

VALOUR



WARWICK DEEPING

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A Novel

BY WARWICK DEEPING

AUTHOR OF "SORRELLAND SON," ETC.

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TO
COLONEL H. G. FALKNER, A.D.M.S.
WITH
THE AUTHOR'S SINCEREST RESPECT
AND GOOD WISHES

VALOUR

CHAPTER I

Pierce Hammersly let down the carriage window as the train ran into Scarshott Station, and leant out to see if any of his people had come to meet him, but the only familiar face was the face of Cripps the lame porter, who was snarling "Scar-shutt, Scar-shutt," with an air of weary scorn.

"She might have come."

Hammersly had not been looking for his parents. He was disappointed because the face that he most eagerly desired to see did not shine out on him with welcoming eyes. Love is a hunger, clamorous, unreasonable, and apt to be sulky unless a man has learnt to smile.

"What an idiot! How could she be here! I wanted her—that's all."

He shouted to the porter.

"Cripps, one kit bag and one valise in the van."

Cripps stared at him dourly.

"Is the car outside?"

"Bin down twice already."

A fat woman who was still comely enough to be interested in the other sex, nudged a friend, and they watched Lieutenant Hammersly walk down the platform.

"What I says is 'e used to be a bit skinny like, but 'e's filled out wonderful."

"And don't 'e fancy 'imself?"

"And why shouldn't 'e? I like a soldier man to walk with a bit of a swagger."

Hammersly saluted an old lady who toddled up with smiling maternal eyes.

"I hear this is your last leave, Mr. Pierce."

"Yes, that's so."

"And where are you going?"

"The Dardanelles."

Her eyes grew serious, and then brightened.

"Oh dear, what a long way! But we are all very proud of you."

He smiled down at her, saluted again, and passed on.

Hammersly's drive through Scarshott had in it the subtler elements of a triumph. The grey stone roadway, like a pale reflection of the June sky, straggled uphill between the high red houses. The steep old town waved here and there a banner of roses. Everybody who counted in Scarshott seemed to have some business in the High Street, where the sun warmed the red brick houses and edged with gold the tall elms in the gardens behind them.

Just by the Georgian town hall, with its big bracket clock, sharp gables and leaden cupola, a wagon had got itself into difficulties and was holding up the traffic. Hammersly's right hand kept rising to the peak of his cap. Kate Varley went by, smiling at him out of her dark eyes. Little Grace Rentoul hung for a moment blushing over the door of the car.

"Is it true that you are going out?"

"Quite true."

Her ingenuous face paled visibly.

"I'm—I'm sorry."

Then the traffic cleared and the car moved on.

Other women looked at Pierce Hammersly, women who could not claim a salute. There was a moment of tension in the feminine atmosphere of Scarshott High Street, a ripple of sexual excitement stirred by this man in khaki. The war had quickened life, touched the elemental emotions with a delicate and impulsive passion. The male and the female beheld in each other the finer vital contrasts.

Pierce Hammersly had always been a man worth looking at, not merely because the Hammerslys had been the richest people in Scarshott for half a century, but because he had a face and a temperament that were arrestive. Tall, clear faced, with rather restless eyes, he carried his head with an air of pride. Women were somewhat shy of him, because of a satirical cleverness that did not trouble to hide itself when people chattered provincially. He never argued; his individualism had a fierce independence of its own. He was an egoist, brilliant, charming when he pleased, the product of a selfish yet amiable refinement.

The great elms of King's Walk covered broad stretches of grass with their shadows. The car turned in between the stone gate-pillars of Orchards, the house that a Hammersly had built more than a hundred years ago. Its white window frames and pillared porch blinked through the trees. Solidity, opulence, comfort, a serenity that had never been disturbed! There was a little deer park beyond the dark hush of the cedars. The lawns looked like beautiful green carpets. Everything was admirable, the roses, the glasshouses, the fruit garden, the yew hedges, the lake with its rhododendron-covered banks and its swans. Nothing could have been more English than this house of the

Hammerslys, and yet it had lost the brick-red hardness of its Georgian days. It was soft and mellow and selfish without being bold. Life had been easy—before the war.

Porteous Hammersly, Esq., was loitering at the end of the drive, making a pretence of examining the standard roses for any trace of briar shoots.

“Well, well, here you are—at last.”

He held out a pink hand, and looked affectionately at his son over the top of a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez perched halfway down his nose.

“I missed the connection, Dad.”

“We sent the car down to meet the 2.35.”

“And the train was late.”

“It’s becoming a habit with them, Pierce, an absolute habit.”

In some respects Porteous Hammersly resembled a plump, sleek, well-preened bird, a very debonair bird with bright and friendly eyes. He was inclined to strut, wore spats, loved talking. He had the pink and white face of a healthy boy, and was a little vain of his teeth and his hair. People who knew him well forgave him his small pomposities, because they had discovered the sensitive, kindly creature hidden in a worldly shell.

“Your letter was rather a shock to us, my boy.”

“I’m sorry, Pater.”

“I mean, we did not expect it to happen quite so soon. But these are epoch-making times. I’m proud to live in them. Your mother is in the drawing-room; of course she is feeling things, that is only to be expected; but then—duty, pride; she bears up on these.”

Sophia Hammersly was bearing up magnificently. A large, white woman in a large room, she rose slowly, spoke slowly and with great emphasis.

“My dear Pierce, this is a very great occasion.”

Her solidity matched her surroundings. The room was colourless, the furniture massive, a medley of heavy wood bureaux, black lacquer cabinets, a Boule table or two, a Jacobean armoire, Louis Quinze chairs, an Empire clock and ornaments on the mantelpiece. The chesterfield, two or three armchairs, and the carpet were modern; conventional things upon which a great deal of money had been spent. It was a room without flowers, whereas old Porteous always had his library full of them.

Pierce kissed his mother, because it seemed the obvious thing to do.

“Beastly dirty these trains are.”

But Sophia Hammersly had not completed her period of solemnity. She never indulged in emotion, did not understand it, and her attitude towards it suggested that it was a quality that belonged only to little dressmakers who did not know how to behave themselves.

“We were not unprepared for the news, Pierce. Your father and I feel that we are making our sacrifice through you.”

“Meanwhile the firm is going to make a fortune out of leather.”

For the Hammerslys were tanners, dignified and extensive tanners who kept the smell of their craft at the farther end of the town. They also traded in hops and malt. Mrs. Sophia herself had inherited an income of a thousand pounds a year.

She subsided with stateliness among the cushions on the sofa.

“I have always wished, Pierce, that you would forget to be flippant.”

“I was only stating a fact, Mater. I have been falling over hard facts for the last six months. If you don’t mind I will go and clean up.”

“Tea will be ready in ten minutes, dear.”

“Excellent.”

Had Mrs. Sophia not been his mother Pierce would have allowed himself to hate her with absolute sincerity. She was everything that her son was not. He could not help knowing that she was ignorant, pretentious, arrogant, absurd, but her solid stupidity was as inopportune as it was real. Pierce’s inclinations were on the edge of outraging her prejudices. He knew it, and the knowledge irritated him.

He was restless. The familiar figures of his parents intruded upon the great emotion that dominated his consciousness. He detected a probable sympathiser in his father, an unendurable and aggressive obstinacy in his mother. Therefore he avoided her, willed himself into the library with old Porteous when tea was over, and so into the garden where things lived and bloomed and the sunlight streaked the grass with gold.

“What time is dinner, Pater?”

“Any time you like.”

“Can we make it eight? I want to see one or two people this evening.”

“These are your days, my boy.”

Porteous, being a man, did not ask questions.

They wandered about the place together, but Pierce was too preoccupied with his own romance, and the grim adventure ahead of him, to be interested in the familiar details of his home. Old Porteous loved the place, and he loved his son. He was proud of Pierce, and just a little astonished at this new soldier creature that the war had brought forth, this young man of arms who was going out to face death. Porteous Hammersly hid a sensitive timidity behind that pleasantly pompous manner. The war had confused and shocked him. He could only utter the old, complacent, British platitudes, and quote the stuff he read in his daily paper, persuading himself that everything was going splendidly, and that England could never be beaten.

“Well, Pierce—any news?”

“What sort of news?”

“Interior information. I suppose we are preparing to strike the death blow? When we have taken Constantinople _____”

Pierce gave his father a curious look.

“Do you ever doubt about things, Pater?”

“What, about our winning?”

“In a way. You see, we had no idea—I mean the ordinary man had no idea—of the vastness of the job we had let ourselves in for. We had a sort of notion that we were going to recruit men by the hundred thousand, teach them to drill and shoot, and the business would be done. We didn’t suspect that we had got to think in army corps. We forgot about the co-ordination, the awful mass of technicalities, the brains required.”

Porteous glanced at his son like a troubled bird.

“Of course, it’s immense, but with the men as keen as mustard, Pierce——”

“Supposing you had been in the army, Pater—years ago—and had comfortably commanded a regiment, and you were lugged out at five and fifty to train and command a division of utter amateurs. Supposing you had to create things as you went along, with everybody in a dickens of a mess, and you knew that you were up against the best organised and the finest fighting nation on the face of the earth?”

“It’s not quite so bad as that, Pierce. Time is on our side; we shall do it.”

“And sweat blood over it, Pater. The big men behind the scenes must be living through a sort of devilish nightmare. I have glimpsed it now and again. Sometimes I think they are just cynics, fatalists, that no man could stand the strain unless he was a cynic. Hallo—you have done away with that fence beyond the beeches.”

His father’s eyes lit up.

“Yes, it used to spoil the vista, don’t you think so? Cut off the fine pedestals of the trees.”

“Of course it did. You have an eye for landscape, Pater. That is the funny part of this war; I have lost my vision. One’s old real self has been put in bondage, and every now and again it struggles fiercely and tries to break out.”

“Do you really like the life, Pierce?”

“Army life?”

“Yes.”

“Like it! I loathe it. I wish the whole of Europe was at the bottom of the sea. Still, here we are, up against destiny, having murdered most of our real soldiers because as a nation we wouldn’t face facts. I have got just six days, Dad, and I am going to forget the war—or try to.”

He held his head fiercely, and his eyes looked resentful.

“And yet one can’t forget it. I’m going out, and, in a way, I’m glad.”

They wandered out into the park, but Pierce Hammersly grew more and more restless, and kept glancing at his watch. He wanted dinner over, he wanted to get away from these two people who looked on him as their property, and who knew nothing of the real man in the body of their son. He belonged to someone else, utterly and completely, and he wanted to tell her the great truth, win her for himself before he went out—perhaps to die.

CHAPTER II

After dinner Mrs. Sophia followed her husband into the library, and since she disliked the room and never sat there during a normal day, her presence filled Porteous Hammersly with a sense of discomfort. Pierce had gone out by way of the high gate leading into the park, and Porteous had seen him disappear beyond the trees.

"Is Pierce out for a stroll?"

"He has gone out to see some people, Sophia."

"Oh—! Who?"

Porteous felt a fool when he had to betray his ignorance.

"He didn't tell me."

"Didn't you ask him?"

"No. Why should I?"

The opposing attitudes towards life of these two people showed in that question and answer. Mrs. Sophia looked annoyed. Her husband had a way of doing things that she thought quixotic and absurd. She was always telling him that he was much too generous and kind-hearted, too easily fooled.

"Have you ever considered the question of Pierce marrying?"

Porteous Hammersly put the evening paper aside, and showed himself resignedly attentive.

"I can't say that I have, Sophia."

"You mean you have not troubled?"

"I am not a believer in interference. After all, marriage——"

He did not complete what he had meant to say, simply because he had caught himself rushing into disastrous sincerity.

"I have a sense of parental responsibility, Porteous. I should like to see Pierce engaged before he leaves us. It is a unique opportunity——"

"But my dear Sophia, how do we know? Pierce has given us no indications."

"Grace Rentoul would marry him."

"But what has that to do with it?"

His wife stared him out of countenance.

"What a haphazard creature you are, Porteous. You choose a boy's career, and what is marriage but one of the great landmarks in his career? I—should like to see him engaged to Grace Rentoul."

"But, my dear. You don't understand Pierce."

"I am asking her here to-morrow. I am going to let Pierce see as much of her as possible. He used to like her. And the Rentouls—well, they are the Rentouls."

She spread her big white hands, and Porteous Hammersly glimpsed all that that gesture of hers implied. If a man was a baronet, had large estates, and a daughter who was gentle and charming—what more could the mother of a son desire?

"It means safety, Porteous, security. Young men are such fools."

"I see, my dear. I appreciate your point of view, but would Grace suit our boy?"

"What earthly objection——?"

"Yes, yes, but we don't all look at life in the same calm way. You don't understand Pierce."

"My dear Porteous, I understand him perfectly. Surely I ought to know my own son!"

Pierce Hammersly had left the long shadows of the park behind him, and was striking across Scarshott Common with its masses of furze and sweeps of heather. Scarshott stood on the edge of the pine country, a world of black spruces and Scots firs, of heather and bracken, with an occasional thicket of birches lightening the solemn gloom of the resinous trees. The sun was setting behind Claybury Hill, sending great slants of light over the oak woods and meadows about Scarshott town.

Pierce Hammersly's objective lay over yonder where the common ended, and the woods began. It was a little white rough-cast cottage with a brown tiled roof, one of those very new cottages with a queer squat chimney, unnecessary buttresses, a mock oak and plaster gable over the porch, and a general air of studied originality. It was the first thing of its kind that had been perpetrated in Scarshott, where the Victorians had been content with adding a blunt brick ugliness to the finer Georgian atmosphere.

A ragged laurel hedge surrounded the garden, and behind it a girl was cutting the grass edges with a pair of shears. She appeared to be expecting someone, for she looked over the hedge from time to time and watched Hammersly crossing the common.

She was a tall girl with a mass of rich brown hair, bright red lips and a quick colour. At the first glance a man might

have thought nothing of her face. It was rather broad and sun-tanned, the mouth too big, the cheek bones slightly prominent. Her eyes were large, of a blue-green colour, and set well apart under straight brows. You noticed at once the redness of her lips and her white, strong teeth. Yet there was a human and spiritual attractiveness about her face. It promised mystery, elusiveness, passion, though there was a tinge of bitterness about the mouth and an expectation of sadness in the eyes.

“Janet!”

He was at the gate, and she turned to meet him, dropping the shears points downwards in the grass.

“Hallo!”

His eyes were the eyes of a lover, and though they found an answering light in hers, she was very much the queen of her own soul.

“You got my letter?”

“Yes. And you are going out?”

“We are supposed to sail about the 30th. They are sending me out unattached.”

“What does that mean?”

“I shall be tacked on to something when I get out there. Utterly unsatisfactory, but everything is unsatisfactory about this war. What’s the use of being proud of your unit, and getting to know your men! The volunteer is just a dog.”

There was a suggestion of pain deep down in her eyes.

“It is hard. I suppose they can’t help it.”

“The English haven’t any imagination. We deal in labels and tins of meat, and returns, and vouchers; of course it is trying to be thorough. The fact is, in this war, we are like a man late out of bed and dressing in a furious haste to try and catch the train.”

She smiled at him.

“Will you come in and see mother?”

“Of course. How is Mrs. Yorke?”

“Not very strong. But come in.”

She repeated the invitation in a way that made it a challenge, and Hammersly was sufficiently sensitive to understand her meaning.

“And afterwards?”

“Well——?”

“I want to talk to you, Janet. Let’s go down into the woods. Will you?”

“Perhaps.”

She pulled off her gardening gloves and took Pierce into the cottage. It was most simply furnished and with studied taste. The tall clock in the hall, the Sheraton bureau, and the Hepplewhite chairs in the drawing-room were genuine, and in fine condition. Japanese matting, and plain cord carpets covered the floors. The walls were distempered a soft amberish buff. Here and there a little picture in oils gleamed out with rich colour.

The Yorkes had been unfortunate. Wentworth Yorke had died in prison after being sentenced to five years’ penal servitude for fraud. His wife, fortunate in possessing a little income of her own, had fled with long-legged, quick-coloured Janet to some place where they could be as proud as they pleased. And Janet had put up her hair, lengthened her skirts, and taken the world’s challenge to herself. Scarshott had attempted to be kind to the Yorkes, pityingly, tolerantly kind, but Janet had refused all pity, and refused it with a fierceness that had offended some of the Scarshott ladies.

Mrs. Yorke held out a tremulous, blue veined hand to Hammersly. She was a frail old lady, with a high colour and frightened eyes. She talked in a kind of breathless way, not merely because her spirit was broken, but because she had a heart that should have failed her years ago, in the opinion of the doctors.

“How good of you to come and see us. I hear this is your last leave. How terrible! This war frightens me so, Mr. Hammersly.”

Pierce chatted to her gently for ten minutes, and Mrs. Yorke appeared to understand things perfectly when he pretended that they were expecting him at home.

“Of course. The time must seem so short to them, Mr. Hammersly. I do hope—I do indeed hope—that you will be spared.”

It was Janet who led the way into the pine woods, not as a girl luring on her lover, but as a woman who deigned to hear what a man might wish to say to her. She did not look at Hammersly, but walked beside him with a detached air, her head held high, her eyes gazing into the deepening gloom under the trees.

“Janet, do you realise what this means?”

He was pale with the intensity of his love.

“I am human, Pierce.”

“This damnable war! Of course I expect to come back; everyone does. But you know—why I’m here?”

They were deep in the woods, the straight trunks rising all about them making a world of mystery and of silence. Twilight was drifting over the black tree tops and the bracken was turning grey.

She stood and faced him.

“What am I to think?”

“Good God, you know I love you? I came to tell you. I can’t go out there—to that hell—without the thought of you.”

She looked at him with an air of suffering aloofness.

“Perhaps I know. But I do not know yet how you love me. You remember—about my father.”

“What difference does that make?”

“Every difference. Think.”

He flushed slightly.

“You mean——”

“Try to put yourself in my place. Ought I to let you love me?”

“You can’t prevent it. Janet, what does it matter? You were not responsible; your father might have committed a dozen murders for all I care.”

She said very gently, “Do you realise that I have a devilish pride?”

“I ask for pride. I don’t want some sop of a girl with fluffy hair. I want—you.”

“Well?”

He looked at her fixedly.

“Do you imagine that I think I am conferring a favour?”

“All men do, though the best of them don’t enlarge on it. It is the other people.”

Pierce Hammersly straightened himself, with a quick, proud lifting of the head.

“By God, you are right, and I love this pride in you, Janet. Will you let me take you down to my people, and boast about my luck? I want to go swaggering through Scarshott with you at my side.”

“Do you love me like that?”

“Why, yes. How else could I love you, dear?”

Her eyes lit up with a light that was sacred.

“Pierce! You shall never regret it.”

“Regret it! Oh—my dear, isn’t life wonderful?”

She let his arms take her, let her mouth meet his.

CHAPTER III

Porteous Hammersly, from his dressing-room window, beheld a vision of youth moving light-footed over the dew-wet grass, head in air, intoxicated, exultant.

There was something so arresting about his son's figure, that old Hammersly paused to watch him, razor idle in one hand, half his face white lather, the other half, pink skin. Pierce was walking to and fro, head high, throat showing, like some Greek singer whose lips quivered with the rush of a rhapsody. Such glimpses of vivid moving life rouse old memories, odd intimate emotions that stirred one long ago. Old Porteous was snatched back thirty years, and made to see himself in the exultant figure of this young man.

Love may make people very obtuse or very sensitive, and it had made Hammersly very sensitive towards his son. "The boy's in love," was the thought that crossed his mind, "and why shouldn't he be in love?" and then he sighed and went on scraping his chin. "Women don't see enough of life in a place like this. They get narrow, selfish."

He heard his wife tapping her way down the polished corridor, for she had a curiously quick and fussy step for so big a woman.

"Oh—damn!"

Porteous had cut his chin in listening to the sound of those fussy footsteps, and in thinking of the thousands of potential Sophias who were waiting to fill a man's life with crass prejudices and boring ignorance.

Pierce dreamed into the dining-room with a smile deep down in his eyes. His mother was buttering toast, and Porteous stood by one of the windows glancing at the morning paper.

"Hallo, had a good night, Pierce?"

"Excellent. Sorry I was late. I'll have tea, Mater, please."

Mrs. Sophia opened her attack.

"You are coming to the fête this afternoon, Pierce?"

"What sort of fête is it?"

"A war fête. Sir Lionel has lent his park."

Pierce mused a moment; he was thinking of Janet and of the romantic publicity he meant to achieve.

"I'll turn up, Mater."

She beamed at him coldly.

"Grace Rentoul is coming to lunch."

"Is she? Any news, Dad?"

"I want Grace to come with us. Her people are away in town."

Pierce was disgracefully inattentive.

"I see. What about the Russians, Pater?"

Porteous Hammersly turned to the table.

"Bad news—as usual. A most regrettable setback. These Germans are cunning beggars."

"Your porridge is getting cold, Porteous. I will order the car for two-thirty, and we can all drive over to Sir Lionel's with Grace."

"I say, is the Singer running?"

"Bains drove me out in it yesterday."

"Excellent. I'll come along in the Singer. What time is the show?"

His mother looked puzzled.

"The gates open at two, Pierce."

"Is the affair public?"

"It is open to everybody. Perhaps you would like to drive Grace over, Pierce?"

"Thanks, but I shall have someone with me. What is it, Mater—a bazaar, and a pocketful of loose cash?"

Mrs. Sophia was frowning over her tea cup.

"Are you bringing a friend, Pierce?"

"Yes—a friend," and Porteous, who was watching him, saw the gleam of the rebel lover in his eyes.

Mrs. Sophia saw nothing but her own particular ambition.

"Why not ask your friend to lunch, Pierce? Who is he?"

"Thanks, Mater, but I think he is booked for lunch. Is that the marmalade over there?"

His father enjoyed an inward chuckle, which was traitorous and disloyal of him. He even dared to hope that Pierce's friend would prove to be a thing in petticoats, for the father lived in the adventurousness of the son.

Pierce left his mother reading her letters, and lighting a pipe in the hall he strolled round to the garage, where the chauffeur was changing a tyre on the Rolls-Royce.

"Is the Singer running all right, Bains?"

“Like a dream, sir.”

“I shall want her at two o’clock.”

“Driving yourself, sir?”

“Yes.”

He sent Janet a note.

“DEAR,—There is a big function on this afternoon at Sir Lionel Phelps’s. I want you to come to it with me, and let me boast about you to everybody. I shall call for you with the car about half-past two. I am being good, and am spending the morning at home.

“What feeble things letters are! I am not going to reduce this great happiness of ours to bathos by trying to write about it.

“I love you. Just that.

“PIERCE.”

He spent the morning with his father, trailing round Scarshott for the pleasing of the old boy’s pride. Porteous had tact, and a decent respect for another man’s reticences, even when that man happened to be his son. Despite his interested and sympathetic suspicions he made no attempt to discover the identity of that mysterious friend whom Pierce was to drive over to Milford Park that afternoon.

They strolled home in time for lunch, to find that sweet bribe ready and prepared, and shyly awaiting the coming of the potential lover. Mrs. Sophia had been broadly and bluntly suggestive, and little Grace Rentoul was pathetically self-conscious.

She flushed up, and let her eyes glimmer at Pierce with shy kindness. He just noticed her, with a kind of brotherly good will.

“Hallo. What are you turning into, Grace, a V.A.D. nurse or a munition worker?”

“I am afraid I am nothing,” she said.

Which was the bitter truth, poor child.

Pierce hid himself after lunch, for he had an unhallowed mistrust of his mother. She had a genius for creating awkward situations, and for playing havoc with innocent conspiracies. He was so determined to elude her that he took the Singer out before two o’clock, hustled the little car at a reckless pace down the drive, and made for Heather Cottage as though he were carrying urgent dispatches.

The adventure intoxicated him with its tenderness and audacity. What a day, what sunlight, what a depth of blue in the sky, what a whiteness of clouds above the pines! He was a charioteer, reckless, exultant; life went at a gallop, with laughing mouth and flashing eyes.

He bumped the car up the sandy track to the cottage, and had a vision of Janet at her window gathering up a sweep of rich brown hair. She waved a hand and scolded him.

“Half an hour early. What treachery!”

He climbed out, and stood looking up at her with triumphant tenderness.

“Why blame me? Could I help it?”

A bare white arm showed its perfect lines.

“Go away, Mr. Soldier. This is one of the most serious moments of my life.”

“Can I see your mother?”

“Yes, of course. You will find her in the veranda—round under the pergola.”

“Be merciful, Janet. Remember—I am made of human clay.”

“When a woman arms herself, my friend——”

“Then the gods look down from Olympus.”

Mrs. Yorke was very kind to him. There were tears in her eyes when she spoke of Janet.

“Of course you know what happened to my poor husband? It has made us very sensitive, Mr. Hammersly, and I must say your courage has touched me. But I want you to be frank—for Janet’s sake. Your father and mother——?”

Pierce made haste to reassure her.

“Janet will see them this afternoon. As for the courage of the thing—well, I don’t think I could help loving Janet. Besides, this war is starting life afresh for most of us.”

And then Janet appeared, a slim and gracious creature in the simplest of pale-blue frocks, with eyes that glimmered and a red mouth that smiled. She wore a black-brimmed hat that threw a soft shadow over her face, the very hat in a hundred that she should have worn. Her figure was so perfect, and her head so finely set, that absolute simplicity, a mere soft-coloured sheath, was all she needed.

Pierce’s eyes exulted in her.

“I think my car happens to be just the right colour.”

“Oh, do you?”

“Have you a coat?”

“Shall I want one?”

“Perhaps not. I see no reason for driving at thirty miles an hour.”

Janet kissed her mother, and Pierce carried her off, telling himself that she was like a flower, just as pure and natural and convincing, with no cheap tags of finery and no silly mannerisms to mar her absolute completeness. She had breed, a slim, girlish dignity, and a throat and bosom that were full of subtle and human suggestiveness.

“You look ready for conquests.”

“I——?”

He took his seat, and felt a thrill of pride in her as she slipped into her place beside him.

“I am a little frightened.”

“Of what?”

“People—everything. In a way I am defying society.”

“Dear heart, what nonsense! Well, and if we are, it’s splendid. I think you are going to cause a great sensation.”

“Don’t try to make me self-conscious, don’t, please.”

“I can’t help feeling proud of you.”

“And—and I want you to be proud of me. You won’t let them eat me up.”

“You are too convincing,” he said, looking at her with shining eyes, “a stone of the very first water, dear.”

Hammersly, mischievous young egoist that he was, had always delighted in shocking Scarshott’s prejudices, but his heart ruled that afternoon’s adventure. The spirit of protective chivalry was aroused in him. Janet’s pride was his, and through her he felt himself at war with the crowded complacency of Sir Lionel Phelps’s “grounds.” They were late in arriving, and he led her in a state progress through the crowd, taking his homage and spreading it like a cloak under her feet. All the world could see that he was in love with her. His eyes laughed at Scarshott. He carried his head exultantly.

“Do you know, Janet, there is not a woman here to touch you.”

She looked proud, adorably happy. He had never seen such a glowing, radiant Janet as this. She was unique, softly dominant, mysteriously graceful. Even Pierce Hammersly’s vanity had its triumph; he had created a sensation. Scarshott was astonished.

There were secret thrills of feminine distress, and little dream romances melted into the air.

“Who’s that girl with young Hammersly?”

“Never seen her before, but she’s jolly handsome.”

“What, don’t you know! That’s Yorke’s daughter, the people who live at that new cottage.”

Pierce had been keeping a brisk look out for his father. He was not afraid of old Porteous, and he intended Janet to touch what was best in the house of Hammersly before she met his mother. For Pierce—the lover—mistrusted his own mother. Mrs. Sophia was capable of bitterly wounding Janet’s pride.

“Hallo, there’s the pater! I want to take you to him.”

He saw Janet stiffen herself.

“You’ll like him; don’t be afraid.”

Porteous Hammersly had been talking to Sir Lionel Phelps, when these two young people came to prove the metal of his manhood. They overtook him in a quiet corner of the herbaceous garden below the terrace.

“Father——”

Porteous turned on them with a faint smile and inquiring eyes.

“I’ve brought Janet—Miss Yorke. She is going to marry me—some day, and I’m a proud man, Pater. I shall want you to be kind to her.”

Porteous Hammersly and the girl looked at each other like shy children.

“Bless me, but you young people——”

Janet was mute, and her eyes waited on the chivalry of Pierce’s father. Porteous Hammersly was very pink, and a little breathless. He looked at Janet, and, being the man he was, he somehow felt that he could let his impulses run away with him.

“My dear, I’m very glad to meet you. Pierce is a scoundrel. He ought to have told me.”

“We only knew yesterday, Pater. Besides, I was afraid Janet would say no to me.”

Porteous held out his hand.

“Well, I am not surprised.”

“I hope—you will like me, Mr. Hammersly.”

“I don’t suppose I shall be able to help it.”

She had called on his sympathy, and it rushed to serve her.

“I will be quite frank. I did not know whether I ought to let Pierce—get engaged to me. Perhaps people have told you——?”

Pierce thrust in.

"I think father knows. If not, it is my business to tell him."

But Porteous Hammersly insisted on speaking for himself.

"My dear, I am not going to let you humiliate yourself. Just so, just so. If you young people happen to love each other—well, all I say is, God bless you both. Now, let's consider——"

He stuttered, and lost himself in the sudden remembering of his wife.

"Pierce, my boy——"

"I am going to bring Janet to Orchards to-morrow."

"Yes, that is what I was going to suggest. Exactly. Now, I expect you two young people want to amuse yourselves. I'll take myself off. I dare say we shall meet again—later. We have got to get to know each other, Miss Yorke. Yes, good-bye."

Pierce sized up his father's embarrassment, and swept Janet off into the rose garden.

"The pater's a sportsman. You will like him."

"I like him already," she said simply. "I'm not hiding the fact that this must be a shock to your people."

"Janet——!"

"It must be. I have the courage to face things—because——"

He bent over her, dearly.

"Don't be afraid of the pater. But I'll own up—my mother——"

She nodded.

"Don't let her make you flare up, Janet, and throw me over. I know what I am asking. I love you; I want you."

"I will be very patient, dear."

"Leave it to me. I am not going to have your pride outraged."

Ten minutes later Porteous Hammersly found his wife at his elbow.

"Porteous, what has happened to Pierce?"

"Happened to him? Why, I was with him a few minutes ago."

"Haven't you seen him—with that Yorke girl? It's abominable!"

Porteous Hammersly displayed a scandalous and genial stupidity. His admirable assumption of cheeriness steadied the situation.

"I don't see anything abominable about it, Sophia. He has just got engaged to the girl, and she's charming."

"Engaged! Good heavens, why Yorke was——"

"Tut, tut, not so loud, Sophia. This war is teaching us to forget such things. The girl is charming."

"Oh, you fool!"

She gulped and turned away.

"I am going home. How we mothers have to suffer!"

CHAPTER IV

Pierce drove Janet home, making her wear his light burberry, for his own blood was afire, and his love delighted in these small tendernesses. It was one of those limpid evenings, soft, fresh and dewy, with the scent of mown hay drifting from the fields, and the distant hills looking like a dim blue haze-wrapped sea. Janet's eyes seemed to give back the western sunlight. She was silent, dreamy, a little solemn.

Pierce left her at the porch.

"Good night, dearest. To-morrow——?"

"Well?"

"There is a certain shop in Scarshott where they sell such things as rings."

She smiled up at him.

"Something quite simple——"

"Sapphires. Like that exquisite piece of ribbon there. Then you will come to lunch with me—at home."

"I suppose so. I will try to be meek."

"You will be nothing of the kind," he said. "I have no use for meekness."

Dinner at Orchards developed into an ogreish meal. Mrs. Sophia sat there like a white gravestone, all bellettered with solemn, accusing grief. Her husband persisted in being voluble and banal. Pierce looked grim and cool and on guard.

When the mother had rustled out of the room, Porteous Hammersly filled his port glass and lit a cigar.

"Pierce, my boy, what about this engagement of yours?"

"Isn't it perfectly in order, sir?"

"My dear lad, you ought to know that all I care about is your happiness. If I ever had any snobbery in me, this war has wiped it out; you are going to the front; we have no right to refuse such men anything. But it's your mother, Pierce. She is upset, shocked."

"You mean because old Yorke made a mess of life?"

"Your mother is an ambitious woman, Pierce; she had social ideas of her own for you."

"Poor little Grace Rentoul! Or the Dixon girl! I couldn't marry any tow-haired fool, Dad, who happened to have money. We Hammerslys have money; I can afford to marry a real woman with grit and cleverness. Isn't there sound sense in that?"

"Admirable sense, Pierce."

Porteous reflected for some moments, turning his wine-glass round by the stem with finger and thumb. He had lost all his sententiousness, the real man in him acted and spoke and felt.

"About marriage, Pierce. We don't discuss these things enough in England. Forget I'm your father, and let's talk like a pair of friends."

"What do you want me to tell you?"

"Just what you expect of marriage."

Hammersly leant his elbows on the table, and looked at his father over his clasped hands.

"I have been in love before, Pater—just a few days' excitement, and all that. But this is different, because Janet is different. I began to be fond of her quite a long while ago, but she held me at arm's length. She's proud; that business of her father's made her something of a rebel. You know, Pater, how most women bore one after a while."

His father nodded.

"I don't think I have ever said it before, Pierce, but from what I have seen of life the average marriage is only a makeshift; it is the best we can do. In fact, there are people who ought not to marry. And I don't believe in a man marrying too young; he hasn't seen life, he hasn't found out what things are worth—sexual things, I mean. I believe in a young man having his adventures."

Pierce looked at his father in astonishment. He had never suspected that such heretical truths lay hidden under that debonair, conventional surface. Older men rarely speak out what is in their hearts; for in telling such truths they uncover their own nakedness, and we civilised people have been taught to be ashamed of nakedness. Hence much suffering and many hidden sores.

"I respect you for telling me this, Pater. You mean that if a man has never had adventures——"

"There comes a time in his life when he finds that he has never lived. A great restlessness torments him. Life is successful, safe, boring, but he regrets the experiences that he might have had. Perhaps he breaks out. We hide these truths, Pierce, and try to pretend. Well, you see—so much depends on the woman."

Pierce was thinking of his mother. His knowledge of her made him realise the patience and the self-restraint of the man who sat opposite him.

"Of course, one always imagines the woman one loves is unique. But I don't think that Janet would ever bore me. Besides, I may never live to be married."

"God forbid, my boy. But you have every right to choose, and there is something that makes me think that Janet is the woman for you."

"But you don't know her, Pater."

"She has suffered, Pierce, and she has seen something of life. It is the woman who has never suffered, who has never had to deny herself anything, who is so impossible to live with. There are responsibilities on your side too, Pierce. I don't know much about women, but I have an idea that a woman must be allowed to spend herself, live on her emotions. Your cold, clever, moral man must make a ghastly mate."

Pierce Hammersly stretched out a hand to his father across the table.

"I have never known you till now, Pater. I have never suspected you of being so human. We English are such reserved beggars."

"Again, it is the war, Pierce. It has made us draw closer together; it has made some of us understand life better. And now——"

He spread his hands, and gave his son a half-whimsical look.

"You have got to persuade your mother. Women can say such bitter things."

"I don't want Janet hurt. Mother can say what she likes to me."

"Go and talk to her. And Pierce——"

"Yes."

"Try not to be sarcastic or clever. Your mother does not understand sarcasm or cleverness."

"I will go and see her, now."

Pierce did not find his mother in the drawing-room. She was in her bedroom, wrapped up in a pale pink rest-gown, sitting in expectant isolation, and waiting for the inevitable male thing to appear.

Pierce knocked at her door.

"Are you there, Mother?"

"I am here, Pierce."

"I want to talk to you."

"I have been expecting you to come."

She received him with the air of a woman whose faith in human nature had been outraged.

"You may sit down, Pierce."

He did not sit down, for his spirit was the spirit that attacked. His mother symbolised obstinate and blind resistance, that sort of selfishness that is wholly negative.

"I want to bring Janet to see you to-morrow."

"I most absolutely refuse to see the girl, Pierce."

He glanced at her with restive, clever eyes.

"That's rather awkward, Mater. You will have to see her some day. We are not going to be married till I come back again—that is, of course, if I ever come back."

Now, when a woman of Mrs. Hammersly's breed wants to justify her own prejudices, she crowns herself with a fictitious altruism, and pretends that her recalcitrancy is for the other person's good.

"I am not thinking of myself, Pierce. I am thinking of you."

He began to smile with thin lips, for his temperament was undisciplined. Opposition angered him. He had not the tired patience of his father.

"Which means, Mother, that you insist on choosing my wife for me?"

"I wish to protect you from an adventures."

"Exactly what I expected you to say, Mater."

"Mere infatuation. Men are all alike—utter fools when a pretty face is concerned. The girl has caught you—or thinks she has caught you. The daughter of a petty swindler with no social position."

Pierce stood a moment with his hands in his pockets, and then made a subtle movement towards the door.

"You are utterly wrong, Mother. And isn't this rather mean of you, trying to poison my little romance before I go out to that hell?"

Then there was a scene. Mrs. Hammersly lost her temper, and showed it by indulging in one of the few storms of emotion that had ever ruffled her heavy serenity.

"Oh, this is monstrous!"

Pierce paused with his hand on the door-handle, and watched his mother flaring up and down the room, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief and breathing heavily.

"As if I were not your best friend! You are just a silly, infatuated boy, and I want to save you. Haven't I loved you all these years? And then when some little wench appears you turn on me—because—because—I try to tell you the truth."

Pierce refused to be moved.

“You have never spoken to Janet, Mother; you know nothing about her.”

“What ingratitude! My own son——”

She padded to and fro in a flutter of wrath, and Pierce watched her with a feeling of antipathy.

“I’m sorry. So you refuse to see Janet?”

“You have to choose between your mother—and that girl.”

“That is just what you are compelling me to do. I will go and have my things packed. I can get rooms at The White Hart.”

His mother swung round, and stared at him in stupid bewilderment. Her chin seemed to relax; her face looked flabbier, whiter, more ponderous. She was one of those women who are essential cowards, and who go on tyrannising over people all their lives, till some day a rebel strikes back. Had she married a bully instead of marrying Porteous Hammersly, she might have stood a chance of being loved by her son. And Fate willed it that he should deal her a blow, and cow the shrew in her—the shrew that had victimised his father.

“Pierce, you can’t mean——”

“I’m sorry, Mater—but you see I am in deadly earnest. If you refuse to accept the woman I hope to marry I shall leave this house.”

She gaped at him, and then flounced down in an armchair.

“I can’t believe it! How we women have to suffer! I try to do my best, and you—you——”

“Why not see Janet?”

“I can’t. What—humiliate myself before my own son?”

He opened the door.

“Very well. I’m sorry. You haven’t been very kind to me, Mater, have you? Good-bye.”

Before he had closed the door she called him back.

“Pierce!”

He came back into the room and stood waiting.

“Well, Mother?”

She had managed to find some tears.

“I’ll sacrifice myself—yes—rather than there should be a scandal. I suppose I must sacrifice my honest prejudices. You will never know what this means to me.”

He said very quietly:

“I’m very proud of Janet, Mother. I don’t want anybody to hurt her.”

“You don’t think of us—your father and myself. Your father is so weak. Of course, he has given in; he always leaves all responsibilities to me.”

Pierce went and stood by her.

“Father trusts me, as I trust the woman I mean to marry. It’s inevitable, Mater—unless I don’t come back.”

CHAPTER V

So the elder Hammerslys accepted the situation, arguing that the times were abnormal, and that they could not quarrel with an only son a few days before he went on active service. Women can be very adaptable, especially when it is a question of covering a retreat, and Pierce's mother appeared at breakfast with an air of self-sacrificing serenity that suggested victory in surrender.

"You had better bring Jane to lunch, Pierce."

"Janet, Mother."

"I stand corrected. There is a more aristocratic flavour about the name of Janet. For your sake, Pierce, I will efface myself; we must make the best of this affair."

"I don't think we shall find it so very hard, Mater."

"In your absence, Pierce, I will afford Janet every advantage in the way of—education. She might like some French lessons."

Pierce showed signs of restiveness.

"It is very considerate of you, but you haven't realised, Mater, that Janet is a gentlewoman. She speaks French and German. As far as education goes she is better off than any girl in Scarshott."

"Indeed! Quite a blue stocking!"

Pierce drove up to Heather Cottage in the little Singer, and found Janet tying up some of her roses. One long shoot had scratched her cheek, and there was a little drop of red blood hanging there like a ruby.

"Hallo, a real live wound!"

"Have I scratched myself?"

She put her handkerchief to her face, her eyes smiling into his.

"My people expect you to lunch. I have got a formal letter somewhere."

"I want you to be quite frank, Pierce. Are they very angry with me?"

"The pater was splendid; we had a long confab; there is nothing wrong with the pater's heart."

"And your mother?"

He took her hands.

"I'll admit I had to fight the mater, but she surrendered and peace reigns. And now, there is a finger here that has got to be decorated. Can your mother spare you?"

"I think so."

"Then we'll run around in the car."

That was one of the happiest mornings of their lives. They drove in to Scarshott, and processed once or twice up and down the High Street with the triumphant audacity of lovers. There was no doubt about the elemental picturesqueness of their romance. They were watched with peculiar interest, and to Pierce Hammersly this love pageantry moved to subtle music. He was a romantic egoist, and life was full of colour, delight and tenderness.

They drew up outside the bank. Pierce cashed a cheque, and came out smiling.

"Will it please Her Highness to walk a little way."

Pierce Hammersly was not a man who looked tentatively in shop windows. He walked in with that large air that does not consider trifles, an aristocratic English tranquillity that assumes the ownership of the earth.

Cranston's, the local jewellers, was one of those ancient and solidly established shops that suggest the solemnity of a cathedral close. Old Cranston had the presence and the manners of a dean. He sold you a wedding-ring as though he were performing the marriage ceremony, and he was so polite that he made self-conscious people feel apologetic.

He swept forward to receive Pierce.

"Good morning, Mr. Hammersly; good morning, madam."

"Show me some rings, Mr. Cranston, will you?"

"Signet rings, sir—or ladies' rings? Ex-actly. I understand. That tray out of the window, sir. A chair, Mr. Wills, for the lady. Delightful weather—just what we should wish to see in June. Permit me to show you the contents of this tray, Mr. Hammersly."

Pierce caught Janet's eye and winked at her.

"Is there any particular sort of ring, sir?"

Mr. Cranston rubbed his pink hands together, and hovered tactfully over the problem. It did not do to jump to conclusions, and Mr. Cranston prided himself on his discretion.

"I want a ring for this lady, Mr. Cranston."

"Ex-actly. Now—as to stones—diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds? Sapphires. Thank you. Now here is a very elegant thing—an exquisite thing. Such superb colour."

With Mr. Cranston's sympathetic assistance they managed to find the one miraculous ring that was to change its

velvet bed for Janet's hand. It cost Pierce Hammersly forty guineas. He began to look around the shop for other plunder.

"May I have the pleasure of showing you something else, sir? Bracelets, pendants, ladies' watches——?"

"Have you a watch, Janet?"

"Yes. And I don't care for trinkets."

She looked at him tenderly, but meaningly.

"What about——?"

"No, really—I won't have anything else."

Mr. Cranston effaced the merchant in himself, most delicately.

"Will you wear the ring, madam, or shall I——?"

"I'll wear it, thank you."

Mr. Cranston handed it with great stateliness to Pierce, who slipped it on Janet's finger. Cranston beamed on them, and slid round the counter to open the door.

