. They offered him mystery and stateliness, a something he loved more dearly than the subtle, man-made beauty of any church.

Stone vases were ranged along the coping of the wall, with clipped box trees growing in them, and these vases played a trick on Quentin North. He noticed their existence, and yet failed to observe that their regular spacing was broken in one place, for just above him there appeared to be one vase too many. Had he been less absorbed in studying the trees he might have discovered that the whitish thing just above him was not a vase at all.

It was a woman wearing a white cloak and leaning her arms on the coping of the wall. She remained there, quite motionless, looking out over Rome.

But she was fully alive to the presence of the man below her. In fact, he had taken such a stand that he was not to be overlooked. In staring at the trees, Quentin North was staring right over the woman's head with a persistency that might have been either insolent or amusing.

Possibly she chose to see in it an element of humour. Perhaps she herself was not innocent of an impulse towards devilry. At all events, she gathered a handful of moss and earth from the wall and flung it down on the man below.

The stuff landed on the brim of North's slouch hat. It came like a bolt from the blue, compelling him to leave his star-gazing and to take note of something more vital. And then it was that he discovered the white shape above him to be out of rhythm with the stone vases spaced along the parapet.

"Thank you. I am very much obliged."

He spoke ironically in Italian, and proceeded to dust his hat. The woman was smiling with an air of casual, girlish wickedness, but she caught the foreign flavour of his Italian and drew her own conclusions. The man spoke Italian like

an Englishman, and his slouch hat, coat and belt marked him out as one of Garibaldi's legionaries.

"Did you speak, signore?"

Her voice was the voice of an actress, a voice of infinite flexibility.

"I beg your pardon—I did. After all, you were quite right in throwing that stuff at me. I must have seemed a rude beast."

She laughed softly.

"Oh, no; just a mad Englishman."

He stood back against the opposite wall.

"How do you know that I'm English?"

"Because your Italian is so perfect."

"Oh, come now, that's rather brutal. I admit that I must have seemed a rude beast, staring up like that; but the truth is, I did not see you."

"No?"

Her voice was mockingly incredulous.

"The fact is, I thought you were one of those vases—I mean—I suppose I must have thought so—subconsciously."

"Thank you," she said; "I know the English have a way of turning people into stone!"

Her voice provoked him, for it was a very beautiful voice, not only in the subtlety of its tones, but in its hinting at the fineness of the instrument that produced it.

"I am afraid I put that very clumsily. I was enthralled by those trees of yours."

He had come by a sudden desire to make her talk to him, to discover who she was, but she remained silent; and her silence made him feel like a fool of a bear begging for cakes at the bottom of a pit. He put on his hat, moved a few steps, still looking up at her.

"I hope you have forgiven me, signorina? Good night."

She answered him with an air of careless abstraction.

"Oh—of course. Good night."

The year was 1849, and Rome had once more become a city of romance. The Byronic spirit was abroad in her. Garibaldi and Mazzini were her men of the moment; the republic had been declared; the Pope had fled. There was stir and passion in Rome; men walked with their heads a little nearer to the stars, and their blood simmered with heroic audacity. Half Europe was sending her soldiers to smother this breath of liberty that had been born in the great city. The Austrians were moving in the north; the French had landed at Civita Vecchia; the Neapolitans and the Spaniards were on the march. A desperate enterprise this for reckless idealists and adventurous fanatics, and for men who had grown tired of a tame life.

Quentin North had run to help brandish the torch. He was young, an aristocrat, a poet, Byronic in his intensity, and yet nothing of a cynic. A kind of romantic restlessness had made him an adventurer.

"I wonder whom that villa belongs to? I wonder who she is?"

Such was the drift of his thoughts as he walked on down the lane. Her voice had provoked in him a rebellious curiosity. He was a mere boy in his knowledge of women; they were either angels or devils, for no woman had captured him as yet.

"Some mad Englishman!"

She smiled over the incident, this lady of the terrace, resting her chin on her hands and gazing out over Rome. The fingers of her hands were long, slender and delicate. She carried her head proudly, even with a suggestion of arrogance, the arrogance of one who despised many of the things that simpler folk held sacred.

"Dear Saints! what a dust men raise over a few words or phrases! I am very tired of preachers and prophets."

She yawned, and then turned her head as though to listen. Someone was coming along the terrace under the shadows of the trees, someone whose shoes flip-flapped grotesquely on the stones. There was a sound of heavy, stertorous breathing, as of some ponderous animal making its way up-hill.

She turned from the balustrade.

"I am here, Father."

"So I see, my child; a white plume in the helmet of the night."

"You are late, Father."

"True, my child."

"And out of breath."

"Still more true, my child."

"Which comes of walking fast after supper."

"In order, my dear, to enjoy your wit!"

He was a very fat man was Father Giuseppe; the irreverent called him the "good Silenus." A great, rotund mass of good humour, with little eyes twinkling in a rosy face, he seemed the most benign and harmless of creatures. No one would have suspected such a fat man of possessing a fierce share of energy and ambition. He was a great laughter was Father Giuseppe, and when he laughed men forgot to wonder whether he was cunning.

"Rome is quiet to-night. Let us sit down, Father. I have remembered your cushion."

He was still blowing like a grampus, but he could behave gallantly even when out of breath.

"The Contessa is very kind to a fat old man. I kiss your hand."

She smiled cynically, and led the way to a marble bench under a stone-pine. La Contessa Venosta was a widow, and still young; but if she retained any of her illusions, she did not boast of them. It did not thrill her to know that she was called "La Belle Anna." Pride, and the dissolute escapades of the vain dandy, her husband, had made her look at life with ironical eyes.

"Well, what are the heroes doing?"

Father Giuseppe chuckled.

"They have been a little sobered by the news. They are not crowing so loudly, and their feathers look ruffled. And

yet you are not tempted to fall in love with these noble fellows?"

"Since my husband's death I have ceased to believe in heroics."

"Come, come! I know the poor man was very foolish. Your pride has no pity."

"My pride is a statue, Father; it demands a cold repose. I have no patience with these fanatics, these ferocious egoists. They wish to change things to their own advantage, that is all. The old days were well enough. I prefer the aristocrat to the butcher."

Giuseppe rubbed his hands.

"Of course. It is ridiculous to believe in people who would make a flag out of the tail of a shirt. Mazzini is that sort of man. Well, the French are coming."

"And you are in touch with the French?"

"Possibly, possibly," he chuckled. "I think we shall manage the business for them. Besides, I know the Italians; they are my people. They will clank their swords and talk a great deal, but they will not fight."

"None of them?"

"Then you believe that some are brave men?"

"Oh, I believe in nothing," she said coldly.

Father Giuseppe wagged a fat forefinger at her, and read her a little lecture upon the perils of too casual a philosophy. He enjoyed being sententious, especially when he could end his discourse with a wink of the eyelid.

"It is necessary to be in earnest about something, Contessa."

"Supper is a necessity, Father; you cannot contradict me there."

The terrace of the Villa Venosta was a noble platform from which one could view the sunset and watch the dome of St. Peter's floating like a great black bubble upon a sea of gold. Monte Mario and the Janiculum were outlined against the glow. Rome herself lay deep in a kind of purple haze.

A spruce little officer in the uniform of the carabinieri straddled a chair on the terrace, as though he were riding a horse, and talked gallant nonsense to the Contessa Anna. This Captain Costello had a plump, wax-coloured face, a neat black moustache, sleepy eyes, and an air of cynical self-confidence. He was giving a humorous description of the Republican troops in Rome.

"Yes, we are very gay birds, I assure you. We have plenty of feathers and gold lace; we crow like game-cocks. The French will fire a few cannon-balls; the cocks will turn into a cackling crowd of hens; we shall surrender; everybody will laugh; a few fools will be shot."

"And you?"

He laughed.

"Oh, I am not nervous; I am quite impartial; I can cheer for both parties. Besides, I am such a good fellow, and my uncle is a cardinal. It is an amusing farce."

Captain Costello continued to entertain her with descriptions of heroes whose hair hung down to their waists and who made a boast of never washing, but Anna had the air of a woman whose interest was wholly artificial. She was

listening to a sound that emerged from behind Captain Costello's chatter. Someone was walking up and down the lane at the bottom of the wall with the regularity and the persistence of a sentinel.

"It is a woman's right to be inquisitive."

She rose from the seat, leaving Costello poised open-mouthed in the middle of a droll word-picture of Mazzini, and crossing the terrace, looked down into the lane. The coincidence proved dramatic. That absurd Englishman was standing there, staring up at her with innocent intentness.

"Good evening, signorina."

He saluted her with just a trace of embarrassment. His lean, brown face looked boyish under the brim of his plumed hat. By his long blue coat and black belt she knew him to be one of Garibaldi's men.

"It seems that my trees still interest you, sir."

He answered quite gravely.

"I desired to see them by daylight." And then, as though to smother any possible repulse: "That glimpse of Rome down yonder is particularly fine. I thought I knew Rome, but this is a discovery."

She smiled enigmatically.

"Your military duties cannot be very exacting. Does the general never drill you?"

"Garibaldi is not a pedagogue."

"I see. He believes in liberty, of course—liberty in the ranks."

Costello had twisted his chair round and was listening with both his ears. Then curiosity overcame his discretion. He got up, crossed the terrace, and poked his head over the wall.

"The devil! It's North—Garibaldi's 'Englishman.' Greetings, my dear sir."

The Contessa threw a quick and angry side-glance at Costello. He should have effaced himself, waited her pleasure before thrusting himself into evidence.

North's eyes seemed to darken slightly.

"It's you, Costello!"

"Most certainly."

And then, glancing from North to the Contessa Venosta's cold face, he chattered on.

"Am I to be called officious? But it seems that I can play the part of cicerone. Quentin North, Esq., private in the Legion, be honoured by being presented to La Contessa Anna Venosta. Now we all know each other, and the world is at ease."

North saluted. The Contessa bent her head with sudden mock graciousness.

"If Signor North is a friend of yours, Captain Costello, no doubt it would please you to show him the view from the terrace. The little gate and the steps—you know them."

Costello gave her a wondering look and bowed.

"An excellent notion, Contessa." And in an undertone: "Really, the man will amuse you; he is so grim, so drunk with

star-wine. I will fetch him up."

Yet Captain Costello was disappointed in his idea of making the Englishman play the heroic fool. The sunset was splendid, a pageant of scarlet and gold, but Quentin North remained as stiff and grey as an English landscape in winter.

They walked the terrace, the three of them, and it was Costello who did the talking. Anna Venosta seemed absorbed in her own thoughts. Every now and again North stole a look at her, while he pretended to listen to Costello's vapourings.

The sun had sunk below the hills. The evening grew chilly, and the Contessa's manner suggested frost.

The carabineer flattered himself on being a man of subtle sensibilities.

"Phoebus Apollo has thrown us a hint. And I have to inspect the guard. We will drag ourselves away, Contessa."

He made his bow with a flourish, and glanced meaningly at Quentin North; but the Englishman might have been blind by the calm way he took Costello's departure for granted.

"Good night, captain."

"Then you do not go my way, North?"

"I think not."

Costello left them with a blank face and the air of a man who could not quite decide whether he ought to feel insulted. He loitered for a few moments outside the gate that opened into the lane, as though he expected to be joined by a very much chastened and routed Englishman. But no Quentin North appeared. Costello shrugged his shoulders and walked on.

Anna Venosta and Quentin North were talking to each other with strange frankness.

"You have seen the view from my terrace, Mr. North. If you are quick you will be able to overtake Captain Costello."

"I am very grateful to you, but I have no wish to overtake the captain."

"And you are very slow to take a hint!"

He looked at her with those keen, unflinching eyes of his.

"Contessa, if I am in the way—if I am offensive to you—send me off. But I have never liked being the slave of whims and little conventions. I want to talk to you; I have been waiting for that chatterer to go."

His calm directness challenged her, though she could detect no shade of insolence in this attitude of his. It appeared to her that he was unlike any other man that she had ever met, a kind of new creature whose behaviour piqued her curiosity.

"Are we such old friends?"

Her eyes studied him.

"Perhaps Captain Costello is an old friend?"

"Mr. North! And yet I do not think you wish to be rude to me!"

"What is rudeness? To insinuate mean things? Let's ignore such an idea——"

"Well?"

"If a man like Costello can be suffered to talk to you—then—I—ask at least an equal right."

She began to smile a little. The man was an original; his sword-play was strangely virile and aggressive.

"But all this is beyond me——"

"Beyond you?"

"You arrive here—by chance; you are absolutely unknown to me; you claim a kind of intimacy that in Italy——"

They turned by some mutual impulse and stood facing each other, with the sunset dying in the west and night falling like a curtain from the branches of the trees. A sudden subtle curiosity possessed them. They looked at each other with questioning intentness, and with something of the naïve hostility of children who meet for the first time.

"Contessa, life is very simple for all of us—here in Rome."

"I see nothing but complexity."

"Impossible."

"Be arrogant—like most Englishmen."

"Arrogance! I don't think I am guilty of that. Let me explain. You are La Contessa Venosta, a Roman woman; I am a man who chooses to see in this blaze of liberty one of the finest things on God's earth. The facts are very simple—I want to talk to you, a Roman woman, about Rome, Italy, Garibaldi."

A flash of wickedness escaped her.

"But why to me?"

His eyes held hers.

"That puzzles me. Why does one desire any particular thing in this world? Why does one walk a mile to look at some particular view?"

She laughed softly to defend herself. His frankness and the strange sincerity of those eyes of his troubled her.

"You spoke of facts. Has it not occurred to you that I am an aristocrat?"

"Of course."

"And a devout Catholic?"

"Certainly."

"And that therefore I may have no love for these excitable and loquacious—ragamuffins?"

She had scored a hit. He looked at her almost blandly.

"No; I refuse to believe that."

"And why, indeed?"

"Because anyone with a living soul——"

The steel of his intensity began to glitter, and something within her hardened and clashed with it.

"Thank you. Please do not create a heroic atmosphere for me. Let us be frank. I have no faith in Italy."

"No faith in your own country?"

"No."

Their spirits were in combat—instantly. It was as though his intense idealism exasperated and touched her pride. She counted herself a worldly and a cynic, and this man seemed ready to hold up a light to her soul and boldly catechise her upon her most intimate prejudices.

"And you tell me that this great adventure does not move you?"

She answered him with hot perversity.

"Not in the least. It strikes me as pathetic and ridiculous—even a little contemptible."

"My dear lady!"

She flushed.

"You are one of those heroic people who rush about the world in search of adventures. Believe me, you will be disillusioned here in Rome."

"I refuse to believe it—I refuse even to believe that you believe it."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I find your obstinacy rather tiresome. I am afraid the French will soon drive your heroes into the cellars."

"On the contrary, I can swear that we shall give the gallant French a very gallant repulse."

"Oh, as you will. A few days will settle the question——"

"Shall we make a wager of it? I will lay you a challenge. If we do not win our first battle—then I will forget that there is such a place as the Villa Venosta."

"Then, my dear Mr. North, I think I shall be certain to be rid of you. Good night. I am sorry that our acquaintanceship has been so brief."

She gave him an ironical and tantalising glance, and swept away down the terrace towards the flight of steps that led up through the ilexes to her villa. Quentin North had to find his own way back into the lane. His eyes had a set and almost fierce look, for he chose to feel very much in earnest about that rather extraordinary wager.

It was close upon noon on that cloudless April day when the Roman cannon near the Porta Pertusa fired their first shots at the attacking French.

Anna had been reading in her boudoir, but the sound of the guns brought her out upon the terrace. She had tried to treat the whole affair with dispassionate and casual curiosity, but the thunder of the guns sent a sudden thrill through her. It is not easy to remain impersonal when life and death meet in the smoke of war.

She chose a place where a stone-pine threw its shade, and leaning her arms on the wall, looked westwards over Rome. She could see the Janiculum, St. Peter's, and the mass of the Vatican, and here and there the flash of the cannon on the walls. The rattle of musketry swelled the increasing thunder of the guns. A haze of smoke began to rise, and hung like

a thin cloud of diaphanous silver. Overhead the sky was as blue as a sapphire, and birds twittered in the branches of the stone-pine, whose flat top shaded the terrace.

The sound of musketry over yonder came in gusts and then died away to nothingness. She was conscious of an effort to retain her poise and to smother an incipient and passionate curiosity. She did not feel any fear, but a kind of wonder stole upon her. Men were killing each other, letting blood flow for the sake of an idea.

And somewhere that irresponsible Englishman was taking his share in it. She could almost see that brown, intense face of his, rather grim and a little exultant. Had he forgotten that wager of his? Of course, there could be but one end to the business, for raw volunteers and Italians could not be expected to stand against troops like the French.

Yet she stayed there on the terrace the whole of that afternoon, lunching on some cold chicken, bread and red wine that a servant brought her from the villa. The battle enthralled her. It had spread like a storm along the western walls of Rome, and had enveloped the Janiculum and the villa gardens outside the walls. Now and again she could hear a faint cheer or a confused roar of voices drifting between the fiercer burst of musketry.

And Quentin North? He was standing at the upper window of a little stone house near the Villa Pamfili, firing steadily at the French. There had been a wild tussle in the gardens, an affair of bayonets and clubbed muskets, discipline and gallantry pitted against gallantry and ardour, and for the moment discipline had won the day. Garibaldi's legionaries were holding on in the grounds of the Villa Pamfili, little parties of desperate men, but elsewhere the Italians had been driven back under the walls of Rome.

A youngster, who had had his arm broken by a musket ball, sat on the floor and watched North loading and firing. There had been a bayonet attack on the house, and a bloody fight in the room below, but the defenders had driven the French out and piled furniture against the broken door. The French had taken cover behind shrubs and walls, and were firing at the windows.

The youngster with the broken arm seemed fascinated by North's steadiness. More than one bullet had entered the window and flattened itself against the wall.

"The devil! but you have a cool head, comrade."

North was ramming home a charge, with the pleasant smile of a man who had no trouble in the whole wide world.

"A charging elephant is worse than this."

The boy's eyes grew rounder.

"So you have shot elephants?"

"Yes. But this is fairer sport. The other man always has an honest chance of potting you."

So the afternoon wore on, and North kept firing steadily. Great things were preparing—a gallant storming forth of men, with Garibaldi riding on his white horse, a figure of Liberty. But of all this North knew nothing. He and the men who held the house saw no more than the flash of the French muskets and an occasional blue-coated, red-legged figure moving in the background.

"Hallo! Listen!"

