Anderson's Jo

MARY GRANT BRUCE

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Title: Anderson's Jo
Date of first publication: 1927
Author: Mary Grant Bruce (1878-1958)
Date first posted: Oct. 8, 2017
Date last updated: Oct. 8, 2017
Faded Page eBook #20171001

This ebook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at http://www.pgdpcanada.net

Father, she whispered

ANDERSON'S JO

BY

MARY GRANT BRUCE

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Mates of Billabong, *Nora of Billabong*, etc.

AUSTRALIA:
CORNSTALK PUBLISHING COMPANY
89 CASTLEREAGH STREET, SYDNEY
1927

Wholly set up and printed in Australia by
The Eagle Press Ltd., Allen Street, Waterloo
for
The Cornstalk Publishing Company
89 Castlereagh Street, Sydney
1927

Registered by the Postmaster-General for
transmission through the post as a book

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FATHER, SHE WHISPERED
HE TURNED TO THE STILL FIGURE ON THE BED
SHE PICKED UP THE FIRST THING SHE COULD SEE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF HARRAP

"Dad! Da——ad!"

The long, shrill cry floated across the paddock. Jim Harrap, cutting bracken fern in a corner by the creek, straightened his aching back, leaned on his long fern-hook, and shaded his eyes to look in the direction of the call.

Two small boys came into view, running among the scattered stumps of trees across the rough ground. They ran with haste and determination, shouting as they came. A frown creased the man's forehead as he watched them.

"Wonder what's up now?" he muttered. "Something's always up." He gave a long cooee, to make his whereabouts known, saw the seekers change their direction and come towards him, and then returned to his cutting. Whatever had happened, he would know about it soon enough without going to meet it: and meanwhile, there were plenty of ferns. There was never any lack of ferns to cut in South Gippsland: as soon as you had cut to one end of a paddock the new crop of little green croziers, straight and strong and merciless, was springing up at the other end. They kept a man busy—kept him poor—kept him irritable. The ferns—and other things. Life was no easy matter for a man on a hill selection, with rough, steep country from which to hew a living for a sickly wife and five children. Not so hard until the youngsters had to go to school; they did not cost so much while they ran about barefoot, clad in any old bits of things. But when school-days came—Lord, how they wore out boots! His forehead creased again as the hook swung backwards and forwards through the ferns. Something was wrong again, he knew. Billy and Dick never came out to find him in the paddocks without reason—too afraid he'd have some job for them.

They came up, panting: boys of nine and ten, heavily built, their faces showing the curious exultation that comes to some people when they are bearers of unpleasant tidings.

"Mum wants you to come 'ome," said Billy.

"What's her hurry? I got an hour's work yet in this corner."

"Says she wants you right away. That woman's sick."

"Well, she was sick this morning. An hour won't make her much worse." The busy fern-hook had not ceased cutting.

"Too right, she's worse," said Dick. "Mum's only been waiting for us to get back from school to fetch you. She says something's got to be done."

"Blessed if I know what," said his father. "All right, I s'pose I'd better come. An' I'd reckoned nothing 'ud stop me gettin' this corner cut out to-

night. Oh, well, it's no good reckonin' on anything but trouble on this place." He thrust the fern-hook under a log, picked up his coat and the blackened tin billy that had held his dinner, and they set out towards the little homestead tucked into a fold of the hills half a mile away.

It was only half a mile as the crow flies, but to walk it took over half an hour. There were patches of boggy ground and tea-tree scrub to be circled round; great dead trees lay here and there, too big to be scrambled over—they followed the little sheep-pad that wound in and out among them. Now and then they dipped into a deep gully, where to walk down one side was almost as laborious as to climb up the other. All the ground showed the stumps of cut ferns, brown and stiff, but between them the little deadly green heads, stiffly curled, were already showing—the new crop that would so soon uncurl, to cover the ground with a mass of dense fern-fronds, choking the grass on which the sheep depended for their lives. If only grass and lucerne would grow as easily, as furiously, as the evil bracken! Jim Harrap scowled at it as he led the way, the boys jog-trotting at his heels.

At the last fence, near the house, he turned to them.

"You two better go an' bring up the cows," he said.

"Aw, it ain't cow-time yet, Dad," protested Billy. "Mum said we could have a piece when we fetched you 'ome."

It was characteristic of Jim Harrap that he rarely enforced an order.

"Well, hurry up an' get it," he said. "Only, don't you slip out on me an' forget all about the cows, or you'll get what-for." The boys grinned at each other, following him. Dad was always promising them "what-for"—a promise that was never kept, no matter how richly they might have merited the mysterious penalty.

The cottage in the fold of the hills was bare and unpainted, except that the soft woodwork of the doors and window-frames had been roughly blued—apparently with the domestic blue-bag. The colouring was peeling away in ragged flakes. In front, a few sickly flowers struggled for existence among a mass of docks; at the rear a more serious attempt had been made to grow vegetables, of which the main crop was a stretch of fly-infested cabbage. A few dusty tree-lucernes shaded the dreary back-yard: a clothes-line, stretched between them, carried some dingy garments that flapped heavily in the rising breeze. Two little children quarrelling over a broken toy in a dust-hole, raised grubby faces to greet their father.

"Dad! Make Benny le' go of my engine. You make him, Dad!"

Harrap growled an inaudible reply, slouching across the yard to the open door of the kitchen. His wife came out to meet him, a year-old child in her arms. She was a meagre woman, thin and sallow, with a strained, anxious face that might once have been cheaply pretty, before years and cares and

shiftlessness had done their work upon it. Now it expressed a perennial grievance against the world—mingled, at the moment, with something more definite.

"Well, what's wrong now, Loo?"

"It's that woman," she said. "She's worse, Jim."

"Worse, is she?" He looked at her in a heavy, puzzled way. "Well, I can't do anything for her, can I? Ain't she took the med'cine?"

"Oh, she took it, all right. But she's worse, all the same. She won't touch any food, an' she just lies an' looks at me. She don't seem able to say what's wrong. An' I don't know what to do with her."

"Oh, well, just leave her be," said Harrap. "Ten to one she'll be all right to-morrow, after a good sleep. I wouldn't get in a fuss if I was you, Loo. You've done all you could for her."

"She won't be all right to-morrow—nor next week neither," said his wife, sharply. "That woman's real ill, you take it from me, Jim. She wasn't right when she come here. Jolly shame, I call it, taking a situation an' landing herself on decent people to be looked after. An' how do we know what's the matter with her? Something catching, as like as not—an' the next thing'll be all our kids'll have it. An' then what are we going to do?"

"But—" He looked at her stupidly. "You don't want me to go in for the doctor, Loo? Ten mile, an' I'm up to me eyes in work as it is, let alone the milkin' to be done."