"Pierce, I almost feel married!"

They laughed joyously.

"It was quite a rite of the church——bless you, my children——what? There is quite a good shop down by the Guildhall."

She stood firmly by the car.

"I am not going to let you buy me anything else."

"Why not?"

"Pride, dear. I am not going to let anybody say——"

"Oh, you sensitive goddess! But you are adorable. All right; I surrender."

"Thank you, dear man."

They reached Orchards about twelve o'clock, and found old Porteous sitting under the weeping ash near the porch, and pretending to read the paper. He had been waiting for them, determined that the house of the Hammerslys should meet Janet with a smile.

He flourished the paper at them.

"Here you are! Delighted to see you, my dear. Let me open the door."

He was very gallant and fatherly, and the aloofness melted out of Janet's eyes. She went into the house with one hand resting in the crook of Porteous's arm, and her heart wholly his from that moment.

"Sophie, here are our young people."

Sophia Hammersly rose slowly from her chair. It was obvious that she had decided to make the affair as formal and intimate as was possible, without risking a further battle with her son. She gave Janet a high and drooping hand to shake, and stared at her with hard and observant eyes.

"I am glad to meet you, Miss Yorke. I hope you will make my son——happy."

A slight emphasis on the "hope" trailed a flicker of doubt after it.

Janet behaved admirably, and with the utmost nerve. She began talking quite calmly and frankly to Mrs. Hammersly. They sat opposite each other, Janet on the chesterfield, Mrs. Sophia on a high chair, and Pierce's mother seemed the more nervous of the two. The girl's repose was the repose of the well-bred woman of the world. She did not fidget, did not chatter, and her eyes looked straight at Sophia Hammersly as though her pride had nothing to fear.

The two men loitered awhile, and then drifted out into the garden. Porteous Hammersly had a whimsical smile on his face.

"Pierce, that girl's splendid. Did she know——?"

"She knew that mother and I had issued ultimata to each other on her account."

"No! That was a bit of fine breeding, real breeding. I don't care if Yorke was a fraudulent idiot; he passed on some good blood."

"I haven't thanked you yet, Pater."

"What for?"

"The way you met Janet. You should have seen the way her face softened."

"Tut, tut; the great thing in life is not to hurt people. Let's go and choose the child a rose."

Though Mrs. Sophia remained a mass of ice, that lunch proved much less of an ordeal than Janet had expected. Porteous was in great form. In fact, he most thoroughly enjoyed himself, and even made a boast of it under the cold eyes of his wife.

"I suppose you young people want the afternoon to yourselves."

"Not a bit of it. What's the plan, Pater?"

"Why shouldn't we take the Rolls-Royce, and run over to Imping Water for tea?"

Janet turned bright eyes to his.

"I should have loved it, but mother is all alone. You see, she's an invalid."

Porteous's eyes said "Good girl." His wife gave a faint, cynical sniff. Little hypocrite, making fools of the men!

"Mrs. Yorke is not strong enough to motor? If she would ignore formalities——"

"She really is not fit for it, Mr. Hammersly. She has a heart——"

"Dear, dear. I know that's serious."

After lunch they sat in the big veranda and talked, the three of them, for Mrs. Sophia had a headache, and went to lie down. Old Porteous, horribly afraid of finding himself *de trop*, jumped up twice, and was ignominiously held by the coat-tails by his son.

"Don't go, Dad."

"But, my dear boy——"

"Janet, tell him he has got to stay."

"Am I boring you, Mr. Hammersly?"

Her roguish, happy eyes reassured him.

"Bless my soul, bored indeed! Well, I like that! So you went to old Cranston for the ring, did you? I suppose he blessed you?"

They brimmed with laughter while Pierce imitated Mr. Cranston's well-known episcopal and benedictory manner.

"And Janet winked at me."

"I didn't."

"I almost think she did, Pierce."

Pierce walked back with Janet to Heather Cottage, a man wholly delighted with the woman of his choice. He stayed to tea with the Yorkes, made himself charming to Janet's mother, and talked with a humorous yet fiery abandonment that made them both laugh. He told them tales of the amateur army, yet there was a tinge of bitterness in his voice. "If only we were like the French," was his cry.

After tea Mrs. Yorke shepherded them abroad.

"I know Mr. Hammersly would like a walk."

They wandered out together into the woods, and it was still Pierce who talked, wittily, facetiously, but sometimes with passion. Janet had slipped into a silent mood, with a shadow as of much thinking in her eyes. This new-won man of hers puzzled her not a little, challenged her curiosity. He was an egoist, with a sensitive temperament, generous, fiery, proud, much more impassioned than the ordinary Anglo-Saxon, less stupidly passive, less tolerant of restraint.

He noticed her silence and linked an arm in hers.

"What a garrulous idiot I am! And this wise goddess thinks the more."

"I am considering my new responsibilities."

"Me?"

"The whole house of Hammersly."

His eyes flashed laughter.

"Oh, the mater! You need not take her seriously. The mater patronises everybody. If she weren't my mother, I should hate her like poison. Father is different."

"He's a dear," she confessed, "and you are like him in some ways, and yet not the least bit like him."

"This is getting interesting. Let's sit down here, and go into the matter thoroughly."

They lay facing each other in the bracken under the sweeping branches of an old and stunted Scots fir. Janet unpinned her hat and laid it between them. It was very still and peaceful in this great wood.

"Now, you are going to analyse me."

"I'm serious, Pierce. In some ways, you don't seem quite English."

"I'm not. I take it as a compliment. My great grandmother was a Frenchwoman."

"Was she?"

"Yes. And I'm supposed to be absurdly like a great uncle of mine, Gerard Hammersly. We have got his portrait in the library; I'll show it you. He was rather notorious in his day."

"How?"

"Uncle Gerard was in the army. He was one of those restive, fiery men who cannot stand a blackguard. There was some general or other—in one of those Indian campaigns—who ought to have been in jail instead of at the head of a brigade. Uncle Gerard was under him. There was an almighty row about something, and Gerard Hammersly did a thing which was right morally, but utterly wrong according to regulations. They broke him for it—threw him out. The thing caused a sensation for a time; there were squabbles in Parliament over it."

"And what happened to your uncle?"

"He became a Frenchman, fought for France, and was killed at Sedan."

She sat up, with her chin resting on her crossed arms that rested on her bent knees; she stared into the shadowy depths of the wood.

“And they say you are like him?”

“I have noticed it myself. And I have an idea that I am like him in temperament. I have learnt that already in the army. I can’t stand being hectored by a man whom I don’t like or respect. My brain gets red hot, and I feel like boiling over.”

“I can understand.”

He edged nearer, and put an arm over her shoulders.

“I think there is a bit of the rebel in both of us. But what does anything else matter, dear? We have just four more days.”

The woman in her answered him. She drew close and let her head rest on his shoulder. Her eyes were full of enchantment.

“Just four days! I’ll wait for you, Pierce; I shall be so proud of you. And some day you will come back to me.”

“Dear heart——”

“This war is teaching us how to love.”

CHAPTER VI

For two days they were utterly happy, and then the shadow of the Great War loomed over them with a menace that was not to be ignored. They were conscious of the passing of the hours, and with a quick spasm of pain would come the thought: "At this time—three days hence—we shall be together no longer." Yet it was during these sadder hours that Janet began to know her man, and in knowing him to fear for him. Love seemed to give her a subtle insight—an insight that was fraught with vague misgivings.

One afternoon he took her into the library to show her the portrait of his great uncle, Gerard Hammersly. It hung over the mantelpiece in a good light—a picture in oils of a man in a dark blue cavalry uniform, his shako in the crook of his arm, one hand on the hilt of his sword. He looked straight out of the picture with dark, fearless eyes—a look that challenged and arrested. Pierce's likeness to his uncle was remarkable. Janet saw the same proud nostrils, the same restive lift of the head. It was individualism at its best and at its fiercest; the individualism of a D'Artagnan or a Henry the Fifth—no temperament for a machine-made patriotism and the gross hypocrisies of a political adventure.

That portrait disturbed her most strangely. It was as though Gerard Hammersly had repeated himself in his nephew; and given like conditions it was almost possible to imagine that Pierce might act as his great uncle had acted. And civilisation, in the gross agony of its disillusionment, had ceased to value individualism. In fact, it was a danger, a disloyalty to the organised mob; a thing to be crushed, trodden on.

She spoke to Porteous Hammersly about that portrait.

"The likeness is extraordinary."

He gave her a queer, cautious look.

"Did Pierce tell you about his Uncle Gerard?"

"Yes."

There was a something behind Porteous Hammersly's eyes that touched her intuition. He also had been troubled by that portrait and that past; she was sure of it, for old Hammersly had a soul.

"Do you approve of what Gerard did?" she asked him.

"My dear, I can't tell. It is a question how far the individual has a right to defy the law of the majority."

"Supposing it had happened in this war?"

Once again he gave her that queer, troubled look.

"We are supposed to be fighting for our existence as a nation, Janet. No, I don't suppose they would show a Gerard much mercy. We thought we were civilised, and we find that we are savages—clever, devilish savages. Every man must brandish a club—and kill. Of course, there are individual heroisms that are splendid."

"Somehow, I think there is a nobleness in it all. France is noble, and Serbia, and Belgium."

"And what of England, child?"

She looked solemn as a Cassandra.

"I have a feeling that England has lost its soul, and has not found it again—yet. Aren't we horribly selfish still. Isn't the stuff in the papers just so much talk?"

Old Hammersly looked baffled.

"I don't know. I can't make up my mind about things. I feel like a man in a crowd with everyone talking at once."

And there they left it.

Janet began to glimpse Pierce's weaknesses, and perhaps she loved him with a new mother-love because of them.

A girl who has suffered and thought and fought things out for herself is so much older than the man of her own age, however clever he may be. In the subtlety of her intuition, and in her intimate feeling of the human heart-beats of life, she is his silent and conscious mistress. Women's knowledge is from within; most of man's from without.

Pierce would lie with his head in her lap under some Scots fir, with the bracken making green glooms about them, and talk and talk, with his eyes staring at the sky. He was a lovable, highly-sensed egoist. Soldier that he was, his individualism had remained fierce and critical; it had not learnt to subordinate itself, to sacrifice itself blindly. His very cleverness made him undisciplined—as discipline, or resignation, is understood in modern war. He hated authority; he hated routine; and sometimes his voice was inclined to be querulous.

"I know we have had to improvise, improvise, but why we do such fatuous things, I can't imagine. Take my own case: I'm a chap who wants inspiration. I fight on my nerves; I want to feel the men I'm leading are my men; men I've lived and trained with, not an anonymous crowd that don't care a button whether you get hit or not. There are thousands of men like me, and what do they do with us? Send us out like a lot of cockerels in baskets to a strange farmyard! Oh, I know! You can't categorise temperaments. We English are too stupid for that."

She stroked his hair.

"I know it's hard. But they are all British."

"There you are—at once. There are sorts of English that I hate worse than Germans. I can't help it. I don't want to

live with them, much less go through such a devil's ordeal in their company. There were one or two men in my regiment whom I loathed—impossible people. It's no use talking to me about the King's uniform and all that. A blackguard giving me orders makes me feel mutinous."

He kept her thinking of that portrait of his great-uncle Gerard, and she could imagine him defying all customs and regulations just as Gerard Hammersly had defied them.

"Don't you take things too much to heart, dear man?"

"I? Well, I hate vulgarity and caddishness and red tape, and the beastly cheap cynicism that you hear in the average mess."

"Why not take them for granted?"

"I suppose I'm a bad soldier, but I haven't learnt to be meek and resigned. I often wish that I had been born a Frenchman."

"Why?"

"France has a soul. The French are real soldiers. The average Englishman doesn't understand passion and patriotism. He just talks sentimental tosh, and feels warm in his tummy. After all, have we anything to be proud of as a nation? Do I, for instance, grudge the Germans East Ham, or Whitechapel, or the Potteries, or half Lancashire? Not in the least. They could not make things any uglier."

"You remind me of Bernard Shaw."

"Thanks. But I do wish I could feel proud of my own people, but somehow I can't."

A slow and secret misgiving began to take possession of Janet, and she could not help asking herself questions. Would Pierce stand the strain; had he not too restive an imagination? There was no disloyalty in these doubts of hers; she was very quick and sensitive, and she had an uncanny feeling that these fears of hers were prophetic. She could have wished him less impatient, less ready to let that fiery individualism of his flare out against those in authority.

"Dear girl."

"Yes."

"You'll come up to town with me to-morrow? I'm going to have my khaki drill fitted."

"Of course I'll come."

"I want to say good-bye to Mrs. Hansard and her kiddies this afternoon. Hansard is a great friend of mine; he's in France. Have you met her?"

"No."

"She's a dear, and charming. They live up at Vine Court. She would make rather a good friend for you, Janet, and you'd love the kiddies. Will you drive up with me this afternoon?"

"I should love to."

The drive to Vine Court took them through the meadows where the long grasses, with the sorrel and daisies, spread a net of silver and bronze. Now and again the road ran close to the Scarr River, a stream of black velvet with green water-weeds trailing under the willows.

Janet noticed that Pierce looked at the country with a peculiar, keen-eyed tenderness. It was like a moving picture slipping out of his life, this England that he had not yet learnt to love.

Vine Court showed itself close to the river, an old Tudor place half hidden in lush greenness, with twisted chimneys, and a broad wealth of old red brick, grey weathered oak and mullioned windows. The road to it led through a meadow planted with huge chestnuts; a high holly hedge shut in the garden.

The drive wound between herbaceous borders that were masses of colour, the blues of delphiniums and anchusas, the white of lilies, the reds of poppies and roses, the gaudy golds of gailardias, the velvet peach and purple of sweet williams. The whole place smelt of honeysuckle and roses. Ancient trees painted a rich, shadowy background. It was a place of peace and greenness, soft sunlight and honey-hunting bees.

"What a sweet spot!"

"Dick Hansard is a great gardener. He will be back on leave in a week or so, and he'll spread himself around and love the place. Think of it—after the trenches."

"I can hear children."

"There they are."

They had a glimpse of three mites playing in the grass under some old apple trees. A youngster in blue had been making a wreath of white daisies, and was in the act of crowning the yellow head of a little lady of two. A maid was with them. She straightened herself, turned sharply, and looked anxiously towards the car.

They saw her come hurrying across a lawn, rather white, and with eyes whose vision seemed turned inward. Hammersly had stopped the car.

"Is Mrs. Hansard in, Kate?"

"She is not seeing anybody, sir, since she had the news."

"What news? Is Mr. Hansard wounded?"

“He’s killed, sir.”

Pierce blurted out a “Good God!” and leant over the steering wheel of the car.

“Killed!”

His voice sounded incredulous.

“When did you hear?”

“The telegram came about twelve, sir. Mrs. Hansard has her mother with her.”

Pierce’s face had a blank, stunned look.

“And his kiddies making daisy chains over there! No—I can’t send a message, Kate. I’ll write.”

He turned the car and drove back between the masses of living colour, watching the children out of the corners of his eyes. Janet had said nothing, but there were tears on her cheeks.

“Old Dick dead. Good God! This damned war! And those kiddies.”

She laid a hand against his arm.

“It’s too tragic! The poor girl in there!”

“And all those flowers! Waiting for him. He just loved every bit of this place. He was such a good chap, so straight and simple and clean! Just fooled away by someone, I suppose!”

“Oh, don’t say that! It makes it so much worse.”

“It makes it damnable.”

He was so deeply moved that he hardly spoke to Janet on the way home. His eyes seemed intent on watching the road ahead of him, that white strip winding through the green of an English June. Richard Hansard dead, hidden away in a hole somewhere over there in France, while his kiddies played in the sunlight! Hansard had been so much alive, such a lover of home things, and it seemed only yesterday that Pierce had seen him married. Hansard had hated going; it had almost torn his heart out, and now he was dead.

“This damnable war!”

“It is so difficult to realise things.”

“I don’t think I ever realised them—till to-day. That garden and the children, and the darkened house, and Hansard lying dead over there.”

“She has the children.”

“Yes, but they were such pals. There is one blessing; Dick will have left her an income. She was a doctor’s daughter, and she would have had nothing.”

He relapsed again into an awed silence, but he was thinking of Janet as well as of the Hansards and their home. What would happen to her if he never came back? She would be left with a miserable little income, living on her mother, cramped, fettered, a bird in a cage.

CHAPTER VII

Dusk was falling when Pierce Hammersly pushed open the gate of Heather Cottage. He had been running across the common, and he looked strung up and excited.

Janet, rising out of a deck-chair, a pale white figure in the dusk, held out her hands to him.

"I'm sorry I'm so late, dear; I have been talking things over with my father. Janet, you have got to marry me."

"My dear——!"

"Before I go. It can be done—legally, I mean; there's time. Dick Hansard's death has made me see everything in a new light; supposing anything happened to me, your position would be so different if we were married."

"You mean——?"

"I want to feel sure that you would not be left to the mercies of other people. I have talked to father about it. There would be the pension and a little money of my own, and I could will you a life interest in anything I was to inherit."

She took his face between her hands and kissed him.

"You dear. This touches me very deeply. But I won't marry you, Pierce."

"But, Janet——"

"No, no——"

"But why not? It will make me mad to think——"

She looked into his eyes.

"I want to wait for you. I haven't asked for anything else in the world but you. And there's a pride in me that forbids me to marry you for anything I might get."

"It's just blank fanaticism!"

"No, no. It's a good pride, a clean pride. No one will be able to say that I made things safe for myself. Besides, dearest, if I lost you, I should be no worse off than before. I mean, money could not make it up to me; I should want to work, work to help me to bear it."

He held her in his arms and pleaded.

"I only want to feel that you won't be worried by sordid cares. Don't you understand? Why trouble about what gossiping fools might say?"

But she remained obdurate.

"I won't do it, dearest. I understand how you feel, and I love you for it. But there is a pride in my love; I am going to wait for you, just as I was before you came to me."

"Oh, my dear, won't you let me leave you a little money?"

"No, not a penny. I shall feel so much happier, stronger. And somehow I think that your father would agree with me."

"The pater was quite willing——"

"Of course. He is generous and good. But—but supposing you never came back to me"—her voice broke a little—"I couldn't bear to feel that I was profiting. If we had been engaged for months I might have felt differently."

He could not help but admire her delicate sense of self-respect.

"Well, I give way to you. I shall leave you in trust with the pater. He'll look after you. Now, about to-morrow. If we catch the 8.50, we shall be in town by 10.30. I will send the car for you at a quarter-past eight."

They wandered about the garden in the dusk, and a great sadness oppressed them both. The wrench was very near, and poor Dick Hansard's death had brought the grim shadow of the reality very near to them. Pierce's right arm held Janet with a new and desperate tenderness; her head rested upon his shoulder.

"I feel almost a coward to-night, dear."

She sighed, and put her hand over his.

"How small and futile the old troubles seem. Do you know that I shall think of you as a hero?"

"I'm not a hero," he said sadly. "Very few of us feel like heroes, Janet."

"And that's why you are heroic, dear. I know that men must be afraid. Only people without imagination fail to realise that."

He flared up into one of his tirades.

"That newspaper stuff! What tosh! The average Englishman pats himself, says 'Our boys are splendid,' and goes to bed and snores. Perhaps some day they will understand, when half our manhood has sacrificed itself, and all the miserable little skunks who are shirking the ordeal are shoved into the trenches for the enlightenment of their souls. But I should like to send some of the comfortable, middle-aged people out there, the men who are so cheerful and well fed, and who say: 'Oh, we have only to go on long enough, and we are bound to win.' They don't see it with the eyes of the men who do the 'going on.'"

She poured sympathy on his bitterness, and lured him back into her heart.

"We will have our photos taken to-morrow."

"I wish you would let me have a miniature painted for you. I suppose I might be allowed to pay for that? And for your railway ticket?"

"Perhaps."

"We'll arrange it to-morrow. You could have it sent out to me. And you will write every other day, Janet?"

"Yes."

He drew her to him with sudden passion, and kissed her again and again, the long, yearning kisses of the lover.

"My dearest, my dearest——"

She clasped her hands about his neck.

"I'm so proud of you. I'm going to be brave—for your sake."

"I shall be thinking of you day and night."

Pierce Hammersly walked slowly back to Orchards under a star-bright sky. His heart was heavy within him, and he felt like a child, vaguely afraid of the strangeness and the horror of the unknown. No bands played. The sense of adventure, the stir and movement of strong men marching in the sunlight, the sense of great things dared and done, they inspired him no longer. He felt chilly, and most damnably depressed. The thought of leaving Janet wounded him. How warm her lips were, and how soft and desirable and dear she had felt in his arms. His soul shivered before the cynical sternness of this ghastly war, with its wounds and mud and agony, its crouching in holes, its shell-burst, mine-blasts, choking clouds of gas. He found himself wondering how Dick Hansard had died. Perhaps there was no body of Dick Hansard, but only a few strings of flesh. He shuddered.

Pierce Hammersly felt glad to reach Orchards, and to walk out of the night into the lamplit library where his father sat reading. Porteous Hammersly gave his son the keen-searching look that a physician gives a patient.

"All alone, Pater."

"So you are back."

Men throw such obvious remarks at each other when they are feeling ready either to curse or to weep. Pierce strolled casually to the mantelpiece, took a cigarette from the silver box, lit it, and sat down.

"Not so warm to-night. I have just come back from the Cottage."

"It must be rather lonely for those two women up there."

There was a pause while Pierce tried to blow smoke rings.

"I mentioned that matter to Janet, Pater."

"About—your marriage?"

"Yes. She wouldn't listen to me, wouldn't hear of me making a will in her favour."

"She had reasons?"

"A quixotic and delicate sort of pride. She said she would wait till I came back, and that she did not want to profit by—by my not coming back. She said she would not have people saying that she had made things safe for herself."

"I see."

"She said, too, she thought you would understand and agree with her."

Porteous Hammersly's face twitched with suppressed emotion.

"I do understand, and I think——"

"That's she's right?"

"I think she's the finest girl I have ever known. I think she's splendid, Pierce, absolutely splendid."

"By God! She's——"

He hid his face in his hands, inarticulate with emotion.

His father got up, cleared his throat, and adjusted one of the blinds. Meanwhile Pierce had mastered himself; his face seemed lit up by an inward radiance.

"Pater, if anything were to happen to me——"

"My dear boy——!"

"You wouldn't let—you'd help her?"

Porteous came over towards his son.

"Good heavens, of course! Don't worry, Pierce; I'd look on her as my daughter. I'd be proud—only too proud——"

"Thanks, dear old Dad. I couldn't bear to think——"

"I would insist on helping her. I would say it was your—your wish. I'll add something to my will, Pierce."

Pierce sprang up, and put his hands on his father's shoulders.

"Dear old Dad, you have always been very good to me. I—I——"

"There, there, my dear boy, I'm sure——"

They retreated, by mutual consent, into opposite corners of the room, and disposed of certain unmanly manifestations of emotion that were embarrassing and painful.

Pierce searched for another cigarette, while his father pretended to be looking for something at his desk.

"I'll make a note of it, Pierce; I'll write to Finlayson to-morrow."

"Thanks, Pater."

Porteous Hammersly sat down, and scribbled a few words on his memorandum block. His son discovered the evening paper, and made a great noise turning over the sheets.

"Not much news to-night."

"Very little."

"I see we have scotched another submarine."

"Yes."

In three minutes they were talking quite calmly and pleasantly, as though there were no such things as love and tears and death.

CHAPTER VIII

Those were whirlwind hours, those hours of their last whole day together; hours that they tried to lengthen by crowding them with incidents—potential memories. Pierce had his khaki drill fitted and bought a sun helmet, and a few military playthings. They had their photographs taken by Fuselli of Bond Street, and Pierce arranged for the painting of that miniature of Janet. Then he lured her into shops and bought her hats and dresses, gloves and scarves, and she had not the heart to refuse him. His love wanted to spend itself. There was a pathos even in his extravagance, in his passionate seizing of this last chance of spoiling her.

They lunched at the Savoy, a new experience for Janet, and one that affected her negatively. Pierce insisted on champagne, and his cheerfulness was of much the same quality—forced and artificial.

She leant across the table towards him.

“Pierce——”

“Dear girl——”

“Don’t let us stay here long. What time is our train?”

“Three-thirty. You don’t like the atmosphere?”

She looked at her ring.

“I should like to be alone with you—and my own thoughts—in some solemn place, just for a while. I can’t pretend to rise to this—worldliness.”

“I’m sorry, dear. It was a bad blunder; a piece of bad taste.”

“No, I did not mean that. But these last memories will be so precious.”

He looked into her eyes and beheld a new world in them; a world of mystery and strange idealism, and deep, sacred yearnings.

“Of course. Yes, let us get out of the place. I have an idea——”

He carried her off in a taxi to the great new cathedral at Westminster, and there they sat in the hush and the twilight, holding hands and saying nothing. The spirit of the great building brooded over them. Its silence was the silence of unspeakable emotion. They felt that they had never touched each other spiritually until that moment; they had partaken of a kind of sacrament together. Love had a new meaning.

They remained there, sadly happy, for an hour, and then Pierce lifted Janet’s hand and kissed the ring he had given her.

“We must be going, dear.”

She sighed resignedly.

“I shall never forget this. Now I am ready.”

But the pain of parting had stirred in them, and it quickened and grew as the day passed. Pierce Hammersly was conscious of a desperate desire to be near her; he could do nothing but look at her; he did not want her out of his sight. A couple of prim females shared the carriage with them as far as Scarshott; dry, desiccated creatures whose souls seemed to rattle when they talked. Pierce hardly realised their presence. Janet was like a glowing figure of light whose radiance spread itself around and blotted out all trivial objects like a golden fog.

The car was waiting for them at Scarshott Station, and Pierce told Bains to drive them to Heather Cottage. A tragic tenderness had displaced the triumphant excitement of the first few days, and a drive through Scarshott High Street had lost its zest. They did not want to be stared at; their love had grown more sacred.

“I shall have to leave you for an hour or two, dear. I ought to spend some of the time with my people.”

“Of course.”

“I shall walk up after dinner. And about to-morrow?”

She looked at him bravely.

“I don’t think I will come up to town with you. I would rather say good-bye—to-night.”

“Oh, my dear! Yes, but perhaps you are right. We don’t want to be gaped at.”

He left her at the cottage and was driven back to Orchards in the mellow hush of a June evening. Porteous was strolling in the garden, trying to play the philosopher among his roses, and not succeeding very well. The normal placid current of his life had glided suddenly into an abrupt and rocky channel, and there was the noise of rushing water in his ears, and a sense of something slipping—slipping into turmoil, fear, and darkness.

“Hallo, here you are!”

They looked at each other shyly, as though they knew that they were acting a part.

“I suppose that Dent can pack for me, Pater? I am going to spend an hour with Janet after dinner.”

Porteous winced.

“What time is that train?”

“Nine-fifteen. I shall only have to change platforms and pick up a kit-bag at the cloak-room.”

"Is Janet going up with you?"

"No."

"I don't think I'll come, Pierce—unless——"

"The adventure starts to-morrow, Pater, and a man has to set his teeth some time."

"Exactly."

They strolled up and down one of the lawns under the broad shadows of the cedars. The peace and the stillness of the old place seemed strange and unreal, and yet so convincing that Pierce could hardly realise that he might be at sea when that same sun set to-morrow. Those Greek islands, and the Gallipoli Peninsula, vague dots upon the map, loomed up suddenly in the glare of his imagination. He felt his sure grip on life slipping away. It was like going to a strange school, a school whose strangeness haunted him, and oppressed him with vague dread.

"Well, my boy, we must keep smiling."

Old Hammersly's upper lip quivered as he uttered the platitude.

"About Janet, Father?"

"Yes. Count on me, Pierce."

"She's sensitive, and fiercely proud. Don't let people slight her."

"I'll see to that. As to the future—I have already taken steps to render her independent."

"You are helping me, Dad, more than you know. I shall be thinking of you and Janet."

"Of course, my boy; of course. And when the war is over, you will have done your duty, and life will be good."

"I hope so, Pater, with all my heart."

They walked up and down in silence for a minute, and then Porteous mentioned his wife.

"I think, Pierce, your mother would like you to spend a little time with her."

"Where is she?"

"She was in the drawing-room."

"I'll go and have a talk to her."

Sophia Hammersly was one of those fortunate yet much to be pitied people who can neither weep nor laugh. Life had left her cold. She did not feel things; they only added or subtracted from the sum total of her comfort. Having no fire within her, she could flatter herself on her stoicism, and on the admirable and aristocratic calmness with which she faced this great ordeal.

And in her way she was proud of Pierce; proud of him because he was hers, because she had produced him, because he was good to look at and clever. There was no affection in this pride. It was just an aspect of her egoism, a form of self-satisfaction. She liked being the mother of a good-looking son, just as she liked living in a big house, driving in a *de luxe* car, knowing county people. It made her feel fat and comfortable and socially successful.

And since it was quite the aristocratic thing for a young man to go to the front, Sophia Hammersly was able to play the part of the Roman mother with no bitter heart pangs and no dreads. She had no imagination, and somehow she had never seen Pierce lying dead with white lips and blood on his face, and sightless eyes wide open. He remained a successful social figure, distinguished, smartly uniformed, capable of the obvious, fashion-plate gallantry.

"My dear Pierce, I hope you intend keeping a diary. I am going to send one of your khaki photos up to *The Trident*. I know they would like to publish it."

"I shouldn't bother, Mater."

"And if you can send home some curios it will be so interesting. Mrs. Hemmerde has one of those nice brass shell things in her drawing-room."

He looked at her, sadly sardonic.

"Supposing I can get hold of a Turk's head, Mater, and have it pickled?"

"Don't be so flippant, Pierce. I shall expect you to write to me every other day, and I should like bits I could send to one of the daily papers."

She did not mention Janet, for already she had half convinced herself that this foolish infatuation would wither and droop of itself, and that a young man's love is a thing that changes like the seasons.

"I suppose your father will see you embark?"

"No, we have agreed against it."

"But I think he ought to. It is his duty."

"We don't always do our duty, Mater. It is rather a bore, you know."

He escaped from his mother, pretending that he wanted to make sure that Dent was getting on with the packing. The sight of his active service kit did not excite him in the least; in fact, it depressed him; the stuff looked so ominous and final.

"Don't forget that canvas bucket, Dent."

"No, sir. And will you wear the revolver?"

"No, shove the thing in the kit-bag. Have I got a tin mug and a plate?"

“Yes, sir. And what about the water-bottle?”

“Shove it in the kit-bag. And don’t forget that camp mirror.”

“No, sir.”

Dinner ended in inarticulate depression. Pierce was restless, most horribly restless, thinking of Janet and of the stark pathos of leaving her. He dashed off, leaving his coffee untouched, and ran half the way to Heather Cottage, his heart racing, and a sense of emptiness under his ribs. He noticed, in a perfunctory sort of way, how bright the after-glow was, and the wetness of the grass with the falling dew. Even the beauty of things was edged with pain.

Then he was holding Janet in his arms; she had been waiting at the gate for him, and the warm softness of her was like blood flowing from a wound. They were trembling, both of them, breathing jerkily. Pierce turned her face up to his, and talked like a man half out of his senses.

“Little woman—I’ve got to go. It’s damnable. How I love you! Oh, my dear. You’ll be brave; I shall come back all right; I’ve sworn to come back.”

She just looked at him, and looked.

“It’s so hard to believe.”

She closed her eyes, and he kissed them, and they stood awhile in silence, shivering a little, and holding each other close.

Then Pierce mastered himself.

“I ought to see your mother, dear.”

“Yes, come in.”

It was a poor, pathetic, trite little interview, with Mrs. Yorke’s faded eyes looking at them helplessly. They did not prolong it, but went out again into the garden.

And there Pierce had one of his moments of passionate revolt.

“Curse this war! Do you remember those fellows in mufti lunching at the Savoy? Why should I go—while they stay at home? Isn’t it like England—putting everything on the man who has a sense of honour, and letting the slackers grin and stay at home? Why should you have to bear this?”

She gave a deep, quick cry.

“Don’t—don’t. I’m proud to bear it. There’s a sort of nobleness, bitter but sweet. I love you so much more because you are going.”

He reacted to her fineness.

“Do you? How splendid you are!”

“No, I’m so human; but I do love bigness.”

“My dearest——!”

They wandered to and fro awhile, with arms linked, talking with passionate, sweet intimacy. The stars blinked at them; the night was soft and still, yet in the bosom of the darkness there was a throbbing as of pain.

Then the old feverishness, the sense of impending anguish, returned. They yearned for that which they had dreaded, the wrench that was so inevitable and so near. It was like waiting for the poisoned cup; both longed to snatch at it.

“Janet, I ought to go.”

“Yes. I’m being selfish.”

“Oh, my heart, good-bye!”

They clung to each other for a moment, and then Pierce Hammersly turned and fled.

He ran home, panting, cursing.

“It’s damnable; absolutely damnable. Hell! Why didn’t I stay a little longer! I shan’t see her again.”

He faltered, ground his teeth, and went on again towards Scarshott.

“What is the use?” he thought; “I wish the whole damned country was at the bottom of the sea!”

CHAPTER IX

Porteous Hammersly and his son sat up late that night, talking about everything, and about nothing in particular. Each needed the human nearness of the other; they were like men in a haunted house, giving each other courage, pretending to be very bold.

Pierce drank whisky, and it made him talkative for a while.

"I wonder how most men feel before going off on this game."

"I don't know, my boy, I'm sure."

"Resigned, or sulky, or savage. There is not much of the joy of adventure in it."

"If one was quite young, Pierce, with no ties or responsibilities——"

"Yes, that's it. I know now how poor Dick Hansard felt. I saw him off the first time. I never remember a man looking so grey and miserable; just as though he had taken the heart out of his body and left it at home."

Old Hammersly watched his son with furtive and compassionate anxiety. He could not help wondering how this boy of his would behave. For Porteous Hammersly knew himself to be a physical coward; he was afraid of all sorts of things, fast travelling in a car, being in a rowing-boat, the jarring of an express train when it rocked over the points at a junction.

They went upstairs about twelve, and said a leisurely good night on the landing.

"You may be able to drop us letters from Gib. and Malta."

"Certain to, Pater. I think I'll turn in."

"Get a good night's sleep, my boy."

"There is not much fear of that."

They closed the doors of their rooms, and instantly a great loneliness seized each of them, as though it had been waiting there in the darkness. Pierce switched on the light, and saw all his service kit neatly packed and arranged at the foot of the bed. He stared at it, and began to undress.

Then a desperate desire to see Janet again seized him. It was like physical hunger, only a hundred times more fierce and poignant. He felt that he must rush out of the house, and through the darkness to that white cottage, and stand under her window, calling to her to let him see her face. He fought the desire, realising its futility, but his heart hunger would not let him sleep.

Porteous Hammersly had not attempted to undress. He threw off his coat, put on a dressing-gown, and with the light at full glare he sat down in an easy chair and tried to read. This reading proved to be a futile pretence at smothering his feelings, and presently he turned out the light and sat in the darkness. He knew that he could not sleep, that he did not want to sleep. His brain was too wakeful, too much under the influence of to-morrow's parting, for Porteous Hammersly had discovered that all his interests in life had centred themselves upon his son. He had not been conscious of this attitude of his, until Fate had threatened the whole purpose of his existence. He realised that all his acts and thoughts had gravitated towards his son and his son's future. It was the desire for continuity, for the perpetuation of his affection subtilised, and subdivided into a dozen different lines of accomplishment. Pierce stood at the end of everything that old Hammersly planned and did; he was a beloved presence in the office, in the garden, in the park, in a new tree planted, in a new sum of money put by and invested.

And sitting there in the darkness old Porteous saw the very symbol of life snatched away and taken from him. Age has none of the rebound of youth; it cannot create new enthusiasms, new creeds. Porteous Hammersly's eyes saw nothing but blank finality, with a flicker of hope shining in the distance. Pierce might come back, and he might not. No one knew, no one could help him. In such hours of suffering man has to stand alone.

Once Porteous Hammersly rose, and going softly to the door of his wife's room, opened it cautiously and listened. She was asleep; he could hear her heavy breathing. And that one incident symbolised what marriage had given him, or failed to give. He had married a woman whose soul had always been asleep when he had needed her. There was no hand to grasp his, no warm human touch to help him in the anguish of his loneliness.

So the night passed, with these two men both wakeful, both waiting for the dawn. Porteous opened his window, and sat there watching the stars grow pale, while his son turned from side to side, sometimes burying his hot face in the pillow and thinking of Janet and his love for her.

By a curious coincidence both those bedroom doors opened at the same moment, and father and son met in the grey light of the dawn.

"Hallo, Pater, I thought you were asleep!"

"I always wake early, and this morning I woke earlier than usual. What is it—about four?"

"Half-past. I'm going down to heat up some shaving water."

They gravitated towards the stairhead, each wondering whether the other had had any sleep at all.

"Some hot tea wouldn't be a bad idea."

“Excellent!”

“We need not rouse the servants.”

“Of course not.”

They went down and rummaged in the kitchen and pantry, with a new kind of comradeship. Pierce lit the gas-stove and got the kettle boiling, while Porteous collected teapot, cups, tea and sugar.

“I see there is no milk.”

“What about a tin of condensed? Does the great woman keep such a thing?”

They discovered an unopened tin in the pantry, and Pierce punched two holes in the lid with a screw-driver.

“I suppose I shall get plenty of this. The kettle is boiling, Dad.”

Porteous attended to it in his shirt-sleeves.

“Bread and butter.”

“Here’s a fresh pat. This is a real sort of picnic.”

If it was possible for either of them to enjoy anything they enjoyed that scratch meal at the kitchen table, and the simple intimacy of their good fellowship. Pierce’s eyes were rather red, and his father had forgotten to brush his hair.

“I wish I were thirty years younger. I should be going with you.”

They smiled at each other.

“What should I be, Pater?—a warrior in white socks! I say, this tea is good. I am going to have a shave before running over to have a last word with Janet.”

“I thought you said——”

“Yes, I know. But there is something I forgot to tell her.”

“Take the car.”

“I can do it in ten minutes on my own feet.”

No morning could have been more perfect, with the yellow sun just topping the white mist, and all the green world a-glisten with flashing dew. Pierce Hammersly had the common to himself, save for an old black donkey wandering through the furze. Heather Cottage looked very white against the purple under-shadows of the pines, a little house asleep, like a big white shell under a cliff.

Pierce turned aside into a plantation, and filled one of his pockets with fir cones. These were safe things to throw at a young woman’s window, but that pocketful proved superfluous. His first shot went through the open window and rattled on the floor.

“Who’s there?”

“Janet, let me have one glimpse of you.”

She had been lying there awake, thinking, thinking, with the blind up and the sunlight streaming in.

Pierce saw her come to the window in a little blue dressing-jacket, her hair hanging over her shoulders, white lace showing at her throat.

“I felt that I could not go without one last look at you.”

“What time is it?”

“About half-past five.”

“What a glorious day! Pierce, I’ll come down.”

She slipped on some clothes, put on a pair of shoes, but left her brown hair hanging free. Pierce was waiting for her in the porch. He caught her and held her close.

“Dearest, what gorgeous hair!”

He ran one hand under and through it, letting the sunlight play upon its undulations. Then, suddenly, he buried his face in her hair, and kissed her throat.

“I suppose this is gross selfishness? I ought not to have come.”

“Perhaps you could not help it.”

“I was awake all night, thinking of you.”

“It seems easier now. Last night was terrible.”

“My Janet, we will remember the sunlight.”

They wandered out into one of the open glades where rabbits had nibbled the grass till it looked like velvet. There was no wind, and the bracken was as still as the tree-tops overhead. And for some minutes they walked in a world of sweet oblivion, looking into each other’s eyes and talking with a beautiful calm frankness of all that was in their hearts.

Janet went with him halfway across the common towards Scarshott, for there was no one to see their linked arms and her tumultuous hair. They were more tranquil, less despairingly sad, and sustained by an exultant pride in each other. For the moment Janet had forgotten Gerard Hammersly, and the rebellious temper of her man who was so like his notorious uncle.

“I feel sure that you will come back to me.”

“What better omen could I have?”

“And I know that you will be brave.”

His last memory of Janet was of her standing there in the sunlight, her hair about her face, her eyes watching him with grave tenderness.

“Good-bye, and God bless you.”

“Good-bye, my own dear man.”

They turned with one last look, and went their several ways. Some subtle bond of sympathy still united them, for when Pierce glanced back and waved, she looked back and waved in answer. Then the furze hid her, and he went forward with a stiff face and grim eyes to exile and the great adventure.

Old Porteous drove down with his son to the station.

“I don’t think I’ll come on the platform, Pierce.”

“No, quite right, Father. And you will look after Janet for me?”

“With all my soul.”

The car stopped at the kerb. Pierce held his father’s hand for a moment.

“Good-bye, Pater; you have been wonderfully good to me.”

“God bless you, boy.”

“Good-bye, Bains; straight home; the luggage is out.”

“Good luck to you, sir.”

For Pierce had seen that his father’s hardihood had failed him, and that the staring eyes of Scarshott would humiliate the old man.

CHAPTER X

Pierce Hammersly found other men in khaki going down on that train from London to embark for the Dardanelles. One or two had women with them—women with bleak, strained faces; women who would smile pitifully from time to time and try to look brave. Acquaintanceships were struck up. There was a good deal of talking and of forced vivacity—the chattering of men who are afraid of their own thoughts.

“Where are we bound for; what’s your idea?”

“Gallipoli. It’s a dead cert.”

“But is it? What about Serbia? I heard a funny yam the other day from a man in the know; of course, it’s secret, but strange things are going to happen in Serbia.”

There was instant enthusiasm.

“Serbia! I should rather like Serbia.”

“Rather! We may be concentrating a big force there—secretly. And then——”

“Or it might be Egypt.”

“No, I bet it is to be a new landing.”

“I still hold to Serbia.”

Pierce had joined in this gossip, and in that railway carriage his intuition discovered something that was to sound like a leitmotiv through all those tragic days. Egypt—and safety! Serbia—and a temporary reprieve! The desire lay hidden in the hearts of all these men, just as it lay hidden in his own. No single one of them thirsted to be thrust into the slaughterhouse. They shrank from the thought of it; hoped the machine would carry them elsewhere, yet kept a pretence of keenness to show to the world.

But as the journey lengthened, the talk died down. Faces became set, bored, depressed. One man smoked a pipe savagely, using many superfluous matches over it. Pierce had a corner seat, and he watched the country rushing by, this England, this green land that was sliding out of his life. Would he ever see it again?—Janet?—his own people? He had never felt such sadness before, a sadness that was utterly without relief. The war—as he had seen it in the papers—had been one heroic, die-hard grin. What damnable rot those newspaper fellows wrote, the mock heroic tosh of men who had never been chained to the machine!

Pierce Hammersly went on board the *Sorontia* just as the sun was setting. The ship was a thirty-thousand tonner, and her black hull and white superstructure towered like a cliff above the dock sheds and derricks. Pierce had a struggle to get his baggage on board. He was suffering from a sense of turmoil and excitement when he went in search of his cabin.

“I say, steward, is this B deck?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And where’s Cabin 37?”

“Second on the left, sir. I shall be looking after you, sir. Three-berth cabin with porthole. You had better take the single berth, sir.”

“Excellent. I suppose we sail at any moment?”

The steward, a plump, shiny-faced soul, gave him a humorous look.

“Any moment, sir. Perhaps this time next week.”

Pierce was first man in Cabin 37, and so won the single bunk under the porthole. The cabin was beautifully fitted with mahogany furniture, a pile carpet, mirrors, and a couple of easy chairs.