It was the boy who spoke, bending forward, eyes ablaze.

"Garibaldi! Garibaldi! Hear them shouting?"

Over the Corsini Hill and up into the Pamfili grounds came that great charge, cheering, storming, glittering towards victory. The red blouses of the men who led the Legion flamed like torches in the van. Young Italy followed with a shout of exultation.

North forgot all caution, He leant out of the window, waved his hat, and cheered. But the French sharpshooters had forgotten him. There was sterner trouble to hand.

"By God! they are rushing on like a forest fire!"

Men were shouting in the room below.

"Come on, comrades!"

"Charge!"

"Out of this rat-trap, Garibaldi!"

North fixed his bayonet and half tumbled down the stairs. And in ten seconds he was in the thick of a bayonet fight, lunging at blue-coated Frenchmen in a world of rose bushes and flowering shrubs.

Anna Venosta still kept her watch as the sun sank towards the west. The sound of musketry had died away, the cannon on the walls were silent, but she could hear people shouting in the streets. The battle was over. She imagined that the French had forced their way into Rome.

So the Englishman had lost his wager! She was conscious of a sudden spasm of regret, and was angry with herself for being guilty of such an emotion. The man had annoyed her; he was an arrogant, hot-headed fool.

Then she heard someone coming up the lane, and the slovenly, pattering footsteps were very familiar. Bending to look over the wall, she saw a fat man in a black soutane and big beaver hat perspiring up the slope. It was Father Giuseppe.

"You have brought news?"

He stared up at her, and his face was purple and furious. He had the air of a man who had been shocked and scandalised beyond belief; his eyes rounded off their astonishment.

"News! My dear lady, I have never walked so fast in my life!"

"To oblige me?"

He frothed at the mouth.

"The French have been beaten—beaten by that mob of tailors and schoolboys! You would hardly believe it—they are on the retreat to Civita Vecchia!"

She could not help smiling at his glowing disgust.

"What! Garibaldi—that man who never combs his beard—has won a victory?"

"The devil's in the fellow!"

"And you, Father, are you going to sup with me?"

He fidgeted from foot to foot.

"Well—no, Contessa—not to-night. Desolated, I assure you. But to be frank, Rome may be a rather unpleasant place for a day or so. I have a friend over yonder—a quiet, retiring fellow who has offered me a bed."

She waved him away.

"I understand you, Father—yet how could anyone have the heart to hurt you? Sleep well. Besides, these people should be in a good temper to-night. There will be illuminations and rejoicings."

Father Giuseppe went perspiring up the lane, a conspirator whose plans had gone very much astray.

An hour or two later, just as the sun was Bearing the horizon, Winged Victory followed in Father Giuseppe's steps—so far as the Villa Venosta, and no farther. It was Quentin North, a little drunk with exaltation, his lips black with biting off the ends of cartridges, a red bandage round his left arm. He stopped by the gate in the wall, pushed it open, and climbed the steps to the terrace.

The level rays of the sun shone on him as he emerged from the deep shade of a grove of ilexes and cypresses. Nor had the dramatic chance miscarried, though he had not calculated on such a chance. She stood there as though she had been awaiting him, her head held high, a glint of arrogance in her eyes.

"Yes, I have heard the news. It is amazing, but I suppose it is true."

His eyes laughed in his exultant face.

"True. And I have won my wager, madam. And Italy has proved herself against the most gallant troops in all the world."

She looked him over, her nostrils touched with a fastidious pride.

"Pah! and is this what a victorious soldier looks like? Thanks, Mr. North, for the favour of your presence."

He smiled a little grimly.

"The picture-books make us look too clean and pretty."

"But that dirty red rag!"

"A little fellow did it with a bayonet."

"And have you been dining on powder?"

"One has to bite the cartridges, you know."

"Yes; and it interests me in a way—this sordid reality."

"Sordid! Is blood spilt bravely sordid?"

"Are you aware that half your coat is hanging like a beggar's?"

He gave a whimsical tug to the offending fragment.

"Somebody did that in the scuffle—or I may have caught it on a spike when I jumped down into that sunken road."

His eyes flashed to hers.

"And you are a Roman woman. Do you think the Roman legionaries looked like show soldiers when they had broken a charge of the Gauls? And the Roman women would have kissed their bloody harness."

The hot colour rose to her face.

"Mr. North, this terrace of mine is not a stage for ranting. I choose to take my own view of life; I do not quarrel with yours."

"But I do most certainly quarrel with yours, madam."

"Your frankness is irrepressible."

"I ask you to believe in Italy—the new Italy, not the old Italy, ridden by Germans, priests, and petty pomposities
——"

"Perhaps I insist on being part of the old Italy."

He looked at her steadily and with sudden strange gentleness.

"No, I refuse to believe it. Doesn't this struggle of a people to be free touch your heart? Doesn't the splendour of a Roman Empire stir you?"

"Not in the least."

"It must."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Mr. North, I do not know why fate should have thrust you upon me. You are a very extraordinary man, and I have suffered you with great patience. I think I am older than you are—if not in years, at least in knowledge of the world. You are the slave of dreams."

"Dreams! Why, to be sure, if one did not dream, where would the world be? And would you call yourself the slave of facts?"

"Yes."

"Well, I saw youngsters in anguish to-day who cheered and laughed in spite of their wounds. Those are plain facts. And do I look on you as no more than a thing of so much bone and flesh, a complicated bit of chemistry, a pretty machine? What does an artist put into his picture? The mysterious, dream-soul of life as he sees it. You might call that stone-pine there a chunk of wood, but it is more than that—the tree has outlines, character, beauty."

She turned away and leant her arms upon the wall, perhaps because she wished to avoid his eyes.

"Mr. North, I am an incurable cynic. Life has not taught me to believe in people."

"Then life might begin to-day."

She cried out at him as though she were in pain.

"Oh, you weary me! This is an infliction! Please go!"

He watched her for a moment with grave eyes.

"Contessa, I ask you to pardon me. Perhaps I have been preaching, playing the prig. I will wish you good night."

She did not answer him. He waited, and then went on.

"The fascination of life is in its contrasts, its enmities, its antagonisms. It seems that I exasperate you."

"Have you not wished me good night? And yet you are still talking!"

"True. That was a palpable hit. And now see in me your most obedient and devoted servant."

He drew himself up, saluted, and marched away, leaving her to watch Rome decking herself with the lights of a

great rejoicing. The city was in a triumphant, carnival mood, and a candle seemed to shine in every window. But Anna Venosta's heart was full of restlessness and vague rebellion.

It is possible for a soul to wither little by little, to grow cynical and apathetic, and remain contented with the small, luxurious happenings of a selfish life. Such a soul may resent any attempt to revitalise it, for the rebirth of emotion may mean the rebirth of pain.

Such, in measure, was Anna Venosta's fate. The passion had died out of her life. She had satisfied herself with a proud and ironical scepticism.

And suddenly a bold and impetuous force had thrust itself into her life. A voice cried to her almost brutally: "Dead woman, awake!"

It was as though someone had roughly roused her from sleep to bid her go out into the thick of a storm. Her pride and self-love turned angrily upon the intruder. She repulsed the idea of being dominated by any man's personality.

Yet Quentin North had roused her to a sense of spiritual pain. She, the woman, had most strangely inflamed the living man in him; she had seen that in his eyes. He was no ordinary man; he did not come mincingly to kiss her hands, but he came with passion and a scourge.

Each day, towards sunset, North walked up the lane to the villa, entered the gate, and made his way to the terrace. She was there, ready to give him battle—for a battle it had become. She could have had the gate locked against him; but Anna Venosta was no coward, and even discovered a bitter fascination in the conflict.

Such a woman was not to be won with sighs and little tendernesses. Only the shock of a defeat could break her cold and hostile self-confidence. Quentin North never realised that fact, but the blood of his ancestors was more potent than mere intuition. There was much of the Puritan in North, a glow of ethical passion that made him say and do things that would have seemed outrageous in a mere worldling.

"You are a woman in bondage," he told her, "in bondage to old, selfish prejudices. And I am going to break those chains."

She taunted him and accused him of arrogance.

"Are all Englishmen such egoists? You wish to dominate the world. And you talk to me as though I were a soul to be saved from purgatory."

"And so you are—you, a daughter of Dante, who should be in Paradise."

"My Savonarola!"

She would laugh at him, making a kind of cloud of her mockery in which she could hide herself from his too fierce sincerity. And often he laughed with her at himself, and then she was near loving him, despite her obstinate pride.

"Here am I holding forth like an old, ferocious Jewish prophet! Laugh away. But I am going to make you burn for Italy."

"You have climbed to the regions of perpetual snow."

"Nonsense. There is fire in the heart of it. Some day you will surprise yourself."

Her glance was ironical.

"Perhaps."

So the days passed; and then he came to say good-bye. He was in a crusading spirit, elated, happy, bright and clear of eye.

"We march to-night. We are going to discourage the Neapolitans. Pray for us."

She shook her head.

"No; I shall show you no mercy."

"Au revoir, then—till I come back."

His eyes looked at her with a sudden challenge.

"I believe you hate me."

"No, not quite; but I defy you. You have made me declare war to the death. I may be a woman, but I do not surrender."

Her bitterness puzzled him.

"There is something in you that I do not understand."

"I do not think you will ever understand. Be gentle with those poor Neapolitans. They are Italians, too."

His eyes still questioned her.

"Perhaps I am a bit of a fanatic."

"Perhaps."

She did not confess that he had humiliated her, and that her spirit was in revolt.

Garibaldi and his army launched themselves into the unknown, leaving Rome garrisoned against internal treachery, for the French were quiet at Civita Vecchia while the French Republic puzzled out the problem of what to do in a very awkward political situation. Captain Costello and his Carabinieri had been left behind in the city, with orders to patrol the Campagna and keep a watch upon the road to the sea.

Now, Captain Costello was one of those bland fellows who contrive to be popular with everybody. He served the new republic and plotted against it with the clericals; he pretended to admire Garibaldi, and in the course of his duties so arranged it that he became the familiar gossip of certain French cavalry officers who rode out from Civita Vecchia. Lastly, he chose to be in love with the Contessa Anna; her estate in the Romagna was worthy of any man's attention.

And Anna Venosta encouraged him during that month of May. He was a smooth cynic with an amusing tongue, and he helped her to resist the too dominating memory left by Quentin North. She was in rebellion against the man's masterfulness, and out of sheer perversity she coquetted with Costello.

Yet in her heart of hearts she scorned this sallow little dandy, with his perfect manners and his cynical chatter. She suffered him out of malice, and yet herself suffered for allowing her malice to express itself. Costello served as a contrast, and the more she saw of him the more vivid became her mind picture of Quentin North. The one man was all fire, intensity and brave fun; the other sniggered at life and took great care of his moustache and his hands.

Nor was the news that Costello brought her wholly comforting to her cynical pose.

"This Garibaldi is really an extraordinary fellow. The Neapolitans are on the run. One may have to revise one's opinions."

"Then there may be more in it than wild adventure?"

He held up one hand.

"Let us call the thumb the Roman Republic. Then we have, firstly, the French; secondly, the Austrians; thirdly, the Neapolitans; fourthly, the Spaniards. Finger number one has had a bad bruising; finger number three has doubled up. We have left the Austrians and the Spaniards. Now, supposing the French choose to recognise the Roman Republic, what then? Will the Austrians dare to march south out of Tuscany and risk trouble with the French? The whole problem will be solved by the good politicians in Paris, despite our dear Pope. Mazzini and the rest of them are not such fools as we imagined."

Her eyes gazed into the distance.

"Then a dream may come true."

"What dream, Contessa?"

"The dream of a united Italy."

He chuckled, and spread his hands.

"Oh, yes; they might leave us to quarrel among ourselves."

Sometimes Father Giuseppe joined them. He had quite recovered his good humour and his air of fat benignity, and although Costello served the Republic, they appeared to understand each other very well. Father Giuseppe had adopted a playful, paternal attitude.

"Young blood, young blood—that is what it is, my children. The boys must break out of school and do some mischief, and presently they will come back like lambs, and we shall forgive them."

He chuckled and rolled to and fro on his seat.

"We, too, have suffered from fanatics—God forgive them—but we grow more tolerant. Why, here am I sitting beside the brave Captain, who is anti-clerical."

The two men smiled at each other like sly dogs.

"But then, Father, you are such a good fellow."

"Ha! ha! I do not make trouble for poor sinners; I try to mend it—eh?"

He turned to Anna Venosta.

"Never be led away by fanatics, Contessa; they are vampires who thirst for the blood of other men's souls. The unselfish are, of all people, the most selfish—and the most cruel."

Strange rumours spread through Rome. It was said that the French had landed more troops at Civita Vecchia—that the French Government had decided to recognise the new Republic, and had sent a warning note to Austria. Other people were less sanguine. The new troops were to play the part of enemies, not friends. Rome doubted herself, was disturbed, began to cry out for Garibaldi. And Garibaldi himself had been warned of the sinister trend of events; he and his men were making a forced march for Rome, victorious troops who adored their General.

Thus it befell that two men met among the laurels and ilexes above the flight of steps leading from the lane to the terrace of the Villa Venosta.

Costello's teeth showed white in his sallow face. He was ready with his politeness, and far too clever to betray surprise.

"Congratulations, man of victory!"

He held out a hand. North took it, and found its fingers cold and flabby in his grasp.

"How are things in Rome?"

"Precarious, sir—very precarious. We may want twenty Garibaldi and twenty Legions."

"So the French are likely to give trouble? Well, one Garibaldi should be enough."

North had the look of a man who wanted to pass on. Costello smiled at him and stepped jauntily aside.

Anna Venosta was sitting in a gilded Renaissance chair under the shade of the trees. The chair suggested a throne, and her poise was the poise of a queen. She had heard North's voice in the shrubbery, and the blood had rushed to her face. For a moment she had struggled with a confused tangle of emotions—anger, fear, and a kind of unbidden exultation. But she was more than mistress of herself when Quentin North appeared.

Her eyes took in his tall figure and all the vivid details of his manhood. The sun had tanned him a rich bronze; he looked lean and strong; his eyes seemed bluer than ever, more confident and intense. The man was built for mastery. His dominating look made her perverse pride turn to steel.

"So the Neapolitans ran away from you?"

He saluted her.

"They had a bad cause to fight for. Besides, they are Italians; their hearts may have been with us."

"An Englishman explains Italy to an Italian!"

"Why not? You may see your true self in the eyes of a friend."

"But you always forget that we are enemies."

"Then let us be very frank with one another. You have been in my thoughts all through this month, Contessa, for somehow you seem to be Italy to me—proud, doubting Italy, not caring to be saved. And yet Italy may have to be saved against her will, lifted up by strong men and set by force upon her throne."

For the first time he hinted openly at his love for her; nor did his eyes trouble to conceal the light that burnt in them. Yet it was a strange love, making her think of a fanatic with a scourge. He did not bring her homage, but a passionate challenge, an ultimatum that bade her choose between two ideals.

She flushed haughtily, for she was an aristocrat, and this man a mere commoner.

"Well, let us be frank. Your arrogance is extraordinary. By what right do you come and preach to me——?"

"Because I cannot help myself."

"What a simple excuse! Am I so flagrantly decadent, so utterly depraved, fit to amuse myself only with men like that little captain of Carabinieri?"

His eyes held hers.

"Supposing you are what you say you are, shall I agree to it? I see in you another kind of woman."

"A thousand thanks. So you would save me from myself, lift me out of the dust of my beliefs! Mr. North, I am indeed grateful to you; you do me too great an honour in condescending to see possibilities in me."

She rose from her chair, very pale, and drawing her breath more rapidly.

"Have I no pride in myself? Am I to go on my knees before you and confess imaginary sins? Who are you to demand such a thing from me?"

She saw a spasm of emotion pass across his face.

"I assure you—you wrong me. We have crossed swords, you and I. Somehow I could not help attacking you."

"A woman! Oh, heroic man! And now you will find me stronger than you thought."

Her eyes looked past him, to discover Father Giuseppe padding ponderously along the terrace, coughing suggestively behind his hand. Her face cleared. A glitter of malicious amusement leapt into her eyes.

"Father Giuseppe, I have been expecting you all the morning."

Quentin North swung round with the look of a man attacked from behind.

"Mr. North, this is Father Giuseppe, a very old friend of my family. Mr. North, Father, is a merciless enemy of ours; he will have it that I ought to be wearing a red blouse. But, of course, we forgive the English many things.

"Mr. North, will you bring the Father a chair? You will find one at the end of the terrace."

North went without a word.

Father Giuseppe was no fool. He had a quick and human grasp of life, and a genial knack of making himself pleasant under the most difficult conditions. Moreover, he knew more than North imagined, and could guess shrewdly at many things that he did not know.

"I am charmed to meet you, Mr. North; I am always charmed to meet an Englishman, even though he is on the other side of the chessboard. And no doubt you think me a tyrannical, Jesuitical, crafty old man."

He laughed delightedly, enjoying his joke.

"You see in me, Mr. North, a brutal and pitiless reactionary. I help to grind down the peasants, to keep the people ignorant and superstitious."

He beamed at North as though he loved him, but North seemed to have grown mute and inarticulate. He looked steadily at Father Giuseppe and smiled.

Anna lay back in her chair.

"The old things are always evil, I suppose."

"My dear Contessa—consider—my—antiquity!"

He glanced at North.

"You will support my grey hairs, sir."

North straightened himself uneasily.

"I have been given food for thought, Father. Have you ever seen a man overrun himself in a race?"

Father Giuseppe spread his hands.

"Enthusiasm is admirable. At my age, I have to be polite to the hills."

They exchanged quick, questioning glances. North betrayed the restlessness of a man who realised that the proper moment had arrived for him to go.

"You will pardon me—there will be a roll call at noon. Yes, it is most confoundedly hot standing to attention on one of those piazzas."

He looked at Anna half-hesitatingly, but she did not unbend.

Neither Father Giuseppe nor Anna Venosta spoke till Quentin North had left the terrace.

The old priest gazed at the sky as though he were lost in contemplation.

"Strange people, the English—so very stupid and so full of adventure. Quite a fierce fellow, that. He looks at you with the eyes of a Viking."

Anna was frowning to herself, and Father Giuseppe did not worry her. He sat and beamed at life, knowing that a man may learn more by waiting than by asking impertinent questions.

"Father Giuseppe."

"My child."

"I want to teach that man a lesson."

"Nothing could be easier—as he appears to be in love with you."

"Love!"

She smiled bitterly.