"Doctor, indeed!" She gave an angry sniff. "What good 'ud that do? You'd get him out, an' he'd order med'cine, an' you'd have to go in again for that, an' he'd say she had to have special food an' goodness knows what all—an' how am I to do the nursing, with the house an' children, let alone the chance of its bein' catching? I just can't do it, Jim, an' that's all about it." She began to cry, weakly, and the child in her arms broke into a loud, frightened roar.

"Give 'im to me," said Harrap. He took the baby and tried to hush him awkwardly, his face a study of bewildered anxiety. "Aw, get hold of yourself, Loo; it's no use cryin' about it. What do you want me to do?"

His wife dried her eyes with the corner of a very dirty apron.

"We got to get her away," she said, speaking under her breath. "It's my belief she's goin' to die, Jim; an' next thing you know we'll be landed in all the expense, an' everything else. We got to get her to the hospital in the Flat before she gets any worse. I'll be thankful when I see her off the place, an' the kid, too."

"But I can't take her," he said, knitting his brows. "You know I told you this morning that old Jess is dead lame; and she's the only horse I can drive. What's your idea, Loo?"

Mrs. Harrap had her plan already formulated.

“You ride over an’ get John Anderson,” she said, quickly. “He’s good-natured enough, an’ he’s got a Ford truck—he’d never refuse to take her in to the Flat.”

“No, I s’pose he wouldn’t,” Harrap said. “But I don’t quite like it, Loo. Seems a bit rough, sendin’ the poor soul off like that. Why don’t you wait until to-morrow, an’ see how she is then?”

“To-morrow might be too late,” she answered. “Say she’s worse, or that it turns out to be catching—how do we know what sort of illness she’s brought down from Melbourne? There might be no moving her to-morrow, or for weeks. An’ if she dies on our hands? I don’t see we owe anything to a strange woman that’s let us down pretty badly already. She never had no right to come here at all—we’ve only had two days’ work out of her, an’ she’s been in bed for nearly a week. I’m not game to take the responsibility of the kids catching it, if you are. Say I get it too—are *you* goin’ to do the nursin’ of us all?”

“Lor!” said Harrap, with a look of dismay that was almost ludicrous, at the same time pushing back his hat. “You do think of things, don’t you? But is she fit to travel?”

“She’s fit enough,” said his wife, setting her lips in a thin line. “I’ll fix her up comfortable enough; she can lie on a mattress in the truck.”

“An’ the kid?”

“The kid’ll have to go too. I expect they’ll keep her at the hospital: if not, she’ll have to go to the police. I ain’t goin’ to have them here. Soon as I get them away I’ll shut up the room an’ burn sulphur in it to kill the germs. It’s the only thing to do, Jim. You hurry up over to Anderson’s, an’ I’ll get their things packed.”

“Right-oh,” he said, gloomily. He turned and made his slow way to the gate, and then stopped. “I don’t half like it, Loo,” he began. But his wife had disappeared; and after a moment’s hesitation he hunched his shoulders and slouched across to the shed.

CHAPTER II

BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS

JOHN ANDERSON was whistling as he turned his sheep out of the yard. They were a good lot: even better than he had thought when he bought them at the sales at Summers' Flat. He had spent a cheerful day examining them; now, newly ear-marked and branded, they were scattering across the sweet, short grass, glad to be free of the dusty yard and the sense of harassed anxiety that always afflicts a sheep when approached by a man and a dog. Old Boss, having served faithfully throughout the day, came and rubbed himself against his master's knee; Anderson stooped to caress the smooth black head, with a low-voiced "Good dog!" that brought a look of worship into the liquid brown eyes. They were solitary people, he and Boss; all the better friends for being solitary. He asked no better companion. As for Boss, to him all Heaven and Earth united their best in the person of his master.

A queer man, John Anderson, the district said. Not poor; every one knew that his land was his own, with not even the ghost of a mortgage to trouble his dreams. His house, small as it was, was well-built and substantial, with good out-buildings that were as regularly painted as was the house itself and the neat white picket-fence that surrounded the garden. All the place was well improved; the tea-tree scrub was cut, the boggy land drained and reproductive, the blackened stumps burned out. There were no broken places in the fences, no gates lacking hinges. Even the bracken had become discouraged by years of remorseless cutting and ploughing, and now made only half-hearted attempts to break out here and there. The garden that half concealed the house was trim, although it consisted chiefly of lawn and shrubbery; the little orchard held only good trees, kept well pruned and thoroughly sprayed. The neat rows of vegetables were, the district said, as good as a Chinaman's. Altogether, a model farm. But its owner was a lonely man, seeking no friends and making none.

The district dubbed him "queer." He had come, nobody knew whence, ten years ago; had bought the land, built his house, and settled down unobtrusively, with an old housekeeper as unsociable as her employer. Men who "dropped across" to visit him were received courteously, but never asked into the house. Invitations to visit other farms were not lacking, but John Anderson declined them all with a quiet politeness that did not encourage anyone to press him further. He rarely visited the distant township, except on sale-days, when he transacted his business as quickly as possible, never mingling with the cheery crowd of men who thronged the hotel after the

business of buying and selling was over. The storekeepers respected him because he paid promptly and did not haggle; the bank manager paid him the deference due to one of the few men in the district whose account was in a thoroughly satisfactory state. It was said that he was a great reader; the post-office made no secret of the fact that his mail consisted mainly of books. No one disliked him, because it is not easy to dislike anyone who is invariably courteous. Nevertheless, there was a certain distrust connected with his name: the distrust that always attaches to anyone who is unusual. Yes, certainly John Anderson was "queer." People spoke of him with ominous waggings of the head, as of one about whom some hidden mystery clings.

Not that there was any real mystery. It suited Anderson to keep his business to himself, but his history might have been shouted from the housetops without creating any stir. Old Mrs. Collins, his housekeeper, could have told it, but she cared as little as her master for gossip, and had no wish to make friends. It was merely the story of a lonely boy who had grown into a lonely man, asking little from Life until it had flung into his path a year of perfect happiness. That year had ended with the sudden death of the girl-wife whom he had adored—killed at his side by a drunken man whose motor had left the track and plunged across the footpath. It was all the work of a moment; but in that moment something in John Anderson died with his wife.

They had lived in Queensland, but he could not bear to remain where every moment brought memories that were as knives in a wound. So he sold out and came South, striving to put as great a distance as possible between him and his memories: a useless thing, seeing that he carried them with him. Old Mrs. Collins, who had been his wife's nurse when a baby, begged that she might come too; and the old woman and the young man, bound together by their sorrow, took up life anew in the remotest corner of Victoria, and tried to stifle suffering by hard work. Because hard work and time are the only real cures for grief, the years brought to them a kind of contentment. There was something in achievement: in seeing a rough place turn slowly into a model farm, even though it was only for their own eyes. And if one worked so that weariness prevented lying awake at night—then the days did not matter so much.