“Dinner is still on, sir.”

“That’s a good idea, steward. Which way to the saloon?”

“Right aft along B deck, sir. I’ll see to your baggage and get it unpacked.”

“Is it necessary?”

“Well, sir, you may be on board a month.”

“A month?”

“I’ve known stranger things happen.”

Pierce found his way to the saloon, and to an excellent six-course dinner. He sat next an old Quartermaster Captain, a ranker in days of yore, whose rosy face glistened happily.

“Nothing wrong with this sort of active service—what?”

“They seem to be doing us well.”

“Well! It’s like being a little millionaire—for the price of a drink. Steward, another whisky. Have you any ice on board?”

“There will be ice every day, sir.”

The old soldier chuckled.

"We'll make the most of it. This sort of thing can't last."

The *Sorontia* lay anchored in the estuary for three whole days. No one was allowed on board, and no one was allowed to leave her—a wise provision, though it made the home-hungry men fret and swear.

"My wife's only about a mile away," said one of Pierce's cabin comrades, "and I can't see her. It seems bally rot."

"Rot! Not at all!" quoth a hard-bitten second lieutenant of three-and-forty; "this isn't a woman's job. We have left them behind."

They could write letters, for a mail was to go ashore before the *Sorontia* sailed, and Pierce covered ten sheets in writing to Janet, and half that number in a letter to his father. He had recovered a superficial optimism, and the crowd about him was cheery. There was plenty to eat and drink and smoke, and unlimited bridge in the evening, so no one had any right to grumble.

The *Sorontia* sailed on the fourth day. She glided slowly down the estuary, bellowing like a great black leviathan, and her trumpets made Hammersly picture her as a great beast setting out upon some fabulous adventure. He remained on the saloon deck with a crowd of brother officers, watching England turning from green to grey. A few khaki figures working on a fort stood up and waved caps and cheered the *Sorontia* as she slid by. Then came the open sea where two destroyers picked them up, and galloped like greyhounds on either beam.

Pierce slept well that first night, although the married subaltern in his cabin talked for half an hour about the submarine peril, and the inflatable waistcoat he meant to wear all through the voyage. Next day they were in the Bay, and five men out of ten ceased to be interested in anything but the proximity of a basin. Pierce lay in his bunk for a day and a half, abject and miserable, till the steward played the stern nurse and almost ordered him to get up.

Pierce got up, shaved—in anguish—and felt better. By tea-time he was growing hungry, and he ate a most creditable dinner. They passed the Rock that night, and Pierce saw it as a huge, shadowy outline, while some African town, whose name he did not know, glittered with southern lights.

The days were pleasant enough, but the nights were abominable. Every porthole had to be screwed up, and some three thousand men lived on their own air. The heat and the fog in the crowded smoking-room passed description; men sat in their shirt-sleeves, and drank and sweated over their cards. Pierce Hammersly lay naked in his bunk and listened to the married subaltern talking of tragedies and terrors in his sleep.

By day he sat in a deck-chair and watched the solemn and mysterious African coast glide by. It was like a great blue-grey cloud bank dotted here and there with the white glitter of a town. The sea was a sheet of sapphire, turning a blackish green when smoke palls from the *Sorontia*'s funnels drifted over it. There were mock alarms, when the troops rushed to their stations and put on life-belts. Everybody made a joke of it, which is the English way.

They called at Malta, and Pierce went ashore for a few hours. Gossip grew when they put to sea again. A little Jew doctor man, who sat opposite Pierce at mess, had been to one of the hospitals and was full of news.

"We're for Gallipoli all right."

Eager faces were turned to him, nor was Pierce the only man who flinched.

"How do you know, Doc?"

"Casualties—sickness. We're wanted. No Salonica stunt this voyage. I shall end up at Mudros—in a hospital there."

He went on gobbling, and Pierce hated him. The man was a gourmand and a gross feeder, and it was astonishing how much he could eat. He tore bread to pieces with unclean, be-ringed fingers, and hung his head over his plate like a dog. And Pierce hated him; so did the rest. This fellow was likely to have a soft time on a Greek island, and they almost felt him gloating over it and sucking his teeth.

"Fancy being handled by that!" said someone to Pierce on the stairs; "why, blood's cleaner."

Now men are very simple creatures when they are stripped of their affections, and herded together in a crowd to face danger and death. Cleverness counts no longer; the elemental strengths and tendernesses of the individual man shine out, and the man who has a little of the woman in him will be wiser than the most acute philosopher. Pierce Hammersly used to lie stretched in a deck-chair and watch these men in khaki drifting to and fro along the deck. The spirit of adventure was strong in most of them; their faces were cheerful and well fed—the faces of men who lived for the day and did very little thinking. Their uniforms were new and clean, and life could still be healthy and gay; blood and dirt, flies and sickness had not become realities. Here and there Pierce discovered grave, foreseeing eyes and sad foreheads. There were men who looked back at England as well as looked to the land ahead. He noticed that the saloon decks and dining-rooms of the *Sorontia* grew more silent as her voyage drew to its close; a few groups continued to be noisy, and to drink heavily and excitedly at night.

Then came the submarine attack. It happened about five in the afternoon. The *Sorontia* trumpeted with her siren; ten seconds later she fired her bow gun.

Pierce, rushing along the deck, saw a youngster in front of him jump in the air, startled by the bang of the gun. Men were pouring to their stations, men who chattered excitedly, men with set faces, men with fear in their eyes. The *Sorontia* vomited brown streams of humanity on to her decks; there was no shouting; the discipline was good; the

brown ranks formed up and stood steady, each man with his life-belt on.

Pierce Hammersly found himself scrambling down a ladder, and snatching at a life-belt that hung from a handrail. The unattached officers paraded together on the starboard side of C deck. The married subaltern was trying to tie the tapes of his belt, but his hands shook so badly that he could not manage to make a knot. Pierce did it for him, though his own fingers fumbled not a little.

“Anybody seen anything?”

“What’s that over there?”

“Our own wash. She’s turned almost in her own length.”

Bang went the stern gun. A maxim started hammering.

“The beast must be pretty close.”

“Well, we shall know all about it, one way or another, in five minutes.”

They stood at attention, waiting, seeing nothing but the stretch of sea in front of them. Hardly a man spoke. The silence was queer, expectant, solemn. Pierce Hammersly noticed that the married subaltern was nearly as white as his life-belt, and that his nose looked pinched and cold.

The stern gun boomed again. Everybody was wondering, waiting for the fatal crash.

“Wonder if they have fired at us?”

“Confound it, I’ve left my pipe in the smoking-room!”

“Isn’t that a periscope over there?”

“Blessed if I can see anything.”

Minutes passed. The *Sorontia* was spuming through the water at a good twenty knots an hour. Nothing happened; the minutes passed.

The rigid men relaxed a little. The feeling of tension slackened. Someone made a joke, and a laugh went round. Five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes slipped by, and there was nothing but the blue sea and the blue sky above it.

“She must have missed us,” said somebody, “and we have got the pace of her.”

And that was just what had happened.

That was Pierce Hammersly’s first taste of real danger, and he had experienced an intense and thrilling curiosity that could not be described as fear. He was rather pleased with himself on the whole, but he discovered that a sudden limit had been set to the imaginations of innocence. He had stood up and faced a chance of death, and the experience was quite different from what he had expected it to be, yet the adventure left a new seriousness behind it, and a sudden vivid sense of grim reality. Scores of green soldiers upon the *Sorontia* saw truth clearly and saw it whole. Much of the hypocritical and smug nonsense talked at home became instantly as potent as an emetic. “Business as usual.” “Doing your bit making munitions.” “Volunteering—to stay at home!” Never has a war taught more bitter truths, never has a country sacrificed all that was most honourable and generous in itself, and spread a cowardly shield over the shirker and the cynic. Who prated in Parliament for the rights of our volunteers? They had no rights but the rights of the soldier, but orators waxed hot over the rights of the little laggards, those free citizens who were so free and noble, such proud electors, such patriots whose refrain was “Tell us it is necessary for us to do our duty and we will do it—under compulsion, not before.”

That submarine adventure produced one fine effect. It had so frightened the little Jew doctor that he could not eat his dinner.

He spluttered with indignation.

“It’s a scandal! Why don’t they give us an escort?”

And then to a fellow medico:

“We ought to be in a hospital ship. We ought not to be made to run these risks—highly trained experts.”

The other doctor snubbed him.

“Thank God we do run some risks. When I look at these infantry chaps I feel ashamed. It’s they who get hell.”

On the second morning they steamed through a glassy sea, and past a strange Greek island that was all bare rock and barren mystery. Hammersly studied it through his field-glasses, and his classic illusions were badly shocked. It looked a fitting place for the starving of the dogs that the Turks shipped from Constantinople.

About ten o’clock they sighted Lemnos, and a destroyer came fussing out to meet them. The submarine peril was at an end; they would have a few days’ peace before they had to face that other peril.

Pierce Hammersly leant on the rail, and watched the rocky island and its magnificent harbour rise out of the sea. The *Sorontia* worked her way in, and the whole panorama lay outspread before these English eyes. The island was a study in yellows and golds, with the blue sky above, and the blue harbour in its midst. The place teemed with shipping, battleships and cruisers, destroyers, transports, colliers, liners, pinnaces, motor-boats. Mudros town gleamed white; the quaint windmills, with their spindle wheels and conical roofs, showed up against the gold and blue. Hardly a tree was to be seen, but the glare of the sun beat upon the little figures of men drilling, upon acres of white tentage, mule-teams, gangs of labourers, dust, piles of timber and stores.

A sententious major, who was standing next to Pierce, grew eloquent and boastful.

“Most impressive, absolutely magnificent! A picture of Empire—what! Amphibious warfare! We are showing them a miracle. And some day before long those grey ships will be holding up Stamboul!”

The day passed in watching the wonderful life of that great harbour, while senior officers rushed off in panting motor-boats to report. Pierce felt a great desire to go ashore and stretch himself, look for Turkish prisoners and explore that Greek town over yonder. He wanted to see the French; anything that was French fascinated him.

There was a magnificent sunset that evening, the wild mountainous hills in the west standing out sharp and black against a sheet of red and gold. The sunburnt fields were the colour of umber, the water of the harbour a purplish blue. Pierce Hammersly leant over the rail of the saloon deck, and thought of Janet, and the woods at Scarshott, and old Porteous and the life at home. A deepening melancholy possessed him. That superb sunset depressed him, filled him with prophetic sadness.

The colours changed to hard yellows and steely greys. Memories gave place to a sense of cold contact with that grim and immediate future. Scores of men on board the *Sorontia* were turning their eyes towards that strip of country forty miles away across the sea.

What was it really like over there? What did the “real thing” mean? How did a man feel when the first shell burst near him?

Pierce Hammersly wondered.

Life seemed very strange.

CHAPTER XI

The Clyde boat, with all lights out, glided over the dark sea towards Cape Helles. Pierce Hammersly and a dozen other officers were bunched together on the forepart of the upper deck, watching the eastern sky and talking in undertones. The lower deck was packed with troops, drafts for various regiments, but the silence on board was astonishing and suggestive. It was like a ship of the dead gliding through the darkness over a black sea towards a land of shadows.

An indescribable melancholy reigned supreme. Hammersly felt it in the very marrow of his bones, and in the whispering voices of the men on either side of him. The great mystery lay over yonder in the darkness, that land of unknown chances where a man might leave his bones to rot or gain strange, transient glory.

A great sword of light swept suddenly across the sky.

"Hallo—a searchlight!"

"One of ours, I suppose."

"It looked right up in the sky."

Queer flashes stabbed the distant darkness, strange momentary glares, like summer lightning.

"Guns?"

"But I don't hear anything."

Raw, inexperienced, innocent, they watched these solemn phenomena with inquisitive awe. It seemed to be a sort of devil's world towards which they were driving, the victims of fate, chillily resigned.

Presently a glitter of light showed all along above the water, outlining a vague, dark, looming mass. Then the glitter separated into hundreds of little points of light, and beyond them lay darkness, nothing but darkness.

"What the devil are all those lights?"

"Couldn't say."

Someone supplied a suggestion.

"Lights in dug-outs along the cliff."

"Yes, that's it."

Half an hour later the Clyde boat lay moored inside an improvised pier made out of sunken steamers. The troops were told that they were to spend the night on board, and that they would land at dawn. Everything was strangely quiet. It never occurred to these innocents that they might be shelled.

Hammersly slept on a table in the saloon, with his haversack under his head. He woke up stiff, aching, in a most unwholesome temper, and some twenty other gentlemen were in much the same condition. The Clyde boat provided them with a touch of active service, in acute contrast to the *Sorontia* with her clean sheets and luxurious meals. There was no food to be had on the Clyde boat, no hot tea or coffee, no hot water.

"I say, what about breakfast?"

A grinning steward trod on the illusion.

"You won't get any breakfast here, sir."

"But a pot of tea——"

"We don't feed troops, sir; we only carry 'em."

Bits of broken biscuit and oddments of chocolate were routed out of pockets. Pierce went in search of his baggage, found that his valise had been opened, and that his burberry had been stolen. He started the day hungry and exasperated.

They went ashore about six o'clock on the morning of a perfect day. The sea was blue, but everything else looked brown—the cliffs, the slopes of shovelled dirt, the beach, the men, the mules. A crowd of Greeks, swarthy ruffians, came down to unload the boats. Indians with their mule-carts bumped down the improvised roads. Swarms of soldiers in sun helmets, shirts and faded khaki trousers moved over the baked and dusty ground. There was dust everywhere—and flies.

Still not a shell, not the sound of a gun being fired. The Turks were lazy, or husbanding ammunition, and the amazing and laborious peacefulness of the scene struck Hammersly as extraordinary. He was waiting with several officers who were to be attached to units of the same division, while their baggage was being brought ashore.

"Damn it, I should enjoy some breakfast!"

"This is the real thing, my boy; don't grouse."

"I'm not grouching. I say, what swine those Greeks look! Classic beauty—what!"

They smoked cigarettes, and took in the strangeness of it all.

"I say, what happens to us?"

"We report at Army Corps Headquarters."

"But do we?"

"We'll try it, anyway."

"And where may that be?"

"Round the cliff there. That landing officer chap told me."

Hammersly was feeling cynical.

"One of us had better stay and watch the baggage. I have had my valise plundered already."

"No!"

"It's a fact. They took my burberry."

It was growing hot when some ten innocents, two Indian carts full of baggage, and a guide set out for Divisional Headquarters. The flies were growing attentive, and guns boomed fitfully in the distance. They followed the road from the beach, up hill, and along the plateau above, with the Asiatic coast melting into blue-grey haze, and the island of Imbros purple against the north. The ground that had been bare and baked and brown changed to a great stretch of heather and resinous plants. Here and there were bits of old trenches and shell-holes. Achi Baba swelled in the distance, and Krithia lay grey white on the plain below.

Hammersly's eyes had a dull, tired look. He was sweating, and he wanted a meal, and this new country, with its devilish beauty, made him feel homesick; nor was he thrilled by the adventurous activity of it all. One or two of his fellow officers were chatting with the guide, a lad with the dusty face of a miller.

"Better scatter a bit here, sirs, and let the carts go on."

"What for?"

"Oh, they pick up a target like this. What 'o! I thought as much!"

They were just above X Beach, when there came a sudden whining in the air. The sound seemed to rush on them from nowhere with a kind of spiteful ferocity.

"Look out—she's for us!"

The Indian carts went trundling on, but the guide threw himself flat, and the new-comers imitated him. Pierce felt a sort of grip at the pit of his stomach, and a coldness down his spine. Bang! The shell had burst beyond them, and he heard the fuse go wailing into the sea.

He scrambled up and saw the Indians driving on as though nothing had happened.

"Look out, sir!"

A second shell announced its coming with a queer, thin screech. Pierce Hammersly went flat again, and this time the burst was nearer; he heard shrapnel strike the ground within a yard or two of where he was lying.

The guide shouted.

"Get over the cliff edge; there's a road there; better lie low till the fools chuck it."

He led the rush to cover, and they had just gained it when a third shell burst over the place where they had been bunched in the open.

"What about the baggage?"

"You'll find it at headquarters, sir. Those Indian chaps don't worry."

Then peace reigned. Ten minutes later the guide led on, and his flock followed him in single file, with a fifty yards interval between each man. No more shells arrived, but Hammersly felt that eyes were watching them, and that any moment that whirring death might come sailing out of the blue; a sense of utter insecurity dominated him; he walked stiffly, with restless eyes on the look-out for a possible hole in which to hide himself. His ear drums were strained tight, listening to the sound of a shell driving towards them. He hated that open ground, and wished that the heather stood six feet high.

Then the road dived suddenly over the edge of the cliff. The guide was waiting for them under cover of a seven-foot slope of solid soil, and Hammersly felt that he had never properly appreciated the virtues of brown earth. The road zig-zagged down to a great open space at the mouth of a huge gully; cliffs towered above; those infernal gunners on Achi could no longer see them.

The man next to Pierce lit a cigarette. His face was white and beaded with sweat.

"New sort of experience. Get used to it in a day or two."

"I suppose so."

"Dare say shell-dodging is quite a fine sport."

They arrived at Divisional Headquarters, a series of sandbagged huts strung along the steep sides of a ravine. A sun-browned Staff officer in shorts, a shirt, and a sun helmet, came out to interview them; more brown men appeared; there was some desultory conversation and a production of papers. The Indians with their mule-carts were waiting down below.

"Lieutenant Hammersly?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are to be attached to the 74th Footshires. They are up in the front line at The Bluff. I'll send a man up with you. Colonel Barnack is the C.O.; you will report to him."

“At once, sir?”

“Yes, at once.”

Pierce wondered when that breakfast would materialise.

Lieutenant Hammersly left his baggage at headquarters and tramped on up the great gully, cursing Fate for having bundled him out to Gallipoli, unattached and friendless. He had left the last of the “innocents” behind him; he was alone, very much alone, a “tender-foot,” hot, nervous and hungry. That tramp up the gully and through the stuffy heat of a communication trench completed his exhaustion, and in Hammersly exhaustion showed itself in the form of intense irritability and a vile headache. His tongue was dry, his shirt sticking to his skin.

“How much farther?”

“Them’s the support trenches,” said his guide laconically.

Hammersly was not interested in trenches. He wanted food, a drink, to be down in the shade and be alone. His appreciation of life was utterly jaundiced.

“Regimental Headquarters, sir.”

He saw an expanse of yellow dirt in front of him shut in by banks of yellow earth. Built into one of these banks was a row of sandbagged dug-outs of varying sizes and shapes; farther on stood the kitchen, swarmed over by many flies; to the left a short trench led to the regimental aid post, where stretchers were piled against a bank. A row of familiar green petrol tins made him think of England and the open road.

His guide saluted and left him, and Pierce asked a red-faced man in shirt and shorts to show him the orderly room.

“That’s it, sir.”

Hammersly made for it, and found a sweating sergeant sitting in the dug-out and filling in “returns.”

“Is this the orderly room of the 74th Footshires?”

“It is, sir.”

The sergeant rose to his feet.

“I am to report to Colonel Barnack.”

“The Colonel is in the mess, sir.”

“Very well, show me the mess.”

Hammersly was growing mad. The sergeant stared at him, came out from behind his improvised table, and led the way to a big dug-out farther down the street. He pulled aside a strip of mosquito curtain, and thrust his head inside.

“An officer here to report, sir.”

“What?”

“A new officer, sir.”

The thick voice said: “All right; show him in.”

Hammersly stepped into the shade of the big dug-out and saluted. The half light puzzled him for a moment after the glare outside, but he was aware of four men seated round a rough table, playing cards.

“Roper——”

“Sir?”

“Fix that curtain; we don’t want more damned flies in here.”

“Yes, sir.”

Colonel Barnack threw one glance at Pierce, and then went on playing cards.

“Three, no trumps, wasn’t it? Whose lead?”

“Goss’s, sir.”

“Lunt goes down.”

Hammersly was rocking on his heels, wondering whether he was going to faint or to break out into a mad burst of cursing. The officer who was “dummy” looked up at him queerly, even sympathetically, but Colonel Barnack had concentrated on his cards. He was a shortish, heavy-faced man, with high cheek bones and a broad nose; his hair was cropped like a German’s; his eyes were a cold, muddy blue and slightly protuberant. His shirt lay open, showing an edge of black hair. He frowned over his cards, sitting squarely at the table. In age he might have been five-and-fifty, and he was going bald.

The Colonel’s opponents made their three tricks, and were apologetic about it. There was much explaining and re-explaining, but Barnack looked sulky.

Hammersly’s eyes blazed.

“Do you mind if I sit down, sir?”

His anger gave an edge to his voice, and Barnack’s eyebrows lifted.

“I have had no food since last night, and I have been on my feet since five.”

There was a hush in the mess-room. Lunt began shuffling the cards; Goss gave a kind of cracked smile. But Barnack looked at his new officer with muddy and sinister eyes.

“Your name, sir?”

“Hammersly. I have come to report to you.”

“Just landed? A little fresh to hardships, I think. Attached to us?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr. Lunt.”

“Sir.”

“Take this officer and show him into one of the empty dug-outs. I will interview you later, Mr. Hammersly.”

Hammersly saluted and went out into the sun-glare, white to the lips. Lunt, a thin, sensitive boy with bright eyes, followed him.

“This way, Hammersly.”

Pierce’s nostrils were twitching.

“To come hundreds of miles to meet—that!”

Lunt glanced nervously over his shoulder.

“I’m awfully sorry. It’s his way of showing his authority; he must always be showing his authority. It’s damnable, but you’ll understand presently.”

Pierce was to understand it bitterly in the course of a few days.

“Come into my dug-out. I’ll get you some grub.”

“I think I’m too done up to eat.”

“Well, have a nap; you can lie down on my bed. And where’s your baggage?”

“Down at headquarters.”

“I’ll have it sent for. Here you are. Use anything you like.”

“Thanks, indeed.”

Pierce threw off his equipment and tunic, lay down and slept in spite of the flies.

CHAPTER XII

Hammersly woke about six o'clock that evening, and found young Lunt sitting beside him, reading a novel.

"Hallo, I seem to have taken possession of your dug-out."

He sat up, refreshed and cool-headed.

"My man has got your bed fitted up. You are next door to me. Come and have a look."

"Do you dine here?"

"At seven. It's just six now."

"I shall be ready."

Lunt showed Hammersly his new home—a sand-bagged cell, seven feet long and three feet wide, and roofed with ground sheets lashed together. Lunt's servant had put up the camp bed, unpacked Hammersly's valise, and stood his kit-bag on end in one corner.

"A pretty tight fit."

"Yes, most of your baggage ought to be down at our dump, but I had it brought here so that you could take out what you wanted. Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks."

They sat on the bed and chatted.

Then Pierce Hammersly made a discovery—one of those inevitable discoveries that are ordered by higher authority. An English officer is always a gentleman, always a hero. Hammersly had been labouring under the misconception that his commanding officer was a cad—a very regrettable error on his part. Let us apologise immediately, and reflect that Lieutenant Hammersly had not been in a fit state to appreciate his Colonel's character. A man who is jaded and irritable and exhausted cannot be trusted to register correct impressions; one can only appreciate the significance of facts when one studies them at a distance of three thousand miles.

Colonel Barnack was very much the father of his regiment. The 74th Footshires were so short of officers—they numbered nine—that the Colonel had decided that all the officers should mess with him at headquarters, excepting those who happened to be on duty. He preferred such an arrangement; it enabled him to keep in personal touch with his juniors; he believed it to be his duty to instil his own personal ideals into the men under him.

As they strolled down to the mess about seven o'clock, Hammersly was struck by the comparative peacefulness of the evening. There was no cracking of rifles, no shelling, not a sound to suggest that the Turks were two or three hundred yards away.

"Is it always as quiet as this?"

Lunt's eyes gave a sudden scared gleam.

"Good Lord—no! We have had a few slack days. Anyway, the flies are always busy."

They found Colonel Barnack and several other officers in the mess, and the table, made of boxes, laid for dinner. Flies crawled over it in hundreds; the jam pot, protected by a piece of gauze, seemed black with them. Barnack was sitting very stiff and straight on a campstool at the head of the table, wiping out his enamelled cup with the corner of the tablecloth.

He stared hard and disconcertingly at Pierce.

"Your brother officers, Mr. Hammersly. Captain Goss, Raikes, our doctor, Captain Beasley, Captain Shott, Mr. Sanderstead, Mr. Hope, and Lunt you know."

There was a lack of cordiality in the mess, a sense of constraint and uneasiness. Hammersly was received with casual nods and faint smiles. Lunt fidgeted, and Hammersly noticed that the youngster kept glancing nervously at Colonel Barnack. Barnack's was the only imperturbable figure present; he dominated the situation, sitting there squarely on his stool.

Dinner was brought in by two mess orderlies—stewed bully beef in a big tin basin. Flies swarmed in after it and shared in the meal.

Barnack was helped first. His neighbours passed him mustard, biscuits, tinned milk with eager politeness; one of the mess orderlies filled his cup with tea, he was the great presence, and Hammersly, sitting at the other end of the table, felt that these other men were afraid.

There was no conversation until Barnack had finished his meat. Then he raised his eyes from his plate, looked round the table and made a remark.

"I hear that the French are going to make a move."

The whole mess turned to him with instant interest.

"Is that so, sir?"

"Indeed, sir?"

"Towards Achi, sir?"

Colonel Barnack stated his views, speaking with a leisurely sententiousness, and eyeing each officer in turn. There was absolute silence in the mess; even eating was carried on surreptitiously while the great man talked.

He turned his eyes suddenly on Hammersly.

“Well, Mr. Hammersly, how are things in England?”

Pierce smiled across at him.

“England is still very garrulous; a sort of clucking hen.”

He became aware of a kind of stiffening of Colonel Barnack’s face. The mess glanced at the new-comer as though he had spoken lightly of sacred things in a temple of the gods.

“I do not like your simile, Mr. Hammersly. An officer ought not to speak lightly of his country.”

Hammersly felt himself heavily reprovèd. The mess murmured consentingly; the great man had given judgment.

When dinner was over, and Barnack had arranged his four for cards, Hammersly and young Lunt strolled out into the cool of the evening. Lunt led the way along a trench that wound down behind what had once been a thicket of pines, and ended in a rough ramp of loose soil. Lunt scrambled out.

“I made this myself,” he said; “you see, this bank gives you a bit of dead ground, and the view is rather fine.”

It was. Hammersly saw a land of purple breaking by golden cliffs into the blue of the sea; the colours were extraordinarily vivid; the island of Imbros loomed a deep blue against a gorgeous west. Lunt and Hammersly threw themselves down in the heather and lit their pipes. The flies were ceasing to be troublesome, and a strange sense of peace descended upon the earth.

“The trenches seem extraordinarily quiet.”

“The row begins as soon as it gets dark. There is rifle fire going on all night; it sounds the most silly thing in the world—men popping off their rifles hour after hour just to show the other side that it is not safe to come out.”

“But the men seem so mute.”

Lunt laughed nervously.

“Poor devils. It is not just heaven here; there is nothing to shout about.”

“They don’t sing?”

“Sing! I’ve never heard a man sing or whistle. Oh, you’ll understand in time.”

“Well, things aren’t exactly blithe in the mess.”

Lunt glanced over his shoulder and frowned.

“You’ll understand that too—in time. The real business is so different; there are dozens of things that you’d never think of at home; you couldn’t imagine them.”

“The Colonel takes himself seriously.”

“My God, man, he’s the most serious thing that was ever made! It’s having to live up to him! You’ll find all that out pretty soon.”

Pierce Hammersly never suspected that his career as a soldier was to be most fatally compromised by the character of the man who was in authority over him. It is possible for two sincere and honourable men to hate each other savagely, and Barnack was a sincere and honourable man. He called himself a Puritan, prided himself on being able to trace his descent from Cromwellian stock, and made an idol of the Captain of the Ironsides. The man was a fanatic, fiercely religious and absolutely unafraid; like all fanatics he took life and himself with immense seriousness; he was pompous, melodramatic, great and ridiculous by turns. He worshipped discipline. Even a game of cards had its uses, though it was the only relaxation he allowed himself.

Yet the pity of it was that he knew nothing about men. His own religious egoism, his mind-picture of himself, prevented him from seeing and understanding anything but his own idol. His officers were afraid of him. A sensitive boy like Lunt lived in absolute terror of the man. For Barnack had no sympathy, no pity, no imagination. He had Prussian ideas. He did not spare himself, and he spared no one else; he sent men to death with an imperturbable and grim face; he worshipped duty; he believed in hardening men, making them face death for the sake of hardening them. He was obeyed, but he was hated; no one could understand why he had not been shot.

This was the man to whom Pierce Hammersly had to answer for his courage and his keenness. Their temperaments clashed from the very beginning; Barnack stirred up all that was worst in the younger man, and within a week Pierce Hammersly hated his Colonel as he had never hated any living soul before.

And to a very proud and a very sensitive man the atmosphere of the mess was loathsome. Barnack had immense power, the power of sending men to their death, and nothing softened his fanatical cult of duty. His juniors were afraid of him. There was a horrible suggestion of obsequiousness, of a haste to propitiate the great man. Hammersly noticed that no one ever disagreed with him; his sentiments were applauded, his prejudices admired. The whole business reminded Hammersly of an Oriental tyranny, and a crowd of courtiers fawning upon the power that held them at its mercy.

Yet this need not have been so. Barnack was a splendid soldier, and had he possessed a little more kindness, shown a little more sympathy, these men would have adored him. Sentiment counts even in war, and the ordinary Englishman

is a sentimental creature. A smile and a pat on the shoulder would have sent many a young officer over the parapet with proud eyes and a full heart.

Hammersly's fiery individualism began to chafe and fret. He had just too much pride to let himself be servile, for servility was what he called it. He was no braver than the other men; he had just as much to fear from his Colonel's peculiar grimness.

His first flash of revolt showed itself one day at dinner. Barnack had been laying down the law on some shred of classical history. He was wrong, and Hammersly contradicted him.

Barnack refused to be corrected.

"You are wrong, Mr. Hammersly. You may have been at school more recently, but I remember a passage in Cæsar——"

He misquoted the passage, and mispronounced the Latin. Hammersly refused to give way.

"I happen to remember the passage, sir; we used to render it rather differently."

"And when was that, Mr. Hammersly?"

"I took a first in Classics at Cambridge."

Somebody changed the subject, and Hammersly felt that he had played the prig, but Barnack's assumption of autocracy in everything exasperated him. The man posed as a scholar, and his Latin was the Latin of a hedge-priest.

Two days later he was lectured for some slight slackness in discipline. Barnack was right, and he did not spare a man when he was teaching him his duty.

"If this happens again, Mr. Hammersly——"

Pierce stood with head up, nostrils dilated.

"It shall not happen again, sir. I have no intention of putting myself in a position to be humiliated."

A wiser man would have told him not to be a touchy fool, but Barnack lectured him grimly for five minutes.

Then Hammersly discovered that he was unpopular in the mess. He reasoned it out, and the result of his reflections filled him with bitter scorn. He believed that his fellow officers were afraid to approve of him, that they preferred to stand well with Barnack. He was right, and he was wrong, but there was some truth in his suspicions.

He flared up over it to Lunt.

"Well," said that sensitive youth, colouring, "it does make a difference, you know. The C.O. is pretty stiff on everybody."

"But, good God, I think I would rather be shot!"

Lunt looked at him queerly.

"Oh, a bullet's all right, clean and nice. But there are other things."

"What things?"

"Well, you haven't seen any bombing yet—or high explosives bursting in your trench. The life happens to have been rather quiet."

Hammersly looked grave.

"I see," he said, "one is so—green—at first."

Lunt's words proved prophetic, for Colonel Barnack sent for Pierce after breakfast next morning.

"Lieutenant Hammersly!"

"Sir."

"I make a point of making my junior officers gain all the experience that is possible. Captain Stradling, our bombing officer, has been sapping towards the Turkish trenches, and has made a bombing station. He expects to do some work to-day, and I wish you to be with him for the sake of the experience."

"Shall I report to Captain Stradling, sir?"

"At once."

Pierce saluted and went in search of knowledge.

He found Captain Stradling in a sort of sandbagged hole at the end of a track leading out towards the Turkish lines. The pit had its forepart roofed in with balks of timber and earth. Bolt-holes into shallow dug-outs opened from the trench. In the centre of the pit they had rigged up a catapult for throwing bombs, a weird arrangement of wood and elastic perched on a pile of sandbags. A corporal with a periscope was acting as observer.

Pierce reported to Captain Stradling.

"I have been detailed for experience."

Stradling was a laconic but irritable officer. He led a sort of wasp's life, and no one loved him.

"I dare say you'll get it," he said.

They started loosing off bombs from the catapult, while the observer watched where they dropped and reported to his officer.

"Still a yard short, sir. Bit too much that time; she went over. That's got 'em, fair in the trench."

But the other side could play the same game, and the luck was with the Turks that morning. The corporal observer

was so intent on watching the range of his own bombs, that he failed to notice one that was lobbed up by the Turks. It scored what might be called a direct hit, bursting right on Captain Stradling's catapult.

Hammersly happened to be standing in the mouth of one of the dug-outs, and he was not touched, but the bombing pit was full of blood and groans. There had been five men in it with Stradling, and all but one were hit.

The untouched man ran screaming down the trench:

"Stretcher bearers, stretcher bearers!"

Hammersly, sick with horror and disgust, seized one of the wounded men, and dragged him out of the bombing pit. He knew now what Lunt had meant when he had spoken of those "other things."

CHAPTER XIII

The 74th Footshires were relieved next day, and went back for seven days to a rest camp in the big gully.

It was a wonderful place, this gully; a huge canon cutting its way through the plateau to the sea, unsuspected till you tumbled into it, a world in itself when once you began to explore it. The place had a devilish beauty, a wild mystery of its own, with its winding ways, its masses of scrub and young trees, its rocky walls and little secret clefts and crannies. After heavy rains its floor became the bed of a torrent that washed all sorts of casual equipment down to the sea.

The great gully gave concealment, shade; but the stuffy heat and the flies almost negated its virtues. Moreover, there had been bloody fighting in it not many weeks ago, and the Turkish dead still lay undiscovered and unburied in odd corners. The Footshires had their camping ground on a low, scrub-covered hill, where a small gully entered the main one; but to call it a "rest camp" was a piece of flattery. The flies and "fatigues" saw to it that the men got no rest; there were trenches to be dug, roads made, ground cleared, and men were scarce. In fact, the troops who were down from the firing-line were far harder worked than they were in the trenches, and Colonel Barnack never relaxed; discipline was even stricter and more irksome.

As for Pierce Hammersly, he was passing through a period of bitter disillusionment and active disgust. The scene in that bombing pit haunted him, and he could not get the horror of it out of his head. Moreover, the life itself was intensely trying to a man with a sensitive temperament, and Hammersly was feeling the strain of it both in body and mind. Some men stood no more than a week of it, and then went sick. Hammersly found the heat and the flies and the food almost unbearable; he felt limp and moody and absurdly irritable. The glare gave him a chronic headache; the various smells sickened him; he slept badly and lost his appetite.

Also, his loneliness was against him, and the mess, hostile, critical; and Hammersly's pride did not help him to make good. No one seemed to care. He felt that Barnack distrusted him, and that there were bitter days ahead.

One afternoon, when he was off duty, he wandered out alone, weighed down by a most damnable sense of loneliness, for some of the other men had gone bathing and they had not asked him to join them.

The day seemed uneventful; the Turks were doing no shelling; the sun shone, and the sea lay like glass. He loafed along the cliff, soul-sick and rebellious, thinking of the glory that might have been and was not.

"This damned humiliation!"

A shady cleft in the cliff attracted him, and he scrambled down and lay flat on his back upon a bed of heather. What wild tosh the journalists talked about the romance of war! There were times when he had dreamed of heroism, and now he had discovered the realities beneath the glamour—such things as mean fear, servility, bombs, flies on jam, corpses over the parapet, stench, yellow soul-sick faces, men covered with sores.

He tried to lose the horror of it for an hour by thinking of Janet and home, but love proved to be a new anguish. He wanted to see her again; he wanted to know that he would see her again. But would he? Supposing Barnack sent him over the parapet—made him bombing officer!

Oh, hell!

What was the use of it all; what was the use of his yearning for home? Eight weeks had passed since he had left England, and he had not received a single letter. Damn those who were responsible! Did they think that a man in the trenches was too busy to read letters from the woman he loved? What good were they doing out here, anyway? The new push at Suvla appeared to have fizzled out; things always did fizzle out; someone had muddled.

If only he could see Janet, even for three minutes; touch her, speak to her, make her feel what his love meant! He wondered whether she had received his letters; was she worrying, was she sad? Loving Janet did not help him; it made him more rebellious, more passionately eager to live.

Hammersly lay there a long while, staring up at the blue sky. Down there they would be eating biscuits and jam, with flies in maddening rivalry, and drinking stewed tea. No, he would not go back yet; he was off duty, there were few precious moments that he could call his own.

About six o'clock he picked himself up, and started on his way back to the gully, and suddenly the Turkish guns opened fire, spoiling the peace of a summer evening. Hammersly could see their shells bursting on the front line trenches along The Bluff—the trenches that the Footshires had been holding a few days ago. Then English field-pieces began to yap back, and an artillery duel appeared probable.

The noise fretted Hammersly's nerves. Why all this pother; what was the use of it; why didn't the fools let well alone? It struck him as being so senseless, so ghastly, so futile. The big howitzers in the gully began clanging as he made his way down into it, and Hammersly had learnt to hate those howitzers. They were always stirring up trouble; bringing back shells on other people's heads.

When he reached the Footshires' lines, a corporal met him.

"Mr. Hammersly, you're wanted, sir!"

“Where?”

“At Regimental Headquarters.”

Several officers were standing outside the improvised shelter of boxes and blankets that served as a mess, and Hammersly caught a fleeting grin on the face of one or two of them. He could hear Colonel Barnack’s voice inside the mess, hard, sententious, and dogmatic.

“You will take B Company up to Dirty Dick’s, Captain Goss, and report to Colonel Fullerton. Isn’t Mr. Hammersly here yet?”

Pierce stood in the doorway and saluted.

“Here, sir.”

Barnack was sitting at the table, and he had been writing a letter. He stared at Hammersly for a moment with hard blue eyes.

“You are late, Mr. Hammersly.”

“I was off duty, sir.”

“An officer who has been here so short a time should never consider himself off duty.”

“I asked you, sir.”

“That will do, Mr. Hammersly. Captain Goss, get your men up as quickly as possible; Colonel Fullerton seems to expect an attack.”

“Yes, sir.”

Captain Goss was a sandy-haired, hard-bitten cynic with an unpleasant temper. He swept Hammersly off with him.

“For God’s sake get a move on, Hammersly; those two platoons of yours are damned slack. This does us out of our dinner.”

Hammersly’s eyes gave an angry gleam.

“Shall I leave a fatigue party behind to bring up your dinner, Goss?”

His senior turned on him like a fierce dog.

“None of that, or I’ll report you. I don’t stand any insolence from my juniors.”

There was a scare on, and Colonel Fullerton, whose men held the front line up at The Bluff, had reported that he expected an attack and that he needed reinforcements. The front line trench that the Footshires were bound for had been christened “Dirty Dick’s,” and it was particularly dirty that August evening. The Turks had been pounding the parapet and in going up the communication trench B Company found itself blocking the way of the regimental stretcher-bearers, who were coming down with their ghastly bundles of blood and khaki. There was some cursing and disorder, with an occasional high explosive flinging dirt down into the trench, but the infantry flattened themselves against the walls and let the stretcher-bearers through.

“Dirty Dick’s” proved to be a most unsavoury place, a jumble of sandbags, earth, live and dead men, barbed wire, dirt and blood. The Turkish shells had knocked breaches in the parapet, and the men were crouching ready to meet the expected attack. An excited subaltern was storming up and down, shouting all sorts of encouraging nonsense. Shrapnel was bursting overhead, and as the Footshires streamed up a high explosive landed in the trench, and made a tragic mess of the men in the vicinity.

Hammersly’s face was the colour of chalk. This was his second real glimpse of the filthy horrors of modern war, and they shocked the deeps of his soul. He felt most damnably afraid. He had seen those fragments of human flesh littered about, and it was not so much the fear of death that gripped him, as a fear of being loathsome mangled, tom, rent open. Nothing but a desperate pride kept him from playing the coward, for his mouth was as dry as a brick, and his loins felt broken.

He posted his two platoons along the section allotted to him, and stood by to await developments. An unused periscope lay on the fire-platform, and Hammersly picked it up, and, leaning against the parapet, set himself to watch the Turkish trenches. He could see nothing but a stretch of bare ground, some barbed wire and a ridge of yellowish dirt topped with sandbags; but even peering into the mirror of that periscope seemed better than doing nothing.

A shell burst close overhead, and shrapnel splattered into the trench, but no one was hit. Hammersly had flattened himself instinctively against the parapet, and at the same moment Captain Goss came round the traverse with a sulky look in his eyes.

He spotted Hammersly and frowned.

“Mr. Hammersly!”

“Hallo!”

“I want to speak to you.”

He drew Pierce aside.

“Look here, Hammersly, this won’t do at all.”

“What do you mean?”

“You must set the men a better example. Keep moving about. You can’t go flattening yourself against the parapet

like that.”

Hammersly went scarlet.

“Do you mean to suggest——?”

“Rot; I’m not suggesting anything.”

“I was keeping an eye on the Turkish trenches.”

“Leave that to someone else, and get a move on. It’s up to you to set the men an example.”

Hammersly flung his hand up in a salute, faced about and began walking up and down the trench with fury in his eyes. He was afraid no longer, but he had ceased to care what happened to his unit, to the Brigade, to the Division, to any damned thing that was English. The devil of revolt stormed in him. His pride had been grossly humiliated, and a man of Hammersly’s temperament fights on his pride and his nerves.

The shelling ceased about sunset, but there was no rush of sturdy Anatolian peasants over the parapet. B Company stood to their arms in the front line trench all through the night, giving the opposing parapet an occasional burst of rapid fire just to discourage the Turks from coming out into the open. Working parties toiled at repairing the damage done by the shell fire. The scare died a natural death soon after dawn, and the Footshires marched back to their rest camp in the gully, and breakfasted on tea and bully beef.

Captain Goss reported to Colonel Barnack, and his report included a confidential character sketch of Pierce Hammersly.

“The chap has cold feet, sir. I had to tell him off.”

“Didn’t he behave well?”

“I caught him making himself as small as possible, and setting the men a bad example. He’s too nery, and inclined to be insolent.”

Barnack bit hard at the stem of his pipe and frowned.

“I have been watching this officer, Captain Goss, and I have formed much the same opinion of him. He wants hardening, disciplining.”

“That’s just it, sir.”

So the battle went on, this clashing of temperaments, this struggle between passionate pride and obdurate fanaticism. Colonel Barnack believed himself to be a maker of men, and he set himself to “make” Pierce Hammersly, to discipline him, to teach him that resigned fatalism that is obedience. Barnack acted with the highest motives, and from a sense of duty. His Prussianism was admirable in its way, but Hammersly was the one man upon whom it was doomed to fail. It was ice against fire, granite against water. These two men never could have harmonised, and Barnack’s grim ideals thrust the younger man towards an inevitable disaster.