"Yes, I suppose he was fated to rouse the devil in me—the devil of pride. I have wondered whether he is just an arrogant fool, or a heroic madman. He has hurt my self-love."

"How, my child?"

"It seems that I am a degenerate daughter of Rome. I cannot rise to a noble inspiration. I belong to the old, cynical, selfish, frivolous order of things. He has been trying to talk the new ideals into my soul."

Father Giuseppe sat with half-closed eyes, stroking his chin.

"So you do not love him, my child?"

She answered hotly.

"No. I want to show that man that he is not my master."

"It should be easy."

"Oh, he is no ordinary mortal. He carries his head high above mere words."

The priest nodded.

"I have some worldly wisdom, Contessa," he said.

"Well?"

"Nothing touches a man so sharply as being made a fool of."

She glanced at him quickly.

"You mean——?"

"I could tell you how it might be done; but you must not be angry with me."

"I can promise that."

Father Giuseppe began to speak very slowly.

"It is known in Rome that the French have declared war on Mazzini's Republic. There will be a second attack on the city, for the French are in earnest, and determined to wipe out that previous defeat. Now, it is of the utmost importance, for political reasons, that there should be no second fiasco. We are going to use our wits as well as the bayonets of our friends—besides, a little cunning will save much bloodshed."

He rubbed his hands together.

"A little diplomacy, a little artfulness. At present they are exchanging pourparlers, while General Oudinot is massing his army and Garibaldi preparing his defence. Now, my daughter, can I trust you to remain in earnest?—for the trust is great."

"I am asking to be given a weapon, Father."

"Yes, I think you will use it. Know, then, that there is an armistice, and Oudinot has let it be understood that he will not attack before Monday morning. To-day is Friday. But the French will attack before Monday morning."

She said nothing, and he watched her shrewdly.

"In war, Contessa, it is the duty of a general to take nothing for granted. He should assume that the other fellow has a card up his sleeve. It is Garibaldi's duty to suspect Oudinot."

"So that if he is tricked by a promise, the responsibility is his?"

"Exactly."

Her face hardened.

"Well, and what next?"

"It would be very useful for General Oudinot to know how Garibaldi has placed his troops. It would be of especial interest if he were informed how the Pamfili and the Corsini are to be held on the night of Saturday."

"I see. And how would the information reach him?"

"I would undertake that."

"And how is the information to be obtained?"

"My daughter, I am offering you your weapon."

She left her chair and walked up and down the terrace. Presently she returned to him.

"The Englishman can tell me this?"

"Of course. He is a favourite of Garibaldi's."

"But will he tell me?"

Father Giuseppe spread his hands.

"My daughter, you are a very beautiful woman, and a very clever one. Let us show this barbarian that we aristocrats are not fools."

Anna Venosta did not succumb without a struggle to the importunities of her pride. There were moments that night when her spirit revolted from the thing that Father Giuseppe had tempted her to do, and when an irrepressible tenderness stirred in her heart. She had varying mind-pictures of Quentin North—at one moment he appeared to her as the adventurous, impulsive lover; at another as a figure of dominant and fanatical arrogance. She hesitated between two impulses, but in the end her perversity won a victory in that battle of unrest.

"I will let him decide it," she said to herself. "If he comes to-morrow, I will not spare him. If he does not come—then I may relent."

It was an arbitrary and unreasonable bargaining with her own self-love; but many of the tragic happenings of life arise out of some little poisonous piece of perverse pride.

And North came.

"We quarrelled rather horribly yesterday. I suppose I ought to ask your pardon."

His eyes looked softer and less intensely blue.

"We should always quarrel, you and I."

"Should we?"

She fancied she caught a gleam of masterful humour in his eyes, and she chose to misinterpret it.

"Supposing you call a truce for one day."

"I'm ready to hang up the white flag."

"But you will contradict me within five minutes."

"I'll promise not to."

"Then you had better do the talking, and I the listening. Go and bring a chair from the belvedere."

She watched him walk away, and her smile was the smile of a Circe. He returned with a certain triumphant boyishness, carrying the chair by one leg.

"What am I to talk about?"

"Why not about yourself?"

"Thank you."

"What it feels like to be in a battle."

"Quite simple. Men differ. I begin by being most horribly afraid."

"You are jesting."

"Nothing of the kind. Most of us are cowards, and are too cowardly to confess it."

She smiled with an air of girlish delight.

"That interests me immensely. But do you worry about what is likely to happen? I mean—well, everyone knows that the French are going to attack the city again; and supposing you were up on the Janiculum—say in the Villa Pamfili—knowing that you would have to bear the brunt——?"

He seemed amused.

"I might feel rather more on the alert. But I shall not be on the Janiculum to-night."

"I thought the Legion were there. Someone told me so."

"No; the infantry of the line have that honour—four hundred bayonets or so. There is an armistice till Monday."

"Where are you? Quartered in Rome?"

"Yes."

"That's strange. I should have thought Garibaldi would have had his best troops in the first defences."

"Garibaldi may think differently. In a game such as war you want something in reserve—a bit of iron to hurl at the enemy at some critical moment."

"Ah, I see. You are the Old Guard."

"Thank you; I'll pin that in my hat."

He drifted into talking of himself, despite his vow that he would do nothing of the kind. He had met Garibaldi at Monte Video, and fallen under the man's spell.

"You want to be a man of the wilds," he explained, "to value Garibaldi. He is not a tame creature."

"A tiger."

"Say, rather, a lion."

"And have you always lived what you English call the 'wild life'?"

He laughed.

"There are different varieties of the wild life, Contessa. You have heard of the Puritans—well, I belong to a Puritan family, and dissipated young men are not encouraged. But I know what civilisation is—perhaps you have heard of Eton and Oxford—and when I am at home I am quite the squire, the little baron of my village, though I have no title."

"Then you are an aristocrat, a man of family?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

She had begun by being very kind to him, and then her mood changed. Perhaps her own heart accused her of treachery; perhaps she was not happy in persuading him to betray the cause he served. It was as though she craved for self-justification, a rewounding of her pride.

But North did not anger her that morning, and so she was compelled to create her anger in accusing him of trying to disarm her pride. He was seeking to master her with other weapons, using the net instead of the sword.

"Perhaps some day a few heroic Italians will land in England, tell your people they are mere ignorant brutes, try to begin a revolution and turn out your Queen."

She spoke sneeringly; and he looked at her in surprise.

"England is not Italy."

"And would you take part with a mob of fanatics against your own class, against all your traditions?"

"If the fanatics were in the right, I might be one of them."

"But you prefer these things to happen in other countries. Yes, you English are very shrewd. You sit still and gather money, and when you want a little adventure, you help to make a bonfire of someone else's house."

"It is you who are trying to force a quarrel on me now, Contessa!"

"I? Not in the least. Besides, Father Giuseppe is coming to lunch with me; I thought I heard the gate shut. And Father Giuseppe never quarrels."

She had suddenly grown restless and ill at ease, and North was trying to reason out the change in her. Yesterday's quarrel had made him self-critical; he had tried to see life from her standpoint, and the effort had humbled him a little. He had begun to understand her proud resentment, the way she had repulsed his revolutionary enthusiasm.

"Anna——"

He was leaning forward, looking at her intently with the eyes of a lover. She started, and tried to think that the blood had not rushed to her face.

"I think you had better go, Mr. North."

"But I want to try and tell you——"

"Here is Father Giuseppe. I saw that he bored you yesterday. Need I say more?"

North rose and bowed to her, his eyes still searching her face.

"If I have spoken rudely—at any time—forgive me. And so—good-bye."

He met Father Giuseppe half-way down the terrace. They exchanged smiles and a few common-places, and then passed on.

Father Giuseppe took the vacant chair, fanning himself with his hat.

"One wishes oneself on the mountains, especially when there are so many hot-headed people about."

Anna did not seem to hear him.

"I do not wish to appear inquisitive, Contessa."

She turned her head slowly and gazed at him.

"What am I to tell you?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, nothing, if our English friend is so masterful that——"

She interrupted him almost fiercely.

"Listen. The Janiculum will be held to-night by four hundred men. Garibaldi's Legion will be in Rome. They are

expecting nothing."

"Contessa, may I kiss your hand?"

She glanced at him with sudden scorn.

"No. I have done this for my own ends, not to help in treachery. Now—go!"

Anna Venosta did not attempt to sleep that night. She dismissed her maid, drew an arm-chair to the open window of her room, and sat there in the darkness, with Rome spread below her all patterned with yellow lights. She had crossed the threshold of the great emotional experience of her life, and had entered the silent chamber where love burns like a sacred fire. But as yet the light of it blinded her. She was groping her way towards the flame that would scorch her hands.

She had scorned Father Giuseppe, and in scorning him had come to discover that it was possible for her to doubt herself. Doubt, indeed! Her headstrong, southern pride had thrust the suggestion aside with a gesture of fierce impatience. This Englishman had persuaded himself that she was a listless, slack-souled aristocrat. Italians can strike with a knife when a phlegmatic northerner would be content with a savage sneer.

Yet when the dusk fell a merciless unrest had seized her. There was yet time to warn Quintin North and to sacrifice her passionate perversity to some nobler impulse, but such an action would imply surrender and a confession that she was not so strong and so reckless as she had thought.

So the night passed, for an intense and increasing curiosity had forbidden her to sleep. The lights of Rome died out, and the city lay black and silent, as though waiting breathlessly for some tragic thing to happen. Now and again Anna Venosta drowsed for a few minutes in her chair; once she lit a candle and read, but she could not lose herself in the book. She spent most of the time leaning her arms on the window-sill and staring at the dark mass of the Janiculum rising westwards beyond the city. Would anything happen? Had Father Giuseppe managed to send a message to the French? Were Oudinot's regiments gathering silently for a surprise attack?

The tension slackened a little; she almost felt that she could sleep.

"Crack!"

The faint report of a musket shot broke the waiting silence of the night. A second shot followed the first, and then a whole spatter of musketry broke out like the noise of a watchman's rattle. The duller sound of an explosion answered it, and then for a moment silence held.

Anna Venosta stood leaning against the window-frame.

"The Janiculum."

She murmured the words to herself.

Then a vague, confused outcry drifted to her like the sound of a distant sea. Scattered musket shots seemed to tell of disorder, a scrambling mêlée in the dark. She heard men cheering, though the sound was very faint and unreal. But she knew what had happened. The French had attacked; they were pouring through the pine woods of the Pamfili; they had caught the garrison asleep.

Day was breaking, and somewhere in the city a big bell began to boom. For a while it tolled on in the silence, and then others joined it, clashing their alarm notes as the sun rose. Then the cannon awoke on the western bastions. Drums were beating in Rome; men were running to arms, shouting to each other and to the women who leaned out of the upper windows.

Anna Venosta listened to all these sounds as though fascinated by them. The sun rose over the Campagna, a great ball of gold; the black trees grew green; away yonder on the Janiculum men were killing each other in the freshness of that summer dawn. She stood there dazed, wondering.

Her face was very pale, her eyes troubled. She was thinking that Quentin North might be dead before the sun set over the Janiculum.

Quentin North was in the first rank of the second company when the Legion marched up the hill to the Porta San Pancrazio. The men were pale, some with fear, and some with fury at the thought of the trick that had been played on them. Garibaldi, on his white horse, rode on ahead.

The tall Swiss who marched next to North had a strange far-away look in his eyes.

"So they have taken the Corsini?" he said.

"Well, we have got to retake it."

"Confound their cleverness. And we had only four hundred men up there. A bad blunder."

He sighed and changed his musket to the other shoulder.

"Well, it does not matter to me."

"Why not to you, Fritz?"

"I am going to die to-day."

"Nonsense."

The Swiss nodded his head with placid sadness.

"Yes, I am going to die to-day. I feel it in my blood; but I shall charge with the best."

They reached the open space within the walls, and stood to their arms, waiting. The battery on the bastion of the Casa Merluzzo was blazing away in front of them; sharpshooters lined the walls; French bullets whined overhead. A boy behind North lay down and was whole-heartedly and fearsomely sick, while a big, bronzed Romagnol cursed him for a coward.

"Let him alone, comrade," said North. "He is only leaving all useless kit behind him."

The men laughed. Other regiments came swinging up, dusty, sweating, fiercely excited, to muster under the shelter of the wall. Garibaldi had ridden through the gateway to see for himself how matters stood.

"Avanti! Avanti!"

A staff officer had clattered back through the Porta San Pancrazio. Garibaldi's Legion was to attack.

Then Quentin North spent the most devilish two hours of his life. Everything was in favour of the French—ground, numbers, arms. The Italians had to charge up an open road, crowd through the gateway of the Corsini, rush up the broad path between box hedges, and then climb the double staircase that led to the house, while the French fired at them from under cover, from the gardens, the woods, and the windows of the house.

The Corsini was taken and lost again three or four times within the first hour, while Garibaldi sat on his white horse outside the Porta San Pancrazio and sent company after company up that fatal road. The Corsini could be taken, but it could not be held. The whole French army was massed on the ground behind it.

Quentin North paid no less than three visits to that house of death, and was driven out of it with the remnant of each

attacking party. He had come off scatheless, save for a bayonet scratch over the ribs. He was not amazed at his luck, simply because a man whose blood is red hot from fighting for his life is too busy to be amazed at anything.

"Forward! Forward!"

Once more he found himself in that bloody house. The French had been driven out again, and the Garibaldini were piling up dead bodies in the loggias to make a rampart. North was in the act of seizing a blue-coated figure, when the figure moved and sat up.

"Pardon me, my friend, I am not dead yet."

The Frenchman was an officer, brown-faced, keen-eyed. His arm had been broken by a rifle bullet. He smiled at North in spite of the pain.

"I'm sorry, sir. Look here, perhaps I can make you more comfortable."

He put his arm round the Frenchman, helped him to his feet, and led him into one of the rooms of the villa.

"The place might be clearer, sir, but there is a corner here."

"A thousand thanks. You are English?"

"Yes."

"We have always fought each other like gentlemen."

"And yet you attacked us this morning."

The Frenchman waved his sound arm.

"It is war, they say; but I do not approve of it. Of course, you should have been prepared. And then—it was a priest and a woman who sent us information."

A burst of firing warned North that a counter-attack had begun. He held out a hand to the Frenchman.

"No doubt your friends will be here in a minute."

"Au revoir, sir. I hope that some day I may be able to serve you."

The French came on bravely, a blue mass that glittered with steel. The Garibaldini repulsed the first rush, but the second proved too strong for them. There was fighting in the loggias, in the rooms, on the great double stairway, till the Corsini was lost once more, and a few wild eyed men found themselves outside the great gateway, where they were sheltered from the French fire. Quentin North was one of them, for his luck still held.

"Damnation! Nine of us left out of sixty-three!"

"Where are the Lombards and the infantry of the line? Are we to batter ourselves to pieces while the others sit still in Rome?"

A man fell, doubled up; he had been shot in the stomach, and had dragged himself as far as the gateway. North carried him down to the Porta San Pancrazio, passing Garibaldi on his white horse.

"So you are still alive, my Englishman?" Garibaldi said.

"We want more men, General. The French are behind there in thousands."

Garibaldi's eyes looked sad. He was King Death on a white horse, sacrificing the men who loved him.

All day the fight went on for that battered villa on the hill. Towards evening a mad cavalry charge and an attack en masse carried the grounds and the ruins. For the moment victory seemed to seize the wings of the sunset; but the French attacked once more in their turn. They were too strong in numbers. The troops of the Republic were driven back on Rome.

About three hours before sunset Anna Venosta went dry-eyed to her room. She looked like a woman whose blood burned with fever; her hands shook as she opened a cabinet and sat down at her table to write.

"If you are alive, come to me. I must see you.

"ANNA."

She closed and sealed the letter, and when she had written North's name, rank, and regiment on the cover, she sat and stared at it awhile with an air of tragic indecision. A silver handbell stood on the table. Presently she stretched out her hand, rang the bell loudly, and sat waiting.

An old manservant entered.

"Hugo!"

"Yes, signora."

"Take this letter. Can you read what is written on the cover?"

The man scanned it, pouting out his lips and wrinkling his forehead.

"Yes, signora."

"That letter must be delivered to-night. If the English gentleman is dead you will bring the letter back to me."

Hugo bowed.

"I will do my best, signora."

"Go—at once."

Night had fallen, and the last cannon-shot had been fired. The men of the Legion, such as were left of them, were bivouacking under shelter of the walls close to the Porta San Pancrazio. Many of them were wounded; many of them almost too weary to eat; they lay about among their piled arms, sullen and dispirited, listening to the French bugles and staring at the stars. They had fought a great fight to retrieve what had been lost by someone's folly; they had failed. If any of them cursed, they cursed in silence.

A plaintive voice was heard asking questions.

"Is this Garibaldi's Legion, gentlemen? Will anybody tell me where the Legion is to be found?"

"Under your nose, old jackass!" said someone who was too tired to be polite.

"I want an English gentleman, Quentin North. I have a letter for him. Is he alive? Does anybody know of him?"

A man sat up.

"Here you are. I am Quentin North."

Hugo picked his way among the sprawling men and delivered his mistress's letter.

"Thanks; and how the devil am I to read it?"

"I have a little lantern, signore, under my cloak. I will light it."

He did so, and the light flashed on North's haggard, unshaven face, with its stern eyes and powder-blackened mouth. His uniform was torn and dirty, his hair hanging over his forehead.

"Pass the lantern."

North fixed it between his knees, broke the seal of the letter, and bent his head to read. There were only a dozen words in the letter, but he sat staring at it for quite a long while.

"Very well. Take the lantern; I am coming with you."

North got to his feet and signed to Hugo to show the way.

"Don't tread on anyone, my friend, for we are not in a good temper to-night."

It took them the best part of an hour to reach the Villa Venosta, for the narrow streets of Rome were crowded with restless and excited people. Moreover, North had to stop at a wine-shop and drink some wine, for he was dead beat and giddy. The wine and a slice of bread heartened him, though his face still looked haggard and grey.

Old Hugo appeared to have received very definite instructions, for he took North to the main gate on the north side of the villa, and so through the gardens to the house. A lamp was burning in one of the open loggias that faced the garden, and the old servant looked curiously at North and pointed to the loggia.

"The Contessa is there. I have obeyed my orders."

North's eyes were no longer dull and sunken in his head, for he could see a woman standing there beside one of the carved stone pillars. An unshaded lamp hung from the roof.

"Anna."

She drew back.

"No; do not come too near me."

The light showed him to her, a haggard and rather wild-eyed man in a torn and bloody uniform.