John Anderson could scarcely have come to a better place for hiding himself. In that hill-country the farms are remote from each other, not because of distance, but because man cannot travel as a bird flies. Very few farms can boast a straight track from the road to the homestead. Good sites, flat enough for building, may be rare on a place of several hundred acres; and when a man has picked the best, and built his house thereon, having due regard to water-supply and shelter, he often finds that his track out to the road can be only a difficult one: a track that must edge along hill-sides, circle round tussocky and boggy land, or plunge into deep gullies. Sometimes the wives will not drive

over these tracks—wives of a nervous nature—and are thus compelled to remain at home, unwilling prisoners, until time can be spared from the milking or the ploughing or the harvesting or the scrub-cutting, or half a hundred similar diversions, to drive them forth. But nervous wives are few in Gippsland. It is more usual to see the lady of the farm driving the old buggy along the dizzy tracks with the latest baby in her arms, the latest but one wedged firmly between her and a responsible ten-year-old, and the intermediate small fry overflowing every crevice of the buggy not occupied by parcels of every size, from seventy-pound bags of sugar to Tommy's boots. They jog away into the hills, and the hills fold round them and seem to swallow them up.

Then, as time goes on, and the stubborn land is cleared, becoming yearly more and more productive, prosperity begins to smile upon the hard-working farmers, and Ford and Chevrolet cars take the place of the battered buggies; tough light cars that make little of the shelf-like roads along the hill-sides. That is a time of great glory for the farmer's wife, who sits back in her corner thinking of the days when it took slow hours to drive the old horses over the road that the car eats up in half an hour: of getting home at night with a load of weary children, and with horses to unharness and feed before beginning the evening work. Certainly it may be admitted that by the time the farmer's wife gets her car she has fairly earned it.

To John Anderson bad roads and remoteness were but part of his wall of defence. He did not need people: did not want them. When outside help was necessary for clearing, harvesting, or shearing, he hired men who "did for" themselves in a hut some distance from the homestead, so that they gave no extra work to his old housekeeper. They were a strange pair. As the years went by the habit of silence grew upon them, so that sometimes days would pass during which they scarcely exchanged a sentence. Once the old woman fell ill, and then Anderson tended her as gently as if he himself had been a woman; then, becoming anxious, made haste to the township, returning with a doctor and a trained nurse—an up-to-date young person who ruled the cottage with a rod of iron until the glad day when her patient was pronounced well enough to resume her duties. Mrs. Collins shrewdly suspected that the nurse would not have been sorry to stay longer—perhaps permanently: John was a personable fellow, tall and good-looking, and not yet forty. Many a girl looked his way more than once when he rode through the hilly streets of the township. But there was great relief in the little white house after she had gone, and they slipped back into their old paths of silence.

To-day John Anderson looked at his watch as the sheep settled into contented grazing, and allowed himself to think of the cup of tea that he knew would be awaiting him at the house. Tea would be pleasant, after the long

hours spent in the acrid dust of the yards. If he sent Boss ahead, to warn Mrs. Collins, as Boss so well understood how to warn her, his cup would be ready as soon as he had "scrubbed up" at the basin on the bench by the pump. So he nodded to the dog, with a curt, "Get along to the house, Boss," and followed slowly as the collie cantered off.

Half-way to the house the sound of hoofs fell on his ear, and he glanced round with a frown. Jim Harrap was riding up the track; and of all his neighbours John chiefly disliked the Harrap family—shiftless, lazy, dirty: people who would never make a decent farm if they stayed on it a hundred years. Harrap never came unless he wanted something: help with a sick cow or a bogged bullock: perhaps to borrow some farm implement that was fairly certain to be returned in worse condition than when he received it. "I wonder what the beggar's after now," mused John; and waited to greet his visitor.

"G'day, Mr. Anderson." Harrap met his eyes for a moment and looked away again. It was plain that he was ill at ease. "I'm in luck to find you at home. Fact is, we're in a bit of a hole at our place, and me an' the missus were wondering if you could help us out."

"What's wrong?" Anderson's voice was not sympathetic.

"We got a sick woman there. Got her from Melbourne last week, from some blessed agency that said she was a good strong servant—me missus is that done up with the work an' the kids we had to have some help. Much help she's been. She had no right ever to have come; it's my belief she was sick before she left town. You know the kind—all they want is a few weeks' change to the country." He spat disgustedly.

"Well?"

"Well, she's been real sick these five days, an' the med'cine we give her don't seem to hit the spot. An' me missus is fair worn out looking after her, with all the other work as well. I'd take her in to the Flat, to the hospital; it's the only place for her. But the old buggy-mare is dead lame, an' I haven't a thing I could drive. Seems a lot to ask you, Mr. Anderson, but we were wondering if you could possibly run her in in your Ford. I wouldn't worry you, only we're in such a hole over it, an' the missus close on caving-in herself, she's that tired."

John Anderson's expression was not inviting. He was tired, after his day's work; even if he were not tired he had no desire to do the Harrap family a good turn, especially when it entailed a drive of over twenty miles on bad roads. Still—a sudden vision came to him of a sick woman left to the scanty mercies of Mrs. Harrap, whose views of suitable nourishment would probably be limited to cold corned-beef. It was not the sort of thing a man could refuse to do, no matter how distasteful it might be.

"I suppose I must take her," he said, ungraciously. "But is she fit to travel?

Can she sit up?"

"Oh, she'll be fit, all right," Harrap answered hastily. "Only we thought she'd better keep lying down an' covered up warm. We could put an old mattress in the back of the truck, an' then she'd go in quite easy. Well, it's jolly good of you, Mr. Anderson; I thought you wouldn't see us stuck."

John Anderson checked an impulse to tell his visitor that he would see the Harrap family stuck quite cheerfully, whatever their difficulties might be—but that a sick stranger was another matter. Home-truths, however satisfying to utter, were, however, not always advisable; so he merely nodded, and turned back towards the shed where he housed his Ford. "I'll get the truck out," he remarked, "and be over at your place in half an hour. Have you got plenty of wraps for her?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right," Harrap replied. "The missus'll fix her up. Well, thanks aw'fly, Mr. Anderson. I'll hurry back an' see that she's all ready."

"You'd better. I don't want to be kept waiting." Anderson did not vouchsafe his visitor another glance. He ran the truck out, saw that oil and petrol were not lacking, and drove to the gate of the little back-yard. Mrs. Collins, a plump little old woman, was standing on the veranda, watching him as he strode up the path. A basin of water, with soap and towel, were ready for him on the bench.

"Got some tea?" he asked, as he scrubbed his hands. "I have to go into the Flat, to take a sick woman to the hospital."

"Mrs. Harrap?" There was the suspicion of a sniff in Mrs. Collins's tone.