CHAPTER XIV

In the library at Orchards Gerard Hammersly looked down out of his gilt frame, with those proud eyes of his, and that restive lifting of his head. This picture had come to have a peculiar fascination for Janet Yorke. She never entered the house of the Hammerslys without making some attempt to slip into the library and gaze at the man in his blue uniform, this ancestor of the Hammerslys whose mutinous pride had brought him notoriety and disgrace. He had Pierce's eyes, Pierce's sensitive nostrils, the same mobile mouth, the same curves of chin and forehead.

Janet would sit on the library table and stare at Uncle Gerard. Sometimes he seemed to smile at her with sardonic shrewdness, as though he could have given substance to her vague, intuitive dreads. Sometimes—when the light was poor—he looked scornful, mysterious, a mere haughty rebel. The portrait haunted her with prophetic suggestions. It made her understand the man she loved, and understanding taught her to fear for him.

As for Scarshott it had not been very kind to Janet Yorke. This romantic affair had not made it change its attitude towards her; she was the clever fisher woman; she had made her catch, but Scarshott reflected cynically that the line was now a very long one. Scarshott had derived some pleasure from the fact that such an anti-climax had been foisted upon the social vapourings of Mrs. Sophia.

Life was hard for Janet in more ways than one. Her mother's delicacy tied her to Heather Cottage; she could not go out and spend herself, play her part in the war; her activities had to be spiritual and inward. She nursed her mother, gardened, and kept the house, with occasional aid from a Scarshott char-woman; she had no badge and no uniform; she had to stay in the same place. Life happened to be solitary, and too full of those long silences that encourage too much thinking.

Moreover, she had to smother her antipathy to Pierce's mother. Mrs. Sophia made it quite plain to Janet that she was playing the philosopher. "What sacrifices we are making!" ran her cry, and Janet felt herself to be the living sign and symbol of Sophia Hammersly's renunciation. Yet Sophia Hammersly's attitude in public differed from her attitude at home. She had a woman's instinct for self-defence, just as she knew instinctively that other women were exulting over her supposed disgust, and she took care to assume in other people's drawing-rooms an air of surprised satisfaction.

"Yes, really, I was rather amazed at first. But now that we know Janet, Porteous and I are delighted, yes—quite delighted. Pierce was no fool. She's really a dear girl, and so clever."

"Indeed! Is that so? You see, I have never spoken to her yet."

"You will adore her. She is the best educated girl in the neighbourhood, speaks French, German and Italian. No, nothing of the 'blue,' rather shy and reserved. I can truthfully say that it is a great relief to me; Pierce was so run after; she will make him an admirable wife. Of course she has no money, but what does that matter to us!"

Janet went three times a week to Orchards, and spent part of her time there sitting in the great, stupid drawing-room, talking to her future mother-in-law. These women detested each other, yet they agreed to meet on the common ground of a sentimental devotion to one particular man. Mrs. Sophia was utterly complacent in her admiration of her son. She had created him; he was hers; therefore he was all that could be desired. She did not love him as Janet loved him, with a passionate, wide-eyed tenderness that was all the more wonderful because she knew that he was human. Your perfect man would be detestable, and the imperfections of the creature make him the very human child of the woman who loves him. The Pierce Hammersly of his mother's vision was a serene, tailor-made, genteel prig; but Janet saw in him the rebel, the potential coward, the sensitive man who might do splendidly or cover himself with shame.

She feared and yearned, while Mrs. Sophia boasted.

"Of course Pierce will make an ideal officer. He is a gentleman and so clever. I quite anticipate his winning the D.S.O."

And Janet wondered at this woman who was so grossly ignorant, so selfishly blind when she looked at her own son.

"Pierce is very proud," she said guardedly, "and pride helps."

Sophia Hammersly's dead eyes stared at her obtusely.

"Of course Pierce has pride. But I do not follow your argument."

Janet knew that it would be useless to try and make her understand that her son was a subtle mixture of cowardice and courage, selfishness and generosity. Mrs. Hammersly knew nothing of imagination, atmosphere, temperamental idiosyncrasies. Her son was just the gallant, stupid fellow in the pictures, striking heroic attitudes and waving a sword. She would have been hugely indignant had Janet suggested that he was mere human clay.

But in Janet Mrs. Sophia discovered a person to be patronised, a protégée to be admonished. Her own attitude towards the feminine part of Scarshott necessitated a public confession of faith. She began to reflect that Pierce's future wife ought to be taking her part in the life of the place, claiming the position that would be hers by right. Mrs. Hammersly's motives were extraordinarily tangled and contradictory. She wanted to patronise Janet, she wanted to humiliate her and at the same time snub the ladies of Scarshott; there was her own self-love to be considered, her claim

to magnanimity and breadth of mind; also she had to justify her boastings about Janet to her more intimate acquaintances.

"You ought to get to know people, Janet. Pierce's wife will have a position to fill. You had better come with me when I go calling."

Janet could find no reason for disagreeing with her.

"People haven't called on us yet."

"But they will do. You must expect them. And I think you ought to take your share in the social work of Scarshott. There is the V.A.D. hospital. And Dr. Skrimshire is giving a course of lectures on first aid."

"I might make time for that."

"I will speak to Mrs. Holmes about it."

So Pierce's mother paraded Janet through the Scarshott drawing-rooms and gardens, and Janet wore the clothes that Pierce had given her, and looked very arresting and handsome. She expected criticism and she received it; but Scarshott was unable to humiliate her, simply because Scarshott found her unassailable. It could not quarrel with her looks or her clothes or her manners, and her charm made victims of the men. She listened well, had a quick sense of humour, and was quite at her ease. There were people who dared to think that Pierce Hammersly had won more than he deserved.

But her chief champion was old Porteous. They hit it off together amazingly; understood each other by instinct. Janet detected the origins of Pierce in him, and secret diffidences hidden beneath a somewhat sententious manner. He was an affectionate fellow, and he showed a desire to treat Janet with fatherly fondness; she appealed to him; she shared Pierce with him with a frank sympathy and an absolute lack of any self-assertion. Old Hammersly found that he could talk to her, tell her things, and not discover himself up against a blank wall.

It was he who took her to see Grace Hansard—"Brave Grace" as he called her—who was trying to mend her life after death had broken it.

"You'll like her, Janet; she's splendid."

He proved his wisdom, for these two women became friends almost from the first. Janet's heart went out to Grace Hansard in that green corner of the world where her children played under the apple trees, and memories brought a choking at the throat. Grace was a "brown woman," with brave hazel eyes. She had known Pierce well, and she admired his impetuous infatuation.

"Come and see me when you can."

"I should love to come. But, you see, my mother is an invalid, and it is rather a long way."

Porteous solved the problem.

"Nonsense. You can always have the little car, Janet, when you like. Why not learn to drive it? I'll arrange for Bains to give you lessons."

But Scarshott did not immediately accept Janet Yorke. There were people whose antagonism to Sophia Hammersly was a question of self-respect; she challenged opposition, and received it. You felt driven to contradict her, even though the contradiction involved you in some absurdity.

Mrs. Holmes, another great lady, would not accept any more workers for the V.A.D. hospital.

"My dear, they simply fall over each other. We had three girls wanting to cook on the same day last week. Besides, Miss Yorke is quite untrained."

Mrs. Sophia always took a refusal as a personal affront.

"Oh, if that is the case Janet need not waste her time there. I only suggested it because I thought you might like to have one clever woman. It is possible that Janet may be given a very important part in a Government department."

"Is that so?"

"She is such a fine linguist, but then, you see, her mother is a problem."

Mrs. Sophia had to pass on the news to Janet.

"My dear, Mrs. Holmes tells me that they have more girls than they want at the V.A.D."

"So I need not bother."

"I was afraid you might be disappointed. Mrs. Holmes has a little clique of her own. These provincial towns are so narrow."

But Janet was living on a plane above such petulances. She had been uplifted by a great emotional experience, and her soul was drawn to those who loved and suffered. In a way she symbolised all that was fine in the women of England, that deep patience, that expectant tenderness, the courage that does not spend itself in little frittering activities. Scarshott was still a model of what England had been a year ago, petty, selfish, unimaginative, afraid of great emotions and of great ideals. Anything that was new had seemed iniquitous, Lloyd Georgian. And the new Scarshott had not yet been born. Its shops were still full of young men, and its middle classes had turned the war into a sort of never-ending bazaar.

Janet was waiting for letters, those letters that would tell her so much. One had reached her from Malta, two more

from Mudros, dear love-letters, but not yet the human documents that her love and her fear foreshadowed.

And Gerard Hammersly still haunted her, staring down at her from the library wall. The picture was like a prophecy. Once she caught old Porteous standing in front of it, looking at the restive face as though it filled him with disquietude.

She closed the door and stood there, smiling, though there was no smile in her heart.

“You see it too?”

“What, my dear child?”

“The likeness?”

She noticed that he looked depressed. His cheery optimism had clouded of late.

“Pierce was always like Gerard. Most remarkable. When did you notice it?”

“Weeks ago. Pierce showed me the portrait.”

“Did he tell you anything?”

“Uncle Gerard’s history. I sometimes think there is more than a physical resemblance.”

Porteous cocked his head uneasily, and went in search of a cigar.

“Perhaps. There’s pride—you know—in both of them.”

He reflected a moment, and then glanced sideways at Janet.

“Terrible ordeal, this war! I wonder how the men stand it.”

She almost felt that he was conscious of certain streaks of cowardice in himself, and that they helped him to imagine what his son might be suffering.

“No letters yet, Janet; no real letters, I mean. Pierce must be seeing the real thing. What a romantic enterprise! Don’t worry, my dear girl, the Hammerslys were always lucky.”

She caught him glancing nervously at Gerard’s picture.

“Pierce will behave like a gentleman. Yes, it will be all right.”

CHAPTER XV

In three days the admiring and interested Bains taught Janet to drive the little Singer.

His professional pride enrolled itself in her service.

"That's O.K., miss. Just a little bit faster with your engine. That's prime. Don't be afraid to let her out at the 'ills; there ain't many she won't do on top."

Bains reported to his master on the driver of the little blue car.

"She's got hands, sir, and a nerve. Don't get flustered, and she's mighty quick on her brakes. Picked it up fine, I consider. Some of 'em fumble for weeks."

Janet kept her promise to Grace Hansard, and spent the whole of one afternoon at Vine Court, sitting under the mulberry tree on the big lawn, while the children played in the orchard. Grace Hansard had passed through the first period of anguish, and was able to look at life with wistful, tearless eyes. The two women had fallen in love with each other from the first, and Janet drove twice a week to Vine Court. She was human and quick-blooded, and Grace needed a friend.

"Do come often. There is nobody down there who understands. I have got to the stage when I feel I must talk. It helps me."

Janet learnt much from Grace Hansard, for Grace had known one man, her husband, very intimately, and through him she had learnt to know man as he is. The Hansards had been in subtle sympathy with each other, and the wife had seen the war through her husband's eyes. And, as she had said, it comforted her to talk about this man of hers who had left her the right to be very proud.

The truths that she gathered from the woman who knew fascinated Janet, because of their significance in their bearings upon her anxiety for Pierce. She found that she had divined what was real in the war, tragic facts that the average person had failed to grasp.

"The country has not realised things yet. Those people in Scarshott are hopeless. It makes me feel bitter at times. I suppose they refer to me as 'Poor Mrs. Hansard,' and think of my husband as a brave man. Good heavens, they don't know how brave he was, they don't realise what it meant to him."

"No one does, perhaps—till——"

"He wasn't brave, really. Oh, I'm not saying disloyal things. But he was brave in spite of himself; he had a wonderful sense of duty. He knew—I think—that he was going to die that morning, for the order he received meant almost certain death, and they tell me he went out calmly, proudly."

Her voice broke for a moment.

"And they call me 'Poor little Mrs. Hansard!' I who have the right to such memories, to my pride in my man. Oh—it was bitter—I know; I felt at first that I hated the man who had sent him to his death. But I can hold my head high—and we were very happy."

Janet reached for her hand.

"I do think you are splendid. You have got a great rich memory that no one can steal away. You couldn't have borne to see him sneaking out of things like some of the men down in that town."

"I know. I gave him. He gave up—all this."

The children came racing over to them, and had to be chattered to and humoured.

"Mummy, can't we pic-lic in the orchard?"

"And what is a pic-lic, Joan?"

"Oh, you know, Mummy. It's cabbage leaves for plates, and milk with tea in it."

"I see. Ask Hester to arrange it. William dear, what have you got there?"

"An ickle snail, Mummy. It's got such a cold in its head. It's all frothy."

"Poor thing, so it is."

Said Janet as the children toddled back to the waiting Hester:

"I can understand men being afraid."

"They are all afraid, except perhaps some of the very stupid ones. Dick used to tell me tragic stories. At the worst, you put life and all that out of your head, and just walk like a fatalist into oblivion. I know how my man suffered, but he was amazingly patient."

"And the impatient ones?"

Grace closed her eyes.

"I remember one tale. No, I can't tell you; it is too horrible. I think it is worse for the men who rebel, the men who feel savage and bitter. Dick was spared that. He just felt most terribly sad."

Janet sat in silence, thinking of Pierce and her own premonitions.

She was waiting for those letters—those real letters that would tell her how her man was braving the great ordeal.

Gerard Hammersly's face was more and more present in her thoughts. It was as though he knew, as though he were watching her with a kind of sardonic sympathy. She wrote to Pierce every day—brave letters, inspiring letters, but it seemed like throwing her love at a venture into the sea.

Her miniature arrived from the people in Bond Street. It was excellent, and surprised her into a moment of sweet vanity. The man had caught her quick colour, the light in her eyes, and the gleams of gold in her hair. Janet had given the artist no more than two sittings, but a painter of miniatures may react to the charm of his model, seizing one arrestive face in the midst of a series of facial monotonies.

That miniature arrived by the first post, and the evening post brought Janet a batch of Pierce's letters. She trembled a little at the sight of them—those dear letters from that land of flies and death. Going up to her bedroom she locked the door, and, kneeling by the bed, spread the letters upon it. There were seven of them, and she was tenderly methodical in her dealings with them; she wanted to get the human sequence, and so she arranged them, date by date, before she read a word.

Her face grew grave as she read, for these letters betrayed an increasing bitterness that culminated in an outburst of rebellious scorn. Pierce cared nothing for the censorship; he had always expressed himself with virile frankness; the so-called soldierly spirit that accepts every blunder and makes no complaint had not been developed in him.

The pictures he drew were sharp, vivid, and merciless; but they grew more gloomy, more savage in the later letters. The soul of the great adventure was dead; the troops were sick and sullen; everybody realised that the affair had been a political gamble.

Some of his pen pictures hurt her, they were so savage, so pitiless, so obviously true. He told her scandalous things, and in his later letters he appeared to gloat over them and to mock at his own people.

"We English are rushing to our great humiliation, and I'm glad."

He described Barnack to her, and she read hatred in every line of the description.

"This man is a Prussian. He has no pity, no imagination. He sends you to meet death with the arrogance of a fanatic."

His picture of the mess and its atmosphere made her shudder. Were men like that? Was war so sordid, so servile, so tyrannical, with no fine devotion, no proud ideals? She saw Pierce's impotent and scornful individualism dominating him, and she could trace its growth from page to page. He was miserable, angry, disillusioned, rebellious, petulant.

"I don't know how this is going to end," he wrote, "but I know that many of us curse the people at home. This eternal blundering breaks the men's hearts. They feel that they are being sacrificed for nothing. I can't say I have any great desire to kill Turks; there is only man I should like to kill."

And again:

"I am ceasing to care what happens. I feel I must strike back, rebel—or go mad. The humiliation of it all makes me savage. This man has never tried to help me."

From a soldier's point of view the letters were scandalous, full of bitter truths that were not ripe for the telling. Janet knelt there with her face between her hands, confronting the egoism of the man she loved, his lack of that fine humility that smiles and carries on. History was repeating itself. Here was a second Gerard Hammersly—sensitive, proud, egotistical, contemptuous, driven to desperation by circumstances over which he had no control.

"Oh—my dear——!"

She hid her face in her hands, ashamed, pitying, afraid. She had a feeling that Pierce was nearing disaster; on the eve of doing some violent thing that might disgrace him forever. How could she help him; what could she do? He said that he had lost his patriotism; that he hated his own men; that he did not care what happened.

There was the cry, too, of a man wounded, lonely, hungry, yearning for the touch of her hands. He wrote very tenderly of his love, but there was a bitter note even in his tenderness.

"What is England to me, when I think that I may never see you again? All this mad murder, this sacrificing of young men by the old men at home!"

Janet spent a most miserable night, perhaps the most miserable night of her life. Her man's faults were plain to her, and yet she loved him with a new and wounded passion. Her own helplessness frightened her. It was so ghastly—this war; you could not escape from it or struggle against it; it seized men and dabbled them in blood and horrors; there was no appeal—no pity. The machine crushed people, and rolled on; love counted for nothing; life itself was mere blood-grease for the wheels of the machine.

And Pierce was rebelling! Most men rebelled in secret, and dared not betray themselves, but Pierce was not an ordinary man.

She walked down to Orchards next morning, bewildered, miserable, with a feeling that she had lost herself. Perhaps old Porteous had had news, letters that were less sinister.

Janet found him in the library, sitting opposite Gerard Hammersly's picture. She knew at once that he had heard from Pierce, and that he was no more happy than she was.

"Have you heard?"

He could not rise to cheerfulness.

“Yes. And you?”

They looked at each other with helpless pathos.

“My dear, this disastrous adventure——!”

“Perhaps it is not quite so bad——”

“Pierce writes without any suggestion of hope.”

For the first time in her life Janet felt a rush of anger against Pierce. She realised of a sudden the full selfishness of those letters. What was to be gained by wounding the people at home?

“I dare say he is not himself, Father. When men go sick they see things distorted.”

“Perhaps. Poor boy!”

Janet found her inspiration in old Hammersly’s broken look. She went home and wrote to Pierce, and it was a very wonderful letter that she wrote. A man might have gone to his death proudly and happily, after reading it. She posted it that night, and with it went her miniature.

But Pierce Hammersly never received that letter. It was opened and destroyed by some blundering beast, and the miniature stolen from it. And a little blackguard carried Janet’s picture in his pocket, and showing it to his pals, boasted of her as his girl at home. “Hot stuff, I can tell yer.”

CHAPTER XVI

There is no doubt that Pierce Hammersly was unfortunate in his first experiences of active service. He had a difficult temperament, and he was learning to hate the man in authority over him with a hatred that cannot be described. It was elemental, and yet spiritual; Colonel Barnack nauseated him, filled him with a mad lust for violence. For days there was murder in Pierce Hammersly's mind.

The 74th Footshires were back in the trenches, and for the majority of the officers the life was one of incredible monotony. Someone has described active service as consisting of "long periods of intense boredom broken by short periods of acute fear"; men yawn and loaf and try to sleep, and there is the horror of nothing happening in contrast to the horror of too many things happening at once. A great listlessness descended upon the Footshires; men were going sick at an alarming rate; sanitary discipline was slackening; the troops were too weary to care.

Colonel Barnack set himself to combat this slackness with all the severity of a martinet. The number of rifles in the firing line, that was his test of a battalion's efficiency; an active worrying of the enemy, that was his proof of a soldierly spirit. He was right, too right, for he failed to allow for the human element, or to consider his men as men.

That was Hammersly's next discovery, the extraordinary power possessed by the doctor, a power that reaches its full development only when men are soul-sick and afraid. Leatherhead was a common little man who drank rather too much whisky. He was bumptious and knowing, and very much afraid of being fooled. The men hated him, partly because he never went into a front-line trench. They had nicknamed him "Dr. Bomb-shy," and talked of the things they would like to do to him in a world where courts-martial and firing parties were unknown.

About that time Pierce Hammersly caught the prevailing spiritual distemper, a horrible longing to go sick, to escape from the foul game at any cost. A deadly languor descended on him, a disinclination to move, eat, or think. He did not care what happened; his one dream was of getting away, and he had visions of a hospital ship, of Egypt or Malta, even of home. Yet this apathy was broken from time to time by sudden storms of intense mental excitement, moods of explosive impatience that made him quarrelsome, even insubordinate. The sight of Barnack caused him to show his teeth like a vicious dog.

They discussed him in the mess, when the Colonel was not there.

"What about Hammersly, Doc? He looks pretty yellow."

Leatherhead grinned.

"Not up to colour yet. Besides, he won't get away unless he is damned bad. The old man has an eye on Hammersly."

Goss looked up from the paper he was reading.

"There is going to be trouble with that chap. I wouldn't mind betting anyone that he'll be court-martialled within a month."

"He will blow up, you mean?"

"That's it. He has never been licked properly, and the Colonel is out to do it. He's a great man, the Colonel, and I believe Hammersly would shoot him if he had the chance."

"Well, it's a dog's life, anyway," said young Lunt sulkily.

"Hallo, Pet; we shall have to send you away if you talk like that!"

"I shall be going—quite soon—I think," and Lunt blushed.

"Rot!"

"Well, there was blood this morning. I'll show you, Doc, to-morrow."

"You had better, young man."

"Lucky devil!"

Three days later young Lunt went away sick with dysentery, and Pierce lost the only man who had shown him any friendliness. He saw Lunt carried away on a stretcher, white but happy, and he envied him from the very bottom of his heart. In a few hours Lunt would be off this sun-baked, fly-blackened, stinking bit of earth, and out there on the sea, bound for a place where shells did not scream. He would not have to mope about those stifling trenches, or sit in the mess and meet Barnack's hard blue eyes.

If only he could go sick!

He examined his face in the glass each morning for the yellow tinge of incipient jaundice, took his temperature at night, felt a thrill of joy when he had a pain in his stomach. But nothing materialized. He felt slack, weak, miserable, but he could not say that he was ill. Even the accursed flies had failed to poison him.

Meanwhile Colonel Barnack developed his scheme for making a man and a soldier of Hammersly. There are a certain number of unpleasant jobs that have to be handed out to junior officers, and Barnack detailed Hammersly to undertake a great many of them. But they were not given graciously, or with that rallying kindness that touches a young man's pride. "Make or break" was Barnack's motto, and he did not like Pierce Hammersly.

“Mr. Hammersly, you will take a listening patrol out into No Man’s Land to-night. I am suspicious of that Turkish trench. Listen for any sounds of work. You understand?”

Pierce understood. He crawled over the parapet that night, just before the moon rose, followed by a sergeant and three men. Rifles were popping, and bullets snacking the sandbags, and an occasional blue flare soared up. Hammersly went like a worm on its belly, working his way through the ragged heather and the debris of No Man’s Land, his sense of smell very much on the alert. He cut his right hand on an old fruit tin, and cursed under his breath. He also cursed the men behind him, for they seemed to be making a devil of a noise, enough noise to draw all the Turkish fire for half a mile. Then a flare went up, and they lay flat. The momentary glare showed Hammersly the yellow, sun-bleached face of a corpse within a yard of him. He sweated a little and crawled on.

The party spent an hour squatting in a shell-crater that had been made by a big naval shell. They heard nothing suspicious in the Turkish trench. Once a Teutonic voice snarled at someone, and there was the thud as of a man being kicked.

The sergeant put his mouth close to Hammersly’s ear.

“Nothin’ doin’, sir. And the moon’s risin’.”

It was a most damnably and aggressively big moon at that. They made tracks for their own trench, cursing the big yellow rim that swung suddenly above the horizon. Pierce and the men got back safely, but the sergeant was shot on the parapet, and they pulled him into the trench with his mouth full of blood.

Hammersly reported to Colonel Barnack.

“We could hear nothing, sir. My sergeant was shot coming back.”

“Killed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How long were you out there, Mr. Hammersly?”

“About an hour altogether, sir.”

“An hour! You ought to have been out there half the night. How do you know that they aren’t working upon some sap or tunnel now?”

“We heard nothing, sir.”

“Answer my question, please.”

“Of course—I don’t know, sir,” and his manner suggested that he did not care.

Barnack told him off.

“Mr. Hammersly, never come back and make a report like this to me again. You did not carry out your orders as they should have been carried out, thoroughly, conscientiously, deliberately. You will repeat this to-morrow night, and you will not come back until you are sure of your information.”

So Hammersly spent some six hours next night, sitting in a hole close to the Turkish wire, cursing the moon, Barnack, the war, his own existence. How the devil could such a game end otherwise than in certain death? Barnack was victimising him, just because he had corrected him in the mess!

He got back safely just before dawn, only to find that this gathering of experience was to become for him a sort of standing order. Two nights later he was sent with a fatigue party to help the sappers in digging a new trench, no pleasant adventure, as Hammersly discovered, for stray bullets were sweeping the ground, and he had two lads hit. He had never seen men work as those men worked to dig themselves in behind a little rampart of soil. He strolled about, hearing the bullets whispering by or kissing into the heather. His conviction grew more morbid and more obstinate; there could be only one end to the game; Barnack was going to get him killed.

Hammersly spent most of his spare time in his dug-out, writing letters, reading, or trying to sleep. He only went into the mess for meals, for he was conscious of the hostility of Barnack’s officers. He detected a secret gloating in the mess, as though these youngsters were watching the baiting of an animal, and were wondering how long its patience would hold out. A scapegoat was useful when there was such a man as Barnack about.

“P. H. has got it again, has he? What’s it this time?”

“A wiring party.”

“Do him good.”

Hammersly ceased to speak in the mess. He came in, ate his food, and went out again, and each meal was an ordeal. His grim and restive silence isolated him still further from the men with whom he lived; they were mere boys, and just as cruel as boys, and they resented his air of aloofness. Their sympathies were with old Barnack, that stern maker of men, so long as he exercised his severity upon someone else.

Moreover, it was Barnack’s presence that made the mess unendurable to Hammersly. He hated the man, he hated his hard head and cold eyes; he hated him for the way he ate, for his habit of sniffing, for the sound of his voice, for what he said. It was an almost insane hatred, born of the loathsomeness of the life he was living, a hatred for that land of flies and death. There were times when Hammersly thought of his revolver, and a round hole drilled in that shining bald forehead.

Hardest of all was the perpetual fear that haunted him, a fear that had no compensations and no fine flavour of comradeship to soften it. It was the dread of mutilation, not the dread of death, that tormented him. He was forever waiting for that particular shell that was fated to smash him, and there were certain places in the trenches that filled him with superstitious fear, places that he avoided, danger spots that made him sweat when he passed them. His nerve was wearing thin and he knew it. No one reinspired him or helped him with sympathy or comradeship. There were certain doomed men in every unit, and Hammersly felt convinced that he was one of them.

Then Goss shouted that order into his dug-out about three o'clock on a sweltering afternoon. The officers who were off duty were going down to bathe in the blue water under one of the yellow cliffs, but Pierce never joined those bathing parties.

"Hammersly!"

"Hallo!"

"The sappers have asked for another fatigue party to-night. The C.O. has detailed you to take it."

Hammersly was lying down on his bed. He sat up in sudden, tense anger.

"What—again? Am I the only officer available?"

Goss ignored his savage tone.

"You are to report at twenty one o'clock, at Liverpool Lane. The engineer officer will be there. They want thirty men and two N.C.O.'s."

He turned to go, but Hammersly called him back.

"Captain Goss."

"Well—what's the matter?"

"I suppose this order comes from the C.O., or have I to thank you for it?"

"From the C.O., of course."

"Thanks."

He heard the sound of Goss's footsteps dying away down the brown trench.

CHAPTER XVII

Hammersly went straight to the orderly room, but Barnack was not there.

"Where's the Colonel?"

"In the mess, sir, I think, or in his dug-out."

Hammersly found the mess empty, but there was an unmistakable sound of snoring coming from Barnack's dug-out, where the C.O. lay asleep under his mosquito curtain, safe from the flies. Hammersly's anger burnt at white heat; otherwise he might have hesitated, and perhaps have repented of his rashness.

He lifted the blanket that closed the doorway, and stood looking down at the man whom he hated so savagely. Barnack was asleep, his face glistening with sweat, and his mouth wide open; a pipe lay on the earth floor beside him; flies were buzzing outside the curtains, eager to get at the sweating man beneath.

"Sir."

Barnack's hard blue eyes opened in a stare.

"What's the matter? Who is it?"

"I want to speak to you, sir."

"Oh—Mr. Hammersly—is it? Well?"

"I hear that you have detailed me to take out a fatigue party to-night, sir. Is that so?"

"Certainly. What of it?"

"Then I wish to protest, sir, and to protest most strongly."

Barnack swept the mosquito curtains aside, swung his legs over the edge of the bed, and sat up. His face looked flushed and ominous.

"Protest? Against what, Mr. Hammersly?"

"Against this unfair treatment."

"What unfair treatment?"

"I have been detailed for every unpleasant duty during the last ten days. I am not the only junior officer available."

They looked each other straight in the eyes, two men who were doomed to be antipathetic, each the exponent of fierce but different forms of individualism. Barnack's egotism had certain objective ideals, ideals that gave him an immense advantage. In theory he was unanswerable.

"In short, you protest against doing your duty."

"No, sir; I protest against doing all the duty."

Barnack kept his temper. He had no self-consciousness, no diffidence, and no imagination to trouble him. Things were just black or white, true or false. It was impossible to hurt him, or to make him doubt his own sincerity.

"Mr. Hammersly, I command soldiers—not young men who have never learnt to obey. I have been watching you, and your work, and I have not been impressed by it. Good God, man, what are we here for? An army has no use for men who flinch, and whine about danger. It is my duty to make my officers behave like gentlemen, even though it means death. War is not a drawing-room game."

Hammersly rocked on his heels.

"You hint that I am a coward, sir?"

"I never hint, Mr. Hammersly; only weak people hint. It is my business to make a soldier of you, and I have my own way of doing my work. You want hardening, disciplining. What do you think a German colonel would say to an officer who came and complained that the enemy were firing real shells?"

Hammersly looked at him with sullen eyes.

"Very well, sir, if you are satisfied with every other officer I must infer that I am the only delinquent, and draw my own conclusions. I suppose I was unfortunate in contradicting you that day. I will carry out to-night's duty."

He turned to go, but Barnack called him back.

"Mr. Hammersly, no more veiled insolence; you understand? Very well, you can go."

Hammersly went back to his dug-out and, sitting down on his bed, drew his revolver from the holster that hung from a nail. There was a glint of madness in his eyes; flies buzzed round him and he beat them off irritably with a paper that he had been reading. The heat was intense, and the yellow trench shimmered as though it were full of molten metal.

Hammersly stared at the revolver, and meditated, with bowed head. He was on the verge of doing some violent thing, blowing that other man's brains out, and his own, and so ending the whole business. But at that moment one of his platoon sergeants came for orders, a little fairish man with a yellow face and miserable eyes.

Hammersly hid the revolver under a blanket.

"Yes, Hobbs?"

"I was in the orderly room, sir, and they said as you are taking out a trenching party to-night."

"That is so, Hobbs."

The man fidgeted, and his miserable eyes touched Hammersly's heart.

"You don't look very fit, Hobbs."

"I'm not, sir. I've been shivering, and I haven't touched food since dinner yesterday. Can't stomach it. I've never cried off a job before, sir, but my nerve's clean gone."

"Why didn't you report sick?"

"I did, sir. But the doctor wouldn't look at me."

"All right, Hobbs; I think I can manage to let you off to-night."

The man's eyes lit up in his peaky, yellow face.

"Thank you, sir; I shan't forget it, sir."

He saluted and disappeared, but he had saved Hammersly from committing murder.

Pierce was quite talkative and humorous at dinner, and the mess was puzzled. They knew that he had the night's dirty work on his shoulders, and his cheerfulness was quite original and unexpected. He even talked to Barnack, politely, respectfully and with easy charm, while his brother officers watched him, and drew the only obvious conclusion.

As Goss put it when Hammersly had gone and Barnack had strolled along to his dug-out to get a pipe:

"P. H.'s tail's down. The C.O. has bruk him. And P. H. is going to be polite. Nothing like these little stunts out in the open for teaching a man to lick the right side of the bread."

But Goss was wrong; Barnack had not broken his man; he had only made him coolly and insanely desperate.

Hammersly had left the mess to its evening bridge. A change had come over him, and he laughed as he went down the trench to pick up his men. So those fellows would imagine that he had surrendered his pride, and was ready to join them in their suave and servile charms! What a jest! He laughed again, cynical, defiant laughter. He had won a new grip of life; he began to understand what he meant to do; his individualism was almost as fanatical as Barnack's, and far more unrestrained and fierce. What Gerard Hammersly had done, he could do also. There would be an infernal row; that was inevitable; but he did not look into the future; he wanted to break out, smash the system, protest. He would get hurt, but he no more thought of the pain than a wild bull in the arena considers the steel in the toreador's hand. He was seeing red. Even the thought of Janet made him angrier.

Hammersly took his men along and reported to the engineer captain who was waiting for him at "Liverpool Lane." The sapper was sitting in a bit of shallow trench, smoking a cigarette. He scrambled up, and looked out over the open country.

"Is that my trenching party?"

"Yes."

"Pass the word along for the men to keep quiet. No talking above a whisper, and no smoking. This happens to be rather a dirty place. The Turks over there have had a funk on, and when they start rapid firing we get all the stuff over here. I had three men hit last night."

Hammersly passed the word along.

"Where do you want us to begin?"

"Carry this trench on. I want the men out in the open to begin with; the direction pegs and tape are down. You have your tools?"

"Yes."

"All right; carry on, please."

Hammersly set his men at work, and strolled to and fro in the darkness with a sense of irresponsible recklessness. He wanted to whistle, but it was against orders, so he celebrated his mood of mad rebelliousness by parading up and down the line of toiling men who were swinging picks and using shovels with grim energy. The work was done ferociously and with set teeth, every man listening for a burst of rifle fire from the Turkish trench over yonder.

It came at last, and the men lay flat as the bullets spat through the air. It was mere "funk firing," blind and unaimed, and through it all Pierce Hammersly went strolling to and fro, speaking softly to the men, with a voice that sounded gay.

"All right, boys, they'll get tired of it in a minute."

He felt extraordinarily exhilarated, and absolutely unafraid. Fate could not touch him that night. He had been born to defy something more deadly than Turkish bullets, even obsolete traditions, prejudices, caddishnesses, a whole system. His megalomania carried him through. And down in that scratching of yellow earth the men muttered together:

"Bit of a surprise packet, what!"

"He's coming on. There ain't nothing wrong with an officer like that."

"Giving him all the dirty jobs, too, and them other blighters playing cards."

The panic firing died down as suddenly as it had crackled into life. The men rose up and became again so many sweating, straining blotches in the darkness. Hammersly sat down on a little hummock of heather, with lips that smiled and a heart that beat sharp and hard.

He was thinking of Janet, and even his love for her was but another flame in the leaping fire of his revolt. Those

other men who were playing cards had women who loved them, but Barnack had neither wife nor child and had boasted of it in the mess. And death touched the women as much as the men. Barnack was being a brute to Janet, making her face grim risks that the women of those other men were not sharing. Why should it be so? Let England ask such men as Barnack that question.

By midnight Hammersly's party had done the work required of it, and he marched the tired men back to the Footshires' lines. And, somehow, he felt a breath of good will flowing from these dark and earthy figures towards himself. He had proved himself in their eyes, and the knowledge hardened the reckless ferocity of his hatred of the man Barnack. His mind was made up. His purpose was like a steel spring, coiled and set, waiting for that dramatic moment when it should be released.

Hammersly turned in, and slept like a tired navy.

CHAPTER XVIII

Doubtless there will always be a lack of sympathy between the picturesque historian who writes about what he has not seen, and the plain man who has seen the real things and cannot write about them. It is as difficult as being in love with a woman differs from being married to her. Your maker of picturesque and thrilling descriptions flirts with war; he does not go through the grim ceremony that ties him to the trenches.

Romance and colour are apt to vanish out of life when a man is thirsty, or underfed, cold and wet, or sick with the sun-glare, tormented by flies and lice, or damnably afraid. He is concerned with urgent and immediate physical distractions, food, the hole in his gas helmet, whether it is going to rain or not, the leak in the roof of his dug-out, the attentions of some particular offensive trench-mortar, the temper of the gentleman in authority over him, whether he will have a chance of drying his socks. He does not see fine, panoramic effects; he is inclined to expectorate on the purple pages of the war correspondents; he spends half his days in a hole in the ground, and he may look at you critically if you are fool enough to call him a hero.

That he is a hero, no one doubts, but heroism has changed the cut and the colour of its coat, though some of the good people at home still insist on a hero being a sort of Scarlet Pimpernel or Monsieur Beaucaire. And these good people at home have very strange notions about courage. Courage in this war has been the virtue of patient and stubborn resignation. It has consisted of sitting in mud-holes five minutes longer than the other man, in spite of gas and shells. Those old picturesque flashes of romantic movement have been few and far between.

Fame blew her brazen trumpet when the grey ships steamed up to batter a way through towards Stamboul. The trumpet note sounded again when the glorious 29th Division stormed its way ashore at Helles, brown men under a blue sky, splashing through the blue sea that was stippled white with jets of bullet-whipped foam. Red patches stained the brown uniforms. The beaches were all yellow and red; the lighters piled with the dead and wounded. The great ships rolled their thunder fire; the iron sides of the *River Clyde* clanged like a thousand sword-smitten shields. Wonderful days, vivid, breathless, sweating, bleeding, heroic, damnable. As they will tell you, the Turks in that cliff trench fled from the hellish faces of those Englishmen. And such Englishmen, grown men of ten years' service, hardened in India, brown, fierce, indomitable.

Speak to a man who knows, speak of the 29th Division, and you will see his chin go up and his eyes flash. That was one of the rare and great moments of the war, terrible, superb.

Pierce Hammersly may have imagined such happenings, such heroisms, such breathless, sweating comradeships when dying men quarrel with each other because neither will drink the last mouthful of tepid water. But he had seen nothing of the kind. He had missed the great moments, the rare, heroic rushes. There had been nothing to inspire the sentimentalist or the poet in him, and he was one of those men who need some such inspiration. He had struck all the sordidness of war, its heartbreaking monotonies, its petulances, its almost ludicrous and incredible horrors. He had not seen men bleed in a wild, exultant charge; he had seen them assassinated in holes and ditches.

The mental attitudes that are developed by the ordeal of active service are various and diverse. It is a question of psychology, temperament. There is the man who attains to the ideal of self-sacrifice, the man who is sullenly and almost bestially resigned, the man who is rebellious and dare not betray himself, the man who is never anything but a coward, and the rarest of all—the man who rebels and refuses to be suppressed. Pierce Hammersly belonged to this last type. Circumstances willed it so—circumstances, and Colonel Barnack.

His egotism had suddenly swung itself to a mountain top. He looked down on the life about him as a scuffle of slaves, of absurd creatures who were fooled by gold hats and stereotyped phrases. His egotism approached the megalomania of incipient insanity. It gave him a new arrogance, a sneering serenity, also a clarity of vision that was merciless and ironical. How devilishly absurd the whole thing seemed! Civilisation ending in rat-holes and blood and little stinking chemical atrocities! Mobs rushing together, losing their heads, getting drunk on phrases! Surely there was some wild liberty left in the world? Why should he obey the crowd, and share in its infatuations? It might come to this that no man would be allowed to decide for his own soul, or go a mile this way or that without being challenged by some petty tyrant in brown or blue. The State, one's country, what were they after all but absurd lumps of human stupidity in which men were glued up like currants in a pudding? Who had asked him to be born? Who had asked him to call himself an Englishman? Voluntary service, yes, and had not the individual the right to volunteer himself back into sanity?

Fools! Why, a fox had more liberty than the modern man. The beast could go out on the open heath and roam the woods, while the man was called Number So-and-So, and was given a bit of metal with which to kill Number Somebody-else. And if he refused—they either shot or imprisoned him.

What a climax to end the fine flowering of all the romanticisms and colour rhapsodies of a century! The deification of a man like Barnack! It was time, for the sake of liberty and reason, that someone should refuse to live.

Many a man has felt as Hammersly felt, and argued as he argued. But foul facts have to be faced, and in the end the

real man must face them. He must grant that we were fools, that certain peoples had big bellies and no hearts, that science may be brutal, that the German beast dragged us down to a death scramble in an exceedingly dirty ditch. The dirt and the ditch and the German are there, and we are in it with him. And in the end the true man faces it out. The German beast must be smothered in the dirt he has made. We can clean up, and talk over things—later.

But Hammersly had this lesson to learn, and like many proud and fastidious people, he refused at first to learn it. His egotism emulated Phaeton. He flamed like a demi-god, or an old-time blank verse hero. The sense of solidarity, of comradeship, had ceased to influence him. He even failed to divine how a woman would feel, the woman who loved him. He just flared off like a rocket, to end in a momentary and vain sparkle of stars.

His brother officers thought that Hammersly had surrendered, for he seemed a changed man, wholly at his ease in the mess; and though his new cheerfulness had the glitter of steel, they failed to discover his mutinous intentions. No one could find any fault with his attitude towards Colonel Barnack. He was very much the fine gentleman, courteous, respectful, but quite unfrightened. None of them dreamed that he was just a polished bomb on the very point of exploding.

Hammersly spent one of his last afternoons in a solitary ramble. He wandered down the gully and along the beach at the foot of the cliff, a beach that was littered here and there with old water-bottles, bits of equipment, battered sun-helmets, and an occasional dead mule. The mules were apt to be offensive and swollen, and Hammersly held his breath till he had drawn out of range. Far away out to sea a couple of monitors were crawling out from under the purple shadow of the island of Imbros, their tripod masts and fire-control platforms making Hammersly think of H. G. Wells's Martians. And presently one of them stabbed the blue distance with a flash of fire. The huge shell screamed on its way; the report of the gun, following the flash by many seconds, came like a crack of thunder.

The monitors were out to shell Chanak or Maidos, and Hammersly sat for a while on a big boulder and watched them with ironical curiosity. They were beyond the range of the Turkish guns, nor did the Turks attempt to reply to them. It was just an example of the arrogance and the power of the big machine, and of the potential devils that placed humanity at the mercy of the engineer. The whole business would assuredly end in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Hammersly strolled on round a shallow bay to where the cliffs jutted out into a snub-nosed promontory. He had a fine view of the coast and the dim heights above Suvla, a panorama that suggested a wild and desolate French Riviera. He would have strolled farther, but a lean figure in khaki drill dissociated itself from a cleft in the rocks and warned him to stop.

"'Tain't safe along there, sir. The Turks can snipe you."

Hammersly looked at the man and thought he had never seen such a figure of patient and dejected weariness. The man's bony knees and legs were burnt the colour of copper; his thin face was all yellow, and his eyes had a vacant look as though his thoughts were hundreds of miles away. His wrists and knuckles were covered with sores. He did not hold himself upright, but stooped like an old man.

"The monitors are giving Abdul something."

"Yes, sir."

His voice was listless, and his utter boredom obvious.

"How long have you been out here?"

"Four months, sir."

"From the beginning?"

"That's it, sir."

There were remnants of smartness and of youthfulness about him; had his blue eyes been keen and his face fresh he would have passed as a good type of young Englishman. The lad's face was intelligent, but it was also the face of a fatalist.

"I have been here about a month. Multiply that by four——"

The sentry gave him a queer, searching glance.

"Oh, you get fed up, sir—fed up to the teeth."

"I suppose so."

"And then you get fed up with being fed up. I'm there now."

Hammersly talked to the man for a minute or two, while the monitors kept emitting their thundercracks, and he turned back along the beach. "Fed up with being fed up!" So that was the end and the limit of that yellow lad's philosophy! Resigned to resignation. But was it the last phase?