"Dear God!"

Her eyes looked shocked.

"You are wounded?"

"No, nothing but a scratch. I know I must look a fairly filthy object. But you sent for me, and I came."

She stared at him as though dazed. She seemed to be struggling to control herself, for the man's eyes were hungry, and his pale face made her afraid.

"Yes, I sent for you."

She pressed her hands to her breasts as though to force herself to speak.

"No; I have nothing good to say to you. I wanted to prove to you that my pride was dangerous when challenged.

Your masterfulness maddened me."

He looked up at her, astonished.

"What am I to understand?"

"It was I who helped to give the Corsini to the French."

"What!"

"Now will you call me weak—a child to be lectured?"

"Good God!"

He recoiled, and then took three quick strides towards her, his face as pale as her dress.

She spread her arms.

"Yes, kill me, if it pleases you."

"Kill you! Can't you understand what you have done? Was it my fault, you Roman tigress?"

Her eyes flashed with a kind of exultation.

"You call me tigress now. I am not the tame creature that you thought."

"God forgive me if I piqued you into betraying me and the cause I serve."

He had recovered his self-control, and stood looking at her with an air of inexpressible sadness.

"So our friend the priest was a spy?"

She made herself meet his eyes.

"Father Giuseppe believes in the things that you hate."

"Oh, I know that. But that you—— What was my arrogance but enthusiasm, the froth on the surface? Besides, I thought——"

His face had grown haggard again, his weariness returned.

"Well, it is all over. I suppose I misunderstood you utterly. I must have done. I believed in you even when we quarrelled. It was beyond my wildest imaginings that a woman could go about to stab a man's honour because he had tried to open her eyes."

She stretched out a hand with dramatic passion.

"Enough! We shall never understand each other. I ask you to leave me."

He turned, hesitated a moment, and then walked away into the darkness.

Anna Venosta leant against one of the stone pillars, her bosom moving as though she were about to weep. But her eyes remained full of a dry and sullen anguish. She knew now that she loved the man, that she had never understood the great mystery of life until that moment.

So the French laid deliberate siege to Rome, and those June days echoed with the thunder of guns, battery blazing against battery in an artillery duel that could have but one ending. More than twenty thousand French troops lay outside

the city.

Quentin North was one of the best shots in the Legion, and he was one of the picked men chosen to reply to the fire of the French sharpshooters who tried to pick off the gunners on the bastions. On June 10th he was lying between two gabions at the Casa Merluzzo with a big flaxen-haired Pole who had become his comrade in arms. They were firing at the French, and the Pole was talking.

"Have you seen the White Lady, comrade?"

"No. Who is she?"

"Everyone is talking of her. She wears a white dress, and she seems to know no fear. She goes everywhere, caring for the wounded."

"Look out! That little fellow over there is a devil of a shot. He hit the gabion that time."

The Pole was a reckless gentleman.

"I fear no French bullet. Let me look round."

"Don't be a fool, man."

But the Pole was on his knees, leaning on his musket, his fair hair blowing. And next moment he was lying in North's arms with a bullet through his chest.

North managed to carry him behind a pile of sandbags on the rampart.

"I have it, comrade. It is under the heart."

"You brave madman. I'd change with you if I could."

He was kneeling by the wounded man, when someone came forward softly and knelt down on the other side. It was the White Lady. She carried a haversack filled with bandages, dressings, and a flask of wine.

North stared at her in astonishment.

"You!"

For the White Lady was Anna Venosta.

She smiled at him, a strange, sad smile, and then bent over the Pole. His eyes were growing dim, but he looked at Anna Venosta with the solemn air of a child.

His lips moved.

"The White Lady."

His blue, child's eyes seemed to ask for something, and the woman in Anna Venosta understood. She bent and kissed his forehead.

"Exquisite," he murmured, and died.

North knelt there speechless, gazing at the woman in white. Presently he spoke.

"Anna!"

She kept her eyes lowered.

"I do what I can," she said simply. "You see, after all, I was in the wrong."

North's mouth was twitching.

"God forgive me," he said, "and God bless you."

She rose from her knees, and North's eyes grew suddenly anxious.

"It is most infernally dangerous for you here."

She smiled at him.

"Is it? And for you?"

"It is my business."

"And mine also."

"Still, there is no need for you to come up here where the guns are firing. I will see you to a safer place."

She looked at him very earnestly.

"Must you always manage people and give orders? Cannot you suffer me to be brave, to take my share? You scolded me because I was selfish, and now——"

But North had caught her hand, and his eyes looked into hers.

"Forgive me. Yes, I understand. You are a Roman woman; your pride must be suffered to be noble. I——"

He staggered suddenly, recovered himself, and put his hand to his side.

"Confound those Frenchmen."

"You are hit!"

He smiled at her, but there was blood on his hand and his face had gone grey.

"Thank Heaven, it took me and not you. I think I'll——"

She caught him as he tottered, and let him slip gently to the ground. His blood had stained the bodice of her white dress just over her heart.

"Quick! Is it serious?"

He was smiling.

"It has smashed one of my ribs, I think. No, I'm not a dead man yet; but I feel I'm bleeding——"

She unslung her haversack and set to work with swift, soft hands that did not fumble or hesitate, despite their haste. And North lay and watched her face with a kind of wondering joy. He did not ask himself whether he was going to die. Even the pain did not matter. He was conscious of her nearness; he felt the soft movements of her hands.

Someone's shadow fell across them.

"Hallo! Work for me? Why, it's our Englishman."

"Hallo, Fabrizi! A bullet in the side, that's all."

"Contessa, I think you are braver than any of us."

She made way for the surgeon.

"I am very glad that you have come," she said.

Half an hour later Quentin North was being carried on a litter through the narrow streets of the Trastevere quarter towards the Tiber. Anna Venosta walked at his side.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked her for the third time.

She looked down and smiled.

"No, it is not to one of the hospitals. They are so crowded with the poor fellows; and you would be such an obstinate patient."

He smiled back at her, and lay and watched the blue sky between the high houses. It was as though he were drifting along a canal. A pleasant languor possessed him, in spite of his wound. The men carried him across the Tiber. They were sturdy fellows and made light of his weight, and the people gave way when they saw that they carried a wounded man.

North knew Rome pretty thoroughly, and he was able to tell in which direction they were going. The truth dawned on him at last. They were bound for the Villa Venosta.

He spoke to her.

"Contessa!"

"Yes."

Her hand rested close to his on the litter.

"I know where you are taking me."

"Does it grieve you?"

"But in Italy——"

"This is the new Italy," she said, "where people are not afraid of being brave."

The windows of North's room looked out on a green mass of trees, rolling ilexes and pines, out of which tall cypresses rose like obelisks. His bed stood close to the window, so that he had a sensation of being cradled on the tops of the trees. It was very peaceful here, in spite of the noise of the guns; and to lie in a bed is an event in itself to a man who has been carrying a knapsack for two months. Moreover, though the bullet had broken a rib and bruised the lung, it had not penetrated. Fabrizi had been able to extract it and to stop the bleeding, which had threatened danger for a while.

"You will have to lie in bed for a fortnight," he told North, "even if you have no fever. I would not trust that bruised lung of yours very far."

And North obeyed like a child. He had lost much blood and was very weak.

Anna Venosta's old nurse had charge of him, a big, broad-bosomed Italian, with great soft eyes and the arms of a man. And North laughed at the way she handled him, for she was absolutely tyrannical in her carrying out of Fabrizi's orders.

Then Anna would come into the room and sit beside his bed. At first a mysterious shyness possessed them both, but

it gave place to a tranquil and exquisite sympathy. They did not seek to explain things to each other; they uttered no confessions, but each understood what was passing in the heart of the other. For the moment the tragedy of the siege of Rome had ceased to be a tragedy. The noise of the guns seemed very far away.

Then an awakening came to Anna Venosta.

"Father Giuseppe is in the garden, Contessa."

She went out to him with a quickening of the heart. He was all smiles, a benignant creature, with eyes that hid his cunning.

"So the wounded hero is being rewarded?"

Her mouth hardened. Father Giuseppe had a way of knowing everything.

"I had Mr. North brought to the house," she said calmly. "The hospitals are so crowded."

"Exquisite magnanimity! And he has converted you to his views?"

"I found that I preferred courage to the philosophy of a spy."

He blinked at the words.

"Contessa, I forgive the taunt. But let us be frank. Rome will be taken before the end of the month."

"It is possible."

"And has it not struck you that it may be inconvenient for the Contessa Venosta to be found sheltering a revolutionary? Many of these gentlemen will be put against a wall and shot."

She held her breath.

"I do not believe it."

"Because you do not wish to believe it. But let us be amiable. You know I have some influence in our party, and"—he leered—"you did us a signal service. I may be able to smuggle this meddlesome English gentleman to some safe place. But, of course, such a thing cannot be done unless——"

He looked at her meaningly.

"Explain."

"We must understand each other."

She had always suspected Father Giuseppe of a certain worldliness, but never till that moment had he shown her the cloven hoof. He had hardly begun before she realised his infamy, and she flashed her scorn.

"You say this to me! Certainly life is very amazing. Well, I will give you my answer. Rome has not fallen yet; there are men in Rome whose passions have been aroused. You will leave Rome, Father Giuseppe, to-night, for to-morrow I shall denounce you to the Republic. You remember what happened to Rossi."

Father Giuseppe's eyes stared at her like the eyes of an ox.

"But I might denounce you, Contessa."

"Denounce me—and see what happens. I am a Roman, an aristocrat; I will meet you face to face, and it will be you who will be taken——"

He held up his hands.

"Enough. I will not vex you. Oh, these women of ours!"

"And you will leave Rome—yes, for I shall denounce you. And do not think that you will be forgotten in the future, even though liberty is defeated for the moment."

She had cowed him.

"It is best to respect madness," he said. "I shall find friends at Gaeta. Farewell."

The Republic was doomed. Even North, lying abed in his upper room, gathered enough news to know what must happen. The French had taken the outer wall, and their guns dominated the situation; it was only a question of time.

He grew restless, troubled, and importuned Fabrizi to let him get up.

The doctor refused.

"You are not fit yet. What is worrying you?"

"I suppose the crash is coming?"

Fabrizi shrugged his shoulders.

"Any day."

"Well, can't you see that I must get out of this house? I am a marked man. I can't hide behind a woman's petticoats, and compromise her in the eyes of those confounded clericals."

Fabrizi humoured him.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes; send me a tailor. Yes, I have plenty of money."

Fabrizi took his departure, and the same day a very urbane Roman came up to take North's orders.

"The signore shall have everything in two days."

Anna knew of these commonplace happenings, of the arrival of new clothes, a new hat, new underlinen. They were mere straws showing which way the wind was blowing; she had guessed what was passing in North's heart.

"He is a Quixote," she said to herself; "he would get himself killed to save the reputation even of a dog."

But she pretended to see nothing.

By noon on June 30th the French had taken the last western defences of Rome by assault. The Constituent Assembly was preparing to surrender, and Garibaldi was on the eve of that famous retreat of his in which he lost an army and a wife. Fabrizi had rushed in to see North and tell him the news.

An hour after Fabrizi's visit old Giovanna hurried to her mistress in a state of great excitement.

"Signora, the English gentleman is mad! He will not listen to my orders; he has dressed himself, and is trying to walk."

In fact, North was already on the stairs, steadying himself by holding to the handrail, his face nearly as white as the marble of the steps.

Anna met him on the last flight,

"This is very wicked of you."

He smiled weakly.

"Dressing and shaving are the devil when you have been in bed for three weeks. I thought I was stronger."

She passed an arm under his shoulders and steadied him down the last steps, and so into a little salon that opened on a loggia and the garden. There was a couch by the window; she made him lie down.

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I did not want to advertise the fact. Besides, I could not stay here."

"And why not?"

He lay back and looked up at her.

"You know as well as I do what has happened and what may happen in Rome. I have got to get out of your house. Do you imagine that I am going to hide here and expose you to persecution—and other things?"

Her eyes glimmered at him.

"Of course, I knew that you would try to do this; but supposing I refuse to let you go?"

"If I have to crawl on my hands and knees——"

"And that is gratitude?"

He sprang up, inspired above mere physical weakness.

"Gratitude? Isn't it the only honourable gratitude I can show you? I can't tell you everything here—in your own house—under your protection. What I feel is too deep and fine for that."

"Why not forget these imaginary obligations?"

He shook his head.

"No."

"You make it very hard for me."

"Anna—I—— No—I will not say it. You see—I want to——"

She saw that his strength was going.

"Lie down, Quentin; be at peace with yourself and your honour. If I do not question it what do other people matter? You must trust me."

He sank back on the couch, and sat with his head between his hands.

"Curse this wretched body of mine!"

"Oh, come! it has been a very brave body. Think what it has suffered these months. And you are still afraid of me?"

He did not answer her.

"I think you love me a little—or am I dreaming? I want you to love me, Quentin."

He caught her hands almost fiercely.

"Love you! Oh, my God! of course I love you. Yes—I think I have been fighting for you all this time——"

She was on her knees beside him.

"Then—what matters?"

He looked into her eyes for several seconds, and then kissed her.

"I couldn't help that, dear. Now help me to get down into Rome. I don't mind surrendering to the French; they are gentlemen. And some day soon I shall come back."

She was smiling.

"What need is there for you to surrender? And do you think that I thirst to stay in Rome?"

"Well?"

"Supposing—supposing we escaped? Haven't you any imagination, Quentin? Must I explain everything?"

He drew her closer.

"Anna—you mean——? Why, of course. Why shouldn't we? Oh, dear heart! But there would be danger for you."

"Surely love is blind! Would you be afraid to face danger for my sake?"

"You're splendid! But how——?"

"Remember that I am not a fool—and that I am a woman of the world. And I am going to see the English consul."

"Freeborn?"

"Of course. I know him. I think he will be kind to me."

It is probable that Mr. Freeborn, the English consul, was the busiest man in Rome during the days that followed the surrender. All sorts of people rushed to him for passes, and being a big-hearted and enlightened man, he contrived to help many of the Republicans to disappear. Nor were the French over keen to serve as gutter-police to the clericals and the reactionaries. They were soldiers; they preferred to wink at the escape of enemies whom they respected for their gallantry.

Freeborn's rooms were crowded. He himself was being scolded by a couple of strident American women when Anna's name was brought to him. He beheld a vision of beauty and an excuse for ejecting the Americans.

"Well, Contessa, how can I serve you?"

She smiled, and in few words told him the truth. Her charming audacity and her courage delighted him.

"North! Of course, I met him once. One of Drake's Englishmen. But this is rather bold, Contessa, and not quite

veracious, though the little piece of mendacity could be eliminated in an hour or two."

"Then you will be kind enough to give me the pass?"

He laughed.

"I cannot refuse to lose my place in such a romance, Contessa. I will give it you."

An order went to the stables: "The Contessa's travelling carriage to be ready in an hour." As for Quentin North, he was fast asleep on the couch in the little blue salon.

Anna found him there, and, bending over him, touched his forehead with her fingers. He awoke, and looked straight up into her eyes.

"Hallo! Back again!"

He sat up, and seemed fascinated by her smiling and half-mischievous tenderness.

"I have seen Mr. Freeborn."

"And was he sympathetic?"

She gave him a sheet of paper. It was a pass for Quentin North, Esq., and his wife—the Contessa Venosta.

North's astonished solemnity changed suddenly to exultant appreciation of her romantic sense of humour.

"Well, I'm——"

He stood up, lifted her hand and kissed it.

"Signora, this is the greatest honour that has ever fallen to me. I most devoutly pray you to suffer me to correct the slight error in this document."

"It will always be a puzzle," she said, "whether I asked you to marry me or whether you asked me——"

"Well, I think I fell in love with you the first time I saw you. That should be decisive."

The Contessa's travelling carriage was quite a stately affair, with its black horses and its servants in their liveries of black and silver. North and Anna stood in one of the loggias and watched the luggage being loaded.

"Quentin!"

"Yes."

"Have you any money, or shall I lend you some?"

"I have about fifty pounds English on me in notes."

"And I have four thousand francs."

He laughed boyishly.

"Then we are not beggars. Besides, there are bankers at Genoa and Turin who know me. I can draw on them up to a thousand pounds."

The travelling carriage was ready, old Giovanna came to tell them.

"And a hat has come for milord."

"A hat! In the very nick of time; a genuine English chimney-pot! I shall have to wear it while we are in the public eye, Contessa."

"Ah, those English hats! I will try to forgive you."

They started on their journey, looking like aristocrats who were seizing their chance to leave Rome now that the mob Republic was at an end. North sat for the picture of the typical Englishman, stiff and a little bored, and wearing his hard hat as though he had been born in it. The thoroughness of his pose made Anna smile.

"Tell me that you are not like that in England, Quentin."

"Not quite so complete. Do not be afraid of the English. I shall not let you see very much of them."

"And are they not charming people?"

"At a distance, perhaps. Hallo! we are approaching the critical occasion."

The carriage was rolling across the Piazza del Popolo towards the city gate. The French had a guard posted there; blue-coated infantrymen went to and fro with fixed bayonets.

The carriage was stopped just inside the gate, and a French officer came to the window. He had his arm in a sling. A corporal and three privates stood at his service.

"Your pass, monsieur?"

He stared hard at North, and North returned it. A slow smile spread over the Frenchman's face. He glanced at Anna and saluted her, and then read the pass that North had handed him.

"Good! we have met before, sir."

North remembered him. It was the French officer whom he had helped in the Corsini.

"I remember the occasion, Captain. I am glad to see that you are well."

The Frenchman beamed at North.

"My friend, this is very fortunate. It gives me great pleasure, this coincidence. We shall always think of each other as gentlemen. Therefore I wish you and madame *bon voyage*. Open the gate there, and let the carriage pass."

He saluted them, and North raised his hat. The gates opened, and the sentries stood aside to let them pass.

"That officer recognised you."

"Yes. You see, we met in the Corsini."

"He might have stopped us."

"The French are gentlemen, God bless them! And I will dare to prophesy that some day French and Italians will be brothers in arms."

The carriage rumbled out through the Porta del Popolo, and North caught a glimpse of the noble trees of the Borghese green against the sky. A few urchins ran shouting beside the carriage, and he threw them a scattering of coppers. Anna was leaning back in her corner. A sudden silence had fallen on her, her eyes looking into the distance.

"It is not exile, cara mia."

He touched her hand, and her eyes lit up.

"No, I am not sad."