"No—some poor wretch of a servant-maid they've got there. Precious poor game, I should think, to be Mrs. Harrap's servant, even if she were fit. I don't wonder she decided to go sick. But it's a confounded nuisance. I'll milk the cow before I go."

"You needn't; I've just milked."

"What did you want to do that for? You know I told you you weren't to milk."

"Oh, you'd had a long day, Mr. John; and Daisy's so quiet that a baby could milk her. You'll need a clean shirt."

"I suppose so." Anderson cast a glance at his grease-stained clothes. "I'll change before I have my tea, and then I must get off as quickly as possible."

Harrap was waiting for him as he drove up to the gate of the untidy yard half an hour later.

"I thought you might drive right in, if you backed," he said. "I don't fancy she can walk out, an' it'll be less of a lift for us."

"Is she as bad as that? All right, keep the youngsters out of the way, and I'll back." He turned the truck and reversed across the yard, coming to a standstill by the corner of a lean-to building little more than a shed, against the

wall of the cottage. Harrap dumped in a dirty mattress and a couple of dingy grey blankets, at which Anderson looked with disfavour, though he made no comment.

"She'll travel comfortable enough on that," the man said. "Now, if you wouldn't mind giving me a hand with her, Mr. Anderson. She's in here." He led the way into the lean-to, his companion following with a feeling of disgust that a sick woman should be in such a place.

Within, the shed was gloomy and airless. It boasted but one tiny window, over which hung a fragment of a torn curtain. Mrs. Harrap was there. She stood aside as the men came in, smiling nervously.

"Good day, Mr. Anderson. Come to help us out of our troubles?"

"Good day," said Anderson, curtly. His glance went past her to the woman who lay on the straw palliasse from which the mattress in the car had evidently been stripped. Only her face could be seen, and one thin hand that plucked weakly at the blanket that covered her. But it was a face so ghastly that the man stopped short in dismay.

"Is she fit to go?" he questioned in a low tone.

"My word, yes," said Mrs. Harrap. "Why, the drive'll do her good!"

Anderson's stern glance went past the woman to her husband.

"She ain't fit to stay, an' that's all there is about it," Harrap muttered. "Hospital's the only place for her."

It was so undoubtedly true that John Anderson had nothing to answer. It was no place for a sick woman—the wretched shed, the scant mercy of the rat-faced slattern in the doorway. He turned back to the still figure on the bed. Great dark eyes, sunk in the white face, questioned him dumbly.

"I'll lift you very gently," he told her. "I'm going to take you where you will be more comfortable."

"What you going to do to my mother?"

John Anderson jumped. In the gloom of the shed he had not noticed another figure: a tiny thing with angry eyes under a tumble of black curls. She crouched by the bed in a dark corner, one hand under the blanket, holding fast to the woman's arm.

"Just you hold your tongue, Josey," said Mrs. Harrap sharply. "No one's goin' to hurt your mother. Get out of the gentleman's way."

"You shan't touch my mother!"

Anderson looked helpless. He had no knowledge of children: certainly not of small black-eyed furies who defied him.

"Is it her child?" he asked. "You didn't say there was a child, Harrap."

"Oh, she's hers, all right," Harrap said. "Precious young handful, too."

"But what are you going to do with her?"

"She can't stay here," Mrs. Harrap said, venomously. "I got me hands full

enough without strange kids. The police'll have to take her, Mr. Anderson—just you turn her over to them."

"I'm not going to take a child too," said the horror-stricken Anderson. "I bargained for a woman—not a youngster, Harrap. You'll have to keep her until the mother is better."

"You won't take her mother away from Jo!"

The defiant voice ended in a wail. The woman on the bed stirred, and as Anderson looked at her, her eyes met his in a passionate appeal.

"Don't—take—her—from—me." The voice was little more than a whisper, but the eyes spoke. John Anderson felt a wave of shame surge through him. Death was near, and they were wrangling in its presence.

"Don't worry," he told her gently. "No one shall take her away from you." He turned to the child.

"Now then—what's your name—oh, Josey," he said. "You and I are going to take Mother in a car to the doctor. He'll make her better. You have got to help me to look after her."

"You—you won't hurt her?" The baby face worked.

"No. We're going to take care of her. Just get out of the way and see how carefully we'll carry her out."

The small thing wriggled out of the corner; a girl of six, thin and wiry, with a dark gipsy face that sadly needed soap and water. She was clad in a skimpy red frock, torn in more than one place, her bare feet thrust into ragged sandals. It was a proud little face, under its dirt. John Anderson found himself looking at her with something like respect.

"Now, if you're ready, Mrs. Wilson," said Harrap.

Anderson put his arms gently under the woman's body, and they lifted her out. She was pitifully thin: it was a very easy matter for the two strong men to put her on the mattress in the truck, while Mrs. Harrap tucked the blankets carefully round her, moved at the last moment to some impulse of compassion.

"There's all their things." She lifted a suit-case into the truck.

"Sure you packed everything?" Harrap said. "They'll want all they've got."

"Rather—I don't want no bother sending things after them. Hop in, Josey. I suppose you're goin' to sit in front with Mr. Anderson."

"No!" It was the weak voice from the truck, and Anderson was beside her in a stride. "Put her—put her with me."

"Will she sit still?" he asked doubtfully.

"She will always sit still—with me. Put her where I can touch her."

John Anderson picked up the little figure in the red frock and swung her gently into a corner by her mother.

"Just you hang on tightly," he said. "Mother's in your charge, because I can't see what's happening when I'm driving. So I rely on you not to wriggle

about.”

“Jo won’t wiggle,” said the elf. “Jo will take care of my mother.”

“That’s all right.” He faced round upon the Harrap pair, speaking curtly.

“Has the mother any papers or letters?” he asked. “The police will want to know all about her.”

“I s’pose they’re in her bag; I packed all I could see about,” said Loo Harrap sulkily. “The bag’s in the suit-case.”

“You don’t know who she is?”

“How’d we know? She didn’t give us her hist’ry. She come to us from Rawson’s agency—they may know.” Mrs. Harrap dropped her shrill voice to a wheedling note. “Don’t you worry about the kid, Mr. Anderson. Ten to one the police’ll hand her over to the Salvation Army or some orphanage—”

“Take care!” Anderson said, sharply. “Do you want the poor soul to hear you?” He swung on his heel; there was nothing further to be gained by talking to the unsavoury pair. He reflected, as he drove slowly out of the gate, that even if the woman behind him were dying, it would be better to die in the clean air than in the evil hole from which he had helped to carry her.

“I wouldn’t leave old Boss there,” he said to himself. He eased the car over the holes in the track until they came to the gate of the paddock. As he got out to open it he cast a look at his passengers. Mrs. Wilson’s eyes were closed. Beside her, bolt upright and defiant, sat her daughter, one hand clutching the side of the truck, the other holding the blanket about her mother. She met John’s eyes squarely, without a smile.