His brilliant and unconsenting individualism seized on that yellow-faced, dull-eyed sentry as a figure to symbolise his scorn. He went back along the beach with smiling eyes, picking his way past the dead mules, and loftily telling those monitors to stop their bellowing. He was convinced of the tragic absurdity of the whole business. He did not believe that any of the politicians had told the truth; they were liars, gamblers, exploiters of the myriad fools. It was just a great game in which all these diplomatic gentlemen set out to gamble with lives when words and "notes" failed them. And the only men who enjoyed it were like Barnack, men with a passion for exerting their authority.

Hammersly felt so utterly sure of his new self that he went back to his dug-out and wrote to Janet, hinting at what might happen.

“It is more than likely that I shall be out of this ghastly foolery in the course of a few days. I am going on strike. A novel attitude for a soldier! It is a pity that a few million sane men cannot arrive simultaneously at the same conclusion. We would just hang all the diplomats and the politicians, and make a fresh start.

“Of course, there will be a horrid scandal. I may be shot. Still, there it is, an end to this slavery. . . .”

His egotism flapped to its zenith in that letter. He felt insolently pleased with himself; he even fancied that he could convince Janet that he had done something fine and singular.

CHAPTER XIX

There are certain memorable days in a man's life when every detail stands out sharply like contrasted colours in a mosaic.

A north wind was blowing, ridging with white the intense blue of the sea, and bringing a new sting and freshness into the life of those who were sick of the sun-glare and the heat. It was a day with a wonderful atmosphere, crystal-clear and vivid. Imbros looked about a mile away. Rocky Samothrace towered up with strange distinctness, and even the Bulgarian coast was visible as a dim grey line above the sea.

Sick men opened their shirts to the wind; it was as refreshing as rain after a drought. There was a new sparkle in life. Hammersly heard a man whistling, a new note in that land of sullen gloom.

About eleven that morning he went down alone to bathe, not unwarned as to the day's possible significance. Captain Goss, with unusual friendliness, had thrown him a hint after breakfast, and Leatherhead, the doctor, had gone fussing down to the field ambulance in quest of additional and suggestive necessaries. But Hammersly felt peculiarly yet bitterly serene, convinced that the dramatic moment was approaching when he would look the man whom he hated in the eyes and quietly give him his defiance.

Even that swim of his appealed to his egotism as something symbolical. He was washing off the dust of the place, cleansing himself, wiping out his humiliations. He resumed his khaki drill uniform with the ironical feelings of a man preparing a grim jest. It even occurred to him to wonder how Uncle Gerard had felt when they had stripped him of his epaulettes and his sword. Very scornful and a little amused, perhaps, and not in the least ashamed.

When Hammersly returned he found the mess tense with significant excitement. Men were laughing a little hysterically and smoking hard, and a great deal of talking was being done. Rumours buzzed like flies, while Goss—who knew—grinned and said little.

As a matter of fact, the Staff had schemed and ordered one of those little affairs that give a semblance of movement and life to an enterprise that may be hopelessly bogged. There happened to be a little bit of Turkish trench that should have belonged to the English system, and didn't. It had made itself objectionable in various ways, and the powers had decreed that it should be taken and occupied by an attacking force from the 74th Footshires. Goss allowed the mess to know the truth when he had listened long enough to their imaginative conjectures.

"There'll be half an hour's shelling, with a cruiser or two giving us an impartial slap on the back, and then a company of ours will go over the top, clear out the Turks, consolidate, and hold on."

Everybody knew what these local attacks meant. The men called them "Free passes to Hell." You won fifty yards of yellow trench, stuck there while the enemy bombed and shelled you viciously, and if you succeeded in remaining, you wondered what you had gained by it. But war is like that.

Hammersly was leaning against a pile of biscuit-boxes that formed one of the end walls of the mess. His brain glowed at a kind of white heat. He had recognised the fact that certain of his brother officers were sending furtive looks in his direction.

"So that's it, is it? We haven't had one of those little stunts for quite a long time."

"And when is it to be?"

"This evening."

Someone broke into a cackling laugh.

"And who is going to qualify for a halo?"

"I haven't heard yet."

"I think the 'old man' ought to make us toss up."

Then they heard Hammersly speaking in a strange, hard voice. He was leaning, square-shouldered, against the wall of biscuit-boxes, and looking straight down on the mess with steady, shining eyes.

"I don't think that question need worry you."

Then he began to smile.

"I'll bet any man here, up to any figure, that I shall have the honour of leading the suicide party."

No one answered him; his bet went unchallenged.

Captain Goss was meditating some sort of retreat, when a sergeant came in and saluted.

"Is Mr. Hammersly here, gentlemen?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"The Colonel wants you, sir, in the orderly-room."

Hammersly straightened himself, and smiled round at the room who were watching him.

"You see," he said, "I should have won my bet. All the same, someone will have the honour of taking my place."

And he walked out of the mess, leaving them to wonder what he had meant.

Hammersly never forgot his short journey along that bit of yellow trench; he noticed objects, details, curiosities,

with minute precision. It was as though even inanimate things had taken on an enormous significance. He was about to say farewell to them, and he knew it. Even the familiar features of that earthy alley, with its nondescript shelters and lurking places, stood out before him with strange vividness. There were the petrol cans, the holes in the ground roofed with waterproof sheets, the dump of stores, the empty ammunition boxes, a broken stretcher, a roll of wire netting. He arrived at the orderly-room with a sense of taking leave of the place for good and ever.

Barnack was alone, sitting at an improvised table; the orderly-room staff were away at dinner. He looked up as Hammersly entered, and his hard eyes gave a momentary glitter.

“Ah—Mr. Hammersly.”

“You sent for me, sir.”

“Yes. My regiment, or rather a small portion of it, is to attack this evening. I have chosen you, Mr. Hammersly, to lead the attacking party. Now, I had better explain——”

But Hammersly interrupted him, speaking with a slow and quiet voice:

“Explanations will be unnecessary, sir. I shall refuse to carry out your orders.”

Barnack did not move. He just sat staring at the man in front of him.

Then he spoke:

“Very well, Mr. Hammersly, you will be put under arrest.”

“I am very much obliged to you, sir; that is what I desire.”

CHAPTER XX

Early in October Janet Yorke received that letter in which Pierce had hinted at an imminent catastrophe. His confessions were too frank for her to doubt his meaning, and she was shocked, frightened, and confounded.

She found herself beset by all manner of impulses, all manner of emotions, the most diverse fears and hopes.

Perhaps he was sickening for some illness, and had written that letter in a moment of feverish misery.

But then her prophetic intuition had foretold some such crisis in the life of this man. She could not escape from her own intimate readings of Pierce's character; even her love had to give evidence against itself. Her imagination had spun a web, and she was but reading the tale that her own soul had woven.

Perhaps these were some of the most miserable days of Janet's life. Her hopes tantalised her, like wayward streams of sunlight on a cloudy day. She pictured that rallying letter of hers reaching him, and inflaming his pride. She pictured him sick, snatched away from that mad, self-willed crisis, feeble and safe in some white ship on the sea. She even pictured him dead, dead at his post, stricken down with honour, dead but unshamed.

Love—ideal love—is a mingling of many tendernesses, frailties and strengths, and there was a mother-pity in Janet's heart for this man of hers, who, like a passionate child, was trying to break unbreakable things. His egotism shocked her and filled her with compassion. Yet this love of hers had set up a dear pride, a white statue sacred to valour and chivalry; it was the ideal of a sensitive and proud girl, an emblem that she could show to other women, and remain tranquil and unshamed.

All this had to be borne in silence. Her loyalty and her pride held her from rushing to confide in Grace Hansard or Porteous Hammersly. She kept the secret even from her mother, standing bravely by the hope that Pierce had written that letter in a moment of acute misery or of savage exasperation. She was bound by her honour to remain silent, lest she should bring her man and her love for him into needless contempt.

There were moments when she reproached herself with the accusation that she had not helped Pierce as she might have helped him. The ordeal was, perhaps, more terrible than she had imagined. She wondered whether she had made it clear to him that her love was mingled with pride, that she would rather suffer any anguish than hear him charged with dishonour.

And here her woman's love stood at the parting of the ways. She had to choose, as thousands of women have had to choose, between loving a weakling and losing a brave man. There may be a hundred excuses to be made for the man whose soul has failed him; a woman's mother-love may bleed with understanding and with pity, and yet—! The great renunciation may have shone in her eyes; she may have shed brave tears and sent her man to talk with Death in the mud and the rain. And then—to have him sent back to her, a confessed weakling and a coward! Her pride and her compassion stand and gaze at each other with tragic and questioning eyes.

The arrival of each post marked the crisis in so many periods of passionate suspense. She would watch for the man, go to the gate to meet him, if he came, which was seldom.

Three whole days passed and the postman never came to the cottage. Her hope began to flicker like a lamp that is empty of oil.

If that letter had been the last that Pierce had written to her, then something had happened. He was either dead, or sick, or in dire trouble—and the last was the thing she feared. She could not conceive his leaving her to live for days on that one ominous letter if he had repented of his madness and recovered the mastery of his soul. She tried to make herself believe that it was the mail that had failed. A ship had been sunk. Yet her heart was sceptical.

Then she received a postcard.

"I am well," it said, and no more.

It did not tell her where Pierce was, what had happened to him, what he was doing. Its ominous reticence did not reassure her. It was like a message from a prison.

She walked down daily to Scarshott, hoping that at Orchards she might hear something that would give the lie to her suspicions. Both she and Porteous Hammersly kept up an appearance of complete cheerfulness; each felt it necessary to reassure the other, and neither of them had any faith in the other's sincerity. They were plucky people trying not to appear worried and miserable, like men in the trenches who meet with a "Cheer-o" in two feet of liquid mud.

Their carefulness in making inquiries of each other was pathetic.

"We shall be sure to have a whole batch of letters soon."

"Of course. One might go two weeks without hearing."

When Janet received that postcard she mentioned the fact very tentatively to Porteous.

"I've had news. Pierce is well."

Old Hammersly looked at her curiously.

"Was it a card?"

“Yes.”

“I had one too. But he didn’t say where he was on mine.”

“He couldn’t do. It would not be allowed.”

“Of course not. But still——”

She knew what he was thinking. “Why only a card?”

Janet made a suggestion.

“Something dramatic must be expected—a victory—and they have stopped all letters.”

She happened to turn her head and glance at Gerard Hammersly’s portrait. It was an illusion, of course, some trick of the light, but a glimmer of ironical pity seemed to strike down on her from Gerard Hammersly’s eyes.

She turned away, half angrily; she was beginning to hate that portrait.

“It’s no use our worrying. It does not help, does it?”

Porteous most emphatically agreed with her.

“This war should teach us to be fatalists.”

A long silence followed the arrival of that enigmatic postcard. It had come like a warning cry in a long night of suspense, leaving those who listened and waited to imagine all sorts of evil happenings. Then Mrs. Yorke fell ill, and Janet had to nurse her. This new anxiety was almost a relief to her; it helped her to spend herself and to rise above mere morbid speculation. Her mother was like a frail and very gentle-natured child—one of those pathetic little women who are born to be loved and petted, and who exhale a perfume of sweet helplessness.

Janet was very much tied to the cottage, and Porteous Hammersly discovered an opportunity for showing his infinite good-nature. He came bustling up to Heather Cottage and radiated kindness, and produced baskets of fruit and flowers and more tangible offers of sympathy.

“Now, my dear girl, you really are doing too much; you must have some help here.”

She assured him that she could manage.

“But I really must insist on it, my dear. I have noticed that you are getting a little pale. Now, I know of a most excellent woman who can cook and nurse——”

He held up an admonishing forefinger.

“Now, do be a good child. I want you to allow me to make you a little allowance, for Pierce’s sake; say a hundred a year—a mere trifle. No, you mustn’t refuse it—you mustn’t really; I shall be hurt.”

She kissed him, and he blushed and looked delighted.

“You are a dear to me. I would not take it from anyone else in the world.”

“That’s splendid.”

“But I’m going to give you something in return; I am going to work for you—three or four hours each day.”

“How?”

“I know that you have lost a lot of your people at the tannery. You let your best clerk enlist last week. Women have got to do their share. I know I could help you in the office; I am sure that I could soon pick things up.”

“My dear girl, quite unnecessary, quite unnecessary—at present.”

But she could see how pleased he was.

“Directly mother is a little better I shall begin.”

“You determined young woman——”

“If you want to help me, is it not just as natural that I should want to help you? I shall be keen, and keenness——”

“I believe you would be tremendously efficient. Meanwhile, I am going to send Bains up to take you out for an hour’s drive each day. And I will give you that woman’s address; she’s the widow of a man who used to work for me.”

Another week passed, and Janet received a second postcard. “I am well,” was all it said, and she detected a note of defiance in its bluntness.

Old Hammersly drove up to see her about an hour before noon. He looked depressed and troubled, and she guessed that he, too, had received one of those curt messages.

She carried two chairs out into the garden and made him sit down in the sunlight under the shelter of a cypress hedge, for it was one of those warm, still autumn days when the dew lies long on the grass and the sky is a thin, pure blue.

“I’m worried, Janet. I have had another of those cards from Pierce.”

“So have I.”

“I don’t understand it. I met Morrison yesterday; he has a boy out there, and he has been getting letters regularly—quite recent ones.”

Janet’s heart beat fast for a moment. She felt the last shreds of her hope falling, falling—like the yellow leaves of the birch trees over yonder.

“Strange!”

Something in her voice made Porteous Hammersly look at her. She flushed guiltily, wondering whether he was on

the edge of discovering her secret knowledge and her fears.

“My dear child——”

“Yes?”

He was looking at her intently and frowning.

“Can you throw any light on this matter? I mean—has Pierce ever said anything in his letters to you?”

She met his eyes bravely.

“Perhaps——”

“Then tell me. I am not an old woman, Janet; I’m a man of the world.”

“You see, I did not want anyone to know—that Pierce was suffering—was unhappy out there. He did write me one very desperate letter. I burnt it. I thought it might be just one of those miserable moments that must come to a man—at times. I did not want to——”

Old Porteous’s face was tragically grave.

“You did not want to—worry me. Of course, that is like you, Janet. But it seems to me that we ought to prepare ourselves——”

He looked at her pathetically, as though hoping she would contradict him. But she could not contradict him.

“Yes. Do you remember that portrait?”

“Good God—Gerard’s?”

“Yes.”

He hid his face in his hands.

The one person who suffered from no misgivings was Pierce’s mother. She was a woman with an excellent appetite and a perfect digestion, and no sensitive and distempered reflections ever clogged her mind. Pierce had written her sundry formal and descriptive letters; he had found his mother rather receptive of scandal; she welcomed it, and proved herself a ready listener to every voice that cried, “Treachery, bribery—we are betrayed!” Pierce had sent her a full list of the so-called Gallipoli scandals—from the history of the *Aragon*, to the dubious behaviour of certain distinguished officers under shell-fire.

Mrs. Sophia behaved like the thoroughly eupeptic and stupid fool that she was. She went about boasting of her son and his doings, boring everybody with intimate and rather imaginative descriptions of his adventures. No young man had ever suffered such hardships and faced such dangers as Pierce Hammersly had done. He was the unique son of a boastful and selfish mother.

She passed on his scandalous gossip, speaking with immense impressiveness, and airing her inferior knowledge. The rottenness and incapacity of the administration were apparent. The whole Gallipoli campaign was proving a ghastly fiasco. The lives that had been sacrificed, wasted! The incomprehensible muddling!

Moreover, she went about prating of “slackers” and “cowards.” She even stopped young men in Scarshott, and desired them to tell her why they were failing to do their duty. She was a “white feather” propagandist.

And there were people who were exasperated by Sophia Hammersly, and very much bored by the heroism of her son. She was laying the last straw on the back of her own vanity; digging the pit that was to swallow up her pride.

CHAPTER XXI

Pierce Hammersly had been tried by a general court-martial and dismissed the Service, the charges of cowardice and refusal to obey orders having been proved against him. He was tried by English gentlemen and sentenced by them, and the apparent leniency of his sentence might have caused ignorant and querulous people to blaspheme and cry out against "class favouritism." Certain facts and fragments of evidence had told in his favour. He had gone sick with paratyphoid two days before leaving the Peninsula, and Leatherhead, in his evidence, had suggested that the feeling of malaise connected with the onset of the disease might have weakened the prisoner's soldierly spirit. He had also described Hammersly as neurotic and excitable. As for Colonel Barnack, he was grimly fair in all his statements. His evidence agreed with the doctor's. He described Hammersly as undisciplined, highly strung, quite the wrong type of man to make a good soldier. He was over-civilised, and a degenerate so far as the military virtues were concerned.

The punishment inflicted by men of honour upon an equal is subtle and spiritual, and not to be judged by crude physical standards. It is cumulative, progressive, psychical, and considers the future even more than the present. The Court might have doomed Hammersly to be shot or sent to prison, but they inflicted on him a far more delicate yet poignant punishment. They set him free. They sent him back to his own people to explain away his shame.

So Hammersly found himself in Alexandria, wearing a cheap suit of ready-made mufti, and living at a little French hotel. He knew nobody, wanted to know nobody, for he was very much at war with the world. The Englishmen who had stripped him of his uniform and relieved him of his commission had quite failed to break his spirit, or to persuade him that he had every right to feel humiliated. He carried his head a little higher, and cultivated an attitude of intense and cool defiance. His egotism had not yet received its death blow. It is rather pleasing at times to play the part of one man against the world, and Alexandria is big and cosmopolitan, and Hammersly's Byronism was in no danger of being challenged.

He had plenty of money, for the bank cashed his cheques, after lengthy and somewhat discomfiting interviews in which he had to produce evidence of his identity, and explain and prove the nature of his position. That last half-hour in the cool bigness of that bank might have shaken any ordinary man's self-confidence, but Hammersly went through it with a sang-froid that was insolent. He ignored the curious glances of the swarthy French-Egyptian gentleman who attended to him. Several foreign fellows consulted behind the brass rails, and looked at him as though he were some sort of strange beast in a cage.

Hammersly walked out of the bank with a hundred odd pounds in his pocket. He went to a shipping office, arranged for a passage on the next P. and O. boat calling at Port Said, and returned to the little French hotel where no one knew him. The place pleased him; it was so undisciplined, so casual.

Hammersly spent four days in Alexandria, and he enjoyed every hour of those four days. He had managed to dissociate himself from all orthodox sentiments; he had denationalised himself, or thought he had, and he wandered about like a superior and cosmopolitan spirit, relishing life with all the audacity of the rebel. He liked the blue sky, the sunlight, the white houses, the French atmosphere of the new town, the multi-coloured, oriental vivacity of the older quarters. The poet and the artist in him reawoke. He had always admired Landor, and the serene arrogance of that brilliant egoist recurred to him with personal suggestiveness. Had he not refused to be one of the fools, repeating catch cries, rushing through the obvious gap in the hedge? His individualism had as much right to deny nationalism, as nationalism had to attempt the crushing of individualism. It was quality against quantity! He could stand alone.

His arrogance and his cheerfulness were quite pathetic. He enjoyed the French wine at his hotel, he enjoyed his bed, he enjoyed the shops, the scented narrow streets, the mystery, the colours. Even the men in khaki amused him; those brown, common men who were slaves. He was quite absurdly soul-blind for the time being. The social part of him seemed asleep. His individualism was drunk with the wine of defiance. He recognised no authority save that of his own free will.

And yet he longed with pathetic inconsistency for home; for that green island. He longed for the woman he loved. His egoism still blinded him. He talked all sorts of imperious nonsense to himself about "telling England the truth"; "shocking British complacency." He was free, he could speak, he would make his voice heard, he would write a book, a terrible book that would convulse the country. England was decadent. He was particularly fond of that phrase, not having dug deep enough into the ultimate truth to know that when a man accuses his own country of decadence there may be something seriously wrong with his own courage or his common sense. The vulgar man disposes of such querulous critics with expressive bluntness—"No innards." War demands humility and a stout, courageous stomach.

Janet read that letter of his on a grey November morning, with the wind buffeting the pine woods and spattering the rain against the windows. Heather Cottage had not been built for rough weather; it had been a summer speculation; the carpenter had worked in a cheerful, go as you please mood when he had fitted the windows, and they leaked and bubbled and produced pools upon the floor. Some tiles had been blown off the roof in the night, and one of the

bedroom ceilings was dripping steadily.

Janet had sent a note of appeal by the milk-boy to Porteous Hammersly.

"The weather is getting the better of us. Can you find somebody to repair our roof?"

Half an hour later the postman had brought her that letter—that letter asking her to tell Orchards the truth.

She sat and stared at the fire, as though the news of his death had reached her.

He was on his way home, a disgraced man, as he put it, and proud to be disgraced. He wrote with a burning sense of wrong, mocking at the bitter things that had happened to him, daring anyone to make him feel ashamed. She realised that he had broken himself in a mood of mad revolt, for he was full of defiance and ready to flourish his defiance in the eyes of the world. "I shall take care to let the people at home know the truth. If the Machine has broken me I may yet do some damage to the Machine. I no longer call myself an Englishman, and I pray most devoutly that this country of shams and hypocrisies and political cowardices may be humiliated in the dust."

He ended by asking her to break the news to the people at Orchards.

"I expect they will be rather upset. Tell them not to worry."

She sat there with dry eyes, shocked by his immense egoism, and yet loving him because of her compassion, and because she foresaw the bitter humiliations he would have to bear. He seemed like a man blinded by his own hot blood, striking out wildly, beating with foolish, naked hands against a wall of iron.

"Hallo—hallo!"

She started up, the letter in her hand, and saw Porteous's face at the window. He had driven up to see what he could do for her, and she had been so absorbed in her own thoughts that she had not heard the noise of the car.

She went to the door to meet him, still with that letter in her hand.

"How good of you——"

He glanced at the sheet of paper, and then raised his eyes almost furtively to her face.

"News, Janet?"

"Yes."

"Not very good?"

"I'll tell you. Come in, dear."

She felt a sudden great pity for him, and more sorry for him than she was for his son.

"Not killed, Janet?"

His eyes were afraid.

"No, nor wounded. Besides, you would have heard. Sit down there by the fire."

She closed the door, and Porteous Hammersly stood watching her.

"Janet—I think—I know."

Her eyes lifted to his; she was very pale.

"You know?"

"I can guess. Pierce has done what Gerard did."

She sat down in an armchair and clasped her face between her hands, the crumpled letter between one palm and her cheek.

"This letter came this morning. He has asked me to tell you. He has been court-martialled and cashiered."

"Good God! For——?"

"Cowardice—and refusing to obey orders. He says that someone was a beast to him—and he went mad. He is on his way home."

Porteous Hammersly stood swaying slightly, and there was no sound save the sound of the wind in the chimney.

"Show me the letter, Janet."

"I think it is better that you should not read it. He wanted me to tell you."

Old Hammersly faced about and leant his elbows on the mantelshelf. His figure seemed to shrink, and his cheeks to fall in.

"I had a premonition. I have been waiting——"

"For this?"

"Yes."

She saw his shoulders jerking. He seemed to swallow something to master himself; he began to speak in a slow, toneless voice.

"You see—Pierce was always restive, impatient. He is just what Gerard was; you can't drive such men—they flare up and burn. Perhaps we spoil him."

He lapsed into momentary silence, and there was a wet gleam in Janet's eyes.

"I don't think I doubted his courage, but I did doubt his temper. I'll admit that; I was afraid. And in a way I feel responsible. And in a place like Scarshott! I must stand by the boy."

He appeared to be speaking to himself, but Janet rose and laid her hands on his shoulder.

“How fine of you. And I’ll fight too. They shall know that I really cared; that I’m not an adventuress.”

“My dear——”

All his plump and debonair sententiousness had left him, and he was just a plain man suffering acutely, and longing to be comforted. He turned, took Janet’s face between his hands and kissed her forehead.

“Pierce did well for himself, dear, when he persuaded you to love him. I can’t quite place things—at present. I don’t think life will be possible for him here.”

“Pierce has so much to learn,” she said softly. “No—I’m not speaking like a prig; this war does not ask for individualists.”

“No—anything does—to block a trench.”

He walked to the window to recover his composure, and watched the yellow birch leaves falling in the wind and rain and dappling the wet grass.

“I had better tell my wife, Janet. She will have to know, and she has made it rather difficult for all of us.”

“Tell her soon.”

He left her, knowing that he had an ordeal before him, and that he would get but little comfort and comradeship from Mrs. Sophia. And so it proved. She stubbornly refused to accept the news at first, and when she accepted it, it was with scorn and indignation. Her complacent soul refused to be wounded through the wounding of her son.

“My dear Porteous, don’t be so foolish. Pierce must have been the victim of some gross injustice. If he disobeyed orders he must have had a sound reason for disobeying them. They have made him a scapegoat——”

And then she declaimed stridently.

“Everyone knows that our Staff is rotten. I don’t believe that there is a competent General in the Army. They have been sacrificing the men, throwing their lives away. I am not surprised that Pierce rebelled. This scandal will have to be made public. You must insist on Sir Joseph bringing the matter up in the House.”

Porteous Hammersly looked like a man nipped with the cold.

“My dear, it was for cowardice,” he said.

“Cowardice! Impossible! Deserting your own son! What poltroonery!”

But when he had left her she was staring with stupid, wide-eyed indignation at the Dresden figures on the white marble mantelpiece.

CHAPTER XXII

Pierce Hammersly arrived in London, like an Athanasius against the world. He put up at the Milan because it was supposed to possess a foreign and un-English atmosphere. His first visits were to his tailor and his hatter, for a man who is out to defy society ought to go naked or be faultlessly dressed.

He proposed staying in London for several days, and he did not write immediately to Janet or his father. London had to be attacked before he defied Scarshott, and he found it necessary to cultivate a detached yet aggressive pose, to carry his head a little higher, and to compel himself to look the world straight in the eyes.

For England—and London in particular—shocked the rebel and the anarchist in Hammersly, and shocked them very considerably. He found himself in old familiar places, and watching familiar things; he had to remind himself that he had quarrelled with London and all that London stood for; the man who drove him in a taxi was an enemy; the little milliner girl who looked at him interestedly in Oxford Street was also an enemy. He sensed a potential antagonism everywhere, even in the most innocent individuals who sold him cigars or sat at the next table in a restaurant.

Hammersly had not lost his sensitiveness, and perhaps his sensitiveness was appalled at the prospect before it. He was defying the solidarity of a people; challenging a whole nation, from the paper-boy to the diplomat. His imagination had warned him of all this, but there is nothing like the restless realism of a great city for compelling an egoist to take his bath in cold water. He may be a cypher in an anonymous crowd, but a man like Hammersly never feels anonymous. There are sensibilities, impulses, cravings that cannot be crushed. A man cannot stand on a chair in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and coolly declare that he stands two feet superior to the fools who carry on the social game around him. The police intervene, or he gets his coat torn. Society has a rough-and-ready way with its own children; you cannot escape out of the great family, even by trying to sulk in a corner.

And London frightened Hammersly. All these floating faces were the faces of strangers, and he began to think of Scarshott as a London in miniature, where the faces would not be strange. And in frightening him London did two things to Hammersly—it exasperated the rebel in him, and it made him feel most damnably lonely. His pose prevented him from talking to people; he was always on his guard, waiting restively for that first occasion when the inevitable coincidence should jostle him against someone whom he knew. But no amount of lofty aloofness could heal the heart-hunger that troubled him. There were times when he wanted to rush at England as though England were lover, father, mother, friend, but his self-imposed hostility nullified such impulses. He wanted Janet most desperately; he wanted her as he had never wanted anything else in the world.

“Hallo, Hammersly!”

That test case had arrived at last. Pierce was walking fast down St. James’s Street—he always walked fast now—when a man in khaki limped across his path. It was Heriot of Trinity, a man he had known well a little less than a year ago.

For one moment he hesitated, looking into the brown face and the blue eyes of his friend. The man within him held out a hand; the revolting self plucked it back.

“Thought you were out at Gallipoli.”

Heriot dropped his hand, and looked puzzled.

“So I was. But I am out of the Machine.”

“Sick? I’m sorry——”

“No.”

The intense discomfort that he was suffering made Hammersly out-Herod Herod. What the devil was he afraid of? He had got to outface these people; ride by on his pride.

“I had a difference of opinion with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. I told them I had no more use for the Army. Of course they retaliated by kicking me out.”

Heriot still looked puzzled.

“You mean——?”

“They court-martialled me. The Machine always wins at that sort of game.”

“They court-martialled you——?”

He seemed unable to grasp such a situation. Only the drunkards, and the rotters, and the wide-world toughs got themselves court-martialled. But English public-school and University men——!

Hammersly’s face looked pinched and cold.

“I refused to obey orders, and they accused me of cowardice. I’m not down about it; I’m proud. I am going to cut all England if necessary.”

“But, my dear chap——!”

He found himself addressing Hammersly’s back—a very square and uncompromising back that was receding up the street. Then it occurred to him that Hammersly was a “mental” case; he had been shell-shocked or something. A few

days later Heriot saw the notice in the *Gazette*.

“Well I’m damned!” he reflected; “this war knocks everything!”

That chance meeting had a most unhappy effect on Hammersly. It had humiliated him bitterly, and he knew it; the feeling was like the burning of a raw wound hidden under a clean dressing. He decided that he was in an impossible position. He could not go about explaining his case to people, and advertising his impenitence by insulting them. Unfortunately, he had lost all sense of humour, and he was not quite sane when he thought of Scarshott. Damnation! He was not going to explain himself to every individual acquaintance in Scarshott. He would launch an official defiance at Scarshott and have done with it.

That was how Hammersly came to perpetrate the most egregious outrage on his own dignity. He was too angry to remember that some things are unexplainable to a crowd; that one should never argue with a crowd; that it is better to be silent when you are being pelted than to scream like a furious old woman. He lost himself utterly in that last childish and paltry bit of furiousness. He was nearer being contemptible than he had ever been before.

Three days later the editor of the *Scarshott Weekly Advertiser* received a very original letter that had been sent him for publication. He happened to be a rather mean little man; moreover, he owed the house of Hammersly a grudge. Instead of burning that letter as the evidence of a young man’s fierce and tortured perversity, he toddled round and showed it to his lawyer, satisfied himself as to his own safety, and published it in the Saturday edition of his paper.

Pierce Hammersly’s letter gave Scarshott one of its sensations of the century, and two days later someone saw the corroborating evidence in the *Gazette*. Pierce had never been particularly popular in the town. His temperamental cleverness had puzzled people, and mediocrity does not like to be puzzled.

Moreover, even the educated part of Scarshott was still very ignorant of war psychology. The average mind is quite unsubtle; it sees only crude colours, obvious movements. It separates qualities and pushes them to extremes. It concludes that there are no intermediate states between being brave and being afraid; between goodness and badness; between cheerfulness and gloom. There are many people who still do not realise that ninety men out of a hundred are physical cowards, and that only gross excitement, some high stimulus, or a grim sense of duty, make them masters of their natural fear. Many a comfortable critic has never tried to imagine what men have had to bear in this war. “Oh, we have only to go on long enough, and we shall beat them.” Well and good, but only those who do the “going on” have the right to judge their fellows.

But Scarshott judged Pierce Hammersly as pigs in a pound might judge a highly bred horse that had bolted after being badly handled. He was just a coward; a cocky young prig who refused to realise his own shame, and there was an end of it. Many people were not sorry. A few women may have pitied him, as women will, perhaps because some women are more subtle in divining spiritual things.

It happened that Janet was one of the first people to see that letter in the *Scarshott Advertiser*, and the paltriness of it made her cry out:

“Oh, my dear, that you should have done this!”

She had never thought that he could strike so false a note, making himself publicly contemptible by challenging such a town as Scarshott. He seemed to have lost his sense of dignity, his fine appreciation of what was manly and courageous and restrained. This last lapse of his hurt her horribly, more than anything else that he had done. It seemed so shamefully irreparable.

Her thoughts turned instantly to Pierce’s father. Had he seen it, or would some fool thrust the paper under his nose?

She put on her hat and cloak and rushed down to Orchards full of the thought that she could break the news to him as gently as anyone. She almost hated Pierce. Why had he not sent them word that he was in England, instead of holding aloof and humiliating them by stripping himself before all Scarshott in that letter? Gerard Hammersly would never have fallen to such a level. He would have carried his head fiercely and kept silent.

But this vulgar, insolent posturing! She began to wonder whether Pierce had ceased to be sane.

Janet arrived too late at Orchards for the accomplishing of her desire.

Porteous Hammersly was being helped into his overcoat by Harkness, the footman, when a door opened, and his wife called him.

“Porteous!”

“Yes.”

“Will you come here at once, please?”

The overcoat was returned to its peg, and old Hammersly discovered himself standing halfway between the dining-room door and the fire, and staring at his wife who was walking up and down in a white fury.

“Have you seen that?”

She pointed to a copy of the *Scarshott Advertiser* that lay a-sprawl upon the table.

“What is it, Sophia?”

“Herrick must be prosecuted. How dared he publish such a letter in his rag. It is absolutely monstrous that Pierce

should ever have written such a letter.”

Her husband picked up the paper as though he were afraid of it, and searched about hurriedly.

“What do you mean, Sophia? Where is it?”

She came across, snatched the paper out of his hands, twisted it into a crumpled pad, and pointed out the place with one finger.

“You must go and see Herrick at once. Demand to see the original of that letter.”

Porteous Hammersly was reading, with his head poked forward, and a frown on his forehead. He was aware that his wife was talking and walking up and down, but he did not take in what she said. That letter had paralysed him.

“Go and see Herrick at once. He must produce the original of that letter, or contradict himself and apologise.”

Hammersly gave her a bewildered and inquiring look.

“What did you say, Sophia?”

“Haven’t you read that letter yet?”

He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes as though he had been asleep.

“Yes, I have read it, dear. It is very—very unexpected. I don’t see——”

“I want that man Herrick to produce the original, his authority——”

“But—why——?”

“I don’t believe my son could write such a letter.”

Porteous Hammersly looked at her with a tragic mingling of shrewdness and bewilderment.

“Pierce must have written it, Sophia.”

“Good heavens! I want you to go and see Herrick——”

“But—my dear, Herrick would never have invented such a letter. How could he? It’s inconceivable—in every way. The boy wrote it; he must have written it.”

Sophia Hammersly stared at him with round eyes in a bloodless face. Her husband’s tired, resigned voice convinced her.

“Then how dared he write it! It is making us ridiculous. Such a letter in that wretched local rag! I don’t understand it; I don’t understand men. And after all that we have suffered!”

She stormed towards the door.

“I’ll not stay in the place; I refuse to stay here. I shall go to Harrogate at once. I refuse to stay here and be ridiculed and pitied. There are limits to what a woman should bear.”

Old Hammersly watched her out of the room, and then sat down and stared at the fire with an air of utter helplessness.

CHAPTER XXIII

And so Janet found him, sitting hunched up before the fire, his fine full-blooded pride in life deflated, his eyes almost vacant; an old man to whom a great sorrow had discovered his own loneliness.

She knew at once that he had seen that letter; the paper itself lay on the floor beside his chair.

"So I have found you alone."

He perked up instantly like a ruffled bird on a perch, pushed his chair back, straightened his waistcoat, and managed to smile. She saw a surreptitious foot thrust the paper under the table.

"Bless my soul! I never heard you come in. This is earliness—with a vengeance."

He sleekened with some of his habitual cheeriness, and continued:

"I suppose you have had breakfast? Yes? Well, come and sit down. I ought to be at the office, but I shall insist now on being late. And what does this energy mean—shopping?"

She understood that he imagined her to be innocent of all knowledge of that letter, and that he was planning to keep her in ignorance of it, just as she had been planning to keep it from him. His affectionate reticence touched her. She had not come there to be saved from pain, and Porteous Hammersly was to find in her a creature of fine and unexpected strength.

"You need not try and hide that paper under the table."

"Which paper?"

Her compassionate, wise eyes held his.

"That wretched *Scarshott Advertiser*. Yes, I have seen it. There is nothing more to be said, is there? I think that the worst that could happen has happened to us now."

She drew a chair up close to his.

"Do you want me to talk, or shall we just be silent?"

"I was trying to think things out, dear—when you came. I have never had to face such a problem. I'm a bit bewildered."

She laid her hand on his.

"I know. So was I—at first; it was like being lost in a fog. And then—suddenly—everything showed up clearly. But I want you to tell me how you feel."

His hand closed on hers. He stared at the fire for a while, silent, absorbed, and then he began to talk, and to give her a pathetic and disjointed picture of life as he saw it at that moment. He showed no bitterness against Pierce; his one desire was to help him.

"Of course, he has taken up an impossible position, and yet I can understand how it all happened—even his writing that mad letter."

"It never ought to have been written," she said quietly.

"But can't you imagine——"

"I can understand how a man might feel, but no man ought to have written that letter."

He looked at her a little anxiously.

"My dear—has it changed you?"

"How could one help being changed by it? But I am trying to think of Pierce as a sick man whom a soul-fever has made irresponsible."

"My dear girl—I know. There is a lot of me in Pierce."

"Perhaps the best of him."

He smiled half-heartedly.

"You are trying to help me—by flattery. But then—there is the future that he has to face. One must realise the popular prejudices, the scandal. I haven't told you yet about his mother. It's an instance in point."

"Yes?"

"My wife is a very peculiar woman. She cannot face the scandal—and she is going away."

He spoke as though he were apologising for Sophia Hammersly.

"It is beyond me. One ought to stand by one's children. Of course, she is bitterly disappointed—but even then——"

"She will change her mind."

Porteous's face showed that he had no illusions as to his wife's temper.

"I doubt it. She is a very extraordinary woman; she never could bear having her comfort or her peace of mind interfered with. She will go to Harrogate and play the invalid. And now—about Pierce?"

"He will come back here?"

"I suppose so. But what is his future going to be? What can we do—you and I? A man chooses his own fate; I'm

not trying to blind myself to the facts, for that letter has only made things worse. He seems to think he can defy Scarshott, everybody—all England.”

She did not answer him for a while, but remained absorbed in thought, and Porteous Hammersly watched her with the beginnings of a blind faith in her courage.

Presently she began to speak.

“It will be very difficult. There are natures that cannot be driven or preached at; I am like that—so I know. With me there must be some great emotional appeal; a blaze of white light; an ideal of self-sacrifice. I believe there are men who would go dancing to meet death if beautiful music were being played to them. You have to touch their souls, and we English are such fumlbers, so mute and stupid, that I have often doubted whether England has a soul.”

Hammersly nodded.

“You are almost arguing—for him. Supposing a man did not love this mute, uncouth country?”

“But you cannot end it there. This war is not parochial, or merely national. If all our men had been too proud—or too clever—to soil their hands in this great cleansing, what would have happened to us—to all decent honourable people—to me?”

He looked at her with a gleam of understanding.

“You mean—that a woman has a right——?”

“To claim that the man should be willing to fight for her, and for all that she means. Isn’t that an elemental, human truth? A man cannot shirk such things. And that is why the plain mass of people are right, utterly right, in agreeing to suffer and win this war. We are England now—all of us. We have discovered England—and ourselves. We are learning what solidarity, comradeship and courage mean. We cannot afford to have brilliant and paradoxical objectors. That is why the common man and woman will be right when they show Pierce no mercy.”

She spoke with a passion that startled him, and a conviction that left him convinced.

“My dear, how did you think this out? But then—of course, it is plain and obvious when you look at it in that way. You have been telling me—what I have been afraid to tell myself. Pierce will have no mercy shown him. But you——?”

His eyes searched her face eagerly.

“But—I——?”

“You will show him mercy; you will not leave him to be broken?”

He stretched out a hand and laid it on her knee.

“Think—think, he may have been a sensitive, arrogant fool——”

“My dear, I am not deserting him.”

“You mean it?”

Her eyes lit up with poignant compassion. Her face seemed to soften and to glow as he looked at her.

“If I love him—I love him. And have I no forefeeling of what he will have to bear, of what I shall have to bear—and make him bear—if he still loves me?”

“Of course—how could he help it? But what will you make him bear?”

She drew him nearer.

“Don’t you know that when a woman has had some ghastly news sent her, that she is not on the way to being comforted until she has broken down and wept.”

“Yes—in a way; yes.”

“Pierce is in the same phase—the stark, staring, bitter stage. He has got to weep, Father; to be humiliated—not by others——”

“But by you?”

“If he loves me still—but not grossly, obviously. He has got to be humbled by himself—through me—through my lost pride. It must come through someone whom he loves; through me—or through you. Now do you understand me?”

He kissed her hands.

“The devil shall be cast out of my son! And your love shall cast it out. Oh, self, self—and the heart of a woman! And yet you will be gentle with him?”

“Has this war found any use for viragoes?”

“What a head and heart you have! Of course! Why, I see light, and a little hope. And some day you will make a man of him—not a man like Gerard?”

Her eyes flashed.

“No, God helping us—both. I should like that picture taken down, Father. That Hammersly tradition needs breaking.”

CHAPTER XXIV

Three days later Pierce Hammersly came home, walking out of Scarshott Station into the thin sunlight of a fine November afternoon. He had warned no one of his coming. Cripps, the lame porter, more inarticulate and sulky than ever, piled Hammersly's baggage into the King's Head bus, slammed the door, and did not wait for a tip.

"Orl right. Nothin' more. He's walkin'."

The driver watched Hammersly swinging up the road to the town.

"Don't see much sign of the husks," he said; "he's got new clothes on, anyway."

There was nothing of the prodigal about Hammersly. He re-entered Scarshott as an aggressor, admirably turned out in mufti, a handsome fellow enough, "a regular buck," as the driver of the King's Head bus expressed it. He carried his head high, and his eyes had a hard light in them. He looked squarely and insolently into the faces of the people he met, compelling himself to challenge them, and doing it well.

Hammersly did not flinch from the first attack. He made his advance up Scarshott High Street, stopping to look into the windows of familiar shops, or turning into Mr. Vicar's garage to inquire the price of petrol.

"Two and a penny, sir," said that worthy. "And—well, I'm damned, but he's bounced me!" as Hammersly disappeared across the street.

Pierce "bounced" quite a number of people on his way through Scarshott. He took them by surprise, asked coolly and cheerfully after their well-being, and was off before they could collect their patriotic wits and snub him.

"Well, Mr. Hunt, how are you?"

And Mr. Hunt would stare and respond with the social reflex.

"Quite well, sir, thank you, and how are——?"

By that time Hammersly would be past and away, leaving the honest patriot to realise that he had insulted his own self-respect by not remembering to be rude.

Hammersly did not bear straight for Orchards, but turned down Mill Street to the tannery. Women standing in doorways gaped at him, and then clumped together in gossiping groups. He left a track of sensationalism behind him. His sang-froid and his insolence were no better than the sang-froid and the insolence of a vulgar adventurer or a crook; but he had lost his sense of the public fitness of things and the saving grace of humour.

"Well, Moss, how are you?"

The old porter at the tannery gate nearly fell off his stool.

"Not so bad, sir."

"Is Mr. Porteous here?"

"In the office, sir."

Porteous Hammersly was alone in his private room, sitting at his oak desk, a drawer open on either side of him. He turned his head and saw his son in the doorway, and for a moment neither of them moved or spoke.

"My dear boy!"

He pushed his chair back and rose, dropping his pince-nez among his papers.

Pierce closed the door. The defiant pose melted out of him when he saw his father's face.

"Dear old Dad—I wonder whether you are pleased to see me?"

"Don't talk nonsense. Sit down here. I'll get the cigars."

He bustled out to smother his emotion, brought out the cigars, poked the fire, and pushed one of the big leather chairs forward.

Pierce's upper lip quivered.

"Of course—you know everything?"