"You looked like a Cassandra."

"But I do not foretell misfortune."

They held hands for a while, and then Anna leant forward and looked out of the window.

"Tell Luigi to stop for a moment. I want to look at Rome."

North called to the coachman, and the carriage drew up at the side of the road. Anna Venosta's eyes were fixed on the city, bathed in the late sunlight, its brown walls the colour of old gold. A great tenderness softened her eyes. She drew back suddenly, as though to hide her emotion.

"Luigi can drive on."

North bent over her with the devotion of a strong man who loved.

"Your heart does not fail you, cara mia?"

"No, no."

"We shall return. I could make Italy my own country."

Her eyes had suddenly filled with tears.

"We can work for the new Italy," she said, "you and I together. And Rome shall be no more a dead city."

"No, but the noble heart of a noble land."

V

BITTER SILENCE

James Arden extricated himself from the crowd and stood back under the shadow of one of the tall Georgian houses.

Milford Green always reminded him of some English village as staged at an exhibition where an old-world quaintness is insisted on with an almost American emphasis. The picture was complete. There were red houses, grey houses, houses of white stud and black timber. The towers of the Abbey Gate were backed by the clouding green tops of mighty elms. The almshouse garden would have served for the "Man with the Scythe." The stocks still stood at one corner of the green.

The full moon hung over the elms, striking down on hundreds of white faces. A big black motor-car formed the core of the crowd, a country crowd that was stolid and quiet, yet grimly attentive. A tall Irishman was standing up in the car. He had been telling the people about Belgium, and he was asking for men.

James Arden stood with his hands in his pockets. A subtle feeling of self-dissatisfaction had made him withdraw from the crowd. The thing that he most desired to do was impossible, beyond debate, and yet he had felt a kind of shame oppressing him. He wanted to give himself, when all that he called himself was not his to give.

The Irishman in the car flung out a last trumpet call.

"Men, put your fists up! Who's coming to help us thrash the German bully?"

There was a kind of consenting growl from the crowd. An old farmer raised his stick in the air.

"Make it sixty, sir, and I'm with ye."

The crowd laughed. Women were whispering. Men stood with their heads close together, a little shy of each other, grimly inarticulate. There was no froth, no sensational excitement. The crowd was thinking it over, making up its solid, rustic mind.

James Arden turned away. If only he could have given those fellows the lead, been the first man to walk into the temporary recruiting office over yonder! He had felt the call of the blood and the blaze of that great wrath that was sweeping England towards a veritable crusade. For years he had been a dabbler in words, making a name and a living out of the weaving of romances. One month's war, a few nights of devilish suspense, the glory of great things done and suffered, had filled him with an heroic discontent and a scorn of his world of words.

Milford Green sloped up towards the Abbey Gate, where a very modern gas lamp threw its light on the black foliage of half a dozen old yews. James Arden walked round towards the gate in order to avoid the groups of people scattered over the "green," for he was in a mood that shrank away from the presence of his fellow humans.

Someone was standing there close to the stone wall under the yews. Arden, staring at the ground in front of him, seemed to feel a presence near him, for he turned his head sharply, as though he had heard someone call him by name. The light from the lamp showed him a tall girl standing there alone. She was in evening dress, her head uncovered, a black cloak thrown over her shoulders, and her face, throat, and hands looked very white against the black background of the yews.

Her eyes were fixed on Arden with a kind of grave expectancy. It was as though she looked for comradeship on such a night, counted on it; his coming seemed the most natural thing in the world; he was one of the men, perhaps the one man, of whom she expected to be proud.

"What, are you going home?"

He turned aside with an inward hesitancy that was hidden from her, and yet it was to her that his thoughts had turned for the last year. To-night there was a prophetic fire in her eyes. Her face had a white radiance. Life had become a strange, heroic business, and this woman under the yews came of heroic stock.

"It's impressive, that crowd."

"So quiet?"

"Yes. I am wondering whether they will get the men."

She gave him a quick, proud look.

"Do you doubt it? You have not been with us long enough to understand our people. We do not hurry; we do not like being hustled. But the men will come in to-morrow."

She looked down at the crowd, her chin raised, the white line of her throat showing, and Arden, standing beside her, realised that he had never known the real Elizabeth Grenville till that night. She had loosened her reserve. The war had stirred her profoundly.

"It will be good for us."

She caught her breath.

"Good for us! We are going to live; we are going to learn to make sacrifices, to face death. Just think what England was two months ago, a bored, grumbling, quarrelsome country. Haven't I changed in a month? Of course. And you, are you the same man?"

He winced. Never had she struck so intimate a note. It was as though she was opening her heart to him and expecting him to open his to her.

"We were getting spoilt."

"How I envy you men! It is a man's game—all this."

Arden was silent, oppressed by the realisation of all that these words of hers implied. She could not imagine an Englishman hanging back. She talked as though she took it for granted that he would volunteer.

A sudden restlessness seized him. It was pain for him to be near her. He wanted to be alone, to think.

The crowd was breaking up into black dots and eddies. Arden noticed how sharply the shadow of the Abbey Gate was outlined by the moonlight on the grass. The sky was clear and cloudless. This little English town looked as though it had slept undisturbed for centuries.

"I must be getting home."

His own voice sounded thin and unconvincing.

"And I too. I ought not to be here. We have people staying with us, but I had to come."

Her way was his way for two hundred yards or more, along under the abbey wall where a row of old Scotch firs spread their black tops against the moonlight. Milford Church, on its green mound, stood black and square, its gilt weathercock aglint. The dark cypresses growing between the graves looked like so many mute sentinels. Once, in mounting the steps that led up to the raised path under the abbey wall, James Arden's hand touched hers. He drew away instantly with self-conscious pride, but she had smiled and glanced at him in the deep shadow which lay beneath the wall.

"What a changed life for most of us!"

He answered her almost brusquely, and neither of them spoke again before they reached the iron gates and the lodge of Milford Hall. Arden swung one of the gates back for her, and his eyes avoided hers.

"Good night."

"I shall see you to-morrow. They are to meet on the 'green'—the men."

He nodded.

"I have a lot of work to get through. I'll try."

"You must come. It will be a great morning. We shall be proud of this little town, I hope."

"Yes."

"Good night."

Arden swung the gate to behind her, but he did not move away. This entry to Milford Hall had always fascinated him, with its little red lodge-house and stately iron gates that opened upon stateliness and mystery in the midst of a prosaic town. Looking through the iron gates one saw green spruces and great trees, gloomy cedars, the dapplings of sunlight on grass, and the half hidden, mature, Jacobean beauty of a goodly house. On moonlight nights the place was an exquisite study in shadows. Arden had often paused there with the quite innocent delight of a child outside a garden.

To-night the place filled him with a great sadness.

It belonged to her, and he realised the nature of her heritage as he watched her disappear under the trees. Tradition counted; it was in the blood. The Grenvilles were people who had never spared themselves when blood had had to be spilt and human sacrifices made. They had never been trammelled by the petty necessities of life. The great issues had always been open to them; their lives had been spacious, adventurous, proud.

Arden turned away with a twinge of bitterness and self-scorn. What a ridiculous dreamer he had been through all these months! He had succeeded, yes, made a name for himself, even saved a little money, but he belonged to a different world from the world of Elizabeth Grenville. He had dared to emerge from that country cottage of his, and to imagine that his personality and his work as an author could count as tradition and prestige counted in this little red town among the hills.

His cottage lay about a mile outside Milford, a little rambling place that had once been a farmhouse. Arden loved the place. It had meant the realisation of one of his dreams. Spaciousness, books and a garden, a garden dependent upon the labour of his own hands! They had come to him, and now he despised them as the banalities of peace.

"Any letters, Mrs. Barker?"

"Yes, sir. I put them on the mantelpiece, sir."

He passed the ascetic figure of his housekeeper and made his way into the room that served him as keeping-room and study. The lamp with the red shade was lit. The windows were open, and he could smell the night-stock in the bed below them.

Two letters stood propped against the clock on the mantelpiece. He opened them perfunctorily; the handwriting on each of the envelopes was so hopelessly familiar.

"DEAR JIM,—You don't know how horrid it is to have to write like this, but this terrible war is making everything so dear. I used to be able to manage on two pounds a week, but now I can't do it, though I have been pinching everywhere I can. Ruth has just caught measles. Isn't it vexing? It means another doctor's bill. Leonard has been in bed for three days. He had another bad attack of hoemorrhage last Tuesday. How good you are, Jim! I don't know what we should do," etc., etc.

Arden read the thing through wearily. Rose, his elder sister, had always been a pathetic figure, and her fate had been a consumptive husband, three children, and no money. For three years they had been absolutely dependent on James Arden, and, being a good sort of fellow, he had accepted this burden among others and had never complained.

The second letter was more vigorous and promising, but it also indicated the nature of Arden's responsibilities. Kate, his second sister, was fighting her own way, working in London to qualify as a woman doctor. Her course had two more years to run, and Arden was financing her.

"DEAR OLD LAD,—So many thanks for the last cheque. Some day I am going to pay it all back again.

"Bother this war. Why wasn't I born two years earlier? If I were qualified now," etc., etc.

There was no letter from Peter the schoolboy, Peter for whose fees James Arden was responsible; but that was the complete picture that necessity had painted for him. He had succeeded, and in success had taken to himself all these responsibilities. He was the shepherd of a flock. The burden of all these lives lay on his shoulders.

And now the Great War called him, an unmarried man of three-and-thirty. How could he answer that call, go and leave these people moneyless and at the mercy of chance? It was impossible. His whole income was created by his pen. He had accepted these responsibilities; he could not fling them aside even to please a woman and his own pride.

Elizabeth Grenville paused beside Aunt Nancy's chair in the great stone loggia of Milford Hall. Aunt Nancy had been reading the morning paper. Her benign face had a look of puzzled distress.

"Isn't it terrible, dear?—terrible!"

Elizabeth's thoughts were fixed upon the nobler issues.

"Oh, I don't know. It's a scourge; we shall be better for it. We shall be proud of our men."

"Gregory told me that thirty-three had volunteered."

"Yes; it's splendid. I am going down now. They are to be driven into Oakshot. They must have a fine send-off. James Arden is to meet me."

Aunt Nancy glanced up questioningly.

"I suppose—well, everybody will be volunteering."

"Everybody—clerks, dukes, poets, painters, cooks and chauffeurs."

"And James Arden? Will a man like that throw up his career?"

"Of course. He will be one of the first. Our best men will show the way."

"It's very splendid, dear, but how sad!"

Elizabeth Grenville passed down the drive and under the stately calm of the great cedars. The little red town in the valley was beside itself; she could hear the local band playing, and though the music was execrable she forgave it because of the occasion. People had flung flags out of their windows, the children had been let out of school; it was a sunny September morning; the band blared, and no one looked sad.

A row of cars decorated with flags had been drawn up in long file outside the White Hart Hotel. The men of the hour were grouped on the "green," rather shy and self-conscious, but wholly happy. Old General Vandeleur, from High Ashes, was talking to them, while a recruiting sergeant strutted up and down with an eye for likely fellows who might be snatched up at the last moment.

Elizabeth Grenville was part of the life of Milford; a flavour of feudalism still lingered in the place; she knew most of the men by name, those men who had chosen to carry a gun.

"I'm proud of you."

Her pride showed in her eyes and in her bearing as she walked through that group of country lads.

"I'm proud of you all."

Old Vandeleur met her, hat in hand. The soldier's eyes had a queer, happy glint in them.

"The old country's all right. By George! I wish I were twenty years younger. Our lads are made of the right stuff."

A long, grey car came slowly along the road skirting the "green."

"Hallo, General!"

"Hallo, Winnington!"

Hats were lifted to Elizabeth Grenville. Both the young men in the car were ready to wear her favours.

"I sat on the War Office steps for five hours yesterday. Guy here—had some luck. He was a crock in the Yeomanry three years ago. They are going to give him a regiment."

"Glad to hear it, Hemmerde."

"Oh, we'll get in all right. I say, those fellows have turned up well."

They were talking through the General to Elizabeth Grenville. Their homage was hers. It is the woman whose praise is sweet when men go out to war.

"Yes, it's splendid! You all are splendid!"

They were nice boys, and a sudden shyness overcame them.

"Of course we like it. Nothing to boast about. Why, it's the chance of a life!"

She smiled at them beneficently, and in turning to catch something that the General was saying, she sighted James Arden walking slowly towards them. Her glance rested on him for several seconds. She forgot to listen to old Vandeleur's prosings.

"Hallo! here comes the author man. How do you fancy Arden as a dashing dragoon?"

Winnington was smiling and leaning forward over the steering wheel. Hemmerde's elbow had caught him in the ribs.

"Shut up, you idiot!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, all right."

They stared at Arden, and nodded to him with a certain aloofness as he joined the group. They did not look at Elizabeth Grenville, for perhaps neither of them cared to go in search of the truth.

James Arden had no light in his eyes. He looked grave, even sullen.

"I am glad you could come. This is not a sight to be missed."

"No. I suppose it is one of a thousand incidents marking a new epoch."

She glanced at him inquiringly. He did not carry himself with any confidence, and confidence was the note of the morning.

"I like to see these men going off with a joke and a laugh. It's so English."

Arden stared at the recruits.

"Yes. No imagination. They are to be envied."

"You mean that imagination means cowardice?"

"Don't let us use that word. It's too crude—and too unjust."

She gave a little lift of the head, and her eyes clouded. The General was issuing orders. The line of cars came sliding along, hooting to warn eager mothers and sisters out of the way.

"Now, lads, climb in. How many can you take, Winnington?"

"Four, sir."

"All right. Fill up, and move on and then wait for the rest."

A quarter of an hour of excitement, cheering, kissing and flag-waving followed. Cigarettes, chocolate, packets of tobacco were thrown into the cars. Everybody made a joke of it, even though some eyes were a little dim. These country lads went off bravely. The day seemed rather objectless afterwards.

There was a far-away look in Elizabeth Grenville's eyes. James Arden still loitered at her side with an air of melancholy self-absorption.

Old Vandeleur came up to say good-bye.

"I'm just running over to Eveleigh to whip up men. Good-bye, Dame Bess. I suppose you will be shouldering a gun, Arden, before long?"

Arden's face was like the face of a man roused out of a reverie to meet some sudden danger.

"I? Nothing would please me better."

His eyes met Elizabeth Grenville's, and he saw that she was watching him. Her face betrayed a certain expectancy. He would have given the little transient fame he had won to have been able to say, "I am going to-morrow."

The soldier gave him a keen, appraising glance, and walked off towards his car. Arden understood the meaning of the look. Men were being put to the grim test of action. Words had ceased to be of any significance.

He found himself crossing the "green" with Elizabeth Grenville beside him. A glimpse of her profile troubled him. She seemed to have withdrawn herself behind a sudden silence.

Arden felt acutely miserable. Explanations, attempts at justification stuck in his throat. How could a man make excuses to the woman he loved when those lads had just gone off to give themselves for England?

Yet he had to say something; this tense silence maddened him.

"What a gorgeous day!"

He knew that her eyes threw him a quick glance of surprise.

"Perfect."

"All this rather disproves the theory about gunfire bringing on rain."

"It appears so."

Ages seemed to pass before they reached the iron gates. Arden did not linger there, nor did Elizabeth Grenville appear to be in an expansive mood. He broke away with the gaucherie of a shy boy, humiliated, hating himself, conscious

of a sense of bafflement and of a smothering silence that inspired distrust.

Arden hated that cottage of his when he returned to it; he hated the garden that he had made. They seemed to stand in his way, soft-eyed, helpless things, like these women and children whom he had to support. And yet—all the while—the greater unselfishness was struggling to overcome the less; he knew in his heart of hearts that circumstances were too strong for him.

A glance at the morning paper did not help him. He had taken it out into the little orchard where an old apple tree threw a circle of shade. There was no escape. That grim and tormenting struggle on the Aisne, those desperate flanking movements, the agony of Belgium, the insistent call for men! He tossed the paper aside, with a vision of Elizabeth Grenville's proud and watching face. Did it matter to her whether he went or not? Would she think him a creature of excuses if he ever tried to tell her why he could not go?

James Arden passed through one of the most bitter mornings of his life, for even the resignation that came to him was born of a kind of surrender to fate. Compassion and a sensitive generosity won the day. He thought of Rose's youngsters, of Peter the schoolboy, of Kate fagging away in London and making her eyes red with reading. The prime necessity seemed so obvious, so inevitable. He was fighting for these children of his own blood, giving them breathing space and room to grow in the great struggle for existence. It was up to him to say nothing, to look the world in the face, to carry on.

A note was brought to him next day by a boy on a bicycle. The lad's manners were somewhat bucolic. He poked a freckled face over the hedge, discovered Arden mowing the grass, and hailed him without ceremony.

"This be for you."

Arden stared at the child, who tossed the note over the hedge on to the grass, remounted his machine and went gallivanting down the hill with his feet off the pedals.

Arden knew whence the letter had come. He opened it with a feeling of unwillingness, not counting on being comforted:

"DEAR JIM,—*We are having an informal little party to-morrow at four o'clock. It is in honour of the 'Knights of Milford,' who are going out to war.*

"We shall be glad to see you if you care to come. Yours truly,

"ELIZABETH GRENVILLE."

He went. In fact, he compelled himself to go, making an escort of his pride. He found them all grouped under one of the cedars, with a manservant handing round tea, and a couple of puppies causing some amusement by their undisciplined attempts to smell the cakes. There were the usual girls whom Arden had met at tennis. The men could be numbered on the fingers of one hand. Young Hemmerde was in khaki, Winnington and two more had just succeeded in crowding into an O.T.C. The rector's son had enlisted in a cavalry regiment, and had been sent home to report at a depot in two days. Illingsworth, of Illingsworth and Illingsworth, the Milford solicitors, a married man of thirty-six, was to rejoin a Territorial regiment in the course of the week.

"I am so glad you have come."

Her reserve had vanished, but Arden still saw that questioning look in her eyes.

The rector's son was describing his experiences at the recruiting office.

"What do you think? They told me last week I had veins, and that I couldn't march, and I've done my twenty-five miles a day. Well, I just tramped it all the way from here up to town just to show them. It took me three days."

He laughed joyously.

"What rot, isn't it? And I was going for a cavalryman."

Elizabeth Grenville looked at him with a kind of maternal tenderness.

"You are splendid."

"Oh, bosh! It's only like seeing a scrum at school and wanting to be in it."