“All right?” he asked, gently.

“S—sh. Jo’s watching her to sleep,” she said, a note of authority in the small voice. John Anderson grinned under his moustache, turning towards the gate. But his face was anxious enough as they took the track to the township.

“Poor little soul!” he muttered. “She’s going to be up against the world sooner than she thinks.”

He turned to the still figure on the bed

CHAPTER III

JOHN ANDERSON SHOULDERS A BURDEN

THE road to Summers' Flat had never seemed so long, the holes and ruts so many. Anderson drove as carefully as he could, dismally conscious of the bumps he could not avoid: well aware that what he felt on the padded driving-seat must be much worse for the quiet passenger on the mattress on the truck floor. Evening was drawing near; he met other cars and buggies coming out from the township, and abused them in his heart when they forced him to take to a bad bit of track. Once they met a touring char-a-banc, loaded with singing passengers, who were greatly diverted by the look of fury cast upon them by the big stern-faced man who piloted the rattling truck. But he need not have been troubled. The woman at the back was far beyond the possibility of being disturbed by any loud-voiced tourists. She was conscious of one thing only—the small scrap of humanity in the red frock who crouched beside her, holding the blanket round her in a clutch that was both fierce and tender.

They came to the little town at sundown, and rattled up the main street. Already the shops were shuttered, and few people about; the scents of cooking floated out from the houses, and mothers called shrilly for children to come in to tea. John Anderson drove to the outer fringe of the houses, stopping at a bungalow with a wide veranda that bore the sign of Cottage Hospital. With a brief word to the child he went up the path to tell his story.

A Gippsland bush hospital is swift to help. Within a few minutes a nurse had helped him to carry his patient to a little empty room, clean and bare and airy; the child keeping close to her mother, in silent, suspicious watchfulness. John stood back in awkward silence when they had put the mother on the bed. His task was done, and he was free. Yet somehow, he did not feel free.

The sick woman settled the matter, for the moment. Her great eyes beckoned to him and he went forward, looking down on her silently.

"You—you won't go away?" she said. "Not yet. Let me—speak—to you again."

The words were broken and faint, but he heard them. There was only one reply possible.

"That's all right, Mrs. Wilson," he said, trying to put into his answer a heartiness he was far from feeling. "I'll come back when you have had a little rest and the doctor has seen you. Don't you worry about anything." He did not know why he said the words. They seemed to come without any will on his part. A little flicker of contentment crossed her face, and she closed her eyes.

"Now, run along with the gentleman, dear." The nurse put a kind hand on

the little girl, standing straight and wary by her mother. "You shall see Mummy to-morrow."

The child shot a fierce glance at her.

"Jo's going to stay with my mother," she spat back. She twisted her tiny shoulder from the compassionate hand.

"But you can't. We must put Mummy to bed."

"Jo can put her to bed. Don't want any old women. You just go away!" The childish voice was shrill and terrified, and the mother stirred and opened her eyes.

"Don't take her," she begged, weakly. "She will be good. It—it won't be—for long."

Already so much was clear to the nurses. They looked at each other silently.

"Oh, for goodness sake let her stay," John Anderson said. "The poor soul wants her. I'll come back later on, and we'll see what's to be done."

The matron shrugged her shoulders, eyeing the dirty red frock.

"Very well—we can't drag her away. But she is really too dirty to go near her mother. Has she no other clothes?"

John Anderson shook his head helplessly—what did he know of angry small girls and their clothes? And yet the truth of the matron's words was evident. No doctor in his senses would allow such a grimy little tatterdemalion near a patient. A bright idea came to him, and he stooped over the child.

"Look here, Josey—"

"*Not* Josey," said the fierce voice. "Jo."

"Well, Jo, then. You come with me while the nurses fix Mother up comfortably and I'll get you all cleaned up and decent, so that the Doctor will let you stay with her. He won't let you stay like that. Doctors are terribly particular about people being clean."

"So's Mother an' Jo," she flung at him. "Only Mother was too sick."

"I know she was. Come along and I'll get you fixed up the way Mother likes you. Then I'll get you some tea and bring you back."

At the word "tea" he saw her mouth tremble. She looked up at him eagerly, and John Anderson suddenly flushed with anger. The poor mite was hungry! When had those brutes of people fed her last? It was as well for Jim Harrap and his wife that they were beyond his reach at the moment.

"Jo will come back to Mother?" she begged. "Promise, Man."

"I promise—faithfully," he said. "See, Mother's gone to sleep; we'll hurry and come back before she wakes."

At that, after a shrewd glance at her mother's quiet face, she came to him. He took the small hand in his big palm, and they went out together, while the nurses sighed with relief and fell upon their patient.

In the hall lay the battered suit-case a nurse had brought from the truck. John Anderson conquered a feeling of reluctance at meddling with other people's belongings and peeped inside it, hoping to find what his small companion needed. But the merest glance was sufficient to show him that his hope was vain. The few miserable rags it contained would certainly fail to make Jo either clean or decent. He snapped the cheap lock and stood up with a puzzled frown. What did a lonely man do to clothe a child who had no clothes—and with all the shops shut? Then a thought struck him, and his brow cleared.

"Tarrant lives next door to his shop, and he's a decent chap," he said, aloud. "Come along, Jo, and we'll throw ourselves on his mercy." He took her hand again, and they went out.

Tarrant, the draper, who was wont to say that the selling of "rag" was a far more certain way of arriving at fortune than either sheep or dairying could furnish, was mowing his lawn in his shirt-sleeves, while his pretty wife watered her rose-bushes close by. They looked with some amazement at the big man who came into the garden, holding the hand of a tattered elf in a red frock.

"Good evening." He greeted them awkwardly. "I've come to beg a favour, Mr. Tarrant." Favour-begging was not in John Anderson's line, and he spoke stiffly. "This youngster wants clothes pretty badly, and I'd be awfully obliged if you wouldn't mind selling me something after hours."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Anderson." Tarrant looked his bewilderment. "Where on earth did you pick her up?"

"I'd better tell you how the case stands." He drew them aside, and explained briefly—telling his story badly enough. But Mrs. Tarrant's own baby slept on the veranda porch, sweet and warm under his snowy blankets, and it did not matter to her that the story was badly told.

"The poor mite!" she breathed. "But indeed, she needs more than clothes, Mr. Anderson."

"That's true enough—she needs that hose of yours turned on her, Mrs. Tarrant," he said, ruefully. "I thought that if I could get her new clothes I'd take her to the hotel and manage to tub her somehow." He looked very large and helpless as he spoke. "The poor youngster's hungry, too: I don't know how long it is since she had a meal. I believe she has been sticking to her mother all day."