"Everything."

The father's eyes avoided the son's.

"Well, I'm up against the whole world. It is Uncle Gerard over again; and I'm going to fight through just as Gerard did. They have branded me, and I'm proud of the brand."

Porteous made a weak attempt to get him down from his high altitude.

"Sit down, my dear boy. Now, I want to hear the whole truth. Well, supposing you tell me to-night; you see, Janet would not show me your letter——"

"Why not?"

"Well, I think——"

He floundered, and Pierce followed him in his flounderings. They sat and looked at each other uneasily, sensing all sorts of complexities and implications, reserves and fears, in the silence that followed. Pierce had only to ask himself one very obvious question in order to discover a new problem.

"How is Janet?"

“Quite well.”

“I mean—has she changed?”

“In what way?”

“To me?”

He was afraid, and he showed his fear.

“Janet is a very fine woman, Pierce; an exceptional woman. I must leave you and Janet to each other.”

“But was she so much—upset?”

His father looked at him curiously.

“Well, just imagine. But Janet won’t fail you.”

“She’ll understand. I feel, Pater, that both of you will understand; I don’t care about anybody else; I don’t care what they say or think. And the mater——?”

“She’s away—at Harrogate.”

“Piqued?”

“My dear boy, it was not very easy for any of us. But, of course, you had reasons—you must have had reasons——”

Pierce tossed his head like a swimmer throwing off spray.

“Reasons? I should think I had! People have no idea what militarism means, nor had I till I went on active service. At home—it is just a question of good manners, being polite to your Colonel, trying not to get red in the face when someone tells you off; but out there—good God!—what a difference! I suppose if your Colonel is a gentleman and human things are not so bad, but if he happens to be a beast, he can make your life hell.”

“I suppose one does not realise——”

“As I tell you, Dad, I did not—till I found myself in the power of a man who was half a Cromwell and half a cad. All the other fellows were afraid of him. Why? Because your little Colonel-god can send you slap up against a machine-gun or keep you playing cards with him in the mess. Good heavens!—the fawning and toadying I have seen. It made me sick. And I did not hit it with Barnack—our C.O. He was the sort of man who believed in making or breaking, and he worked his theories on me. I had all the dirty jobs. I might have risen to it if the man had been human, but he wasn’t—and I kicked.”

His father’s face seemed to have grown thin and shadowy, for dusk was falling, and the fire did not give out much light.

“It never crossed my mind that men could be penalised.”

“People at home don’t suspect all that. Well, I have had that experience; I have had my taste of the English spirit, Dad, and it has made me an anarchist, an outlaw—if you like. I’m out against society——”

Porteous put out an appealing hand.

“I know, I can understand, but, my dear boy, let us try and face things calmly; you have got to go on living, and individual injustices don’t count in this war. It is too big, I suppose.”

“It’s the Machine; it is a machine, and nothing more.”

“I know. But Pierce——”

“Well, Dad?”

“Try and remember Janet. We three must stand together, and if you have suffered—try and remember that we have suffered too. Now, let’s be getting home. I’ll tell Moss to ’phone for the car.”

“Why not walk, Dad?”

And then Pierce Hammersly received one of his first great shocks. He realised that his father was shy of walking up Mill Street; that he was afraid of Scarshott; that life had taken on new shames, new bittermesses, new complexities.

So they drove to Orchards and had tea in the library, and talked of unimportant things, like men afraid of touching upon the truth. Gerard Hammersly’s portrait had been taken down, but in the half light Pierce did not notice that it had gone. He was in a fever to see Janet, to pour out his tale to her, to justify himself, to discover how near her heart beat to his, for his father’s reticences had shaken him a little, and he was less sure of himself than he had been an hour ago. A man can give scorn for scorn when some casual enemy makes a mouth at him, but when those who love him show eyes that are shamed and sad, then his self-pride is apt to melt like wax.

He slipped away out of the house and along the avenue of elms all bleak and dim in the grey autumn darkness. The road was soft with the pulp of fallen leaves, but overhead dry stars were shining. There seemed something incredible about this home-coming, a strangeness that he could not overpass. The surroundings were so familiar, the great trees and the white posts and rails, but the self that had returned with him was a strange, new, unhappy self—a spirit of discords, arrogancies, doubts, dismays. For weeks he had known nothing but loneliness—the sensitive, armed loneliness of a man wandering through a savage and hostile country. And now—he was going to see her, the woman who held the magic fire in her bosom!

And suddenly he realised that he was afraid. Of what? Of her eyes, her voice, the poise of her head, of what she

might say to him. He faltered on the dark edge of Scarshott Common. It was as though his old self had been stunned and wounded, and was now struggling back to consciousness, to find that tragic and desperate things had happened.

He fought with himself and went on.

Of course, she would understand, side with him, play the comrade. What was he afraid of? Janet was not the meek, conventional creature, the slave of social inadequacies; a mere impressionable girl.

He saw a light in one of the upper windows of the cottage, but the rest of the little house seemed to be in darkness. Pierce hesitated a moment at the gate, conscious of a strange and incalculable force within there that could not be estimated or defied. What would she say to him; what would he see in her eyes? For the first time that rebel pride of his faltered and came near uttering a despairing cry; he wanted those arms of hers round his neck; he wanted to be understood, comforted.

Walking up the gravel path, and knocking at the door, the thought crossed his mind that there was a poignant romanticism even in such objects as brick and timber porches and brass door-knockers. He touched the rough walls with sensitive fingers. After all, it was femininity that counted; Gallipoli had taught him that, with its mob of sick and depressed men in dirty khaki, and never a petticoat or any homelike thing to be seen. For Hammersly it was a moment of passionate and tense expectancy, his waiting there in the darkness and wondering how she would welcome him.

He heard footsteps and the sound of a lock being turned. The door opened slowly.

“Who is it?”

“Janet—can’t you guess?”

It seemed to him that a soft, warm perfume floated out as the door opened.

“You——? Pierce?”

“Yes—at last.”

Her hands and face were white in the dusk. She seemed to falter a little, hold back.

“Janet—may I come in?”

Something in his voice cried out to the woman in her, with a whisper of loneliness and pain.

Her hands went out to him.

“I have been waiting——”

And Hammersly’s pride burst like a skin of fermenting wine. He found himself kissing those hands of hers, and shedding tears over them. She closed the door and mothered him into the little room where a fire glowed red; a room that was full of mystery and warmth, soft shadows and the dearness of her presence.

“Come——”

She sat down in a low basket-chair before the fire, and with the ingenuousness of a child he stretched himself on the rug with his head resting on her knees.

“Janet——”

“Dear man——”

“I wondered whether you would let me come back to you.”

“But you must trust me.”

“I want to tell you everything. Shall we be left alone?”

“Mother has been ill; she is in bed.”

“I’m sorry, dear.”

He turned his head and looked at her intently.

“I wonder what you think of me? Would you be ashamed to walk through Scarshott?”

The firelight lit her face, and he saw that her eyes were very sad.

“No—not yet.”

“Why do you say not yet?”

“Because I still believe in you. And now tell me everything, and I want you to talk as though you were talking to your own inner self and not to me.”

He turned his face towards the fire, and lay resting against her knees, and her hands lay on his shoulders. She hoped for humility, a frank confession of a new faith from him; but her tenderness had warned and revived his egotism, and from the beginning he talked to justify himself, accusing everybody, condemning everything. England was rotten, the army a mere stomach on legs, its organisation contemptible. The men who had volunteered were being sacrificed with cynical indifference, while the politicians polished the boots of the shirkers at home. He had seen the English fighting man and he wanted to see no more of him. There was no doubt about the nation being decadent; everybody had lost faith out there, and why should a man throw his life away because some fanatical cad gave him all the dirty work to do?

But Janet’s eyes were full of a great sadness. He had not learnt his lesson yet, and she knew that she would have to help him to learn it.

CHAPTER XXV

So Pierce Hammersly began life anew in Scarshott, driving down daily to the tannery and taking up the duties of junior partner without enthusiasm, and with no settled purpose to steady him. He shared the private room with his father, but he noticed that Porteous stayed more frequently at home, pottering about alone in his glasshouses, or going to sleep in front of the library fire. Father and son appeared to have come to a tacit understanding in their attitude towards Pierce's past and future. It was an attitude of silence, of nervous and uncomfortable reserve. Both men avoided the one vital issue, and this silence created a certain constraint that was like grit in the wheels of life.

Pierce had prepared himself for an atmosphere of active enmity so far as Scarshott was concerned; he had expected tangible evidences of the town's hostility, but nothing sensational occurred. At first he was a little surprised, nonplussed. He was out to be challenged, and no one challenged him; people were curiously silent; if he went into a shop there was silence; the clerks in the office were like so many dumb creatures whenever he passed through it. He saw nothing but a sort of cold curiosity on the faces of the people whom he met, and this chilling and sinister interest blew like a perpetual wind through the passage of each day.

A man can deal with tangible and physical attacks, but he cannot fight a fog. Scarshott gave Hammersly no chance of making any passionate assault upon its silence, of justifying himself, of giving it a lecture on psychology. The town turned his defiant home-coming into a pathetic anti-climax; it just stared at him coldly and contemptuously, and left him alone.

Once only was he subjected to any sort of exhibition of popular disapproval, and that when half a dozen urchins in brown paper cocked hats, marching down Mill Street, and carrying toy guns and wooden swords, set themselves at his heels, shouting: "Cowardy, cowardy custard, couldn't touch no mustard." A few people laughed, but Hammersly reached the tannery gate white as chalk and cold with shameful anger.

Old Moss drove the youngsters off.

"Now, you boys, get along with you."

But from that day Hammersly never walked down one of the meaner streets of Scarshott. He went everywhere in his car, driving it himself, his eyes fixed on the road ahead of him.

There were the people whom he did not know, and there were the people whom he knew. The first week or so he forced himself to stop and speak to acquaintances, holding his head high and looking them in the eyes. He found them curiously mute, irresponsive, inattentive. They said the most trite and obvious things, and seemed in a hurry to edge away. On one occasion he compelled himself to go to a small social affair in place of his father, and he noticed the sudden silence that fell when he and Janet entered the room. This silence challenged him. He moved about, making himself audaciously pleasant, but found no eyes that smiled. They were cold, curious, expectant. When he attached himself to a group of older men who were discussing some piece of parochial business, and forced himself half aggressively into the discussion, he found that no one listened to what he said. His voice was no more than so much sound. He simply did not count.

Driving away from the place with Janet in the car, he let fall some words of bitterness.

"What provincials these people are!"

"Do you think so?"

He noticed that she did not look at him.

"Assuredly."

"I think they are just average men and women. You cannot expect them to be much else."

He said no more, for her proud, unhappy face hurt him.

But there were certain people whom Hammersly could not bring himself to meet. His courage failed towards them, and in his secret heart a kind of hatred made the thought of meeting them intolerable. They were the few people whom he had liked, people who had interested him. Grace Hansard, old Roger Wendover, Chalford the doctor, and a few more. Nor could he escape from the significance of his own dread of these old friends. They were people who counted, people whose views of life could not be despised. His own reluctance to come into human contact with them shocked him, made him suspect that he was less of the iron rebel than he had thought.

And Janet?

She would lie awake at night, her face burning, loving Pierce and hating him, very miserable and very proud. She had framed and chosen her most wise and tender part; it was her business to endure it, waiting, hoping, believing in the inevitable end.

And this man of hers never guessed how she suffered. It did not occur to him to imagine what Scarshott said of her; that she had caught her man and his money, and that she did not mean to surrender them.

"I can't understand a girl of any character remaining engaged to a man like that."

"She ought to be ashamed."

People judge so easily, more especially the people who have never suffered. There were a few whose vision went deeper, and who saw and understood.

Grace Hansard had that vision. It was very strange to Janet that Grace was so gentle, so free from all bitterness in her attitude towards Pierce. She did not judge; she explained, sympathised.

Janet went to Vine Court more often than Pierce suspected. It was like stealing into a warm, still place out of the wind. She found that she could talk to Grace without any feeling of dishonour.

"Of course, I believe that there can only be one end to it. But he has got to discover it for himself. Meanwhile—it's heartbreaking."

Grace made her sit on a cushion at her feet, and stroked her hair.

"I know. But some day there will be an awakening. I know Pierce almost as well as you do, dear; you have to touch such men, touch them to tears. Oh, I believe in him."

"What soft hands you have. I want to bring him here. May I?"

"Of course. But Janet——"

"Dear?"

"I hope he will not come."

"You mean, he will not have the courage?"

"Not that—in a sense. But I hope that he will be too sensitive. He must be thinking—thinking all the time. He and my man were friends—and my man lies dead out there. Do not ask him yet."

"And when I do——?"

"If he refuses"—she bent over Janet—"then, the real man in him is awake; he will be near—very near. Yes, I believe it will happen."

Old Hammersly had aged. He had lost his jauntiness, that cheery and sententious confidence in men and things that had cloaked and covered up inherent diffidences. He troubled less about his clothes; his buttonhole forgot to blossom; he had a shrunken look, and an almost furtive lowering of the eyes. A great talker—one of those shrewd, babbling, kindly fellows—he had grown silent and frowningly thoughtful. There were times when he went wandering about the place with a bewildered and baffled air, as though life had tricked him and left him with empty pockets.

Pierce could not but notice the change in his father; his depression was so obvious that it was like straw spread in a street outside a house where someone lay deadly sick. There was an air about him, too, that said: "No inquiries, please." And Pierce felt himself perpetually accused by his father's melancholy, by the way he hid himself at home, even by his sudden bursts of artificial cheerfulness. They never discussed the situation; both of them left this skeleton locked in the cupboard; they ceased to be able to talk to each other in the old frank, friendly way.

Janet was often at Orchards when Pierce was at the tannery, and there were secret conferences between Porteous Hammersly and his future daughter, confidences in which she admonished him with wise courage.

"I have not given up hope, dear. But you must go on in the same way; of course—he notices it——"

"One may feel rather desperate, child, but it seems like stabbing the boy in the back, this playing on his better feelings."

"Don't you see that it is inevitable? A time will come when he will realise that he has not convinced the real people—the people who matter."

"And then——"

"He will not be able to convince himself. It is bitter for all of us, but it is the only way."

To Pierce she played the good comrade, though there were times when she could not bear him to touch her. These cold moods troubled him, for it was when he needed her most that she seemed to hold aloof. Yet there were moments when she kissed him with passion, the passion that goes before a parting, and again he would go away unhappy, dreading the doubts that pressed upon him more and more. For a whole day she would baffle him with a mysterious reserve, a silence that was not mere moodiness. He became aware of a look of expectancy in her eyes, as though she were watching and waiting for something to happen, and this look of hers filled him with a feeling of tragic insecurity. He saw himself standing alone on the edge of a cliff with darkness under his feet.

And then a certain vulgar incident drew blood from his soul. It was market day in Scarshott, and Pierce was driving through the town with Janet in the Singer, circumnavigating droves of sheep and cattle, and being irritated by the leisurely cussedness of the people in country carts. He felt in a hurry, a mere mood, for he had nothing to hurry for, and at the corner of the market-place he collided with a hawker's barrow. It was the hawker's fault, for he turned his barrow across the road, ignoring the sound of Hammersly's horn, and not troubling to glance round to see what was behind him. Anyhow, the barrow was overset, and a collection of vegetables and fruit spread about the road.

Hammersly lost his temper.

"Why the devil didn't you keep to your own side, you damned fool?"

The hawker was a hook-nosed, red-eyed scoundrel in an old bowler hat, one of Scarshott's bad characters, a fomenter of strife in low taverns. He screamed like an angry bird at Hammersly.

“That’s it—that’s like a gen’leman, ain’t it? Why didn’t yer blow yer blasted trumpet?”

“I did blow it, you fool.”

“Nar yer didn’t. And look ’ere——”

Hammersly was white with rage. He felt Janet touch his arm.

“Please drive on.”

The hawker was standing in front of the car, jerking his arms up and down like an animated scarecrow.

“Look ’ere, who’s callin’ names, hey?”

“Get out of the way, man. Send in the bill for all that stuff, I’ll pay for it.”

“Get out of the way, is it? Pay for it, will yer?”

Hammersly raced his engine and let the clutch in slowly, the hawker side-stepping and hollowing his figure so that the near mud-guard just missed his waistcoat.

“Yah! And who was kicked ’ome because ’e was a coward. That’s class justice, that is; a pore man would a’ bin shot.”

Hammersly edged the car through a gathering and an unfriendly crowd. He could have killed some of those people; pulped them as the wheels of his car pulped some of the hawker’s oranges.

“The swine!”

And then he became conscious of Janet. She had drawn a little apart and was sitting there with a rigid, haughty look, her eyes set in a cold stare. Her face was almost colourless, her lips pale. And of a sudden Pierce Hammersly’s anger died out of him. He understood in an instant the shameful significance of all that had happened. That beast in the battered hat had struck home; he had drawn blood from Janet’s pride.

Pierce said nothing, for he could find nothing to say, and by his own silence he was judged.

CHAPTER XXVI

They had tea together before the library fire; Janet at the brass tea tray, very grave and silent; Porteous Hammersly sunk in one of the big armchairs; Pierce restless and gloomy, seated farther back in the shadow, as though he feared the light upon his face. He was absorbed in watching Janet, without appearing to watch her, for there was something in her eyes that he had never seen before; a something that made it difficult for him to meet their gaze. He did not know whether it was pity or whether it was scorn, but the finer manhood in him shrank from it, and remained silent and ashamed.

She talked to Porteous across the light of the fire, and Pierce noticed how steady and white her hands were when she touched the things upon the tray. He had a clear view of her profile, and the soft lines of her hair and throat. She seemed to have developed a new dignity, a sad and quiet stateliness that made him suddenly remember his vulgar, tempestuous altercation with that drink-sodden beast in Scarshott market-place. He felt himself flush with the shame of it. He realised that he had behaved like an irritable ill-balanced, badly-bred fool. Good God! Was he really like that—a petulant and excitable ass; a fellow who lost control of himself when he was thwarted, or when other people got in his way?

Then Janet was rising and putting on her hat, with Porteous protesting against her going so soon.

She smiled down at him as she ran the hatpins through her hair.

“I have been away for three whole hours. Mother likes to be read to after tea.”

Her eyes swept round to Pierce who was still sitting well back in the shadow.

“You need not bother to come with me.”

Her voice was very kind and quiet.

“Of course I am coming.”

He stood up, challenged by his own fear, for if Hammersly had ever feared anything, he was afraid of that walk to Heather Cottage with Janet in the darkness. He knew that he had hurt her that afternoon, and that the Janet who stood there in the firelight had become a woman of mystery, of tragic accusations, griefs and gentleness.

It was a particularly dark evening, and Pierce was glad of the darkness. He knew every turn and twist of the drive, but to Janet it was less familiar, and he had to guide her.

“More this way.”

“My eyes haven’t got accustomed to it yet.”

He did not slip his arm through hers as he would have done even a few days ago, for somehow he felt that it would be an insult if he touched her, and so he held himself a little apart, very miserable and self-contemptuous.

“Are we near the gate?”

“Yes.”

“I can see the elms now. One really ought to have a torch.”

“I’ll get you one to-morrow.”

She was just a shadowy figure at his side; a poignant, tantalising presence that dominated all his unhappy pride. He wondered what her thoughts were; whether he had angered her beyond forgetting; made himself wholly contemptible. The rebel in him had surrendered with such strange swiftness that he felt bewildered, lost, and most piteously lonely.

And then she began to talk to him of Grace Hansard and the children at Vine Court, and of how Hansard had died so bravely; how he had been brave in spite of himself, and of Grace’s sacred pride in him. She spoke gently and quite naturally, as though she were telling him a tale, and as he listened to her voice Hammersly’s heart smote him and all his bitterness turned to pain. A sudden wild scorn of himself gripped him by the throat. He found himself envying Hansard; envying that dead man whom women spoke of with such tenderness.

“Pierce——”

He started. They were quite near the cottage, and a dim light showed in one of the windows.

“Will you come and see Grace with me to-morrow?”

He would rather she had asked him to go out and be shot.

“No.”

“But why not?”

“She does not want to see me.”

“You are quite wrong. She does.”

He answered her sullenly, miserably.

“I don’t want to see her. I did not know you had seen her lately.”

“We became great friends while you were away. I think her a wonderful woman. Good night, dear.”

She slipped through the gate and closed it behind her.

“Don’t wait; I think it’s going to rain. Good night.”

She left him standing there, haunted by the persuasiveness of her voice and the subtlety of her abrupt retreat. He felt that something lay behind that desire of hers that he should go up to Vine Court with her to-morrow. How could he go? And in asking and answering that question he seemed to thrust open a closed door and to let a great rush of light into his soul.

What a judgment of Solomon! How simply and wonderfully she had contrived to make him prove himself to himself by challenging him to meet Grace Hansard. She had guessed that he would shrink and falter; that he would betray himself by refusing to go near Vine Court. And he had betrayed himself; she had dared the defiant devil in him and seen it sulk and flinch from the ordeal; she had made him disclose his own moral bankruptcy.

He remained at the gate awhile, resting his elbows on it, listening, hoping that she would take pity on him and come back to see if he had gone. Never in his life had he felt so miserable and so lonely. With a few gentle and miraculous touches she seemed to have broken the iron of his pride, shown himself to himself, brought him to the edge of a terrible awakening. Had he been right or wrong; was he a weak fool, an emotional idiot at the mercy of a clever woman? Yet, why should she want to make him confess that he had not the courage—the insolence—to meet Grace Hansard's eyes? Damnation, but she was right! He had not the courage to meet Grace Hansard; to go into that house and prattle about England's decadence; to look into the eyes of Hansard's wife and say: "I am satisfied; I have nothing to regret." It was unthinkable, blasphemous, absurd!

But no Janet returned to him out of the darkness, and he walked back over Scarshott Common like a man bewildered, and still half dazed by some dire blow. He was conscious of pain, spiritual nausea, shame, wonder, and an almost savage hatred of his own soul. Two figures held the stage before him—the figure of that beast of a hawkker flapping his arms and screaming abuse, and the figure of Grace Hansard, that brown-eyed, clear-browed woman, whose man had left her a dear legacy of pride.

From that moment there was no more unhappy man in Scarshott than Pierce Hammersly. Self-knowledge had come to him like a flash of divine revelation. It was April after March; greenness and soft rains and a note of exquisite pain instead of bluster and dust, hard skies and mocking swirls of sleet. He discovered that a man cannot live alone, cut himself off from the world of common people, or carry a light heart without a sense of comradeship and spiritual well-being. His eyes were opened; he began to see the crass and monstrous treachery of a vindictive egotism at such a time as this.

But the ultimate humility was not his as yet; he went about sullenly, miserably, realising that he had not convinced the people who mattered; that he had put them in a position to be pitied by the very people whom he had despised. He understood now Scarshott's attitude towards himself; that silence, those looks of cold curiosity. He had been making a melodramatic fool of himself all these weeks; trying to strut above the level of the town; throwing a defiance at it that had broken harmlessly against Scarshott's unimaginative common sense.

Hammersly had hated anything in khaki, and now he began to fear it, being tempted to face about or turn down a side street whenever he sighted a man in brown. The war was becoming abominably aggressive, demanding more and more of the life of the country, forcing itself into every home, or like Death—stealing up and touching men upon the shoulder. England was passing through a very necessary period of pessimism; the adventurous spirit had gone, and a new inspiration was needed to convince the cautious, bide-your-time gentlemen that they would have to take their share in wet-blanketing the German fever. The slow and casual British soul began to realise that the war was no newspaper affair, no sensational interlude; but that it was life itself, remorseless and splendid, a stark fight for elemental things.

In his heart of hearts Pierce Hammersly knew this, and the truth confronted him with an ever-increasing sternness. Man is a nation in miniature, and the consciousness of a nation is made up of the massed psychical experiences of individual men. Even the most selfish people began to glimpse the sacrifices that were ahead of them, but in the souls of the true men and women a new courage and a new faith were born.

No one will ever forget the squeals of the weaklings, the elaborate arguments why such and such men should stop at home, the consternation of the flabby folk, the rush for birth certificates and marriage licenses. It was the death-struggle of Britain's selfishness, her little individual egotisms, her back-parlour hypocrisies. The army of France watched this national soul-storm with wonder, bitterness, and an occasional jeer. There were so many people rushing to "do their bit" in comfort and security. Who could sell stockings over a counter if Mr. So-and-So went away? "Yank all the blighters out here" was the Tommy's inward verdict; "doing your bit in a bed, what!" The Voluntary System still spluttered and argued: "We are free people." Yes—but—when hundreds of thousands volunteer themselves out of danger! Thomas, the plain man, had no use for such cowardly blather.

And Pierce found himself more and more fascinated by this last querulous fight for freedom, the wriggings and ingenious complainings of the weak and the crooked, the selfish and the greedy, the objectors who objected to everything that placed them under any national restraint. He took an almost morbid personal interest in the great question; it touched his conscience, challenged his unhappy pride. He saw that England had been divided into two great factions: the generous, honourable folk who had given themselves in the beginning; and the grudging, careful,

gun-shy citizens who shouted for the voluntary principle in order that the grim honesty of Conscription might never see the light.

He had belonged in the beginning to the gentry of Britain; that fine family that had included bricklayers, butchers, baronets, intellectualists, men from off the soil. But he no longer belonged to it. He found that he had joined himself to that other mass of humanity: the people who argued and wrote letters to the papers, and talked about the number of their children, their own ages, how indispensable they were at home, and how they were waiting for the other man over the way to make up his mind. In fact, he was worse than these poor worried loiterers obsessed by all manner of domestic dreads. He had belonged to the aristocracy of Britain; the aristocracy whose blue blood was courage; he was renegade; he had deserted to join the ranks of the army that wanted to fight by proxy.

And then Janet again asked him to go with her to Vine Court. They were sitting alone in front of the library fire at Orchards, and the wind was making a great stir in the elms.

“My dear girl—don’t——”

She saw him flinch like a sensitive child.

“I can’t do it.”

She thrilled with bitter and compassionate exultation. He was very near the edge. His own fate was driving him towards it.

CHAPTER XXVII

There had been a frost overnight, and the frost still held in spite of a clear sky and a pale yellow sun. The lawns at Orchards were painted a pearl grey, the hedges and trees all crusted with silver. Youngsters were sliding on a series of frozen puddles under the elms by the Orchards gate; their breath steamed in the air, and their faces were red and chubby. Some of them had discovered a holly bush—well berried, flaming crimson in the sunlight, like a Christmas beacon just lit. Scarshott town lay white-roofed under a film of soft grey haze, but away on the hills the pine woods were black against a keen blue sky, the dark stems of the trees rising out of a welter of tawny bracken.

There was an exhilaration in the air, a glitter and a mystery even about the hard high road, while Scarshott Common was a little goblin world of strange fantastic beauty, and Janet Yorke, walking through those miniature mountains of frosted furze, carried her head with an adventurous pride. The day had a message for her. Her eyes looked at the world with a deep and laughing tenderness. She believed that her triumph was very near; that her love was about to venture into the dark valley and lead her man back into the brave sunlight.

She laughed at the youngsters sliding on the frozen puddles and hailed them like a man.

“Hallo, you little beggars.”

“Come and slide, miss,” said one of them.

“Ain’t she a pretty lady?” quoth a chubby thing whose stockings looked shocked at having to travel so far to meet her petticoats.

The omen was a happy one. Janet walked up the drive under the glitter of the great elms, and found that man of hers alone before the fire.

“I want to do some shopping. Come with me.”

He looked helplessly at her shining eyes and glowing face.

“You had much better go alone.”

“No—you are coming with me.”

“Shall I go and get the car?”

“It is not the day for the car. We are going to walk.”

Her exultant and prophetic vitality dominated him, carried him away, like a sick man who needed thrusting out into the clean air and the sunshine. He had no wish to walk through Scarshott and loiter in shops with her, for he had grown so acutely sensitive of late that he had hardly shown himself in the town. But he was so much afraid now of his own cowardice that he could not confess it to her, and he went with her with strange docility.

They walked down Scarshott High Street, two sensitive and self-conscious creatures, poignantly alive to all that passed about them. And it happened that the son of a local tradesman, who had done gallantly in France and been given a commission, was home on leave. They chanced on this Second Lieutenant strolling up the High Street, a pleasant-faced and rather shy youngster, with a couple of delighted girls sharing his radiance. One of the great dames of the neighbourhood stopped to congratulate him, but a moment later she cut Pierce Hammersly dead.

In passing the youngster Hammersly tried to meet his frank stare. He failed, and fell into an anguish of self-humiliation. Janet had flushed hotly, feeling that his humiliation was also hers.

“Who was that?”

Her eyes were a gleam, her upper lip quivering.

“Young Hardcastle. Where do you want to go?”

She knew that the street had suddenly become a place of public torture.

“I don’t think I want to go anywhere.”

“I see.”

He felt savage and miserable.

“Shall we get back home?”

“Yes.”

They walked back to Orchards, with a great red sun looming beyond the naked trees. It shone on Janet’s grave face and thoughtful eyes, but Pierce walked with his head hanging down, saying nothing, and wishing himself dead.

At Orchards they had tea with old Porteous before a fine wood fire—a comfortable tea with hot cakes and buttered toast, and big chairs to lounge in, and yet a most unhappy meal, made up of dreadful silences and of trite words spoken now and again. Porteous Hammersly had the look of a moping bird, his head sunk between his shoulders. And Pierce was thinking of young Hardcastle and his bright-eyed girls, and of the wet trenches in France, and other notable battle corners where the men who had been his friends were carrying on a great tradition.

Presently Janet rose to go. It was done quietly, and yet there was something tensely dramatic in the way she stood looking down at Pierce.

“Are you coming with me?”

“Of course.”

Her voice sounded gentle and very calm, but it made him afraid.

“I suppose it is freezing still. You did not put on the furs I gave you.”

“I’m a warm-blooded creature.”

She went across and kissed Porteous with quiet tenderness, and Pierce felt the pain of the firelight shining on her hair.

The night was fine and dry, and the sky full of crisp stars. Fallen leaves rustled against their feet—leaves that had fallen from the great giant elms overhead. Halfway along the avenue Pierce made a gesture as though he would have taken Janet’s hand, but she repulsed him gently. Their love had come to the crossways, and that night he was to be persuaded to stand and make his choice.

“Pierce——”

“Yes—dear girl?”

“Your father is not in great health.”

“Isn’t he?”

“You must have noticed it.”

The tender intimacy of her voice accused him as she moved at his side, holding herself a little aloof. Yet for the moment Pierce Hammersly could find nothing to say to her. He was afraid, most and acutely and whole-heartedly afraid of her, because he knew that if she were about to give judgment against him it would be a judgment that he could not challenge.

“Haven’t you seen how he has changed?”

He answered her almost sullenly.

“I am not blind. I suppose he is worrying.”

“But—Pierce——?”

“Well?”

“Are you going to let him go on worrying? Don’t think I’m a prig; I’m only most desperately human.”

They had reached the place where a sandy track turned off to the cottage, but Janet passed it by, and walked on slowly towards the pine woods. A great, black headland jutted out towards the road, a cliff of towering trees with the stars dusted thickly above it. The woods were quite open here, with nothing but a dry and shallow ditch to mark them off from the common land, and this great grove ahead of them looked like a huge cavern opening to the underworld, or some mysterious temple whose roof was upheld by a thousand pillars.

Hammersly, following half a step behind Janet, felt the mystery of the place overspreading him like a shade of destiny. This wood of pines had seen the very beginnings of their love, and Hammersly found himself wondering whether it was to see the end and ruin of it.

Then he was aware of Janet speaking to him.

“Do you remember those days in June?”

“Yes—I remember them.”

She paused and looked into his face.

“I was very happy then, even though you were going away, even though I knew that I might never see you again.”

“Perhaps I have suspected it.”

“Is that all that you came to say?”

He hung his head, and remained motionless, dumb, and suddenly she began to speak with passionate sincerity.

“Do you never think of us? Oh, my dear, what a terrible thing it is to be such an egoist! Our love has come to the crossroads, and I cannot follow your road any farther.”

Still he said nothing.

“And yet—I have a feeling—that you will not let us go on bearing everything with a servile, doting pity. Do you want us to pretend forever and ever that our pride in you does not matter—that we are almost as selfish as we seem? I know that man was a beast to you out there; that the other men were fawning cads; but, oh, my dear, haven’t we all of us been punished?”

She was striking home, and he did not try to defend himself. His defiant spirit lay broken.

“Good God, I ought never to have come home. I ought to have shot myself.”

“Oh, man, man, what blindness! Is love nothing; has it no promise, no second awakening?”

Her soft and choking voice was a wounded cry in the darkness, and for a moment Pierce Hammersly stood very still. But in a little while he began to tremble like a man who has struck out wildly in a moment of madness and found blood upon his hand.

“Janet, tell me——”

“What can I tell you? That you are crucifying my love——”

“Crucifying! Good God, yes!”

He fell on his knees at her feet, clasped her, and hid his face in her dress.

“Help me; help me!”

She bent over him in a passion of tenderness.

“Oh, I want to be proud of you, and I can’t, I can’t!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

The mere common man may become a god when some very human cry rings utterly right and true, and so this great thing happened to Pierce Hammersly in that pine wood under the winter stars. A presence that was very near and wonderful bent over him in the darkness, a pride that was bleeding, a compassion that wept strange tears. For she was no weaking, no silly, doting girl, this Janet of his, and he was awed and amazed that she should care so fiercely.

“Good God, what a selfish beast I have been!”

She did not contradict him, for contradiction was not the thing he needed when his pride and his perversity were melting in the white heat of a new humility. She bent over him, clasping his head between her hands, and trembling with an exultant tenderness.

“And now—I can begin to love you again. Yes, I know how it all happened; I am like you, sensitive and rebellious. But then——”

“I was mad, Janet, mad—and most damnably miserable.”

“Dear heart, I should have hated that man, that Barnack, just as you hated him; he is one of the horrors of this war. And now, I want you to forget that man, dear, or change the thought of him for something else.”

“I have been thinking too much of myself, and thinking of you—in the wrong way.”

She gave a little shiver of excitement.

“How cold it is!”

“You have not got your furs! What a self-absorbed fool! Come home.”

He stood up and put an arm about her, nor did she repulse him now, for his vanity had deserted him, and he no longer thought of her love as the thing that he need not strive for.

“How is it that I was so blind?”

“If my man’s eyes are open—now——”

“Yes. But you have opened them. Good heavens, what have I been doing; what sort of fool have I been making of myself? You will have to help me, dear; we have got to go down into the deeps together.”

“I want you to trust me—always.”

“I trusted myself too much. You did well to take away that portrait of old Gerard.”

They passed out of the wood into the starlight and across the strip of common to Heather Cottage. Janet went up for a few moments to see her mother, leaving Pierce alone in the little sitting-room before the unlit fire. He found matches on the mantelpiece and lit it, and kneeling before it, watched the flames grow and spread, and hearing above the crackling of the wood Janet’s voice and footsteps in the room above. While watching the gradual kindling of that fire he fell into a great and tender tranquillity, and felt a glow within him as though life and love had been reborn.

Hearing her footsteps on the stairs, he stood up and turned to meet her.

“Why, there is no light!”

She came in with a sort of mystery, closing the door as though she were shutting out the world.

“I lit the fire for you. It is what you have done for me.”

He took her hands and kissed them.

“I have never learnt so much in so short a time, just while I have been alone here.”

They stood and looked into each other’s eyes.

“If I have hurt you, dear, forgive me.”

“I needed it,” he said quietly; “and I think no other hand could have given me such an honest wound.”

They did not light the lamp, but were content with the half-darkness and the glow of the fire.

Janet sat on a cushion before the hearth, with her man’s head in her lap, her hands holding his, and they talked, or rather Pierce talked, though now and again she prompted him. He talked like a man who had had a bad smash in the hunting field and wanted to explain to himself and to her how it had happened. He seemed to discover a healing force in his new humiliation, for it allowed him to be utterly and humanly natural; it justified his surrender to her, and gave birth to a new and finer spirit of sincerity.

“That is how it strikes me, dear. I did not grasp the bigness of this business. I was just the old sort of young sentimentalist pretending to be a soldier for a year or so. I resented all sorts of things that I ought not to have resented; I hadn’t any proper sense of proportion; I didn’t make allowances for the size of the job we have in hand. In short, I was a selfish brute.”

She took his face between her hands.

“We were all of us growing too selfish, and then the war came.”

“I know. It was not easy for a fat and self-satisfied country like ours to strip itself for a great sacrifice. I have been an England in miniature. There are thousands of men who have gone through the same hell, hating it, hating everything. I think I should have pulled through but for Barnack. I might have behaved like Dick Hansard. Good God! I

wonder when I shall have the courage to meet Grace!”

She fondled him.

“Quite soon; yes, I believe it. And, dear man——”

“Yes.”

“I think we women realise that this war is big and splendid. It convinces me——”

“You mean—it is destiny?”

“Yes. Aren’t we fighting organised brutality; a nation of horrible megalomaniacs, and—most horrible of all—a nation that has no sense of humour, none of the spirit of playfulness?”

His eyes flashed up at her.

“That’s true. We may be a bit fatuous in our sporting ideas, but it is better than calculated blackguardism. We have got to make Germany pass through the hell she has created for other people; she will have to be made so heartsick and weary that she will shut the Blond Beast up in a cellar. Yes, I hadn’t realised the bigness of the business any more than most other people. You know now what was wrong with me?”

“You did not think of me, perhaps, as having a share in it; that I had had to face the thought of sacrificing you. And—and I faced it.”

“Janet, now I begin to understand! Tell me more of that——”

She bent over him and her voice died to a whisper, but Pierce Hammersly’s face began to burn with a new inspiration. He gathered her hands in his and kissed them.

“How utterly right you are! And to think of the pestilent, ill-bred fool I have been! I’ll take my orders from you, Janet.”

“Pierce, I’d love you to be just a plain soldier; just a crusader. You would carry such a cross of splendour.”

“Dear heart——”

“I know what the sacrifice would be—bitter hardships and danger; but you would have given yourself, and I should be so proud.”

He twisted round and knelt before her with shining eyes.

“By God, I’ll do it! I believe I can deserve your pride!”

This emotional experience, which many men would have called heroic rot, sent Pierce Hammersly out into the night a changed man. The great part of life is make-believe; eating and begetting come naturally enough, but all the more complex reactions which we call sentiment depend upon the interplay of the various vanities that civilisation has developed in us. We have to be shown ourselves in mirrors; taught to imitate the fine attitudes and noble gestures of historic or literary heroes. We invent decorations, honours, shames, penalties, and so subtle does the game become that we end by forgetting that all our make-believe is not real. The ape is there behind the mirror, and in Europe the German has taken the place of the ape.

So Pierce Hammersly went high-stepping back to Orchards, full of the fine spirit of honour and self-renunciation poured into him by the generous love of a woman. She had held up a magic mirror to him, and taught him to see in it what she desired him to see.

He found his father dozing in front of the fire, and he tried to be casual—an English cult that has puzzled foreigners.

“I want your opinion, Pater.”

Porteous Hammersly rescued his pince-nez from the depths of the chair.

“Opinion? Of course; what is it?”

“I have made rather a mess of life, Dad, and I think of starting over again. Janet put it into my head. I’m going to enlist.”

“My dear boy!”

And Porteous Hammersly did a most un-English thing. He caught his son by his shoulders and kissed him.

CHAPTER XXIX

At six o'clock the bugles blew the *réveillé*, and the wooden huts became alive with the stirring of many men. The whole camp hailed the grisly darkness of a winter morning with coughings, sneezings, and much unnecessary throwing about of boots. Men lit odd ends of candle and dressed with grudging haste.

Corporal Palk, in charge of D Hut, glanced at the closed doors of the sergeants' cubicles, and bellowed at sundry figures that had not yet emerged from their blankets.

"Now then, tumble up. You, Faggin; the Orderly Room for you, my toff, if you're late on parade again. Curse it! but I've bust my blazing braces!"

Corporal Palk was a characteristic type of the New Army—a plump, stocky Londoner in khaki, by no means up to the Chelsea standard in the matter of physical smartness. He bulged. His legs were too short and too fat about the calves; there was no definite line of demarcation between his chest and his stomach; his neck was short and stubby, and his head too big. He had a round, red, cheerful face, rather pimply, and a wicked humorous nose. But there was the proper sort of manhood in Corporal Palk; he was irrepresible, a cheerful wag, with a wonderfully shrewd knowledge of men and their weaknesses. D Hut knew what discipline meant, for Corporal Palk's tongue was equal to any emergency.

Private Hammersly sat on the end of his bed putting on his puttees. His bed was next to Corporal Palk's.

"I've got a spare pair of braces, Corporal."

"Blimy, didn't I always says that 'ammersly was born to be a universal provider. I'll take 'em on the 'ire purchase. What!"

Someone was sneezing vigorously.

"'Allo, the geysers got it as usual! Why don't you get the doctor bloke to burn the hinside of your nose out, Wiggins?"

"I was born with it," said a blue-nosed youth.

"You'd be useful in summer, layin' the dust!"

The brown figures streamed out in the dusk to the first parade, with a raw wind blowing, and the mud sucking at their boots. Half an hour's brisk drill saw the sun beginning to send a suspicion of a red face above the pine woods of Wiledon Camp. With the blood running warmer in them, and with discipline served by that early discarding of army blankets, the parade was dismissed, and there was a rush for the ablution sheds, where the men washed at long wooden benches, using zinc basins.

"B-r-r-r—it's damned cold!"

So said the late ship's cook, one of Hammersly's pals, a fair, florid, honest soul who had lost two brothers at Loos, and whose one idea in life seemed to be that it was his business to fit himself to bomb, shoot, or bayonet unlimited numbers of Germans.

"Lord, but I wouldn't quarrel with half a day in the Red Sea, with the bacon all juice, and men hating their own shirts!"

Hammersly was washing the soap out of his hair.

"What's for breakfast?"

"Bacon, my boy, and bread and margarine."

"I don't care what it is so long as it's hot."

The D Hut shaved, a dismal and grim affair of concentrated grimacings and set stares. The day touched its limit of discomfort. D Hut felt better after it had shaved, and turned about to attack beds and kits to make the place shipshape. They knew that the cook-house was busy with great cauldrons full of tea and dishes of bacon. Some silly devil, stupid with the cold, would be slicing off the ball of his thumb with the breadcutter. No matter. Breakfast was due.

So Hammersly sat on a wooden form at a deal table between McVittie, the ship's cook, and Lambourne, the gamekeeper, eating bacon off a tin plate, and gloating over his mug of tea. Hundreds of other men were being equally primitive. The great slabs of bread and margarine vanished most healthily. The crowd was cheery and warm and strong. As yet there were no conscripts among them—none of those poor things with "heart trouble," the spiritless victims of the shop and the office.

Then the hard business of the day began, and since the English climate has no sympathy for soldiers in training, unlimited mud and rain helped to tame the habitual grouser. There was abundance of variety in the day's work, for specialisation has made mere infantry drill but a small part of the "recrooty's" education; he bombs, he wears a gas-helmet, he digs dug-outs and trenches, he is taught to cook in his mess-tin, he is inoculated, vaccinated, inspected, lectured, hardened with physical drill. He is trained in musketry, he attacks stuffed sacks with his bayonet, he has to learn to carry his pack and to stick fifteen miles in full marching order. He must dubbin his boots, polish his buckles and buttons, keep his rifle spotlessly clean, or be crimed and given C.B. His hair is cut short; his company officer is interested in his tooth-brush; he is sent to the dentist if his teeth are not what they should be. He is taught how to use

his first field dressing, and told what to do and what not to do when he is wounded. The doctor lectures him on flies and lice, on sanitation and trench feet, and all the little cleanlinesses that mortal man is apt to ignore. He draws his pay once a week across a deal table, and attends Church parade on a Sunday. The windows of his hut must be kept in varying degrees of openness at night; he must not talk after lights out, but he is not forbidden to snore.