It was a man's business, and they talked like men, these quiet fellows who hated anything that could be called swank. It was the most glorious form of "shop," spreading itself over half the surface of the globe, touching India, New Zealand, and the Russian steppes. These men were surrendering more than they imagined. Even on that September afternoon the more serious of them glimpsed the things they would have to bear.

"Do you know what you fellows will find hardest?"

Illingsworth looked round at them with a shrewd smile.

"Having to shave once a week?"

"No, the going back to school part of it. Having some fussy old fool bullying you and not being able to answer back."

"Oh, that's part of the game."

"It won't be so easy for men who have been their own masters."

One of the puppies succeeded at last in welshing a cake. There was a roar of approval.

"Well done; he's broken through."

"Captured their artillery."

Arden sat there, consciously passive among these men of action. He had nothing to say; the whole scheme of life had changed; the man who remained the civilian was losing his right to be heard. He envied young Hemmerde in his khaki, and Winnington there, and Illingsworth who was leaving his wife and children. He had no share in this quiet, smiling enthusiasm, and he felt sick at heart.

Now and again he met Elizabeth Grenville's eyes. She was watching, waiting, counting on his declaring himself. He saw her smile at the others with an air of pride. Even these girls had changed, reacted to the great crisis; they had softened and they had hardened; their eyes seemed to look at a man in a different way.

Arden stayed to the very end, paralysed in measure by his own self-consciousness. Hemmerde and Winnington went off together. Illingsworth had work to do, the work of a man venturing forth into the unknown. Young Hacket was making shy but open love to Elizabeth Grenville. She did not repulse him. Her eyes were strangely kind.

Arden found himself alone with her at last. He had nothing to say, little to hope for, and yet he lingered on, inarticulate and proud. That waiting look in her eyes baffled him. Everything or nothing, that was what she seemed to desire.

"What a great adventure!"

"For men——"

"Those boys."

She answered him rather brusquely.

"Jack Illingsworth is no boy."

"I know. All honour to him. But then—he is not alone; he leaves a partner behind him; the work goes on——"

"Is it possible to criticise a man who has thrown up everything, risked everything?"

Her mouth seemed to grow thin and scornful; her eyes hardened. Arden had not meant to be grudging.

"I said—all honour to him. I meant it."

"Only a soldier can criticise other men in future."

"He felt the hot blood rising to his face.

"Sometimes it is easier to go than to stay behind."

She was unconvinced; she did not rise to the suggestion; she did not help him. Her face remained cold and whitely calm beneath the shade of the great tree.

His pride was stung to the quick.

"It is very difficult to judge."

"I suppose any man can go—if he is desperately eager to go."

Arden rose. A sudden bitter anger had been roused in him. What did this woman know of the struggle for existence, of poverty, of the miserable limitations that hamper those who have to work for a wage? It was very easy for her to judge. She had never had to sacrifice herself for the sake of other people who were poor.

"I have had to work very hard——"

He got no further. His pride was in revolt, but he kept his temper.

"Life is not easy for all of us. I'll be saying good-bye."

She watched him walk across the grass, feeling herself disillusioned, deeply grieved. She imagined that he was thinking of his own career, that he was one of those artistic egoists who set the little notoriety of their names higher than the blood-call of a nation.

Arden took the field path home. The greater self-sacrifice lay before him, the dull, drab, obvious, daily duties that filled Elizabeth Grenville with instinctive scorn. That a man should sit down at his desk and write stories while men were fighting over there in France! The white fire of her patriotism had scorched Arden's heart. As he walked home over the fields he tried to persuade himself that he no longer cared, that her lack of sympathy had killed his love for her. It was a lie—and he knew it. He loved her all the more desperately for that merciless enthusiasm of hers.

For James Arden there followed days of savage and strenuous work. He plunged into it, tried to lose himself in it, and to pretend that work satisfied him, and that he could forget such things as the war and a woman. When he had finished at his desk he went straight into his garden and sweated there like a slave. There was comfort in the tiring of his body; he went to bed exhausted, and sleep came to him at once.

He began to build a big rose pergola from the porch of his cottage to the gate leading into the road. There were fruit trees to be planted in the orchard that autumn, and he dug pits for them. He went to and fro at the tail of his mowing machine, repaired a fence that was rotten, lifted his potato crop and stored it in an outhouse. For a fortnight he did not go outside his own gate. He refused to be faced with the seeming futility of all this labour; it was a drug to him, and he took it.

On the hill just behind Arden's cottage there was a wood of Scotch firs. A footpath ran through the wood, winding to and fro among the straight trunks of the trees.

It was a solemn place, this wood, with its deep shadows and its whispering branches overhead, and its solemnity seemed reflected in Elizabeth Grenville's eyes as she wandered along the path one day in October.

From a great woodland window that was filled with the blue of the sky, green fields and the autumnal splendour of the Milford woods, she could overlook Arden's cottage and garden. She paused there, resting one hand against the trunk of a fir. Arden was at work on his pergola, hammering in nails with a ferocity that seemed to tell of bruised fingers. She watched him fitting the cross-pieces into their places, sawing off the rough ends and nailing them to the posts. Her grave eyes looked sad. She had cared sufficiently to believe that the man down yonder was not quite like other men, that he had a fine brain, a more picturesque personality. And he was playing at living while men fought and died.

She turned back saddened, half-tempted to sneer at herself for having been so blind, so much the victim of treacherous impressions. The path opened by a "kissing gate" into Vernor's Lane, and as she reached the lane she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs and the sound of voices. Three mounted men swung round the corner of the wood. She was in no mood to meet people, but it was too late for her to turn back.

They were "hunting men," men she had known from childhood, but riding now on sterner business. Major Falconer, with the hogged moustache and the battle-blue eyes, was the "remount officer" for the district. Sir Charles Grimthorpe was in khaki. Young Eltringham had volunteered, but had been rejected for his eyesight.

They drew in and saluted her. Major Falconer had flirted with her when she was six. Sir Charles Grimthorpe had been a great friend of her father's. To the two elder men she was still something of the child. Young Eltringham had asked her to marry him less than a year ago.

"Heard the news?"

"No. What is it?"

"The Germans are in Antwerp."

"In spite of the newspaper men, and all that rot about it being one of the strongest fortified places in Europe!"

Eltringham patted his horse's neck.

"I am sick of the newspapers. What do those fellows who write know of Germany? Just nothing. There is one idiot, a novelist, who has written an article, giving the Russians just three months to get into Berlin."

Falconer's blue eyes looked fierce.

"I'd stop half the newspapers, shut up all the libraries and cinemas, and start the country on conscription. What use are all these talking, scribbling people—like that fellow down the road there?"

They exchanged glances and smiled.

"A healthy, unmarried man of military age nailing up sticks for his roses. Pergolas and poetry! Damnation!"

Elizabeth Grenville's face remained impassive and cold, but her heart beat faster.

"You mean James Arden?"

Her voice betrayed no emotion.

"The author man. It passes my comprehension how a fellow can play about like that."

Sir Charles Grimthorpe put in one of those slightly sententious periods for which he was famous.

"We are being supremely tested, Falconer—tested as a nation. Individualism is on its trial. In the future we shall know our men. Let a fellow like Arden go on scribbling for old women. He will never count with the people who know."

They had work to do, and they rode away up the lane, leaving Elizabeth Grenville wounded by their scorn. Those scathing words had discovered the truth to her, laid bare the reality of her caring very greatly about the thing they had despised. A man's honour did matter. And yet she was angry with herself for caring, angry with Arden for having stolen that which she could no longer give. He had tricked her, with a fine but false appearance of manliness, and her pride rose in arms, demanding self-expression. She walked down the lane in the direction of Arden's cottage. She felt that she must let her pride soar like a falcon loosed from her wrist, a falcon that would tear the heart out of his selfishness.

She paused at the gate in the hedge. Arden was standing on a stool, balancing a larch pole, with his back towards her. She watched him lift the pole into its place.

"You seem very busy."

He turned sharply, and sprang down from the stool. She was resting her hands on the top bar of the gate, her face very pale, her eyes full of a glitter of irony.

"I am putting up something for my roses."

The words sounded fatuous enough, and he knew it.

"Have you heard the news?"

"Life is nothing but news."

"The Germans have taken Antwerp."

She spoke the words very quietly, but they were uttered as an accusation. He flushed, as though she had accused him of cowardice, for his intuition sensed her scorn.

"It is only a question of time."

"Time?"

"Yes. They have made their great effort and failed. We shall crush them in the end."

"We—— We English."

Harden his pride as he would he could not meet her eyes. He more than guessed that this was a bitter, personal challenge thrown at him by the woman he loved. She did not trust him, credit him with being the victim of fatal, unavoidable responsibilities.

"We are getting the men."

"All honour to those who are going. If I were a man, I could not stay at home."

For one moment he hesitated. In a few words he could have explained things to her, shown her how helpless he was, proved himself the martyr of his own good conscience. But his pride stiffened itself. A fierce resentment inspired

him. What right had she for a moment to suspect him of being a shirker and a coward?

"It is very easy to judge. There are many things that a woman does not understand."

He did not look at her. His eyes stared past her at the wooded slopes of the opposite hill.

"So it seems."

"Each man must choose for himself, nor need he justify himself to anybody."

"I see."

They were so near each other, and yet so far apart. An implacable pride raised an intangible yet fatal barrier between them.

"I am glad that all Englishmen are not such individualists."

She turned away from the gate, and he saw her profile white and unforgiving against the green of the opposite hedgerow.

Then she paused and glanced back at him.

"Good-bye. I suppose these things are best studied at a distance. Perhaps you will be writing war stories. Art is all-absorbing, is it not?"

Arden did not answer her.

"Good-bye."

She walked away down the lane, and Arden went back to his work. And perhaps they hated each other with a love that was disguised as hate. Both were unhappy, but in different ways—she because the man had disappointed her most tragically, he because the woman had failed to believe in him as a man.

Arden hurried across the Park in the direction of the Marble Arch. It was a grey afternoon in November. Men were drilling on the grass, or on what passed for grass; but Arden did not look at them. He walked like a man who wished himself blind to such things.

Khaki everywhere, or the blue of Kitchener's later armies. Men in plain clothes drilling or marching to the recruiting stations! Posters that called England to arms! It was impossible to escape from the great war, to forget that the great blood-game called.

Arden's face had an ascetic look. He seemed to be denying himself something, to be suppressing some natural desire.

Crossing the road-space inside the gates he saw a girl waiting for him. She came forward, smiling, a strongly-built, shapely young woman, with a pale face and keen, dark eyes.

"Here you are!"

She shook hands with him like a man, looking him frankly in the face.

"I'm late, Kitty."

"I always allow you five minutes. Besides, there is so much to watch now."

"Ready for some tea?"

"Quite!"

They found a tea-shop in Oxford Street, and a table where they were out of the crowd.

"Well, how are you getting on, Kitty?"

He looked at her with sad eyes of affection, for she had always been his favourite sister, but that afternoon she had no wish to talk about herself. She was more interested in her brother.

"How long are you going to be in town, Jim?"

"All the winter."

"But you haven't given up Milford for good?"

He avoided her eyes.

"For the winter, anyway. At least, I am arranging it."

Kate Arden poured out his tea, and dropped three lumps of sugar into it with an air of deliberation.

"Dear old Milford. I should like a week-end in the cottage before you shut it up. Take me down there, Jim."

"It's dull in winter."

"Dull! Why, I just love the wet silence and the green restfulness, even in winter."

"I'm sorry, dear; it can't be done."

She looked at him intently for a moment. He was staring across the room, and his eyes and forehead were the eyes and forehead of a man in pain. She was quick, sensitive, full of understanding, not given to blurting out crude questions, but there was something here that challenged her love for him.

"All right, Jim. Tired of Milford?"

"No."

His eyes grew sullen, and then lit up with a sudden flare of anger. He wanted sympathy; he wanted to be understood.

"It is rather difficult down there, just at present."

"Difficult?"

"Yes, you see, the war has stirred people up. Everybody has been volunteering. I didn't."

"Jim, you don't mean to say they have been beasts to you?"

He smiled grimly.

"Oh, well, I think I was becoming a sort of an outcast. You see, the feeling is very strong in such a place as Milford. Of course, I can't go; it's impossible."

Kate looked shocked.

"But you have friends there; didn't you tell them that you have half a dozen people to keep?"

"No."

"Jim, why not?"

"I'm too proud to make excuses. I have always been rather reserved. There are some people to whom one is too proud to tell things."

"Oh! You don't boast about being one of the finest sportsmen alive. I'm angry. Oh, bother these people!"

The place was filling up, and their privacy was at an end.

"Walk back with me to my rooms, Jim."

"I should like to."

Night had fallen, and they went eastwards along Oxford Street, the glare from the shops lighting up their serious faces. Kate Arden had thrust her arm under his. The man at her side wanted to talk; he was hungry for sympathy.

"Do you want to go, Jim?"

"Where?"

"Into the Army—to carry a gun?"

He hesitated.

"You can't hide it, dear. And here we are, a helpless lot of women and children on your shoulders. It's maddening."

He pressed her arm.

"I don't mind that, Kitty."

"It's what they said down at Milford. Didn't she believe in you?"

"Who?"

"You know whom I mean."

He did not answer her for a moment, and she could see that his pride was wounded.

"She despises me. I was not going to make excuses. She might have trusted me."

Kate's voice quivered with anger.

"She must be very blind. To think you capable of shirking! Why trouble? Yes—but after all one ought to trouble."

They crossed Regent Street, and had to pass slowly through the mob of women outside Peter Robinson's. Neither of them spoke till they were clear of the crowd.

"Let's turn into a side street, Jim. I have got an idea."

"Well?"

"I want your cottage for a week-end."

He glanced questioningly into her face.

"You mean——"

"Yes. I'm going down there. I must go down there. I'll go alone."

He reflected.

"I don't want anyone to make excuses for me, Kitty."

"Excuses! I am not going to make excuses."

Hers was the stronger will that night. She persuaded him to let her have that cottage of his for the week-end before it was shut up for the winter. She had spent all July there with her brother, and she knew Elizabeth Grenville; moreover, she had believed that Elizabeth Grenville cared.

"I just want to meet someone, Jim."

"Better leave it alone," he said with a man's pessimism.

"No. I want her to know. One can say things that one cannot write."

Kate went to Milford where the beech woods were all bronze against the blue of the sky. The red town looked a little melancholy and lost in the green of its valley. Kate drove through it on the way to Arden's cottage, but Milford itself was of no significance; the cedars of Milford Hall raised a sanctuary that sheltered the real spirit of the place.

Arden's housekeeper was still at the cottage. A wire from town had warned her to light fires and air linen. She had expected Arden, and was surprised to see his sister.

"I hope Mr. Arden is well, miss?"

"Quite, Mrs. Barker, thanks."

"I suppose he's going for a soldier—like all the rest?"

Kate did not waste her energy on explanations where small people were concerned.

"Is Miss Grenville at home?"

"I believe so, miss. She was in church last Sunday."

Kate set forth next day on her adventure. There was frost in the air, and a clear winter sunset showed red above the woods. The cedars looked like masses of black marble, and here and there a star shone out like a silver point in a deep blue curtain.

This surprise visit of hers was an essay in psychology; she had chosen the hour and studied its possibilities, but her luck was out.

A new manservant opened the door, a stolid elderly person who had been taken on in place of a younger man who had volunteered.

"Is Miss Grenville at home?"

Of course Miss Grenville was at home. She was in her own drawing-room, sitting before a fire, a very obvious fact; and the stolid gentleman who opened the door to Kate had no imagination and did not deal in subtleties. So she was shown into a half-darkened room where a blazing fire showed two figures silhouetted against its glow. The interruption was welcomed by neither. The man had pushed his chair back, and his attitude was full of youthful impatience. Elizabeth was sitting on a sofa, staring at the fire, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting on her hands.

"Miss Arden."

Elizabeth Grenville rose with an apparent surprise that did not seek concealment. Guy Hemmerde, a lean and dusky figure in khaki, with the firelight glinting on his spurs, seemed to stand on guard, waiting.

The two women shook hands. Hemmerde was introduced.

"I am spending the week-end at my brother's cottage. I thought I would come and see you."

"I had heard that Mr. Arden had left."

"Yes—for the winter."

"I see. Won't you come nearer the fire? Tea will be in quite soon, I expect."

Kate knew at once that she had blundered, that she had been thrust in as a stranger upon these two who had been talking by the fire. They had come very near to each other in the twilight, and she had driven them apart. Young Hemmerde sat there, stiffly indifferent, staring at the Dutch tiles in the fireplace. Elizabeth had become the mere society creature, politely tolerating the intervention of a bore.

Something had been happening. A man had been making love by firelight, but with what success Kate could not guess. That she herself was an intruder was sufficiently obvious. Fate could not have suggested a more unpropitious moment.

She had to talk, for the other two were silent and unhelpful.

"Wasn't it horrible about the *Good Hope* and the *Monmouth*?"

"Terrible."

"The ships ought never to have been there."

Elizabeth frowned at the fire.

"Our own fault. We have been a nation of talkers and scribblers. We are beginning to discover who are the real men."

"We didn't realise things."

"The soldiers realised things—perfectly. We have been governed by journalists and politicians."

Tea arrived, and the lights were lit; the room seemed to grow chillier, and more unfriendly. Guy Hemmerde's impatience refused to be hidden; he had motored fifty miles to see Elizabeth Grenville, and Arden's sister was in the way.

Kitty accepted her defeat. There was no friendliness in Elizabeth Grenville's eyes. If she suspected anything she did not choose to be generous to Arden's sister.

"I must really be going. I am supposed to be having a holiday, but I am reading for an exam."

"Are you—indeed?"

Hemmerde said nothing.

She escaped, feeling hot and ruffled and a little humiliated. It was a superb night and a full moon was rising, but it seemed to show a blank and callous face to Kate Arden's eyes. She realised that she would only make her brother look ridiculous by trying to convince people that his seeming selfishness was a piece of self-renunciation.

It proved a dreary week-end for Kate Arden. Wind and rain followed on a clear, frosty night, and the Sunday was a drenched and melancholy day, bitterly raw and cold. She trudged down to Milford Church, feeling like a stranger in a strange land, and from one of the cross pews at the end of a side aisle she studied Elizabeth's Grenville's calmly handsome face. She could understand her brother's love for her, but its hopelessness seemed beyond contradiction.

Kate had courage; she did not shirk telling Arden the truth. It seemed to her better that he should know.

She wired to him to take her out to tea on the Monday, and when they met she knew what his air of indifference concealed.