"Then you'll just leave her to me," said Mrs. Tarrant firmly. "Go off and get your own tea, Mr. Anderson, and when you come back she'll be fit for her poor mother to see. It's no work for a man, and a helpless bachelor at that." She took Jo's hand. "You come with me, dearie, and have a lovely hot bath."

"Jo can bath herself," said that lady, decidedly, twitching away her hand.

"Man will take Jo. Man promised."

"Man can't make you nearly as pretty for Mother as I can," said the wily Mrs. Tarrant. "He will take you back to her, because he promised. But he hasn't got nice clothes for you and I have. If you come with me there will be first a big glass of milk, and then the very biggest hot bath, and new clothes, and then tea. And then Man shall have you."

The baby lips quivered. Jo had arrived at a stage when the very mention of food was almost more than she could bear. "Jo firsty," she said, uncertainly. And Mrs. Tarrant picked her up, rags and all.

"Hurry up, Mr. Anderson," she said, cheerfully. "You mustn't keep Jo waiting as soon as she's ready to go back to Mother."

John Anderson stood looking after her, silently. Tarrant, watching his face, laughed.

"You needn't worry, Mr. Anderson. I never saw the child my wife couldn't manage. We'll have her fitted out for you when you come back."

"Don't stint anything," Anderson said. "I want her to have good things—the mother will like it. And burn the beastly rags she's got on. And—thank you. I felt too big a fool to thank your wife."

"She doesn't want thanks; I bet you she's thoroughly enjoying herself." He laughed as he went off to break into his shop.

"Well, I knew I needed a draper," mused John Anderson, as the Ford rattled its way down the hill. "What I didn't know was that I needed a draper with a wife!"

There was no doubt that Mrs. Tarrant enjoyed the next hour thoroughly. Not that Jo entered into the occasion with anything of the spirit that her new friend brought to it; she was too tired and bewildered and hungry for that. But she was docile, realizing that she was in the grip of circumstances too strong for her. Moreover, being by nature a cleanly little person, accustomed to being daintily kept, it was rest and refreshment to find herself in a great tub of steaming water, after the promised glass of warm milk had put heart into her: to feel the delicious sense of soapy cleanliness again: to see her grimy clothes kicked contemptuously aside, while fresh new garments enveloped her tired little body. Before the toilet was completed she was wrapped in a shawl and fed with hot bread and milk, followed by a brown egg in the most enchanting little red egg-cup: so that she was better able to withstand the ordeal that followed, when the tangled mop of curls that had not been touched for nearly a week was clipped into order and brushed and combed until it shone. And then came a little blue frock that thoroughly pleased her, because it had two pockets, in one of which there was a new handkerchief with a rabbit worked in the corner, and in the other a bright new penny. After which Mrs. Tarrant brought her before a long mirror that reflected all her transfigured little form,

and watched the amazed face in silence.

"Jo looks pretty," said the small person. "Fank you. You made Jo awful nice. Wants to show my mother. Where's Man?"

"Man will be here any moment—there, I believe that's his car now! Come and we'll see what he thinks of you."

They came out upon the veranda as John Anderson strode up the path. For a moment he gaped at the transformation in silence.

"Well, you're a magician, Mrs. Tarrant!" he said at length.

"Not at all: I had excellent material to work on," responded that lady. "She's all ready for you, Mr. Anderson, and very anxious, to go back to Mother." She drew him aside, dropping her voice. "Bring her back here if you wish. I could easily keep her for a few days."

"And I've been told to give her to the police," said Anderson, grimly.

"You couldn't!" was Mrs. Tarrant's horrified rejoinder. "Why, they'd send her to the Neglected Childrens' Department, or some such dreadful place."

"They may not be dreadful at all, my dear," said Mr. Tarrant, cautiously.

"Oh, I suppose not—but they aren't mothers! And babies of six want mothers more than anything. Anyhow, you're going to yours now, Jo darling, and mind you take care of her." She hugged her small charge vigorously, and having watched her drive off in the truck, wept upon Mr. Tarrant's bosom.

At the hospital the matron's eyebrows went up.

"Have you a fairy wand, Mr. Anderson?"

"Mrs. Tarrant has, I fancy; I had nothing to do with it," John answered. "How is Mrs. Wilson?"

The matron's kind face was very grave.

"It won't be long, poor soul," she said. "She wants the child—and she wants you. Jo, will you be very quiet if you go to Mother?"

"Man promised," Jo said, fiercely. "An' you promised, too. Want to show Mother Jo's new dress."

"You shall show her, but you must be quiet. Mother is very sick. Will you promise, too, Jo?" Anderson's voice was stern, as though he were speaking to another man. Indeed, from the first moment, in the wretched shed at the Harraps' farm, they had looked at each other, not as man and little child, but as equals.

Jo nodded promptly.

"Jo will promise," she said. "Come to Mother, Man." She tugged at his hand.

The little room where Mrs. Wilson lay was very still. A nurse sitting by the bedside moved to give them room, and the man and the child came to her together. The mother's eyes dwelt on the tiny form for a moment. They were growing dim, but the light came back to them. "Oh—you have been good," she

whispered to John. “Will you give her to me?”

He lifted Jo, and put her on the bed, and the child snuggled down beside her with a sigh of utter content.

“Jo got new clothes, Mother,” she murmured. “Right to Jo’s skin!”

“Mother sees, dear heart.” The weak arm stole round the dark, curly head, drawing it close. The nurse gave John a chair; he sat down, not knowing what to do or say. The slow minutes ticked away.

“Is there any message you would like sent?” he asked, at length. It was hard to bear the steady gaze of the dying eyes that searched his face unceasingly.

“Nothing—there is no one. She has no one at all.”

“Nothing I can do for you?”

“Yes—everything. Tell me you will not let her go to—to the police. Not my baby. She has always had—love.”

What could he say? He looked at her with all a man’s helplessness—silent, friendless John Anderson, who knew nothing of children.

“Say you will not.” The weak voice held all a mother’s agony. “Find her some one who will love her. She—she is such a naughty baby.”

Surely it was the strangest reason that ever gave weight to a plea; and yet it moved John Anderson more than a hundred claims of goodness. A naughty baby: to be disciplined and brought into line with a hundred others in some rigid Home. There came to him some realization of what it must mean to be going down into the Shadows, leaving a child helpless to the careless mercy of a hurrying world. Death itself was a small matter: but surely therein lay the very bitterness of death. And one might leave a good baby easily enough—not a naughty one.

He put his big hand over the restless one on the bed. Jo had fallen asleep; across her little relaxed body their eyes met.

“I won’t let her go,” he said. “If I cannot find her a good home I will keep her myself. You can be easy about her.”

The passion of gratitude that suddenly illuminated her face almost startled him. She caught weakly at his hand.