Pierce Hammersly went good-temperedly through experiences that would have made him rage less than a year ago. He had his bad days, and there had been occasions when he had had to fight his food and smother a fierce feeling of nausea. But he was still exalted spiritually, and Janet's letters helped to keep him so.

"It is doing me good," he wrote her, "and I keep your proud eyes like a light in front of me. After all, this is the real thing; the men are fine chaps, most of them. I used to be much too stuck up and selfish, but now we are all men together."

As for his past—no one seemed to bother about it, and he played the game so cunningly that he was not suspected of having served before. He even made an ass of himself on occasions, and let himself be cursed by a particularly hot-tongued sergeant-instructor. And being determined to be a good fellow and to find his comrades good fellows he was surprised at his own success, though he had had the luck to be grouped with a very cheery, clean-living crowd. He discovered a real human zest in the fun and the good fellowship and the hearty, hungry cheerfulness. He made friends, two in particular—McVittie, the ex-ship's cook, and big Lambourne, the gamekeeper—and these friendships were a revelation to him, the men were such warm-hearted, generous beggars. The spirit of camaraderie was so splendid that Hammersly would have gone hot with shame if he had caught himself putting on side.

And in a while he was surprised to find himself popular. It was Corporal Palk who gave public utterance on such matters.

"There ain't nothing wrong with the Prince of Panonia. 'E's a sport, and there ain't no flies on 'im neither."

The nickname stuck to Pierce. D Hut called him "Prince," or "Old Prince," the hall-mark of affection. He had a well-filled, warm feeling inside of him; he was not afraid of meeting men's eyes, and he had never been so physically fit in his life.

D Hut was a little world in itself, full of strange, vivid happenings that Hammersly was never likely to forget. There was that day when Garner, the little blacksmith from some East Anglian village, heard the news that his wife and kiddies had been wiped out by a Zeppelin bomb. Hammersly remembered seeing him sitting on the end of his bed, with a sorrowful, dazed, expressionless face, his hands clenched on his knees, and his nose looking pinched and blue. The men had left him alone, though their eyes had looked at him with a grim wistfulness. And then Garner had gone off to that village for a day or two, and come back curiously silent and strange and self-absorbed. D Hut knew what had happened to him, and one day he told them what he hoped would happen over yonder in France.

"Prisoners! Not me. There was just three of them—my Minnie, and little Flo, and young Ben. They saved me a bit of my Minnie's hair. I've got it just here"—he stroked the breast pocket of his tunic as though he were thinking of the softness of his wife's fair hair; "no, I'm not out for prisoners. I'm just waiting to feel my bayonet in a Hun's chest."

D Hut scraped its feet, and made a sort of hoarse noise in its throat.

Then there was the day when Buck arrived—a big, slit-eyed docker, with a flat and evil face and a most pestilent tongue. He was raw and he was a bully, and he tried to shove his great hairy fist down the throat of D Hut the very first night. For some reason or other he picked out Hammersly, addressed him as a "blasted toff," and informed him he would knock his head off for the price of a pint of beer. He had had too much of the stuff himself, and Lambourne, that man of the woods, stood up and would have smitten him, but Corporal Palk took Buck to himself.

"Nar, look 'ere, Flat Nose, this ain't a gin palace. This is D 'ut, and Hi'm the corporal in charge—see? You get that wind off yer stomick, or I'll tame yer pretty quick."

The docker begged to remark that Palk might be a "b——y corp'ral," and but for those "b——y stripes" he—Buck—would smash him flat.

Palk seemed delighted.

"Why—'ere's a real liddle gentleman of the name of Buck, wantin' to make our 'appy 'ome a real paradise. Nar, don't 'it the gen'leman, Lambourne; I'm goin' to forget ter-morrer—after tea—as I'm a real corp'ral, and our liddle Buck can 'ave 'is face made flatter."

And so the New Army discloses its varied professional abilities. Palk had fought at "The Ring" under the pseudonym of "Teddy Walker"; he took the docker down into a quiet corner of the pine woods, with D Hut in attendance, and discarding his chevrons for half an hour, punched Private Buck's flat face into one big bulge.

"Next time you feel a bit bully, my bloke, you come along to Mister Palk."

But the Buck was tamed. Discipline and Corporal Palk reduced him to sullen decency.

Then there were those famous afternoons when Hammersly, Lambourne, and McVittie went out on pass, and trudging to Wiledon Station, took train to Langridge Wells. A most respectable town, Langridge Wells, but there were shops and pavements and petticoats, and things you could buy, and things you could eat. McVittie had an affection for the Castle Hotel, but he was a decent soul and gave no trouble. Lambourne would stand outside toy shops and

wonder what he could send the kids. Hammersly was always in favour of an hour at the hairdressers, and this hour of luxury became his regular contribution to the outing. The three would sit down solemnly and be shaved, clipped, shampooed, singed. Impatient people, fidgeting with papers, cursed them silently and went away, while the three grew warm and sleek with a feeling of well-being, and decided that they would conclude with “scalp massage.” It was Hammersly who led them in these Capuan indulgences, but they took to it as cats take to a soft hand; the huts and the mud and the margarine awaited them over yonder.

Then they would have tea, a Gargantuan tea, with Lambourne exercising himself on doughnuts as though they were mere crumbs of bread. And McVittie would stare at him with his blue eyes, and grin each time that Lambourne’s hand sneaked over to the dish.

“It’s juggling; it’s like eating bombs! Supposing one of ’em were to go off inside ye, Lamb. Think of the nice little ladies behind the counter, and the squashy cakes all blown into a disgraceful mess!”

“We’ll call him Buster Brown, Mac!”

“Or Gilbert the Filbert.”

“The Keeper of the Nuts.”

McVittie was sentimental and fell in love with the young lady who sold him Gold Flake cigarettes—a young lady with sleek, fair hair and “I keep it for you” smile. His infatuation caused a temporary dislocation of the trinity, till McVittie found one of his own lieutenants charming Miss Goldflake so charmingly that she refused to smile at the ex-ship’s cook. The Scot in McVittie was sobered.

“My goodness, and I have spent two and six-pence more than was necessary, paying for that smile! Don’t you have nothing to do with women, Lamb.”

“I’ve done with them. I’m married.”

“And how do you like it?”

“Like it? I’ve never thought about it—one way or the other.”

“My goodness! Prince, old dear, here’s a chap, a regular born Lamb.”

Lambourne drove an elbow into the Scotsman’s ribs.

“She has given me three children, and she has saved my money for me, and she’s——”

McVittie put an apologetic arm round him, and the other round Pierce.

““Annie Laurie’s’ the tune, Lambie. You’re a decent, braw laddie. Such fools as me buying cigs I don’t want, just because——oh——hell!”

And so the fine, primitive, human life dealt well with Pierce Hammersly. He grew harder, kinder, gayer, stouter in heart and stomach. There was not a smarter man in D Company; it was good to see him carrying his pack and the way his head came round with a flash of the eyes and a lift of the chin when the words were “Eyes right.”

His letters to Janet and his father were tender, merry, and quizzical, and the letters he received from them gave him a glow at the heart. Those two were happy about him; proud of him. After all, courage and honour and unselfishness were the things that mattered.

CHAPTER XXX

Then came the spring, and that most wonderful day when the sky was as blue as blue above the pines, and all the winter mud of the camp seemed to have melted into green foam. Hammersly did not feel quite sane that morning, for he had interviewed his Company Officer the night before with very pleasant results.

"Well, Hammersly, what is it?"

"Can I have a day's leave to-morrow, sir?"

"What for?"

"I want to meet a friend, sir."

"Let's see, you haven't had any leave at all yet, Hammersly, have you?"

"No, sir."

"All right. Get your pass made out."

And Hammersly had managed to smuggle off a telegram to someone who had come to stay for a night or two at Langridge Wells. "Will meet you to-morrow at Melling Station. Come early and wire train."

D Hut smiled over the enthusiasm with which Hammersly cleaned his buttons and his boots that morning, and over the extreme care he took in putting on his puttees. The spring was in his blood, and all the sunshine of that April day. He blushed when Private McVittie, rushing out for the nine o'clock parade, punched him in the back, with a "Good luck, lad; it's 'Annie Laurie' all over ye—what!"

The birds piped Pierce Hammersly on that three miles march to Melling Station. He had chosen Melling because it was quiet and not used by the men in khaki, and because there was a pleasant inn there half buried in the pine woods. Great white clouds sailed in the blue sky; the banks were a mass of primroses and wild violets, and all the green growth of the year glimmered in the sunshine. There were white lambs in the green field close by Melling Station, and Hammersly laughed aloud as he stood to watch them at their play.

He found that he had half an hour to wait at the station, and he strolled up and down by a bank where daffodils were in bloom and bees hummed about the pink blossoms of a row of flowering currants. Even this waiting was delightful, this exquisite impatience. Melling Station, with its little pseudo-Gothic buildings and its red-gravelled platforms, seemed as empty as the woods. An old punchinello of a porter bobbed in and out of the lamp-room and booking-office, sniffing energetically as though he smelt the spring. A few country folk wandered in as the half-hour slipped by, among them an old dame with a huge bunch of primroses that were travelling south to spread their perfume through some hospital where a wounded country lad lay blessing his good luck.

Then the signal arm dropped, and Hammersly stood at the very edge of the platform and looked towards Langridge Wells where the line ran in a deep cutting between tall woods of Scots fir. The sky was a blue panel let into walls of a dark green. He heard the faint roar of the train in the distance, dying away and swelling like the sound of the sea. It seemed a very long while before the engine came into view, the most prosaic and the most romantic thing in the world.

"Now then, stand clear, please."

Punchinello fussed up and down, sniffing with that red beak of a nose.

Hammersly was looking for a head at an open window. He saw a blue arm and a grey suede glove struggling with a handle farther along the train. Punchinello turned gallant and opened the door, and Hammersly saw Romance descend upon Melling Station.

She was dressed in some soft blue stuff with a touch of cerise over the bosom and the throat. Her blue straw hat was just a hat, and yet part of her very comely and exquisite self. He was conscious of her quick colour, and the glimmer of her eyes as she came towards him, happy, radiant.

"Pierce——!"

"I don't care; I can't help it. You shouldn't look so adorable."

His impetuosity was new and rather delightful; it ignored Punchinello, and all the casual eyes in the train. He put his arms round her like a man who was not ashamed of anything, and kissed her as a lover should kiss a woman—fully and dearly on the mouth.

"You wicked man! Don't you see——"

"I see—just you."

She was all red and thrilled, a little abashed, a little amused.

"Now, dear man——"

He swept her away with one arm through hers.

"Give me that wrap. I say—you look perfectly splendid. I never saw anything like you."

She laughed dearly.

"So it seems," for he was bending forward and looking in her face with deep wonder and delight.

A small boy at the door of the booking-office claimed Janet's ticket, and it had to be hunted for in her vanity bag.

The child grinned at Hammersly, but he might just as well have grinned at a blind man.

“What are you going to do with me?”

They were walking up the slope to the village.

“Well, to begin with, I think I will kiss you again.”

“My dear man!”

“I can’t help it. I never saw anything so absolutely intoxicating.”

She put a hand on his mouth.

“You wild creature. Now, where are we going?”

“Anywhere. There is a delightful little inn here where we can lunch, and there are woods where no b—— I beg your pardon. I say, Janet; I’m so absurdly happy.”

“Are you?”

“Am I—indeed! Just look at my buttons; you can see your face in them.”

They made their way to The Seven Stars, the particular inn that Hammersly had discovered, a half brick and half timber place at the far end of the village and on the very edge of the woodlands. Its garden was full of daffodils and wallflowers that were just coming into bloom, and its tiled roof was stained all gold with lichen.

“What a sweet place!”

Hammersly interviewed an unobtrusive and pleasant old person in a blue check apron, and arranged lunch. The pleasant old person showed him a panelled parlour with a mantelshelf crowded with brass and pewter, a stone floor and Sussex oak furniture.

“If the lady would like to rest——”

Pierce glanced at Janet and smiled. She looked such an ardent, vital creature, that the thought of her needing a chair amused him.

“Tired, dear?”

“No.”

She smiled back at him, and Hammersly explained to the pleasant person that they were going for a walk and would be back for lunch at one. No; cold chicken would do quite well, though a little soup would also be acceptable. And an apple tart? Yes. Good heavens, what did food matter, when the sunlight was like yellow wine?

They went out into the woods, such woods, green depths of mystery, silent and strange as love. Pierce discovered a fallen spruce that had been blown down by some winter gale; it made them a woodland seat, with primroses for a carpet. They heard the cuckoo calling to the spring.

They held hands and talked, sitting sideways on the tree trunk and looking into each other’s eyes.

“How fit you look, man thing.”

“Fit! I should think so.”

She eyed him with shrewd and penetrating and exultant pride.

“You are so much better looking, too.”

“Oh, come now!”

“It is a fact. Something has been agreeing with you.”

He stared thoughtfully into the green depths of the woods.

“Well, I suppose it’s because I’m satisfied; because I’m not worrying; because I have given up criticising. I am in the great game with my whole heart; and then—your letters—and the dad’s.”

“Dear!”

“They make me sort of flush inside, and feel cheery and proud; quite a simple, happy sort of devil.”

She drew him to her with impulsive tenderness.

“Oh, I’m so glad. I knew you could be fine and chivalrous, and it makes me feel very humble and very proud. Because you have roughed things, done things you must have hated.”

He kissed her.

“You piece of most dear splendour. No; I have been learning to be human and honest; I have found quite simple men who have put me to shame. There are fellows over there who are worth knowing; worth the best comradeship a man can give. Do you realise that we are all turning into Socialists, Janet?”

“Are we?”

“The war is teaching us to do the things we thought impossible; making us laugh at our little old squabbling, selfish prejudices. It’s good—damned good—to be alive.”

So the day passed; a man’s day, a woman’s day, tender, memorable, fine and true. They lunched at The Seven Stars and spent the afternoon wandering in the woods, picking wild flowers, and loving each other with every word and look and gesture. They talked of Scarshott, old Porteous, themselves, the war, the men of D Hut, when Pierce would be likely to go out. And the last matter led to a very touching little incident between them.

“You’ll get leave, Pierce—before you go?”

“I can get it. We could meet—in town.”

She said very softly:

“I should like you to come to Scarshott.”

He looked at her steadily a moment and then dropped his bunches of flowers and caught her hands.

“Do you mean that?”

“Of course.”

“Then you are not ashamed any longer?”

“My dear one—no!”

That evening, after tea, when they were walking from The Seven Stars to Melling Station, they met no less a person than Corporal Palk, though what he was doing at Melling no one but himself knew. He came up with a great breadth of smiling democratic friendliness, and Pierce stopped like the new man he was, smiling back into Corporal Palk’s eyes.

“Janet—here’s a friend of mine. Corporal Palk—Miss Yorke, my fiancée.”

The corporal saluted with great energy, and then held out a hand.

“Prard to meet our Prince’s lidy.”

Janet gave him her hand and a beam of the eyes.

“Of course, I’ve heard of you. Pierce told me all about that little boxing match in the woods.”

Corporal Palk was delighted.

“Did ’e, now! Yüs, that was some scrap; done a bit of it in my time, yer see. Good for discipline, what! Learns a bloke ter keep ’is temper. And ’ow d’yer think our Prince is lookin’? We call ’im the Prince of Panonia.”

“I have never seen him looking better.”

“It’s me as gives ’im physical drill.”

“And why the Prince of Panonia?”

Palk looked with sidelong affection at Hammersly.

“Why? I guess because he’s a real sport; bit of a blood horse. ’Ow’s that, ol’ chum?”

Pierce declared that it was very much all right.

“I’d like to have your punch though.”

“Would yer? Not ’alf!”

So Corporal Palk, having admired Janet very considerably and like a very natural gentleman, went upon his way, while the two lovers wandered on towards the station. But Corporal Palk was back in D Hut before Hammersly returned, and describing with emphasis how he had met the Prince’s young woman, and how he most thoroughly approved of her.

“There ain’t no flies on old Prince. Fine bit of goods, and a real lidy. What! ’ow do I know? ’Ow do I know anythink—you blasted codfish! Course I know. Can’t I tell when the —— sky’s all blue? I ain’t lived in Camden Tam f’ nothink.”

CHAPTER XXXI

Janet had spoken the truth, for the Pierce Hammersly who had caught her in his arms on the platform of Melling Station was a man with steadier eyes and a finer simplicity. His face looked kinder, more solid and less irritable, for he had been living a Spartan life with uncomplicated and unselfconscious people, and Janet had missed certain little mannerisms in him, little egotistical affectations. Life had carved him anew out of fresh oak, a bigger and handsomer man, with more simplicity, more boldness, straighter in his speech, harder in his body. She had known in a moment that she could claim the woman's dearest right—the right to be proud of her man.

She carried her pride back to Scarshott and shared it with Porteous Hammersly.

"Pierce is looking splendid. We had a most delightfully unconventional day, and I was introduced to his corporal."

"Looks well, does he? I ought to have been over there myself, but he asked me to wait awhile."

"I think you will see him soon. He expects to be in France before long, and he will get his draft leave. He is coming home."

"Here?"

"Yes."

Porteous removed his glasses and polished them, just for the sake of having something to do.

"That sounds very good."

She looked at him affectionately, and with a little glimmer of moisture in her eyes.

"It is good, utterly good. And he's happy; quite different in some ways. No, no, I'm not a prig; I'm very proud of him—prouder than I can say."

"God bless you both."

He tried to put his glasses on and dropped them on the floor, and then spent quite a long time repolishing them, while Janet pretended to be looking out of the window.

"What a fine show of tulips you are going to have!"

"Tulips? Yes—I believe so. You had a fine day, dear, did you, down at Melling! I know the country slightly—heather and pines. And Pierce looks well as a Tommy?"

"So much bigger and better looking."

"But he couldn't have grown!"

"But he looks bigger. It's the air of him; the way he walks. Father—I'm very much in love——"

"My dear child——"

He blundered over, patted her shoulder, and kissed her in a shamefaced sort of way.

"I think we both owe you—everything."

"Don't. I want to forget all that. And just now—I am very happy."

"Of course. I might tell you I expect his mother back next week; her health is much improved."

And for once in his life Porteous Hammersly lapsed into undoubted sarcasm.

In May, Pierce Hammersly became a trained man, a good shot and an expert bomber. He could wear his gas-helmet for an hour and run in it for five minutes; a fifteen-mile route march left him healthily thirsty, but sound as to heart and feet. He was the best bayonet fighter in D Hut, and he had gained a stone in weight. McVittie and Lambourne were both down with him for the next draft, and Palk had been chosen as one of the corporals—to his very great satisfaction.

On the 10th May, Janet and old Porteous each received a wire:

"Expect me to-morrow evening by six o'clock train.

"PIERCE."

It was Janet who met him at Scarshott Station and saw him climbing out of a third-class carriage with his white canvas kit-bag under his arm. There was nothing of the prodigal about him; he looked brown and fit and confident, and he kissed her under the very eyes of two very prominent Scarshott ladies who had put it about that he had hidden himself in Spain.

"You haven't got the car, have you?"

"No."

"That's right. I'll just bundle this thing into the office and have it sent for."

He seemed amused, and his eyes had an audacious glitter.

"Well, here goes. You don't feel shy, Janet?"

"I never felt less shy in my life."

"Brazen young woman. Do you know, I look on Scarshott as rather a joke—and the serious way I took the place last winter! What a consummate fool!"

People stared at them—turned on the pavements and stared at them, but Hammersly went through Scarshott with a smile. He was invulnerable, and he knew it now that there was no shadow of shame in Janet's eyes. He looked at nobody, but just marched calmly through the town, shoulders squared, head up, a man who was at peace with himself, and too happy to feel apologetic.

"I suppose you know, Pierce?"

"What?"

"Your mother is back."

He laughed—wicked laughter—and yet there was no sting in it.

"Then the sun must be shining! Poor old mater! It was a bit of a test, I'll admit. I wonder how she fancies me as a private. Janet, I have a notion that three months at a training camp would do the mater all the good in the world. I speak from experience."

"Don't blame the individual, dear man."

"No, it's the class. And yet if I were to tell the mater that I had become a Socialist, she would take the next train back to Harrogate. But I am playing the critical beast again. I say—that's some hat you are wearing."

"Do you like it?"

"Well, I suppose it is partly the face under it. No, don't be frightened; I won't kiss you in Scarshott High Street."

The garden at Orchards was famous for its spring flowers, anemones, tulips, narcissi, and great masses of wallflower and forget-me-not. Porteous Hammersly was almost a Dutchman in his love of tulips; he had collected every shade of colour and every combination of colour, from cerise and rose to black and gold. He liked blood red in his gilly-flowers, and a deep blue in his myosotis. And to Pierce the place had never looked so rich and flowery, nor had it ever smelt so sweet. The cedars threw their great shadows over the vivid grass, and the old beech trees in the park were mountains of green splendour.

"By George, the old place is rather lovely. Things seem to smell sweeter than they did. Perhaps it is contrasts."

"Doesn't one hear of men growing flowers in the trenches?"

"Yes, poor devils. And I could do it myself, and get sentimental over a scarlet-runner. Hallo! there's the old man."

Janet slipped away towards the house, and left the men to meet alone. Porteous had been sitting under one of the cedars, a man grown plump and debonair again, and spruce as a well-preened bird.

"Hallo, Dad!"

"My dear boy——"

They kissed like Frenchmen, or like father and son in some Eastern tale. And then a quite ridiculous muteness fell on both of them; they walked up and down, deeply moved, but saying little.

"I have never seen the old garden looking better. I like that splash of cerise and white over there."

"Some new bulbs I bought last year. Rather disgraceful in war time, eh!"

"Dear old Dad, nonsense! There is so much filthiness in this war that a man ought to be blessed who remembers to give us something beautiful. I suppose there are people who would say we ought to make a salad of those tulips. We English are like that; we save the string and the odd bits of sealing wax, and let half the land go to grass. And how is the mater?"

"Much better, Pierce."

"That's good."

They did not hurry into the house where Mrs. Sophia waited in her heavily furnished drawing-room, but wandered all round the garden and halfway across the park. Old Hammersly's eyes gloated over his son, remarking all those physical details that make a young man's body fine and convincing. As Janet had put it, Pierce looked bigger. He had lost his air of restiveness and that hypercritical gleam in his eyes. There was a fresh-skinned, muscular optimism about him; the poise of perfect health.

"So you are going out soon?"

"In a week or two. And I am not worrying. I am a very much simpler soul than I was last year."

"Where will it be?"

"France, I expect. I hope it will be France; that is the real thing. It's very strange, Pater, that though I know I shall have some perfectly hellish times, I shall be quite glad to go, and not a little proud of it, too—perhaps."

"The country realises what the war means."

"That's it. I used to think I should play at the game for a few months—and my thoughts were all in the future, a future that was to be much like the pre-war past, but now I never think of the future; there is no future till we have cleared up this mess."

"That's so, my boy."

"One just goes out into the unknown and the unknowable, leaving all that is sacred and dear behind, living on the consciousness that it is there, but not tempting weakness by letting one's hopes run riot. It's just the eternal spirit of sacrifice, and the more cheerful one is about it—well—the sooner we shall be out of the mud."

Pierce's meeting with Mrs. Sophia was a somewhat formal affair. He kissed her, and felt that he had nothing whatever to say—nothing that mattered—to this woman who was his mother. She had not changed; she had only adapted her egotism to summer conditions; she had emerged from winter quarters, so to speak, realising that her dignity could take the field again in Scarshott.

"Have you had a bath, Pierce?"

"Not yet, Mater."

"Having to live with all those common men, and catching all those horrible creatures!"

"Oh, we are a very clean lot, Mater. I have to show my feet once a week."

"Show your feet! What an indignity! Just as though you were a tramp in a workhouse!"

Those four days, full of the green of the spring, and all tremulous with the singing of birds, passed like a dream in the night—a dream that was unforgettable, rich with sweetness and strength. Pierce hardly showed himself again at Scarshott. He spent the hours in the Orchards garden, or in the pine woods beyond Heather Cottage. There was no shadow over those days, save the shadow of parting, and even this imminent sadness hid a glow of quiet exultation. Love was making the great sacrifice, and love lives upon sacrifices.

They said good-bye on a May morning in one of the sunlit glades of the pine woods, with the young bracken springing under their feet, and the yellow broom all gold against the dark trunks of the pines.

"I won't come to the station with you, dear."

"That's wise. There's something ghastly about those public partings. I would like to remember you here in the sunlight, where it's so soft and green."

He was aware of a questioning, pensive look in her eyes as though she were trying to see into the future.

"Don't worry, my Janet. I shall not fail you this time."

She drew very close to him.

"Dear man, don't think that I fear for you in that way. It is so much—so much finer than last year. But I was wondering—how can I help wondering?"

"Darling!"

"Oh, my dear, it's hard, though I'm proud, so very proud. Supposing—No, that's cowardly."

He just held her in his arms, so firmly that she could hardly breathe.

"I feel that I am coming back to you, but I won't promise myself anything, or count on such a desire. I know you will be with me, even as I shall be with you. I want to win a badge of honour. And I love you, dear; I love you with all my heart."

CHAPTER XXXII

The bugles blew before dawn, while a black hush still covered the Wiledon woods. Lights gleamed out in the windows of the wooden huts, and there was a stirring of many men, a deep murmur of voices. The cooks were at work in the kitchen, and transport horses were being harnessed, for the draft was going, going overseas to France.

A few people who were awake in Wiledon village heard the bugles sounding in the grey of the dawn. Faint, mysterious and plaintive, a mere thin cry in the breaking of the day, it waxed and grew, winding down through the misty, dew-wet woods, till it became clangorous and challenging. The bugles and the drums were playing the draft to Wiledon Station, while the transport rumbled in the rear, with a little crowd of men who followed for a last handshake and a last cheer. The men of the draft were in marching order—figures whose khaki looked grey in the mist, stepping with a swing behind drums and bugles, rifles sloped, heads in the air. No officers went with them save a subaltern who was to take them to the French coast, and no farther. The draft was just a brown chunk of manhood, cut out of Wiledon Camp and shipped over the sea to patch some other brown and bigger chunk that had had big splinters knocked off it somewhere in France.

So the draft went down to Wiledon Station, and the awakened sleepers in the village heard the bugles growing fainter and ever fainter and more plaintive in the grey of the morning—death music, strange and sad. Then there was silence, and later a little distant sound of cheering followed by the panting and rattle of a train. And presently the empty transport wagons rumbled back up the road, and the men of the bugles and the drums and the cheering voices tramped back in silence to the camp.

The draft had gone, and the birds were singing.

In the corner of a third-class carriage, Pierce Hammersly sat watching the sun rise, with a slight frown on his forehead, and a stiff upper lip. Packs and rifles had been piled in the racks. McVittie was eating the unconsumed portion of an interrupted breakfast. Lambourne, the married man, sat stiffly erect, staring straight at the opposite wall of the carriage, his lips shaping themselves for a whistle that never came. One man had dropped asleep. Three youngsters were smoking cigarettes and parading an immense cheerfulness. A fellow in the far corner was trying to blink something out of his eyes, while he swallowed hard at an emotional substance in his throat.

A mouth organ was being played in the next carriage, and they heard Corporal Palk strike up and lead a chorus.

"The boys seem cheery."

McVittie, who had lit a pipe, turned his face to the rising sun.

"A braw day for the picnic. I wonder where we'll be this time—next year."

"Dead, most likely," said the emotional man.

"You wait till you're dead before you begin to grouse about it," said someone, with Irish impulsiveness.

Pierce Hammersly wondered how these men really felt about the great adventure, what their thoughts were, whether they thought at all. Most of them were without imagination; they viewed the affair ahead of them as though it were a glorified firework show, with an abundance of noise and other little excitements. They were innocent, whereas the man who has been under fire suffers from no illusions. He knows that he will wish himself home again, and wonders how he could have been such a damned fool as to imagine that he would like a second sojourn in that human hell.

But Hammersly was going out to France with no ordinary spirit to inspire him. He meant to keep smiling, and to maintain a stiff lip, even though his face were the colour of chalk. He knew his own weaknesses, and how insidiously fear may make itself felt, in petulances, and little selfish shirking, till some grosser treachery seizes its chance. He knew that a highly-strung man is saved by holding to a high ideal and by grimly smothering the first querulous complainings of his weaker self. A grudging spirit means a tortured spirit. To the uttermost; a cheerfulness that refuses to be dismayed; the thought of honouring eyes and the pride of some loved one at home. A man must see such virtues in the mirror of his own mind and fiercely refuse to see aught else.

So the day passed, with much cheering and crowding at windows, much singing and smoking of cigarettes. England drifted away behind them, and there were men who grew silent, and some who grew sentimental, and some who wanted to drink. By nightfall they were a sobered, tired crowd, lying stretched beside their kits on the cobbled paving of a big quay. The black flank of a ship loomed over them. Steam derricks were hard at work, and brown streams of men were pouring up and down the great gangways with stores and baggage and all the lesser gear of war.

That swift dash across the sea to France was one of the most impressive pictures that Hammersly took away with him. The darkness, the silence, the silent putting forth into the night, those black sea-wolves picking them up and racing on either side with a great smother of smoke! The sudden solemnity that seemed to fall upon the men as they squatted or lay close together in their cork jackets, talking in low voices, when they talked at all! The throbbing of the engines, the stars and the rolling smoke overhead, the calm and swarthy sea, the gliding and dim swiftness of the destroyers who guarded them!

They sighted the French coast just as the first greyness of the dawn spread over the waters. Most of the men were

asleep, but Pierce Hammersly stood and watched the breaking of the day, and the grey line that was France rising like Fate ahead of them. And presently he found Corporal Palk at his side, but a strangely transfigured and spiritualised Palk, with a solemn face and shining eyes.

"Seems sort o' queer and fine, don't it, Prince?"

"Yes, just that."

"Us standin' 'ere and thinkin' of all the chaps that 'as gone in front of us and all the chaps that'll come after. An' the guns and the shells goin' over, and the wounded comin' back, and the fellers that'll never come back, and the women carryin' on at 'ome. Blimy, but it's sort of grand, and we're in it, my boy, you and me."

And that morning the draft landed in France, and refreshed itself with hot coffee and sausage rolls at the disembarkation canteen. It was a good draft, and trained to the last detail, and Wiledon Camp heard with satisfaction that this bit of itself had been handed over within a fortnight to the 53rd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, a battalion of "pukka soldiers," who were critical of riff-raff when it came.

The Sussex Regiment was out of the firing line for a month, resting in billets in a little old French village, a quaint, grey place with a river running through it, and all around it rich meadows and tall woods of beech and oak. It was a green and flowery spot, and absolutely blemishless as to its straggling, single street. The war seemed very far away, and yet if you went over the next hill, you saw things that would amaze you—a vast activity, an immense and patient co-ordination. In the village of St. Just the children played where they would; the women and the old men worked in the fields; cattle grazed; the bells rang in the slate-covered steeple, and people went to church. The river ran placidly between the poplars and willows, and the men of the Sussex Regiment fished and bathed in it when they had nothing else to do—which was seldom. There was a mill lower down the river, a mill that worked night and day, and its rumbling and the rush of the water had a fascination for the men. Sometimes an aeroplane whirred overhead, and it was always an English aeroplane. The children were forgetting to look for the black cross.

"Well, if this ain't a bit of all right!"

So said Corporal Palk, lying flat on his back under an apple tree in a little orchard, and staring at the blue of the sky. A small Frenchwoman was sitting near him, and he was trying to teach her some English and to pick up some French in return. It was a great game, and much appreciated by Hammersly and McVittie who lay on their stomachs with their chins propped on their crossed forearms. Palk's English was somewhat base coin, but he flung it into the child's lap as though it were the English of Shakespeare.

"What's this, eh?" and he pulled out a handkerchief; "nose-wipe, that's what that is; nose-wipe, sweet and simple. No haffectation abart that. And see that hanimal over there; that's what we call a Jock—a Scotch beast."

The child understood, for there had been a Scottish regiment at St. Just.

"But monsieur has no—no petticoats."

Palk roared.

"McVittie, man, 'ear that? You ain't a man, nor yet a woman. Bloomin' 'ermaphrodite! See-cie, mamselle, 'e ain't quite growed up; they wear trasers in Scotland till they've proved 'emselves men."

"Shut up," said McVittie; "it's indelicate to suggest——"

"Suggest! There ain't no bloomin' newendoes abart me. Kilts, indeed! National dress—because the Scotties 'ave to scratch theirselves."

"You shut up," said McVittie, leaning over and cramming a handful of grass into his mouth.

But life in St. Just was not made up of lying in the orchard grass or fishing in the river, yet St. Just had its uses. It gave the men back from the trenches a sight of women and children, of little homes and gardens, and cattle feeding in green fields. This was a France in miniature, a land snatched from the Blond Beast, a something for which men might fight with a good conscience and a flash of chivalry. There was not a man who was not a better soldier spiritually for his month's sojourn in that French village. He would leave it with a sweet smell in his nostrils, and the thought of those French women, children and old men sleeping and labouring in peace because of the rifles in the trenches.

And life was strenuous at St. Just. The 53rd Sussex had had a rough time during the winter; they had been brought back to rest, to make good their losses, and to recover their full physical fitness. There were all sorts of rumours in the air, whisperings of a great advance. The youth of England was in training—these soldiers of the New Armies who had yet to prove themselves in attack, and at St. Just the men of the 53rd lived like athletes—lean, brown, heart hardened, swift. It was no longer the patient sticking in the mud, but the wild leap forward—the rush of men who attack with bomb and bayonet. Men who had come out of the winter, haggard, bent, and listless, carried their heads with a new audacity, marched with a new swing.

"A damn fine crard!"

That was Corporal Palk's verdict.

And so they were.

The spirit was splendid. From the very first Hammersly contrasted it with the melancholy that had dominated the Dardanelles. Nor was the contrast to be accounted for by the change in his own spirit. There was hope in France, faith,

cheeriness, a grim optimism, an efficiency and keenness that were refreshing. These men were nearer home; they saw the things for which they were fighting—women, children, homes, fields, even the dogs. Some adventurous gentleman had not flung them raw and half-trained on a beach thousands of miles from home to fight—for what? Stamboul? The sight of an old peasant woman's grey head and grateful eyes is more inspiring than the distant and imaginary glitter of Turkish minarets and domes. The theorist starts out on the presumption that the man with a rifle is always the same sort of man—an unvarying and known quantity wherever you put him and under all sorts of conditions. Of course, nothing could be more fatuous.

For the first time since he had worn khaki Hammersly began to realise that England was a great country. There was a giganticism here that awed and impressed him. He had glimpsed it at the port, on the lines, over the hill yonder where men swarmed like ants. Guns, and yet more guns, shells by the million, railways, motor lorries, mountains of stores and timber, new roads, new aerodromes, new villages. An immense and orderly purpose was being unfolded—the massed, mechanical effort of a great people. But behind the mechanism there was a soul—the soul of Britain, slow, obstinate, practical; a soul that was learning to be thorough after fifty years of casual and drifting complacency.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The 53rd were proud of their officers and in this pride lay the secret of the battalion's efficiency. In a new and democratic army personality counts for much; men are judged on their merits, on their manners, on their attitudes towards each other. The New Army had no traditions behind it, save the tradition of British pluck; its officers came to it as did the men—mere citizens who had played team games, and never handled a rifle or given an order. The 53rd had but two Regular officers—the Colonel and the Quartermaster. All the rest were new men—country gentlemen, lawyers, undergraduates, a medical student or two, stockbrokers, artists, journalists, and the like. And the 53rd was proud of them. There had been no bullying and no swank, for the senior officers were gentlemen, and any raw youngster who had never been taught good manners, received his education when he joined the 53rd.

Captain Guest, who commanded D Company, the company to which Hammersly belonged, was typical of all that was best in the New Army. An old public schoolboy and a Cambridge man, he was "The Courteous Knight of the Cheerful Countenance"—a quiet, fairish fellow, with shrewd blue eyes, and a clear, vibrant voice. He was something of a dandy, but men never quarrel with an officer for being smart; they like it, provided that he knows his job. Guest was calmly but almost fanatically thorough. He made a point of knowing every man in his company, not only by name, but by character and capability. He never swore, but his discipline was perfect; it never crossed his mind that a man would ever question an order, and no man ever did. D Company saw the smile in his eyes and trusted him, and knew him as a devoted leader and friend.

The Second Lieutenant who commanded Hammersly's platoon was known in D Company as "The Boy." He may have been twenty, but he was the most serious and fatherly youth on earth; fresh-faced, grey-eyed, gravely going about his business, examining his men's feet and teeth, seeing that they washed their socks and darned them; a most solemn and lovable child. In fact, the men loved him because he loved his platoon, and wanted it the smartest in the battalion and the cheeriest and the best led. And not a man among them but was keen, for fear of disappointing "The Boy."

"Gorblimey," said Corporal Palk, "I fancy I see 'im with tears in 'is eyes 'cos some of us were caught with dirty rifles when the Brig. 'appened to come aramd. An' the 'ole platoon snivvellin' with shame! An' I can see 'im puttin' me to bed!"

With such officers anything is possible, and the other platoons and the other companies were almost equally well led. The C.O., an old Indian officer, hard and clean and kindly, had been christened "Old Coffeeberry." There was something of the Bayard about him. He had a presence, fine manners, and a wonderful way with his juniors; when he gave a youngster a stiff job that youngster was envied; there was no grouching and no shirking.

Hammersly had been with the 53rd about three weeks, and was walking off to his billet after a parade had been dismissed, when his platoon sergeant shouted his name.

"Private 'ammersly——"

D Company's parade ground was a cobbled space in front of the village church, a space surrounded by elm trees and gardens. Hammersly swung round.

"Yes, Sergeant."

"The S.M. wants you."

Hammersly found the Company Sergeant-Major under one of the elms.

"Hammersly."

"Sir."

"You are to see Captain Guest at two o'clock to-day."

"At the company office?"

"No, at his billet. White house in the garden opposite the inn."

"Very good, sir."

"That's all."

Hammersly, just a little bit anxious as to what his company officer wanted with him, reported punctually at two o'clock. An iron gate, hung between two brick pillars, opened into the garden of the white house, and from the gate a path paved with kidney stones and edged with box led straight to the porch. The house had a steep roof, and queer little dormer windows peering out of it. An old vine carried on stone pillars and oak beams made a rambling and pleasant shade along the front of this French house.

Captain Guest was sitting in a deck chair under the shade of this green-leaved loggia, a short briar pipe stuck in one corner of his mouth, and *Punch* on his knee. Hammersly saluted and stood straight and motionless before him.

"Hammersly."

"Yes, sir."

"I want to have a little talk with you. You have served before, haven't you?"

“Yes, sir.”

“I happened to have heard about it, but that’s neither here nor there. Personally, I think you have done just the right thing. Do the other men know about you?”

“I don’t think so, sir. Nobody ever troubled to find out. Of course, I had to do a little fibbing.”

“Sound sense. I shall keep quiet about it. Mr. Brydon has reported very well of you.”

Hammersly flushed.

“Thank you, sir. I made a paltry ass of myself out there—lost my temper. I’m out to make good.”

Captain Guest’s blue eyes smiled up at him.

“That’s it; that’s the game; I’ll help you in any way I can. There’s no need for me to talk shop; we don’t like it. That’s all.”

Hammersly saluted.

“I shall follow you, sir—anywhere. Thank you very much.”

So that when D Company boasted about its Captain, a kind of glow came into Hammersly’s eyes. The love of man for man is a very fine and subtle thing, begetting strange heroisms and rare self-sacrifice. And Hammersly loved Guest; loved him for his clear, calm face, his straight and smiling eyes, his chivalry and thoroughness, for the way he carried his head, for his calm voice, even for the faultless care with which he put on his puttees. It was absurd and it was splendid, but war is both absurd and splendid, and there is nothing finer than the sexless love of man for man.

Then the 53rd was warned for the trenches, and the men smiled and joked tremendously, but most of them had grave eyes. For days a gigantic thunderstorm seemed to have been rolling away yonder without a moment’s cessation. It was one long reverberation, keeping the windows of the village of St. Just in a state of tremulous excitement. Camp rumours grow up like gourds in the night, but every officer and man guessed that he was to face something grimmer than a rumour. Those thudding, hammering guns that never ceased firing, filled the men’s stomachs with queer, adventurous qualms.

“Old Fritz is gettin’ ’ell!”

“And there won’t be no long spoon for us, you bet!”

Pierce Hammersly spent the last evening at St. Just in a solitary country ramble. He came off duty at five, and after tea in his billet with Lambourne and several others, he escaped alone and struck westwards across the fields into the yellow light of a perfect June evening. A letter from Janet had reached him that morning, and all through the day he had had no chance of reading it, for Hammersly still kept some of the more sensitive reserves and shynesses that are not understood by men of rougher fibre. So he took his way across the fields where the grass was knee deep and all bright with flowers, and up a long hill to a beech wood that was as solitary as he desired.

He lay down in some bracken on the crest of the hill where a clearing had been made in the wood some previous winter, and there, facing the evening sun, he opened and read Janet’s letter.

He had written to her a few days ago, telling her that they expected to be in the trenches within a week, and this letter of hers came as an answer. It seemed to him strangely and sacredly opportune—like a cup of wine and a proud glance of the eyes before his going out to battle. And that letter of hers made him strangely and splendidly happy. It was like brave music, very tender and courageous, breathing such a fire of pride and faith in him that he needs must kiss it devotedly, and put it away in his breast pocket, where it lay just over his heart.

He sat for a long while, watching the sun sinking towards the horizon and filling the valley below him with a fog of gold. A great calmness possessed him, even while he listened to the dull hammering of those distant guns. He had nothing to fear but his own fear, and his fear of it and his loathing of it were greater than his fear. For he was like a man dying to wipe off an insult; to prove himself a fine comrade, a soldier fit to follow such a man as Guest.

Of course, it would be hell over there; of course, he might never see Janet again. He knew the sort of ghastliness he might have to suffer, but he did not flinch from it in the spirit, even if some of the “flesh fear” remained.

CHAPTER XXXIV

All St. Just turned out to see the 53rd march away at six o'clock on an exquisite June morning. The battalion was going up to the Front by road, and the men were in full marching order, and looking very fit and brown, as they lined up in the main street. Dogs, children, girls, women, boys, old men, and even the cats crowded out to say good-bye. Many of the Tommies wore flowers in their caps, which was quite irregular, but a sensible C.O. approves of irregularities on certain psychological occasions when something more than discipline has to be considered. The Colonel knew what the battalion did not know—that these lads were marching to bear a very great ordeal, that half of them might be dead within a week.

The 53rd marched out of St. Just in column of fours, the Colonel riding at their head, the transport rumbling in the rear. The children and the dogs followed them for the best part of a mile, and then took leave of them at the top of a hill in a little cloud of dust. The 53rd covered seventeen miles that day, with tunics open at the throat and shirts unbuttoned, and not a man fell out. They bivouacked for the night in a field beside a farm, and Hammersly did two hours sentry-go under the stars, with the tumult of the distant guns a little louder in his ears.