"I'm afraid I did not do any good, Jim."

His face hardened.

"I did not expect it, old girl. Did you see anybody in particular?"

"I had tea at the Hall."

"Oh!"

"Times weren't propitious. In fact, I was very much in the way. Someone in khaki had motored over."

"Anyone I know?"

"Hemmerde."

"Oh, Hemmerde! I see."

No more was said on either side, but James Arden understood. So that pink-and-white boy who had put on a uniform had taken his place in the sun!

One Saturday a week or two later Boy Peter came to spend a week-end with his brother. Peter was a sensitive, finely built youngster, with a great rapacity for hero-worship; but his enthusiasms varied every six months. At the moment he was war mad, and Sir John French was his hero.

Arden took the boy to see a Kitchener regiment reviewed in the park. It was a dull, lowering Jay, but the park was crowded. Peter swung along at Arden's side, his scarlet school-cap on the back of his head, his hands in his pockets, his eyes alight.

"I say, what a lot of chaps in mufti. It's like a football match. What are they outside the ropes for?"

"All sorts of reasons—and no reasons."

"Rotters—don't you think?"

"I'm in mufti myself, so I say nothing."

The boy's brown eyes turned to him eagerly.

"Oh, I say, Jim, I wasn't thinking of you. You're a sort of father of a family. I know all about that."

"About what?"

"You keeping us all. You are an A1 sport. Besides, you want to go."

"How do you know?"

"Kitty told me."

It was a strange coincidence that in all that crowd they should have walked up against two people who belonged to a little country town. Elizabeth Grenville was staying, in London; Guy Hemmerde had contrived to get forty-eight hours' leave. He was in love; that was all that fate had granted him as yet.

They made a handsome pair: the tall girl with the proud face, and the brown lad in khaki. Even Arden had to grant them that when chance decreed that sudden meeting. There was no escape. They met in a narrow lane that divided two sections of the crowd.

Elizabeth's eyes betrayed nothing. She did not even smile at Peter when he was introduced to her. Hemmerde had a certain triumphant air, and Arden hated him for it.

"Plenty of people here."

"Too many young men in mufti."

"That was my young brother's verdict."

"Why not take it to heart?"

Very little more was said, but those two put Arden under their feet. It was done so palpably that Peter noticed it, and was whole-heartedly puzzled. Jim had always been to him something between a father and a hero; other lads at the school had rather envied him his brother, who was a celebrity.

Elizabeth and her officer man passed on.

"I say, who's Miss Grenville?"

"Someone from Milford."

"A bit of an iceberg!"

Even his boy's eyes noticed that strange look on his brother's face. He continued to be puzzled, but he was sufficiently sensitive to refrain from blurting out any further questions. He had a notion that those two had been insolent to Jim, with a sort of subtle, freezing insolence that was altogether new to him.

"Silly beast that officer chap. I say, they've managed to scrape up a band. Hear them coming, playing 'Tipperary.'"

Arden carried a wounded heart and a wounded pride through that London crowd. He envied Peter his irresponsible youth and his exuberant enthusiasm. What a thing it was to be a boy, with no woman's hands to make a tangle of life, no smoulder of live passion to madden a man with its fumes.

Arden always remembered the night when that amazing letter reached him. Restless and full of a patient discontent, he had spent an hour in the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Westminster, brooding, letting the calm and solemn silence of the place flow over his soul. He had come forth tranquillised, conscious of the far more poignant sufferings of others. He had lost something that had never been his; mothers and wives had lost their all.

He had taken a flat in Victoria Street, high up, under the sky. The noise of the traffic did not worry him; it helped him to feel less lonely.

Sitting before the fire, he read that amazing letter, that excited, jubilant, astonished scrawl that his sister Rose had sent him:

"I can hardly believe it. Uncle Barnabas never troubled about us—much; he was always mean to Leonard. And now we are to have six hundred a year, and there is a legacy of a thousand pounds that will be paid to us at once, so that we shall have ready money. It's amazing. We always knew that the old man was very wealthy.

"You can't think how glad I am, Jim. We shall not be a tax on you any longer. What's more—we shall take Peter off your hands, and Kitty can have enough to help her finish in London —"

Arden sat and stared at the fire.

If this had happened two months ago; if only an old man's belated generosity could have been foreseen!

But he was free to act; his liberty had been given back to him. He rushed like a boy down the long flight of stairs, hailed a taxi, and gave the man the address of the working women's club where Kitty lived.

Kate Arden had a little bed-sitting-room in that big Bloomsbury house. The place was wholly modern in its spirit; all men were not looked on as potential blackguards; these girls were capable of answering to their own consciences.

Arden was shown up. He found Kitty reading "Medicine" before a very modest fire. She tossed the book aside and looked questioningly into his eager, exultant face.

"Read that."

She read the letter and understood.

"It's a miracle! I thought Leonard's Uncle Barnabas was past all hope. I wonder why people have to die in order to be generous?"

"But I'm free, Kitty."

She jumped up and kissed him.

"Oh, you dear, patient old hero. And now?"

He laughed.

"Oh, to-morrow—to-morrow I shall enlist! I know the very regiment."

"One of Kitchener's?"

"No, a Territorial. Men in the know say that the Territorials will get out sooner. It's a reserve battalion that is training to send out big drafts to the one that is already out."

"You'll go in as a private?"

"Of course."

"You're splendid! Oh, she ought to know."

Arden's eyes grew stern.

"No. She misjudged me; let her find out—if it matters. I don't suppose she will ever know. But I can hold up my

head, old girl."

Arden went through it all, the rough-and-tumble process of enlistment, the billeting in odd corners, those queer, amorphous parades of all sorts and conditions of men in all sorts and conditions of clothes. He touched the very rough realities of service in the ranks. All the veneer, the niceties of his social culture, became as nothing. He was one of a herd of male creatures, decent fellows enough; their ways were not his ways, their thoughts not his thoughts.

Clerks, labourers, warehousemen, waiters, scavengers, shop assistants, grooms—the Knightsbridge Fusiliers knew them all. Men spat, and swore. The humour was crude, obvious, rough and ready. Arden had many bad days.

He found himself a clumsy fool at drill. It was a new experience being hectored by a non-com.

"Form fours. As you were. 'Ave you got a left foot, Arden? Yes; well, for Gawd's sake use it. Step back on the left foot. Now then, form fours."

His comrades seemed a little shy of him at first. He was a queer bird, strangely feathered. The days left him utterly weary in mind and body, with tired eyes and a bored soul.

He set his teeth, grimly determined to pull through. Sometimes he felt that he was but half a man, that these rough, coarsely cheerful creatures were his betters. He swallowed his nausea, kept his temper, laughed at himself like a sportsman, refused to let himself shrink from the cheerful human smell of the crowd.

He went through six weeks of it, and became aware of a new spirit. He made the sudden discovery that these men of the people respected him. He had a reputation, some money, and he was in the ranks. A new kind of friendliness showed itself, a friendliness tinged with a rough chivalry that touched him very deeply. These comrades of his did not slap him on the shoulder; but they had accepted him. He was a "sport"; he was a "little gentleman." They were rather proud of Arden.

Then his battalion in the rough was entrained down to Kingscliff, and quartered in huts on the downlands overlooking the sea. The grey skies were not kind, and the huts were not wind-proof and let in the rain. A sea of mud stretched everywhere; all Kingscliff seemed made of mud-camps, permanent barracks and town.

The Knightsbridge Fusiliers christened themselves the "Mudlarks." Their lively cheerfulness refused to be damped or reduced to pulp. Arden went through the first part of the winter with a chronic sore throat and incipient lumbago. His boots were always sodden and wet.

"Bloomin' open-air cure. What!"

"Why don't they put us on stilts, and call us the Stilt Brigade?"

Arden learnt to emulate their cheerfulness. He found himself hardening strangely both in mind and in body, becoming a more primitive creature with tough muscles and hawk's eyes.

Sometimes when off duty he strolled down into Kingscliff town. Kingscliff was a fashionable watering-place; it had its sea front and gardens, its pier, bandstands, promenades and big hotels. That winter it was packed with officers and their womenfolk, wives, future wives, and those "enthusiastic amateurs" who emulate the great profession. It all seemed very strange to Arden, a plain, weather-hardened private in muddy boots and indifferent khaki. He found himself looking with a certain scorn at civilians who slept in beds. The fashionably dressed women both provoked and repelled him; they brought a sensuous and troubling perfume into the muddy seriousness of his life. Visions of Elizabeth Grenville haunted him at times. He felt grimly exultant when he thought of his own thoroughness; the hardships were like the self-scourgings of an anchorite; the animal rage for petticoats that seized on most of the men left him cold and scornful.

And then he made a discovery.

The Fromeshire Yeomanry had come into camp at Kingscliff, and Guy Hemmerde was in command of a squadron. Moreover, the Fromeshires had been warned for service abroad.

The winter wore away, and spring began to put forth its first glimmerings of green. It had a subtle effect on Arden; the slush and the wet disappeared, and life recovered some of its romance. When off duty he went countrywards instead of towards the town; the first primroses filled him with a yearning for something, he knew not what.

On one of these brief ventures of his into Arcady he met Captain Hemmerde. It was in a little green lane that burrowed through the woods at the bottom of a valley. The woods were a mass of bluebells and the birds were singing.

Three officers came riding along, and Arden, who had been sitting on a grass bank below a thorn hedge, jumped up and stood to attention.

The leading officer reined in, and Arden saluted him. It was Guy Hemmerde.

"Does this lane take us up to Kingscliff Downs?"

"Yes, sir."

He did not recognise Arden.

"Thanks, Tommy."

There was an element of grim humour in the incident, but it spoiled Arden's joy in the green woodlands and in the subtle scent of the spring.

A few days later he had been down to Kingscliff to buy tobacco, and his way back lay along the cliffs past the big hotels. Two people were coming out of the gates of the Victoria as Arden went by: Elizabeth Grenville and Guy Hemmerde. Hemmerde was looking into her face, but her eyes gazed out over the sea.

"What about an hour in the green country? I hate these sea fronts."

She smiled.

"Well, perhaps. You are going so soon."

He touched her arm with his hand.

"Does it matter to you, Bess? It matters to me."

They did not notice Arden, nor had he any desire to be seen by them. He turned his face away and hurried on, his chin in the air, his eyes hard and sullen. Yet that vision of her with young Hemmerde had hurt him, humiliated him, made him feel bitter. He still cared very desperately. The look on Elizabeth Grenville's face had made him realise that.

For he had noticed a light in her eyes, something that suggested a new and mysterious tenderness. He had seen Hemmerde touch her arm with his hand.

Arden had guessed at things intuitively, but intuition did not give him a complete vision of Elizabeth Grenville's soul.

Perhaps she could not have explained herself to herself. All she knew was that she was conscious of a strange new spirit of compassion. Death had laid a hand upon the life of the land. Men crossed the sea, and never returned. Youth was spending itself heroically—youth that was splendid and pathetic.

It was the youth in Guy Hemmerde that had touched Elizabeth Grenville's heart. The mother-woman in her was filled with pity. It seemed so hard to refuse love to a man who might be dead—dead for England—in a few weeks.

The greenness of spring had a compassionate softness of its own. Even the birds singing sounded plaintive and persuasive.

"We are off in a fortnight, Bess."

"So soon."

They had driven out, and sent the car back, and the green hedges hid them from the world.

"You know what I want to tell you. What I want to ask you."

"Perhaps."

She looked into his boy's eyes. There was love in them, yet it was not Guy Hemmerde that she loved, but the youth that had offered itself Upon the altar of war.

"I'll tell you everything, dear."

"Well?"

"It's awful cheek, I know."

Before they returned to Kingscliff she had promised to marry him, and to marry him before he went to the front, while Arden, sitting on an upturned bucket outside his hut, cleaning his boots, was trying to put her out of his thoughts. His face looked hard and grim.

"Let her marry the boy," he thought. "I'm tougher than I was last autumn. This is a man's job. I don't want to be pitied."

A few days later the Fromeshire Yeomanry held their "sports." Arden asked for leave and went to them, lured thither by a kind of bitter curiosity. He was one of the khaki-clad crowd about the ropes, one of the common soldiers, and he rather exulted in the thought.

Elizabeth Grenville was there in the officers' enclosure, a little social heaven that he was forbidden to enter. She was one of a little group of English gentlewomen, backed by their menfolk, tall figures of authority. Hemmerde stood behind her chair. He hardly left her, save when he had to take his turn in one of the competitions.

Hemmerde could ride well, and he was finely mounted. The first prize for jumping fell to him.

Arden watched him with a kind of sardonic interest. He was a fresh-eyed, brown-faced youngster, the happy warrior well-loved by Death.

"That there orficer can ride."

"That's 'is gal over there. Kind of proud she looks—what!"

"Another bloody tunic to be wept over some day, s'welp me—Gawd!"

Arden smiled at the grim picturesqueness of his neighbour's prophecy. He did not pity Hemmerde; he would have chosen to replace him, even if he knew that the choice meant certain death.

But even James Arden did not foresee that marriage. It came as a shock to him, a kind of final smashing of his dreams.

It was a soldier's wedding, and the scene was laid at the red-brick garrison church. Bride and bridegroom came out from it under crossed swords. There was a photo of them in one of the illustrated "dailies," and Arden saw that photo. He sat and stared at it for quite a long while, with a queer, ironical smile flickering about his mouth.

"I say, Jacker, when do the Fromeshires go?"

"Monday, old man."

"France?"

"Ask the good Gawd!"

On Monday the Fromeshires embarked for France, and Arden, doing sentry-go on Kingscliff Downs, saw the grey transport go gliding out into the dusk of a spring evening. A couple of destroyers were belching smoke ahead of her, and the sea was the colour of granite, hard and cold. Arden watched the troopship and wondered.

If he had had young Hemmerde's chance would she have waved good-bye to him?

Did she really love that blue-eyed boy?

Would she have married Hemmerde if she had known?

But Arden let his thoughts carry him no farther. He shouldered his rifle and went to and fro, shoulders squared, head up, his eyes looking into the distance. Women were out of his life; war was the great game. He was not going to pity himself or be pitied; he had done with all that.

Arden never expected to meet her again, never counted on meeting her, and yet the thing happened. The roads around Kingscliff were being closed after six o'clock; barriers were thrown across them, and guards set. Arden was doing duty as sentry in a side lane branching off the Sandchurch road when she walked out of the green spring twilight, life and love in a white dress.

He had to challenge her, though his instinct would have prompted him to face about and let her pass.

"It's all right, sentry; I have been for a country walk."

Then she looked along the shining line of his bayonet, and met his eyes. His face had a kind of greyness, the lips tense, the jaw set. She stopped dead, her hands hanging limply, her eyes staring into his.

"What—is it you?"

He shouldered his rifle and stood to attention, heels together, his eyes looking beyond her at the whiteness of a thorn tree in bloom.

"You can pass."

But she did not move. It was as though that changed look of his fascinated her. He was no longer the scribbler of romances, but a bleak-faced, long-jawed, weather-hardened man, lean and keen-eyed, in training for the great game.

"May one talk to a sentry?"

"No."

"Then I shall have to break the regulations. I did not know that you had joined. Is it long?"

"Six months or so."

She glanced at the sleeve of his coat.

"A private?"

"Yes."

"But you should have got a commission."

He smiled, and his smile challenged her.

"I wanted to fight. I wanted to do the thing thoroughly."

"But you never told me."

Her assumption of an intimate interest in him touched his anger.

"Why should I have told you?"

For once her eyes avoided him. He saw her lower lip droop.

"Well—we were——"

"Friends?"

"Perhaps."

He glanced over his shoulder.

"Will you pass along? My lieutenant and the guard are down there on the main road."

She flushed.

"Thank you."

But she did not move.

"Why did you keep things so quiet? I want to know."

"Why should you want to know?"

"I do."

He seemed to think a moment before answering her.

"I did not consider that it mattered. I could not join at the beginning of the war. I never explained things then. I have no mind to explain them now. Will you pass along to the guard? I have to patrol the lane."

He saluted her, laying his right hand on the stock of his rifle, and walked straight past her as though nothing more could be said. She hesitated, and then went on slowly down the lane. Neither of them looked back.

Yet James Arden was shivering with emotion. The perfume of her womanhood had mingled with the scent of the may blossom and the dewy freshness of the twilight. For months he had not spoken to a woman of his own class, and then Chance had thrust the one woman close to him—the one woman who had stirred his senses and his soul. For the moment he hated her because she had filled him with an impossible longing for her. Desire flamed red, the passion of a man who had lived a hard, Spartan life, and whose blood was full of the spring.

Elizabeth Grenville wandered back to Kingscliff in a mood of strange unrest. Another face had come between her and the face of the man she had married. The last months were blotted out; her life went back to the previous summer when Arden had made love to her and she had not said him nay.

Her thoughts and emotions were confused. She had pitied young Hemmerde, married the youth in him, but this other man was different. She did not pity Arden; she was even a little afraid of him. He had filled her with a sudden feeling of hardness, of mastery. And somehow that lean, proud face of his haunted her, and appealed to her own pride.

A day or two later Arden had a letter from her:

"JIM,—*I want to see you. I feel that we have been at cross purposes. I shall walk along the cliffs every afternoon.*

"ELIZABETH."

Arden put a match to the letter and burnt it, and vowed that he would not go. Those words of hers had opened the old wound; the pain of it maddened him, made him curiously cruel. Yet the desire to see her, even to triumph over her, conquered. He went, grimly determined to tell her the truth.

The green carpet of the earth ended in white cliffs and the blue of the sea. The furze was all gold; masses of stunted blackthorn looked like drifted snow. Arden found Elizabeth Grenville waiting where the path ran through a little hollow, and the young bracken was springing up all about her feet.

"I had your letter."

It was the soldier and not the civilian who saluted and stood stiffly as at attention. There was a smoulder of fire in his eyes. His nostrils looked scornful.

"It was good of you to come."

She gazed at him questioningly, with a suggestion of humility.

"I had meant not to come. But then I decided that it did not matter. Nor does it matter."

"Why say that?"

"Because it's a fact. I have given up everything for the great game. You have somebody to live for."

She glanced at him quickly.

"My husband. Well, I can afford to be proud of him."

"Of course."

Arden did not help her, but stood there rigidly, showing her no mercy.

"You remember last September?"

"I think so."

"You had reasons then——"

"Reasons for what?"

"Not volunteering."

He smiled at her.

"You doubted it—doubted me. My pride was equal to yours. I did not choose to make excuses, or what other people would have called excuses."