“When you came first I knew you would be kind,” she said—the words scarcely audible. “I had prayed so hard that I would not die until some one kind should come. You—you will remember how easy it is for her to be naughty? She is so small!”

“I will remember,” he said. “I expect I was pretty naughty myself. Jo and I are friends already. Don’t worry about her.”

She gave a little contented sigh, just as Jo had sighed as she cuddled down beside her. Then her eyes drooped, and her breath came more faintly. Whatever thoughts filled her dying mind, whatever questions she longed to

ask, he could only guess at; she had made her last great effort, and now she was too tired to fight any more. Once her lips parted, and he heard her whisper, "Philip—Philip." It was a happy whisper, for the ghost of a smile was on her lips as she drifted into sleep. Perhaps she had already reached the country where broken dreams are mended.

The nurse touched John's shoulder presently.

"Can you take the child away?"

He questioned her with a look, and she nodded gravely. As he stooped and very gently lifted the sleeping child his hand touched the still fingers that yet rested on her curls. Already they had grown cold, and the touch seemed to linger on his hand for hours afterwards, as if it were her last message—reminding him that he had promised.

He carried Jo into the hall and stood irresolutely: no unfortunate man ever more bewildered by new responsibilities. Somewhere near him a clock struck, and he counted the chimes mechanically. Ten. What on earth did a fellow do with a sleeping six-year-old at ten o'clock at night, when he had no bed in which to drop her?

The matron appeared before he had found any way out of his perplexities.

"We can keep the child for the night, Mr. Anderson," she said.

"Thank the Lord for that!" said John Anderson, explosively.

"But of course I'll have to ask you to get her away early in the morning. We have at least three patients very ill: no one will have time to look after her. And there will be trouble when the poor child asks for her mother and cannot have her."

Too well John Anderson knew that. He groaned in spirit over the certainty of it. The matron, after a compassionate glance at his troubled face, took Jo from his arms and gave her to a passing nurse, with a word of instruction. Then she beckoned him into her little sitting-room.

"Do sit down, Mr. Anderson. May I say that you have undertaken a great responsibility. And is it wise?"

"I'm hanged if I know why I did it," John said. "But what could a man do?—and the poor soul dying—keeping alive to put up a fight for her child. I like a fighter."

"Yes. But you didn't know anything about her, you said: she was just a farm servant out at those awful Harrap people's place. A stray woman and child from a Melbourne slum, perhaps. What are orphanages and institutions for, Mr. Anderson, if not to take charge of a child like that?"

"I don't know—and I suppose they're all right," he muttered. "But as for being a farm servant—well, you could see she was something different. There was breeding about her—did you notice her hands? They weren't common hands. And the youngster is not a common child." He smiled faintly. "She's a

fighter, too.”

“She is—which does not make things any easier for her. The mother told me she was quite alone in the world: that her husband was dead. But other women have told that story, and it has not always been true. Mr. Anderson, if you are wise you will let me send the child to the proper authorities. She will be quite well treated.”

“That means the Neglected Children’s Department, I suppose? Then they’ll board her out to some one.”

“They choose good homes.”

“Oh, they do their best. But—” Memories of newspaper reports came to him: of boarded-out children badly treated. He frowned heavily. “There’s always a chance of things going wrong.”

“Oh, not often, Mr. Anderson. And very probably you could arrange to keep an eye on her—if you were anxious.”

He pondered the matter. It was the easy way out of his difficulties; after all, who was he to undertake the future of an unknown child? What did he know of a child? What could he offer one, solitary and silent and grim as he was? And then came a memory of Jo’s small, clear voice, “Man promised:” and he knew that having promised he could not draw back.

“It’s no good, Matron. Very kind of you, I know, to want to take the trouble off my hands. But I gave my word, and I’ve got to see the thing through somehow.”

“Well, if you will—” she said, with a shrug. “But you are making a mistake. What will your housekeeper say?”

“That’s what I’ve got to find out,” he answered, smiling ruefully. “But I know she won’t let me down. After all, I am at liberty to give the child to anyone who would adopt her; I am not bound to keep her myself, so long as I don’t hand her over to an institution. There must be plenty of lonely people who would be glad to adopt a child as attractive as Jo; if you hear of anyone you might let me know, Matron.” He stood up, looming tall and broad in the little hospital room. “Well, I’ll be back early in the morning. Good night—and thank you.”

“It’s very foolish,” the matron finished later on, having told the story to the nurses over supper. To which they agreed: all but the youngest nurse, who being only a probationer, had not yet acquired sense. “Oh, but what a nice fool!” breathed the youngest nurse.

John Anderson, driving the Ford home in the moonlight, called himself many varieties of a fool, none of them “nice.” To think that only that morning he had been placid and comfortable, with nothing to trouble either himself or Mrs. Collins; nothing to interrupt the peaceful routine in which their days glided by, year after year. And now, instead of that placid current he had

suddenly turned them into a whirlpool—and had done it for the sake of an unknown woman with pleading eyes and an unknown child who was "a fighter." Well, if she were a fighter he was certainly a lunatic. He wondered for the hundredth time what Mrs. Collins would say, and failed to find any answer.

The housekeeper was still up; supper waited for him, and she had freshly-brewed tea. He told her his story before he ate, telling it as badly as he had told the first part to the Tarrants; standing on the hearth-rug with his hands dug deep into his pockets, and looking rather like a boy caught stealing apples.

"I'm afraid it's frightfully rough on you, Mrs. Collins," he floundered to a finish. "All very well for me, but I know the trouble falls on you. But I'll see that it's for as short a time as possible. It won't be difficult to get the youngster adopted: she's a good-looking kid, with plenty of brains. And a fighter, too; you could see she'd fight tooth and claw for the poor mother. I'll take her off your hands as much as possible if you won't mind doing what I can't do, for the present. A man's pretty helpless with a six-year-old."

Mrs. Collins had not spoken at all, and when she did answer her words were few, but decisive.

"What's done can't be undone," she said, "and I don't know that either of us would want it undone. No, neither of us. Don't you get fussed, Mr. John. I'll give you a list of little clothes to bring out to-morrow. And some treacle. We're right out, and my poor mother always said never to spare treacle with children."

CHAPTER IV

THE WEIGHT OF THE BURDEN

"THANK GOODNESS you've come," said the matron.

There was a faint hint of dishevelment about her—if one could apply such a term to anyone usually so immaculate as the matron of the Cottage Hospital. Her hair strayed in errant locks from the edge of the prim cap: her apron bore marks and creases. Moreover, she was flushed and panting.

"Anything wrong?" asked John Anderson.

"We've just stowed your infant in the empty stable at the bottom of the garden," she answered. "It took two of us to do it, and neither of us weaklings. When you said she was a fighter, Mr. Anderson, you didn't over-state the case."