Next day they covered another fifteen miles, and the countryside began to be brown with khaki. There seemed to be troops, camps, new roads, transport convoys, new railways, clearing-hospitals, bakeries, A.S.C. dumps everywhere. An immense and ordered energy became evident. Staff officers abounded. Great bodies of troops were moving forward, or resting under the shelter of the woods.

“What price the Big Push!”

The men of the 53rd were intensely interested and excited. Eyes looked grimmer, mouths more set.

“We're for it, boys!”

“Are we down-hearted?”

“No.”

That night they bivouacked in a big wood, and the thunder of the guns seemed very near. They could see the flashes in the darkness. But the men were tired, and they slept on their ground-sheets, wrapped up in their great coats, so that the whole wood was full of the sound of heavy breathing.

The 53rd did not move off at once next morning; they lay in the wood, awaiting orders, and, as it turned out, they were to remain there all day. Yet all sorts of suggestive things happened. The C.O. and the Adjutant disappeared over the hill with a couple of Staff officers; there was an inspection of gas helmets and an inspection of rifles and emergency rations. The bombing officer appeared to be very busy, and the M.O. spent part of the afternoon examining the battalion's feet. After tea the men were ordered to lie down and get what sleep they could; but they were to be ready to fall in at a moment's notice. No man was to take his boots off, and that looked like business.

Hammersly had been asleep some hours when a whistle-call woke him. Men were tumbling up in the darkness and falling in upon the road. Here and there an officer's electric torch flashed on sleepy faces; and the roll was called.

Hammersly never forgot that night march. They swung through deep black woods and across bleak hills, with their faces towards the intermittent glare of the great guns. A dozen more battalions were moving in the same direction, but the 53rd knew nothing of those other dim and plodding masses, or of the complex scheme which was in the process of being woven, and of which they formed but one brown thread. Yet the old soldiers among them were wise as to their destinations.

“Reliefs at dawn. We'll be in the front line, boys, for breakfast.”

“Damn them guns,” said somebody. “Why don't they kennel up for the night?”

A veteran rebuked the voice.

“Don't you grumble at the guns. They're our —— guns, by God, givin' the Boches what we used to get. Hats off to Lloyd George.”

At midnight they halted and rested for half an hour, and then marched on again into the night. The temper of the darkness began to change; it was no longer an impenetrable, mysterious expectancy, but a tense gloom that was full of invisible terror and grim happenings and an all-pervading uproar that seemed to keep the dark earth in a tremble. The 53rd were now in the midst of those great hidden howitzers that thudded and clanged and thundered like huge beasts hidden in their secret lairs. There were other sounds, too, sounds that were new to the recruits from overseas, but familiar enough to the older hands and to Pierce Hammersly. Once again he heard that rushing sound in the air, a sound that ended in a sullen, menacing “wumph,” the arrival and bursting of a high-explosive shell flung by the German heavy guns at those grumbling British howitzers that never ceased to fire through all the night.

“What's that queer row, Prince?” whispered the man who marched beside him.

“Which row?”

“The thing like an express train with a collision at the end of it?”

“A German 5.9.”

“What—bursting over here?”

“Yes.”

One or two of these “crumps” landed within a hundred yards of the 53rd, and fragments went screeching overhead, making the new men duck and wince, but no one was hit. Pierce Hammersly kept his head up, and felt strangely and unexpectedly exhilarated. This huge confusion of sound, this gigantic drumming and hammering stirred his vitals as though he were listening to the vibrant crash of massed bands striking up a march. A trickle of excitement went down his spine. He carried his pride like a badge of honour, with Janet’s letter over his heart.

They were given another rest of half an hour, and “The Boy” went about among his men, wanting to know how their feet were standing it, and whether one or two men who had been sick at St. Just were any the worse for the long march.

“Sykes—where’s Sykes?”

“Here, sir.”

“Feeling all right, Sykes?”

“A1, sir.”

“That’s good.”

A long line of motor lorries ground their way along the road, with no lights showing, and there were more lorries coming back, with an occasional ambulance-car working its way towards some clearing-hospital. Then an R.F.A. battery went by, visible only as a series of dim shapes, drifting out of the darkness and disappearing almost at once. The 53rd were using their water-bottles, and munching odd scraps of biscuit.

“Fall in.”

On they went again, sighting on a dim, dark hill far ahead of them things that looked like bluish falling stars.

“What’s that?”

“Flares.”

“And there’s a bullet, my boy, reg’lar lost spirit.”

“Then that’s the firing line over there?”

“It is. You’ve hit it!”

Two minutes later they were halted, having left their transport some miles back. The officers were called together, and stood grouped round the Colonel, the Adjutant, a staff captain, and a subaltern from some other battalion who was to act as guide. Shells were passing high overhead from the howitzers and big guns in the rear.

Then they were moving once more, and within five minutes they had left the open country and were filing along a communication trench, with a narrow strip of sky studded with stars above them.

A grey June dawn found the 53rd in occupation of a certain length of the firing line, with the battalion that they had relieved in a system of support trenches in the rear, and for the 53rd the day proved a busy one. The sector was new to them: all its winding ways and redoubts, and danger points, its machine-gun emplacements and dug-outs had to be “mapped out” in the brains of those who were responsible. Trench-life has a complex system of its own; it is a life of specialisation, and every man has his place in it, from the M.O. to the gas expert, and from the C.O. to some poor devil in a listening-post, who is always fancying that he hears the enemy’s miners at work under his lair. D Company was given so many yards of front-line trench, with the care and use of a rather important observation post. As a matter of fact there was not much to observe for the moment, save the innumerable spurts of smoke and earth that the British shells were knocking up along the German lines.

Aeroplanes swarmed overhead. As for the noise, it was indescribable, monstrous, with howitzers, long-range guns, field-pieces and trench-mortars all thudding and booming and clanging in one vast chorus. It had a peculiar and varying effect upon the men; some had a dazed, stunned look; others grew irritable; a few had the air of being a little bit drunk. And this noise went on and on without cessation, and with such a rush and crash of shells that men felt dizzy and sick.

Pierce, with his steel helmet on, and his gas helmet slung ready in its satchel, was standing with his back against the trench wall when Corporal Palk came round a traverse with a set grin on his face.

“‘Allo, Prince, we’re in it, by Gawd!”

His words were lost in the din, and Hammersly shook his head to show that he had not heard. Palk came close and shouted.

“Bit noisy, those guns. But ain’t Fritz catchin’ it! ‘Allo, old cock, ‘ow’s yerself?”

This to an imperturbable child who lounged up with his steel helmet on the back of his head, and an air of serene boredom. He had seen a year’s trench warfare, and had been wounded at Loos, and he knew all that was to be known about anything and everything connected with the war.

“Damn fine ditches these,” roared Palk.

“So-so,” said the imperturbable one, “but we shan’t be in ‘em long; just a week-end visit.”

Palk’s grin broadened.

“The band’s playin’ the music of: ‘We’re goin’ over the Top.’”

It was no rumour, no mere piece of trench gossip; the great drama was complete in all its gigantic details, and moving towards its inevitable climax. The men of the 53rd understood the meaning of that month at St. Just, with its physical drill and route marching, bayonet fighting and extended order drill, and all the snap and dash and ardour of young men trained to the last muscle. They were to be part of the great striking force; a bit of steel in the spearhead of Britain. And the guns were clearing a way for them, tearing up barbed wire, smashing parapets, machine-gun emplacements and dug-outs, plastering the ground for miles behind the German lines with a hurricane of steel. The war-hawks sailed and swooped overhead, plucking out the eyes of the German army. The “Great Push” was at hand.

And Hammersly sat in the corner of a dug-out writing home. He was surprised at his own calmness, and at the absence of all self-pity. He was conscious of an intense curiosity, an excited feeling of lightness somewhere about the pit of the stomach. He had no illusions as to what might happen on the morrow; he was nearer death than he had ever been in his life before, and yet he was not afraid. Nor did he allow himself to be inspired by any hope. The unknown lay in front of him like a black fog, and he was going to leap into it with thousands of other good men and true; men who were strangely calm, strangely resigned, strangely contented. There was no future so far as the individual was concerned, and Hammersly was so much the lord of his own ego, that had he been offered the choice of some safe billet behind the lines, he would have refused it, and chosen to stay with the 53rd. It is the spirit of comradeship that counts at such a crisis.

He scribbled his last letters to Janet and his father, and they were brave letters in which no sentimental self-pity could be detected.

“Dearest,” he wrote to Janet, “I cannot tell you much, but we hope that great things will happen. I am in good heart, and proud to be here, and I do not mean you to be ashamed of me. The men are fine, and we are in splendid form. I am out for that badge of honour, and your letter lies over my heart.”

CHAPTER XXXV

One hour more; forty-five minutes; half an hour!

The men lay stretched on the sloping bank of the "trench of departure," as the French call it, with a shrieking arch of shells flying over them and bursting in such numbers that the explosions merged into one long crash. Hammersly lay between McVittie and Lambourne. Both these good comrades looked rather white about the mouth, and he wondered if his face had the same colour. McVittie appeared to be whistling, judging by the puckering of his lips, but no sound of whistling was audible. Lambourne was picking up bits of soil, and with great gravity rolling them between finger and thumb, his eyes set in a blind stare. Hammersly guessed that Lambourne's thoughts were far away in that Dorsetshire village, where the soft country was still full of the mystery and the ripe greenness of early summer. There were poppies in flower up above the trenches where the soil had not been disturbed of late; poppies that were the colour of blood.

Fifteen minutes! Lambourne turned suddenly and held out a hand to Pierce. His mouth opened and he said something that sounded like "good luck," but the grip of their hands was eloquent enough. Then "The Boy" appeared, very excited and a little pale, but smiling at the men, and keeping an eye on his wrist-watch. McVittie had drawn a photo out of his pocket, the photo of a girl; he looked at it for fully a minute with extraordinary intentness, and then slipped it back into his pocket, solemn and self-satisfied.

Captain Guest kept passing up and down, and his face shone as though a white light blazed behind it. He paused and spoke to Hammersly, and for a moment these two men stood and looked into each other's eyes.

"This is a great day; I would not have missed it."

"Nor I, sir."

Guest smiled at him, and Hammersly felt that a badge of courage had been pinned upon his tunic.

Five minutes!

The men dug their toes into the steep slope, and crouched like sprinters getting ready for a race. "The Boy" was there, with his steel helmet on a level with the parapet, a revolver in one hand, a trench dagger in the other. He kept his eyes on his watch. And Hammersly found himself thinking of Janet—thinking of her with such vivid intensity that she seemed with him there in that trench, a passionate and proudly inspiring presence, more eloquent than death.

One minute!

A sudden, miraculous silence, as all those smoking guns stopped firing, and the shells ceased rushing overhead. Then a strange, far-spreading cheer.

Hammersly saw "The Boy" rise up and go over the parapet with a wave of the hand. The 53rd went out like one man after those devoted leaders who had trained with them for the great ordeal.

Ask any man to give you a connected account of all that happened on such a day, and he will look at you with half-contemptuous and half-wondering eyes. As the youngsters put it in their letters: "Imagine an earthquake, a dust-storm, and two or three thunderstorms going on all at once, with us getting killed and killing other people, losing ourselves, falling into shell-holes, cursing, sweating, finding your boots red after treading in something. Then—I stopped to blow my nose!" The business is too huge, too terrible. All that Hammersly knew was that they went forward across No-Man's Land, took a smashed trench that was full of corpses, went forward again into a hell of machine-gun and shell-fire, got mixed up in a wilderness of death and destruction, blundered against more Germans, killed them, got still more mixed up, and he had no ideas as to time or place. The battalion seemed to have melted away, and a moment came when he found himself utterly alone, staring at a dead German whose head had been blown off.

Then a shell burst near him. He dodged, and fell into a shell-crater, and in the crater he found Corporal Palk. He had a smashed leg, and was swearing at it.

"'Allo, old man, come in out of the rain."

He recognised Hammersly.

"'What-o', old Prince! Got it in the back—somewhere?"

Hammersly explained that he had not been hit, and that his sudden disorderly descent into the crater had been unstudied and unintentional. He knelt down and set to work on Palk's leg, cutting off the puttee with his clasp knife, and slitting the trouser-leg up the seam, while the Corporal unearthed a rather tired-looking cigarette from his breast-pocket and asked Hammersly for a match.

"Blimy, but you've 'ad a bosh on yer tin 'at!"

"I remember something making a row."

Palk called the heavens to witness.

"'E remembers somethin' makin' a row! That tin 'at should 'ave bin yer christenin' mug, bloke. Gawd, but I was forgettin'!"

"Forgetting what? Hold on a moment till I have got this first field dressing fixed."

But Palk tapped him on the shoulder, and stared into his face.

"The Captain's out there."

"What, Captain Guest?"

"Just you stay 'ere, Corp'ral,'e says to me; 'I'm goin' on. I can see one or two of the boys lyin' out over there.' And on 'e went. Then a —— machine-gun started spittin'. You can 'ear the blighter at it now. And I've a sort of feelin', Prince, that the Captain's lyin' out there, for 'e's never come back."

Pierce said very quietly: "I'll go and see."

He went, and in going he discovered the spontaneity of certain kinds of courage, and the way a man behaves when his heart is touched. That particular machine-gun was firing from some hole or other in a spiteful and panicky fashion, but Hammersly was not thinking of machine-guns; he was thinking of finding Guest.

He came quite suddenly upon him, lying in a little hollow, one leg crooked out at an absurd angle, his chin resting on his crossed arms. He raised his head when he saw Hammersly, and a queer look came into his eyes.

"What the devil are you doing out here? Get back!"

"I heard you were lying out here, sir."

"Well, get back, get down. Can't you hear that damned machine-gun?"

"I can't help the machine-gun."

"We have been cut up, and my right thigh is smashed. Get back under cover."

"There is a goodish crater fifty yards away."

Guest stared at him intently.

"Look here, Hammersly, it's damned plucky of you, but your life is as good as mine, and I order you to crawl back to the nearest trench."

Hammersly crouched down.

"Sorry, sir; this is the second time I have refused to obey orders. I came out to find you, and you are going to let me get you into that shell-crater."

Guest's eyes held his.

"All right. Somehow, I think you mean it."

Hammersly crawled close to Guest, and sitting down, unwound his own puttees to serve as bandages.

"A afraid I may hurt you a bit, sir."

"Carry on."

Hammersly splinted the broken thigh with his rifle and the scabbard of his bayonet, and lashed Guest's feet together. It was quite a creditable piece of "first aid" work, though it made Guest grit his teeth.

"The best way will be for me to drag you."

"I think I can crawl now. It was that wobbly leg that made it hurt so damnably."

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Let's try. I am going to do a little land-swimming."

It proved a slow and rather agonising business, but they reached the shell crater in safety, where Corporal Palk welcomed them with an absurd and exuberant bray.

"Blimy, if that ain't a bit of all right, sir. Good man, ol' Prince."

The adventure had sharpened Hammersly's appetite. That German machine-gun was hicoughing as though its inwards were out of order, and but for an occasional shell the neighbourhood seemed comparatively quiet. Then the machine-gun jammed and stopped firing, and Hammersly slunk out of the shell-crater and betrayed an extraordinary business capacity. He collected three more wounded men, several water-bottles, a box of bombs, and a supply of emergency rations.

Corporal Palk grew ecstatic.

"Blimy, sir, if this 'ere 'ole don't begin to look like 'ome!"

They settled down to wait for the dusk, or for the coming of some of their own men. Hammersly had offered to try and make his way back, and to send up stretcher-bearers, but Captain Guest ordered him to stay.

"I would rather you stuck here, Hammersly."

It was said in an undertone, and Pierce stayed.

The luck had been with him that day, and his luck still held, even when Corporal Palk poked his nose over the edge of the shell crater and sighted that German patrol.

"Lumme—Boches!"

The patrol was about a hundred yards away, and advancing in the direction of the crater. There appeared to be about twenty Germans, grey, clumsy figures in their badly-fitting uniforms and flat caps. Their bayonets glittered as they spread out and began searching the ground.

"'E!!!"

Corporal Palk's eyes glared in a white face.

"Bayonetin' our wounded! Saw two of 'em 'jabbin' at a chap over there. 'Ere, gimme a rifle."

But Hammersly was bending over the box of bombs. He was a trained bomber, and like most players of games, a pretty expert thrower. Captain Guest's voice rapped out like a machine-gun.

"Put your head down, Palk, and leave that rifle alone for a moment."

He glanced meaningly at Hammersly.

"We shall have to make a fight. Will you take it on? Let them come fairly close, and catch them in a bunch if you can. How many are there, Corporal?"

"'Bout twenty, sir."

"Give me your rifle, and you other men—do what you can. We must back up Hammersly."

The Boches came on towards the crater, and Pierce watched them from behind a twisted tuft of grass. They were on the alert, but did not appear to expect immediate trouble ahead of them; in fact, they bunched together when they were about twenty yards from the crater, and Hammersly saw his chance.

He withdrew the catch, waited a second, and then stood up and threw the bomb. He was out of the crater and ready with a second just as the first exploded. He had timed the thing and pitched it perfectly, for it burst in the middle of the group and made a useful mess. Hammersly pitched the second a trifle short, and before he could throw his third the Germans were ready to retaliate.

He had scrambled clear of the crater so as to draw the Germans away from it, and in such a fight quick wits and quick feet serve. The Boches had scattered and were using both bombs and rifles, but luckily they were flurried and a little scared, and the irrepressible Palk was cracking away at them like mad.

Then Hammersly fell into a shell-hole, and the fall saved him. A bomb burst a yard away, and his left foot was put out of action forever. He remembered hearing Palk shouting:

"What price the boys! 'I, 'i, this way for the Clapham 'bus! Blast me, they've got a Lewis gun! Oh——!"

The remnant of the German patrol turned and bolted as a wave of brown figures hunted them homewards with the bayonet.

A wonderful sense of contentment possessed Pierce Hammersly as they carried him back to the nearest dressing-station. His foot and his leg felt like so much red-hot iron, but somehow the pain did not seem to matter. He knew that he had done well, that he had recovered his self-respect, that he had saved Guest's life. And he was out of this hell for a while, with a pretty sure chance of seeing the people at home.

The dressing-station was a big dug-out tunnelled in the side of a hill. It had a sort of sunk courtyard in front of it, protected by high sandbag walls. The space was packed with stretchers; so were the approaches and the winding ways that led down to it. Slightly wounded men squatted by scores in every alley and corner, even on the banks and open ground above. As for the stretchers—they carried every sort of anguish, every sort of wound. There were figures that lay very still, figures that made a soft moaning, figures that laughed and smoked, figures that twisted with pain. Hammersly found himself lying in the shade of a bank, wondering how long it would be before his turn came to be dressed. Someone gave him a cigarette, and lit it for him. In turning slightly on his side, his eyes met the eyes of the occupant of the next stretcher. It was Captain Guest.

"I hope you are not badly hit, old man."

Hammersly flushed up like a sensitive boy.

"Only my foot."

"You saved our lives, you know. Shake hands."

They shook hands, looking into each other's eyes.

"You ought to feel pleased with yourself, Hammersly."

"Not a bit."

"I'm not going to keep quiet about it. You ought to get the Cross."

CHAPTER XXXVI

Twenty-four hours later Private Hammersly lay abed in a general hospital somewhere on the French coast, with a few old letters and Janet's photograph on the table beside him. His foot, smothered up in dressings, no longer seemed to belong to him. He had been washed, put into a hospital nightshirt, given some hot soup, had his temperature taken and his pulse rate registered by a little nurse with brown eyes and black hair who took him in charge as though he belonged to her. His name, rank, unit, regimental number, and the nature of his wound were recorded on the case sheet at the head of his bed. And he felt most flagrantly and serenely comfortable, a tired man who exulted in his pillow and in the clean sheets, in the brightly coloured coverlet of his bed, in the flowers on the tables, in the pleasant figure of the little nurse with her pretty bosom and swinging skirts.

Through the window opposite him he could see sand dunes, a few pine trees, and the blue sea. The ward seemed most strangely quiet after the monstrous racket of the trenches. He turned his head right and left and looked at the other beds and the inmates. The two men next him were both asleep, and Hammersly understood the meaning of that sleep—a blessed and luxurious oblivion after days and nights of hell. One or two of the beds had red screens round them, ominous screens. Some of the men were chatting, others reading papers.

The nurse drifted near, and Hammersly hailed her.

"Nurse——"

She came to him, smiling, like a creature out of another world.

"I don't want to bother you, Nurse, but are there any other men of the Fifty-third Sussex here?"

"Not in this ward. Now we want you to go to sleep."

"Yes, I'll be very good. But can I write a letter?"

Her eyes glimmered at his.

"I see——"

"I shan't sleep till I have scribbled something home."

She brought him a bed-table with a sloping flap, some note-paper and a pencil.

"Nearly everybody wants this first dose of medicine."

"I'm sure it does them good, Nurse."

"Of course."

He thought her a very charming and sensible young woman.

So Pierce scribbled a short letter to Janet.

"MY DEAR HEART,—Don't worry. Here I am in No. 33 General Hospital, and as comfortable as could be. Left foot a little bit knocked about. I'm happy. I have got my pride back. Surely life is very good. . . ."

Then he lay down, curled himself up, and slept as though he had not slept for weeks. The nurse came softly and took the table away, smiled at him, glanced at the address on the envelope, smiled again, and went to make sure that the letter was posted.

When Hammersly woke there were red screens round his bed. The little nurse was bending over him, with her hand on his shoulder, and a couple of doctors stood at the bottom of the bed.

"Had a good sleep, Tommy?"

"Splendid, sir."

"Now, let's have another look at this foot, Nurse."

The elaborate and careful business of removing the dressings was gone through, as though hidden poisons lurked in the clean bed-clothes and the air of the spotless ward.

"Hurting you?"

"Not a bit, sir."

The nurse bunched the clothes up so that Hammersly could not see the thing that had once been a foot, but as a matter of fact, he made no attempt to get a glimpse of it. The two doctors were making a careful examination; they appeared to understand each other without speaking; a glance, a nod of the head sufficed. Then the taller of the two came round and felt Hammersly's pulse.

"I say, my friend, I am afraid that foot of yours is rather badly smashed."

He looked down kindly at Pierce.

"You mean it is no more use?"

"Yes. I am afraid we shall have to amputate it."

Hammersly smiled up at him.

"That's quite a small thing. It won't worry me in the least."

They operated on him next day, and with complete success, and he was back in bed, being abominably sick after the anæsthetic. The little nurse was very kind to him, and full of pleasant sympathy.

“You’ll feel better—soon. I know it seems very hard to lose a foot.”

“That’s nothing, Nurse. It’s only this confounded sickness. What’s a foot—after all? I’m one of the lucky ones.”

“We have sent a wire off to your people.”

“What a brick you are, Nurse. Yet ‘brick’ seems the wrong sort of word to use.”

“I like it.”

And they laughed.

At Scarshott there were two people who were very happy, for a wound is good news to those at home when death has been dared and cheated. Pierce’s letter reached Janet a day after the official telegram, and kindled such a glow of joy and exultation in her that she ran out into the pine woods to take in deep breaths of sweet woodland air. Her man had proved himself; he had passed through the valley of shadows; he would come back to her, proud and unashamed. The suspense melted out of her brain; her heart beat like the joyous wings of a bird.

Now while they had been lying side by side outside that dressing-station, Hammersly and Guest had scribbled down each other’s home addresses, Pierce making his record on the back of Janet’s photograph, Guest pencilling Hammersly’s on the corner of an envelope. And Guest, lying abed in a hospital not twenty miles away, thought much and often of Hammersly and also of those people of his at home. These thoughts of his gathered and took shape in the form of a letter, a letter that sent Porteous Hammersly walking through Scarshott town with a rose in his buttonhole, and his hat tilted at a triumphant angle.

“I should like you to know,” wrote Guest, “that I owe my life to your son’s courage, and that four other men can say the same. He behaved most splendidly, bringing in wounded under fire, and to save us, he, single-handed, attacked a German patrol. I hope he will be with you soon, and I’m proud to have known him.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

Late in July a white ship carried Pierce Hammersly across the Channel. He was disembarked as a stretcher case, having not yet reached the felicity of crutches, and being put on board a hospital train, he ended the day's journey as one of a little convoy assigned to a V.A.D. hospital in one of the southern counties. It had been raining, but the clouds broke towards sunset, letting in a great stream of golden light. The earth smelt fresh and sweet, and there was a soft and pleasant dripping from the trees. The rain pools on the platform of the village station caught the gleam of the sunset, and this village station had one of those high-banked gardens that was a smother of flowers. These wounded men sniffed the air exultantly, and breathed in well-remembered summer perfumes as they were carried or walked to where the cars were waiting. One of them stopped to pick a sprig or two of mignonette, and, holding it to his nose, breathed deeply in.

"No gas-helmet wanted, Snowy!"

A fragile youngster, with large, troubled eyes, looked up at the big chestnut trees along the road.

"Isn't it green!"

"By God," said a voice, "it's good to be home."

Dusk fell as the three cars climbed out of a red village and up a wooded hill covered with well-grown larches. The orderly had left the curtains looped back, and Hammersly had a view of a wonderful dusky landscape, all soft and dim, melting into a green-gold afterglow. The tall larches stood solemn and stiff, with a few stars glimmering above them. Even the grey road had a mystery and a romance of its own, winding in and out between the darkening woods.

The man on the other stretcher had been lying very still, with his hands folded on his breast. He had lost a leg, and was as white as milk. And suddenly he began to speak.

"Seems worth it, somehow, all that funk and sweat and worrying. Can't you smell the hay, old pal?"

"They must have been cutting in that field over the hedge."

"Lord, I should like to roll in it! Did you see that little garden down at the station?"

"Rather."

"It damned nearly made me cry."

This V.A.D. hospital had settled itself in Poyntz Hall, a big country house hidden away in the middle of a deer park, a weather-worn, red-brick house, sunning itself on the south slope of a hill. Its gardens were a century old; so were the beeches and oaks in the park. There was a great stretch of water where the deer came down at dusk to drink. In the distance, between the dense green masses of the woods, you could see the glint of yellowing cornfields touching the blue of the sky.

Pierce's bed was pulled out on to the terrace next morning, but he was in an adventurous mood, and growing restless.

"Can I have this letter posted, Sister, please? My people don't know I am here."

"Of course."

"And I think I could manage to get about on crutches. The stump has healed."

"We will see what the doctor says."

The doctor came and saw, and promoted Hammersly to the mobile section.

"Don't you go tumbling about. And take care of that leg. Get someone to supervise his first attempt, Sister."

So Pierce was allowed to dress and to stump up and down the terrace, and even to descend the broad steps, a man with one arm steadying him. Poyntz Hall reminded him of Orchards with its great lawns, its cedars, its sharply contrasted masses of light and shadow, and its wealth of flowers. Pierce found a long chair under one of the cedars, and the peace of the place was so compelling that he lay down and went to sleep.

Scarshott was eighty miles away, but that letter from Poyntz Hall brought the Hammerslys' big car speeding along the summer roads. Mrs. Sophia was away from home at the time, and in his heart of hearts Porteous Hammersly did not regret her absence, for on this almost sacred day he had a girl with wonderful and proud eyes beside him. And in watching her, Porteous Hammersly marvelled that he had ever been a snob. This war was giving life its truer values; in the future there would be more winning of things, and less buying of them.

He was an unselfish old boy, and as the car turned in at the park gates he proposed to efface himself for the first half hour.

"I shall stay in the car, Janet, for a while."

"Oh—no!"

He smiled at her.

"Won't it look rather ridiculous if we both insist on sitting here? And age is supposed to be privileged."

"I wonder why you are so good to me."

"Because I like it, or can't help it; which is the best possible reason."

At Poyntz Hall the commandant had to be interviewed, and the commandant was a large woman in a red linen dress, who looked stupid, but was not by any means.

“Private Hammersly? I expect he will be out in the garden. It isn’t the regular visiting hour.”

“I haven’t seen him since he was wounded, and his father and I have driven eighty miles.”

“Have you? I will send a boy scout to find your brother.”

Janet’s face betrayed her.

“Really, how obtuse of me. I am sure that he will be out in the garden. Perhaps you would like to see the garden? We are particularly proud of our rambles; I’ll show you the way, and the scout can find Private Hammersly.”

“Thank you so much.”

This rose garden was a very sweet and sequestered spot, surrounded by a yew hedge ten feet high, and in this green and living wall recesses had been cut for seats. The commandant was a woman of understanding, and when Pierce entered the rose garden, tapping the flagged walk with his crutches, he could see nothing but masses of rambler roses, smothering arches and pillars and running along ropes like flame.

“Janet.”

He called to her as though he were the lord of the garden and no other man in hospital dress had any right to be within hearing.

“Where are you?”

“Here.”

Janet was in one of the green recesses, and she came out of her hiding-place, with the sunlight in her eyes. Hammersly was resting on his crutches under a wooden arch covered with red and white rambler roses, and she saw his crutches and that edge of grey cloth that ended in nothing. And her heart went out to him with a great rush of pity and pride.

“My dear girl—my dearest——”

He was absurdly moved, and he kept on saying the same words over and over again. Moreover, he was not very sure upon his crutches, and she had to steady him with her hands upon his shoulders.

“You have lost a foot!”

“Why, so I have!”

“But, Pierce, you never told us.”

“Didn’t I? Well, what does it matter; they rig you up so prettily now. Good God, is it really you, Janet?”

“Really me.”

“Let’s go and sit down. Are you all alone?”

“Father is waiting in the car. He insisted on my seeing you first.”

“Dear old pater; always a sportsman. I say—I think I shall have to hobble along on my own, Janet; I shall only tread on your toes with these things.”

He laughed, and his laughter was happy and tender, while she hovered near him, watching, ready to help him when he should need her. An oak bench stood in one of the recesses in the yew hedge, and Janet took his crutches and helped to lower him with an arm about his body.

“You never told me how it all happened, but someone else wrote to us.”

“Who?”

“Captain Guest.”

“Did he? I could have died for that man, for our officers were splendid.”

“So were you.”

He looked half shyly at her.

“I think I did all right, and the funny thing was I did not feel afraid. I had your picture and your letters in my pocket.”

“Dear man.”

She took his face between her hands and kissed him impulsively.

“I’m so very proud of you. I never thought it was possible to be so happy. There—I really must go and fetch your father.”

“Yes, I’m a selfish pig.”

She went away, and returning with Porteous Hammersly, she pushed him gently into that labyrinth of roses, and left the two men together.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Like many other towns in England, Scarshott was being educated. It was developing the glimmerings of a social imagination; a more intimate understanding of the horrors and heroisms, the sordid splendours, the pathetic moral victories of this great war. There were people in Scarshott, even people of the middle classes, who began to have glimpses of a new era, a new ordering of the ways and means of life, of strange and inevitable changes that would have shocked them into a screaming and frightened rage in the early summer of 1914. Someone was bold enough to say that the British working man had behaved splendidly; that the future was his; that democracy had justified itself. The older individualism was bleeding to death. These armies that have faced German gas and German shells are not likely to falter in their advance upon the Future. Bigness must replace littleness; the red blood of a fine comradeship must flow through us all. Let the bugles blow the "Fall-in," and let us march into the New Epoch like good comrades, not thinking solely of self as in the old days, but of every man and every woman and every child in these our islands.

Scarshott was learning humility, sympathy, kindness. True, the town was still in its "infants' school," but had been shocked out of its rigid, non-vital, sneering, critical selfishness. It had lost a score of its young men; it had seen scores of its young men wounded. Therefore, if Scarshott smiled at all, it smiled very kindly over Porteous Hammersly's second flowering. He was once more the debonair and dressy old gentleman, gay with that frank and honest gaiety that the war has given us, a laughing philosopher and not a dry-as-dust in tears.

His workpeople welcomed that flower in his buttonhole.

"The old boy's feeling pleased with life."

"And he deserves it. Young Pierce did the right thing; he couldn't 'ave done more."

"They say he's lost his foot."

"Yes, saving a wounded officer, and several other chaps. A man couldn't do more than that, could he?"

Moreover, Porteous Hammersly was one of those who had begun to look at the industrial system with a new sort of vision. He had had Pierce's letters to help him; letters written with a fresh and vivid sincerity, the letters of a man who had lived with men.

"We can't go back to the old ways, Pater. It's unthinkable. The fact is, the average man is an amazing good chap; we can't shove him back into any corner, and keep him there sweating ten hours a day. Before this war we had lost the spirit of unity; we were fighting each other. Oh—I know. We said all sorts of sneering things about the working man, but it is the working man who has checkmated Germany. I have been asking myself all sorts of stiff questions. Why should I have so much more than I really want, when other people are just existing? There is only one honest answer to that question, Pater. Yes, I'm a Socialist. What a lot of rot we used to talk about Socialism! And it is with us now, the Socialism of Organisation, the Fair Deal, Discipline, the Courage that faces facts, and is not afraid to turn things upside down. If any man tries to talk the old individualistic, selfish stuff to me when I come home I shall want to kick him."

And again:

"Of course there must always be authority, but not the authority that money gives. Men will do anything, put up with almost anything when they realise that it is for a big end, a big ideal, for the good of the whole family. We don't want any more swollen individualism in our natural life, I mean that individualism that is too rich and too powerful. I have lived with working men, heard them talk, and some of them are my very good friends. I have come to understand and to share their distrust of the big boss. I believe our future industrial army could be as well disciplined and as solid and as comradesly as this Fighting Army. I should like to see this discipline carried on, becoming a tradition. It is such a mistake to imagine that discipline makes life harder. It doesn't. Discipline for all and for the benefit of all. It would mean life—real life—for millions, instead of mere existence."

These rough and ready scribbles from a training camp and from France served as a ferment, converting a complex concoction of old prejudices and opinions into a few simple and stable truths. Porteous Hammersly began to ask himself all sorts of novel questions, and to answer them in a quite original way. He sat at his desk and looked up figures, scribbled notes, made a number of fairly simple calculations. He realised that he had a private income of two thousand pounds a year; his tanning business was bringing in a profit of some thousands, even when the war-profits were deducted. He did not need the money; he had no respectable excuse for accumulating more money; and his own son, the inheritor, was arguing fiercely against such purely selfish accumulations of wealth. The alternatives were obvious, so obvious that Porteous Hammersly felt surprised that he had never considered them before. What about the people who worked for him? Of course, he was travelling the road that had been travelled for years by men who had

been moving ahead of their fellows, but to Porteous Hammersly all this country was very strange, and new, and fascinating. This war has sent thousands of staid folks upon voyages of adventure and discovery. Men have rediscovered the woman in their wives, and the dead dreams of their own youth.

He confided in Janet, and found in her an enthusiastic partisan. For the last two months she had been working at the tannery office, learning to do the work of one of the clerks who had joined the army.

“How splendid of you to think of such a change,” she said.

“At my time of life, you mean?”

“You are very young still.”

“Not my second childhood?”

“No, the real youthfulness. Is it not rather strange and delightful that you and Pierce should be looking at life with the same eyes. It shows——”

“Well, young woman?”

“How near you are to each other; how you will be able to work together. It is not merely a question of father and son——”

He thought for a moment.

“I suppose,” he said, “you are showing me that in some way I am justifying my existence. If a son can look on his father as a co-worker——”

“It proves what a success the father has made of being a father.”

“And the converse holds.”

“Yes.”

Once a week the big car carried Janet and Porteous Hammersly to Poyntz Hall. And in some quiet corner of that great garden these three would sit and elaborate the future, scheming all kinds of sound, business improvements, where business meant the good of all. It was not philanthropy, as understood before the war; it was just common sense, and honesty and kindness, with the ardour of youth to throw a glow upon it, and woman’s sympathetic insight to subtilise the details.

“You will have to have women on the committee.”

“Haven’t you made that obvious?”

“Why this personal tone?”

“I was conveying the most delicate compliment. Isn’t Janet indispensable, Dad?”

“Absolutely indispensable. We men have our limitations!”

“It is charming of you to confess that. Before the war——”

“We apologise for everything before the war. This is a new epoch.”

Then Pierce was transferred to an Orthopædic Hospital in London. He was to be discharged from the army and to be provided with an artificial foot. Ten days later came the “cinema touch,” though that little bit of red ribbon can never be vulgarised in the eyes of the men who know how such a badge is won.

Pierce sent the news to his father. It seemed right that Porteous should be the first to hear it, for there would be such pride for him in the telling.

That letter caught Porteous Hammersly as he was finishing an early breakfast, and it so excited him that the regular habits of the last twenty years failed to keep him the sober elderly gentleman. His one idea was that Janet ought to hear the news, for Pierce had asked him to tell her. Dear boy; splendid boy! Porteous Hammersly never thought of rushing upstairs to tell his wife.

His exhilaration was so triumphant that he forgot his hat, and the people who happened to be on the London road had the opportunity of seeing Mr. Porteous Hammersly walking at a great rate towards the common. He had remembered his walking-stick, if he had forgotten his hat.

“Silly old fool!” thought a spectacled insurance-agent, who posed as a conscientious objector; and was cycling off on his day’s round.

But Porteous Hammersly would not have quarrelled with any man who called him a fool that morning. What did it matter if he happened to be a little drunk and flustered with happiness? He caught Janet just as she was coming out of the cottage on her way to Scarshot, and he had to rid himself of the great news before he opened the gate.

“Pierce has won the Cross!”

She looked at him with wide bright eyes.

“The VC.?”

“Yes, just that.”

She went and kissed him.

“Isn’t it splendid!”

“We owe it to you, Janet.”

He was still immensely excited.

“Where’s your mother, dear?”

“Downstairs. She has just finished breakfast.”

“I want to congratulate her. We ought to have a dinner or something—what?”

He had to be taken into the cottage, and in the hall he put up his hands to remove his hat.

“Bless me—where did I leave it?”

“What?”

“My hat?”

She could have hugged him.

“My dear, you had no hat.”

“Bless my soul!”

And then he fell a-laughing.

“I think I am just a little bit excited, child.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

They stood for a moment outside the gates, a little group of three, the wounded man with his crutches and the Cross on his breast, the girl looking up at him with a glow of tenderness and triumph, the older man flushed, excited and very proud. A quiet and grave crowd had given them an affectionate and scattered cheer, for these three people were very pleasant to behold. If they were envied, they were envied by men and women who felt the better for envying them. The little group of three glowed with human emotion, and spread that glow into the hearts of those who watched.

A big police-sergeant came up and saluted.

“Do you want a taxi, sir?”

He addressed Porteous, and Porteous seemed a little lost.

“Taxi? Yes, thank you, Sergeant. I think we had better have a taxi.”

The taxi was produced, and the sergeant helped Pierce into it.

“Where to, sir?”

“The Piedmont, please.”

“Piedmont Hotel. No, I’m not taking anything for this, sir. Right away.”

It was the most wonderful drive that Pierce Hammersly had ever taken. No one said a word. He sat and held Janet’s hand, and old Porteous appeared to be a little weak in the eyes and quite extraordinarily interested in the traffic. Now and again he could not help glancing at the Cross and the bit of ribbon on his son’s tunic, that red badge of valour.

Porteous Hammersly had taken a suite of rooms at the Piedmont, and they had arranged a little dinner that night, with Captain Guest to make the fourth. Mrs. Sophia was in bed at Orchards with a sprained ankle, and no one had regarded the coincidence as a disaster.

They dined at eight. Captain Guest came on crutches, his thigh still fixed to an iron splint, and a patten fixed to his right boot, a pale but grossly cheerful man, with blue eyes full of fun. And these two be-crutched men stood propped over against each other and shook hands.

“How’s the thigh?”

“Splendid. They tell me that it will be only an inch shorter than its brother. Haven’t they given you a foot yet?”

“I believe it is in the post.”

“We’ll be as brisk as ever in no time.”

The Piedmont gave them a very delightful little dinner, and Porteous had chosen the wine.

“A legitimate extravagance,” as he explained it; “besides, we have pledges to drink.”

They all talked, and talked as though they had been mutes for a month, for the war has developed in us a new and excellent loquacity that is wise and natural and joyous. But towards the end of the meal Guest and Hammersly held grave debate together, and the others listened to these two generous voices.

“It is all a matter of luck. If I hadn’t fallen into that shell-crater and found Corporal Palk, it would never have happened.”

“It happened by chance up to a certain point, but it wasn’t luck that sent you out to try and find me. Nor was the rest of it luck.”

“If you argue in that way I shall have to go farther back. It was luck that you led us; it was luck that I was joined on to your Company. In fact, because you always led us so splendidly—”

“My dear chap——!”

“The Company was rather fond of you; dozens of men would have done what I did, only it happened to be me, and you were too generous about it.”

Guest looked at him with eyes of affection.

“We’ll leave it there. You men were fine.”

“Did we follow you well?”

“I could have wept for joy when you came along as you did. Miss Yorke, you don’t know what it means to an officer who has worked and grown proud of his little bit of an army, when those fellows follow him like a solid wall.”

Janet smiled at him.

“I can understand it. What a great moment!”

“Almost as great as that moment when you learn that somebody cares.”

They drank healths, and the dinner was over, and the two crippled men were manœuvred into armchairs by Janet and old Porteous.

Said Guest:

“I suppose they will want to give you some sort of triumphal reception down at your place?”

“I hope not. I don’t think I could stand it, thinking of ‘The Boy’ and all the fine chaps lying out there.”

“But I don’t see why you should mind.”

“Doesn’t the brass-band idea seem rather beastly?”

Guest appealed to Janet. He had noticed that she was watching Pierce’s father, and Porteous Hammersly was looking self-conscious and uncomfortable.

“What do you say, Miss Yorke?”

She paused in thought, and then looked straight at Pierce.

“I think there are times when a man becomes public property for an hour or so. Besides, if it pleases other people _____”

Her eyes held Pierce’s, and then glanced meaningly at his father. That look of hers was an appeal and a challenge, for Porteous had grown very silent and appeared distressfully intent upon his cigar. Pierce saw and understood. His eyes swept back to meet Janet’s and, with an honouring look, thanked her.

“Perhaps you are right. I dare say I should enjoy it thoroughly.”

When Guest had gone, Janet contrived to snatch a few moments alone with her man. She went to him impulsively, holding out her hands.

“How much kinder you are. You see, he had confided in me.”

“Dear old dad; I would not hurt him for worlds. What’s in the air?”

“The tannery people sent a deputation. They want to drag a carriage up from the station. He was delighted.”

“Good heavens! Still, after all, it is really very decent of them. It’s the pater’s triumph; he has always treated them very well. I’ll go through with it, Janet, and smile.”

CHAPTER XL

The day of Pierce Hammersly's home-coming was his father's day, bright with September sunshine, clear and still. Quite a big crowd gathered at the station to meet the train. People threw flowers into the carriage, and the cheering was perfectly sincere.

Men and boys had roped themselves to the carriage and they went up through Scarshott town with great ceremony, Janet gathering up the flowers that had fallen into the carriage and making them into a great posy. Old Porteous was very dignified and very happy, lifting his hat from time to time, and giving it a slight flourish. Pierce sat very still, like a soldier at attention.

The crowd followed them into the Orchards garden, and Porteous Hammersly stood up to make a speech. It was a very short speech, and the most effective part of it was the breakdown towards the end.

Pierce had to struggle up and cover the old man's emotion.

"Thank you all, thank you, most heartily. I hope—some day—to be the man my father is."

They cheered him unreservedly.

But the light in Janet's eyes was the light that crowned his valour.

Transcriber's Notes

Obvious printing errors have been silently corrected.

Inconsistencies in hyphenation, spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[End of Valour: A Novel by Warwick (George) Deeping.]