"Yet you said nothing; never tried to put yourself right with other men. You let them think——"

He broke in hotly.

"Did I care what they thought? They were nothing to me. But someone doubted me, and her distrust made me bitter. I had had to fight my way in life, and even when I had succeeded I was not free. Oh, yes; you may as well know. I had a whole crowd of relations to keep, people who were absolutely dependent on me. There was a brother to educate, a sister whose career depended on my money. So easy to leave them in the lurch—was it not?—and to shoulder a rifle! Then something happened: an old fool died and left us money. I was free. That's all."

His passion accused her; his roughness came near being elemental. She flushed, answering, however, the fire of his scorn.

"What could you expect? Did you help me to understand you?"

"Was it easy for me—to make excuses? You were like a white flame then—in your prejudice and your pride. I did not choose to offer myself as a sacrifice. Well, that's in the past. It does not concern me. War hardens a man."

She gave him one long look, and then turned her face towards the sea. Her lips quivered.

"Don't be so sure. You have not yet felt the pity of it. I have."

"So it seems."

"It was mean of you to say that—mean of you as a man."

"If I am bitter, forget it. How can it matter whatever to you? And now—good-bye."

Her heart had softened towards him. The new manhood in him appealed to her; even his hardness had a new influence over her womanhood.

"We were too proud—too reserved—both of us."

She wanted to keep him there, but he was not to be persuaded.

"Well, there it is. I hope to be across soon. We don't count now as individuals; I'm just a creature trained to kill. Good luck to Hemmerde."

He saluted her, faced about, and walked back by the way he had come, leaving her more in love with him than she had ever been in those sleepy days at Milford.

The Reverend John Briscoe, Army Chaplain, appeared explosively in the lounge of the Westward Ho Hotel. He was like a sunny day in March, brisk and vigorous and pleasant; and he was still rather young.

"I say, Mrs. Hemmerde, there's something worth seeing up on the plain."

Elizabeth laid down her book.

"What is it?"

"Two thousand Territorials have been ordered to embark to-night. They are going straight up into the firing line to fill gaps. They're parading up there—ready for the real thing. It's worth seeing."

She rose.

"Will you take me?"

"Yes. I'll get a taxi. We've just got time."

A cold May night was stealing out of a grey and melancholy east. A gusty wind blew out of the north. There was moonlight on the darkening sea, and the fresh green of the trees looked ruffled and sad.

Dusk had fallen when they left the car and passed through the thickets that edged the Plain. Troops were drawn up there, out in the open. They were visible as dark and motionless masses, strangely silent, and strangely impressive in their silence.

"There they are."

"Can we go nearer?"

"Of course."

She was shivering with excitement, and the wind blew cold.

"What regiments are they?"

"A London Fusilier regiment and a Sussex battalion."

They approached the silent masses of men. A few officers stood grouped together, talking, while here and there a solitary figure remained in reserved isolation. There was a solemn feeling in the air, in the gathering darkness, in the whistling of the wind.

Somewhere a voice shouted an order. The dark masses moved slightly and emitted a dull sound that was a mingling of whispered words, and the rattle of accoutrements.

"They are going to move off; come this way—over to the church. We shall see them pass."

Elizabeth Hemmerde found herself standing under a solitary gas lamp on the edge of a rough road. It was warmer here: a belt of fir trees kept off the wind. She was one of the few women present. It was a male crowd, quiet, eager, and rather grim.

A band struck up and came blaring down the dark road.

"Here they come."

Then began a streaming past of brown figures, rifles on shoulders, packs on backs. They followed the band, tramping by in fours, brown-faced and strong. The crowd cheered, men shouted to friends; now and again a laugh went down the ranks.

"B" Company swung past shouting a brisk refrain:

"We won't be jiggered—
We won't be jiggered—
We won't be jiggered—about!"

And then out of the darkness James Arden came striding into the light of the lamp.

Elizabeth saw him, and the impulse of a moment carried her away.

"Good-bye, Jim."

He was in the near rank. His brown face seemed to flush slightly.

"Good luck!"

She held out a hand, even went a step or two beside the marching men.

"Did you know we were going?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. It was generous of you to come."

He held her hand for a moment.

"Good-bye."

"And good luck."

James Arden sat and stared out of the carriage window, and his sister Kate watched him with anxious eyes.

It was a green summer evening, very peaceful and very still, with a glory of sunlight in the west and the cornfields turning a tawny gold. But James Arden's face had none of the softness of the summer landscape. His mouth seemed to sneer, his eyes had a hard, fixed look; he had lost an arm, and lost it ingloriously without having fired a shot in action.

"There's Milford spire, Jim."

"Yes."

His curt, monosyllabic answer was like the snap of a lock.

"I wonder what the roses look like?"

"Just like roses."

They were alone in the carriage, and she bent forward and patted his arm.

"You have got it badly, dear. It might have been the right arm."

"Possibly. I'm not thinking about that. Fate has played a foul game with me—all through. I didn't train for six months to have my arm smashed up by a motor lorry thirty miles from the firing line."

"Why kick against Fate? Perhaps she was kind. We're proud of you."

"Thanks, old girl. But I'm a sick man, none the less."

They drove from Milford Station through the dusk of a summer evening. It was England at its best—calm, green, tranquil, untouched by war. There was a delightful freshness in the air; heavy rain the night before had washed the hedgerows and laid the dust.

Arden's face still retained its look of scorn. His eyes were sad, but it was a sadness that scoffed.

"What a fool's country! They don't realise things yet."

Kate did not answer him as she might have answered him, for she understood his bitterness and let it pass. The great adventure was over for him.

He had come back to the old life, the civilian's life that seemed curiously empty.

Good friends had been at Arden's cottage. The grass had been mown, the beds were full of flowers; there was no air of sadness or neglect about it. And yet the place left him untouched, unsoftened. Kate, who had given up seven precious days to him, days before an exam., stayed with him in Milford to try and help him find his soul.

For the man of romance and sensitive imaginings seemed dead in him. He had grown curiously hard, cynically callous. He was interested in nothing save the war news, and this interest acquired a morbid intensity that smothered all the kindlier emotions of the man.

He idled about in the garden or went for long walks, choosing the lanes and field paths. The idea of meeting people exasperated him. The normal poise of his manhood had been upset. Sentiment had been crushed out of him, and left a dry, sardonic bitterness behind it.

Kate could have wept over Arden. He had come back to her a hero, and she found him not only maimed in body, but maimed in soul. He refused to have Peter down for a week-end; he refused to see his old friends. Nothing mattered; he had lost all that life had had to give.

She came back from Milford one afternoon with a heart full of pity. Arden was lying in the long chair under an apple tree in the orchard. She ordered tea to be brought to them there.

"Elizabeth Hemmerde is back."

"Oh!"

He betrayed no interest whatever in the news.

"I suppose you heard——"

"What?"

"About Captain Hemmerde's gallantry."

Arden looked bored.

"I saw all that in the papers. He was one of the lucky ones who happened to do something that was spectacular. Is he back on leave?"

"Yes."

Kate Arden stared at the blue sky through the apple boughs.

"It's so sad. Oh, Jim, don't you feel things? Don't you realise what a vast tragedy the war is?"

His face remained hard and morose.

"It's not half so bad as people pretend. We keep up the illusion about being broken-hearted."

"Don't talk like that. Captain Hemmerde is wounded."

"That's a commonplace."

"Oh, Jim! How would you like to be five-and-twenty and shot through the spine—a sort of living corpse?"

He betrayed no emotion.

"Is that what has happened to Hemmerde?"

"Yes."

"He has had all the luck. I'd change with him—with pleasure."

Kate let her hands fall into her lap.

"You don't understand. How hard you are! The war seems to have turned you to iron."

Elizabeth Hemmerde was the last person whom Arden wished to see. He had marched out of her life, so he had told himself, when he had tramped down with his regiment from Kingscliff on that bleak evening in May. He had hardened his heart against her; his pride was like the pride of a fanatic. The knowledge that she was down at Milford stirred no emotion in him. He was conscious only of feeling some envy of Hemmerde, of the man who had done gloriously, and who might die with honour. For Arden had long ago lost all fear of death; he would have truly welcomed it with the pessimism of his indifference to living.

That same evening he went up into the pinewood on the side of the hill and wandered through the solemn spaces between the trees. He had left Kate sitting in the orchard, and when he returned—a woman, a figure was still visible there, a white shape under the shade of an old apple tree. Arden had no suspicions. He let the gate swing to, passed through the garden, and was quite close to her before he realised what had happened.

She rose, and for some moments they stood looking at each other in silence. Elizabeth Hemmerde had changed. Her eyes seemed to appeal to him for something; they were the eyes of a woman who suffered.

"Your sister had to go to Milford. She said that I might see you if I waited."

Arden stared at her almost sternly.

"Please sit down."

She glanced at his empty sleeve.

"I'm sorry. I heard you were——"

"An arm. That's nothing. Please don't pity me. It spoilt my chance of getting killed—that's all."

He spoke roughly, aggressively, as though he had some deep grievance against her.

She winced.

"Oh, yes! Death can be merciful. It may be horrible—to live."

She sat down, her face white and strained; but Arden remained standing looking down at her with hard eyes.

She glanced up at him half appealingly.

"You heard about—Guy?"

He nodded.

"Won't you come and see him?"

"See him! I don't suppose I should be particularly welcome."

He saw her flush, and for the first time he felt a quick shame in the knowledge that he had deliberately and of set purpose spoken to wound her.

"I thought you would understand. I had heard that the men who had been out there—were such good comrades."

"I was out there only three weeks, and I was wounded by a motor lorry, thirty miles behind the lines."

He was sneering at himself, compelling himself to play the cynic.

"But does that make a difference? What has happened to you, Jim?"

"Happened? Well——"

She flung out her hands.

"Oh, don't try to be brutal—cynical. Can't you forgive me? Why don't you try and help? Come down and see Guy."

He looked at her askance, unable to meet her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"He has been shot through the spine. Oh, my God! the horror of it! He is dying slowly, day by day, and he has a wild fear of dying. He is so young; he was so full of life. It's horrible, Jim—horrible!"

Arden turned away from her and stared up at the heavy green tops of the pines. Some struggle was going on within him. The humanity in him had been touched and was pleading with his pride.

Her eyes grew reproachful.

"Can't you forgive? Are our little prides so important—now?"

He faced her, though the cynic in him still sneered and rebelled.

"I'll come. But how can it help?"

"Does that still puzzle you?"

"Yes."

"War seems to have made you blind. But you will come?"

"I promise."

He walked with her to the gate, half tempted to be angry with himself for having relented momentarily towards her.

"Will the afternoon suit your husband?"

His formalities chilled her.

"Oh, yes. Hours are much the same to him. When you see him—you may understand."

Kate had to leave her brother next day. She had said nothing to him of Elizabeth's Hemmerde's visit, but when she kissed him good-bye, he noticed an inquiring look in her eyes.

"Keep out in the sun, Jim. Don't mope."

"I am learning to be a philosopher."

"Oh, not a philosopher! Something more human than that."

The devil of obstinacy in James Arden was still very far from being subdued. When Kate left him, a savage melancholy seemed to steal into the loneliness she left behind her. Arden had tried to do some gardening, to pick up the threads of his old "nature life," but a man who has lost an arm has to bear many burdens patiently, to relearn himself with difficulty to do many things that once were easy.

Arden began the morning by trying to mend a rose arch whose posts had rotted in the ground. The attempt was a violent and farcical failure. He lost his temper over it, sent a hammer hurtling over the hedge, and spent half an hour looking for it with sullen persistence.

As his anger died away a morose mood followed it. He found himself thinking more and more of that promise of his to go and see Guy Hemmerde. It evoked bitterness, rebellion.

Why should he go and see the fellow? It was a mere nothing—the loss of an arm! Elizabeth was absorbed in her husband's illness; his was the great tragedy. A man who had an arm smashed by a motor lorry could not be considered a hero.

And yet Arden determined to keep his promise. It was a kind of morbid curiosity that impelled him towards the little red town in the valley.

The church clock was striking four when he found himself at the gates of the Hall. The green world within them looked as mysterious as ever, with the cedars throwing their shadows on the closely cut grass.

Arden had reached the gravel space before the house when he caught sight of someone lying out on a couch under one of the cedars. A book that had fallen from the couch lay face downwards on the grass. The man on the couch was groping for it with a feeble and ineffectual hand.

Arden never tried to explain the impulse that made him cross the grass to pick up that book. The man in him had been touched, appealed to by another man's tragic helplessness.

"Let me get it for you."

But for the moment he forgot the book in looking at the wreck of a man lying on the couch. Hemmerde's face was a tragedy in itself. All the youth had gone out of it; it was sallow and emaciated, with bloodless lips and frightened, childlike eyes.

"Is it you, Arden?"

"Yes. I have come to have a gossip with you. Here's the book."

A sudden softness had come into his voice. He bent down, picked up the book and laid it on the couch, and then, to his great confusion, Hemmerde burst into tears.

Arden could have faced fire, but he flinched before this boy's utter loss of self-control. It made him feel a consummate and helpless fool, and at the same time tinged his whole outlook on life with a new and poignant pity. There was a garden chair close by. Arden sat down on it, wondering what the devil he could say to this man in tears.

"Rotten luck of yours, Hemmerde, getting hit after what you did."

The boy on the couch was struggling hard for self-mastery.

"They might have shot me through the head. It would have been kinder."

"Don't say that."

Guy Hemmerde thrust out his hands as though he were drowning.

"My God, why wasn't I killed outright? I should have known nothing about it. But now—I'm in hell. My back's broken; I'm done for. I'm going to die. Oh, yes, I know it's true."

He stared half defiantly at Arden.

"And I don't want to die. Everything that's in me cries out for life. I lie here and feel death creeping up and up. It's

like being tied to a stake, with the tide coming up to smother one. It's hell!"

Arden's face twitched with emotion. The despairing words of this doomed man had suddenly stripped him of all affectations of selfishness and pride.

"It's damnable, Hemmerde. I wish that——"

He saw Hemmerde's eyes set into a kind of eager stare. He was biting his lip, trying to master his manhood.

"Here's Bess. Don't let on—that I was whimpering. She's such a sportswoman."

And Arden answered him under his breath.

"Yes. You're brave enough, I know."

For the moment he was the spectator, standing aside, and watching these two with a feeling of awe and compassion.

Elizabeth Hemmerde's eyes were the eyes of a mother. It was not the lover, but the child that she saw in this poor, broken bit of youth lying in that English garden. Arden watched her with a new wonderment. The soul in him began to see.

"I'm glad you have come, Jim. Bring up another chair. It's time you had your milk, dear."

Guy smiled at her devotedly.

"I suppose I must take the stuff."

"Of course."

Arden brought up another chair into the shade of the cedar. The world seemed strange and yet mysteriously real. He met Elizabeth's eyes, and they were full of appeal.

"Talk—for heaven's sake, talk."

That was how Arden read their message, and the man in him answered it. He forgot that there were such things as jealousy and bitterness; he was the good comrade, inspired by a generosity that pitied and forgave.

"I want to hear all about it, Hemmerde."

The boy looked at him half sullenly, half shyly.

"About what?"

"How you saved those guns. It was one of the finest things of the war."

"What rot! It was just a bit of luck. I didn't think about what I was doing."

"Well, that's the real thing—no stage effect. But if you don't care to talk about it, other people will."

Arden had won, conquered himself, and helped to brighten a face that was growing dim under the shadows of death. He was inspired; it was not Hemmerde who talked, but Arden who talked for him with a delicate and tender gaiety that was very near to tears. Life smiled a triumphant note, even though death was watching with cold eyes.

Presently Arden rose to go.

"Come again, will you?"

"Of course."

Hemmerde stretched out a thin hand.

"Just look at it. Not much use in a cavalry charge—now. But you've done me good."

Elizabeth's eyes flashed Arden a message. She bent over her husband and kissed his forehead.

"I'll be back in a minute, dear."

"All right. I think I could go to sleep for an hour."

She walked with Arden as far as the gates, and they stood talking there and looking into each other's eyes.

"What a tragedy! You understand—now, Jim?"

He answered her very solemnly.

"Yes, I understand. I'm sorry I was such a beast to you—yesterday."

"But you have wiped that away. It's—it's his horror of death that is so horrible. I want to help him to face it."

"May I come again and do what I can?"

The look she gave him was a precious memory.

"Then it is forgiveness—for both of us. I thank you with all my heart."

So James Arden passed daily through those iron gates and under the shade of the great cedars. He had become once more the child of romance, the man whose soul could burn with a generous, vital fire. Guy Hemmerde's life was flickering out, melting away into the darkness, and Arden played the rhapsodist, trying to soothe him with the spell of an heroic sympathy. He rallied the lad by reminding him perpetually of the fine deed that he had done for England. If flattery can be justified, then Arden was justified in flattering that dying man. He tried to drug Hemmerde with heroics, and he succeeded.

Chance willed it that Arden should be there in the Milford garden when Guy Hemmerde died. The end came quite suddenly, like a sudden breath of wind on a calm night. Arden was reading aloud when he heard Hemmerde cry:

"Bess, it's all dark! Where's your hand—your hand?"

Arden closed the book, glanced at the man on the couch, and then stole away. For Guy Hemmerde's head had fallen back, his eyes were closed.

"Bess!"

"Dear lad!"

"Just kiss me."

She was kneeling, holding his hands, and she kissed him.

"Good night, dear."

"Good night."

For two months after Captain Hemmerde's funeral Arden did not see Elizabeth. He held aloof purposely, feeling that this restraint was an honour paid to the dead man's memory. But Arden's life had changed; he was content to work in his garden, to ask no questions of Fate, to carry himself with a new humility.

Elizabeth had left Milford for a while. Autumn came before Arden heard of her return. She was back at the Hall, but he did not go to see her. Then a letter broke the silence:

"Are you never coming to see me? Why should I have to ask you to come?"

He went.

He found her walking in the old walled garden, where a paved walk ran along the edge of the lake. Beyond the brown sheen of the water the park showed bracken and oaks touched with autumnal gold.

"So you have remembered me at last."

He held her hand, and did not release it.

"I remembered you all the while. I waited until you sent for me; I hoped you would send for me."

She looked at him with clear, frank woman's eyes.

"I understand you. It was chivalrous, thoughtful of you to leave me for a while. Well, I found I wanted you."

They walked there in the garden till the autumn dusk fell, opening their hearts to each other, and speaking gently of the man who was dead.

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