"I'm sorry," he said, concernedly. "Has she given you a very bad time?"

"Well, she didn't wake until nearly breakfast-time, and then we succeeded in keeping her in bed to breakfast: it seemed the simplest way to keep her quiet. Then the probationer dressed her, and of course the poor child demanded her mother. We tried to put her off, but she isn't the sort of person to be put off, as you will find out, Mr. Anderson. She broke away and dashed to the room where she last saw her mother. Of course—it's empty now—"

"I know," he nodded gravely.

"Well then the poor little thing went almost daft. She dashed round the house, breaking into one room after another, screaming for her mother. And we have some pretty sick people here, Mr. Anderson. That sort of thing doesn't do, in a hospital. The whole place was in a ferment by the time we got her—and then she was beyond control, kicking and screaming and biting. And not one of us with any time to give her. So we just had to carry her down to the stable and lock her up. It was awful, but what could we do?"

"Nothing," he told her. "I know well enough you poor souls have no time to mind naughty youngsters. I'll go to her."

"Down at the end of the back garden." The matron hurried away to an insistently-ringing telephone-bell. John Anderson squared his shoulders and marched off to tackle his responsibility, his courage ebbing at every step.

There was no doubt as to Jo's whereabouts. The air was full of the sound of steady banging; such banging as may be accomplished by a stout little new sandal-toe against a wooden door. Over the banging rose screams, mingled with breathless sobbing cries of "Mother!" John Anderson set his teeth as he heard. He flung the door open.

A small blue figure dashed past him, running so swiftly, taking such instant

advantage of the opening door, that she almost escaped him. Only a quick bound and a long arm secured her. He held her tightly—a wriggling, kicking, wholly-maddened scrap of humanity, fighting for freedom with every nerve and muscle. The man tried in vain to calm her—she was beyond hearing. Finally he picked her up, holding her so that she could inflict as little damage as possible, went into the stable and sat down on a box.

"You know it's no good, Jo," he said quietly. "You might as well stop. Can't you ask me what you want to know?"

"Mother!" The word was a gasping sob. "Mother!"

"I know," he said. "Get hold of yourself and stop crying, so that I can tell you about Mother." He loosened his grip a little, watchfully. "Wouldn't Mother be disgusted to know you were behaving like a mad thing?"

For the first time the child seemed to know him—possibly the deep, calm voice helped to bring calmness to her. She caught at his coat-sleeve. "Man!" she begged. "Find Mother—they've taken her away. I can't find her anywhere." The long, breathless sobs racked her childish body.

"I will tell you about Mother when you are quite good and stop crying," Anderson said. He made no attempt to soothe her, partly because he had not the least idea of how to set about such a thing: but gradually his grip slackened as he felt the rigid little body relax, and after a time she lay limply in his arms, the dry sobs fewer and fewer.

"Now you have got to have sense, Jo," he said. "Girls of six must have sense if they're any good. Mother would expect it of you."

"Where's my mother? Did you take her, Man?"

"No, I didn't take her, Jo. But she has gone away for awhile: gone to be made better. No, don't begin crying over again—how can I tell you if you do? Steady yourself, now."

This time she responded more readily. The sobs checked: the great drowned eyes looked up at him piteously.

"You wouldn't want Mother to be ill all the time as she has been lately?" he said. "You want her better. Well, she has gone to be made better."

"Want to go, too. Mother wants Jo," she begged.

"Yes, Mother will always want Jo. But you couldn't go this time. Mother had to go alone, to be made better. And you have got to help her by staying here and being good. That's being decent, Jo. We've always got to be decent to our friends—especially to mothers."

"Will she get better soon?"

It was a hard question. Yet he could answer it truthfully. And he hated to lie to those great searching eyes.

"She won't have any more pain. And after awhile, if you're a good girl, you'll find her again. She said you were to stay with me for a bit. I'll take you

to see my sheep, if you like: I want some one to give me a hand with the lambs. Do you think you're man enough?"

"Jo would like that," she said. "And Mother will come there?"

"No: you'll have to find her later on. I'll try to help you, Jo. But you must come and help me first."

She wriggled out of his arms, and, seeing that the fight had died out of her, he let her go. She stood before him, looking at him squarely: tear-marked and battle-scarred, but with something of pride in her bearing. There was courage undefeated in the steady eyes: courage, and breeding too. They measured each other with mutual respect.

"Jo likes you, Man," she said. "Jo'll help you with the lambs. You won't let those women come too?"

"By Jove, no!" he said, hastily. "I've no time for women."

She nodded grave approval.

"Jo hasn't got time for women, eiver," she stated. "Only Mother. But Jo'd like lambs."

"So do I. And there's a dog you'll like, too. His name's Boss, and he's got more sense than most men. And a horse or two. Well, I think we'd better go and find them, Jo: it's getting late, and there's ever so much to be done." He rose: she slipped her hand into his, and they went up to the house.

The matron met them, casting a relieved glance at the subdued antagonist of an hour earlier. Jo stiffened, much as a terrier stiffens at the sight of a fox, but she did not speak.

"You have a way with you, Mr. Anderson," said the matron. "Going home now?"

"Yes—Jo and I have a day's work ahead with the sheep," he said, gravely. "Is there anything of hers that I should take, Matron?"

"Nothing of the slightest value—and no papers or letters," said she. "Better leave what there is for the present, Mr. Anderson, until the necessary business is over; you will have to get the child some kind of outfit, if you are going to keep her."

"Well, destroy anything that isn't worth keeping," he said. "I'll see you next time I come in. Now I'd better go down and consult Tarrant on the subject of outfit. Say 'Good-bye, and thank you,' Jo."

"Good-bye, and fank you," Jo repeated, obediently. But she stiffened her little back as she spoke, and the words were flung like a challenge. The matron smiled.

"Good-bye, little Jo," she said. She shook Anderson's hand warmly, and watched the queer companions as they went down the garden path.

Tarrant was helpful and sympathetic: so was Mrs. Tarrant, who left her own baby to come and advise on the question of suitable clothing. John found

her most comfortably sensible. She scorned the idea of fussy frocks, concentrating upon dresses warranted to stand hard wear and frequent visits to the wash-tub. Indeed, when informed by Jo that her immediate future was to be spent in tending sheep, she insisted on adding boy's knickerbockers to the outfit. "Let her wear those, with a jersey," she said, "and you'll halve Mrs. Collins's trouble." John blessed her for the suggestion.

Everything was packed at last, in a neat new suit-case. Long before the business of clothes was concluded, Jo wandered away, plainly bored: a new blue frock was pleasant, but bundles of clothes were, in her unfeminine mind, almost nauseous. A tableful of the toys that form part of the bush draper's stock held her. She stood staring at them, fascinated, but not offering to touch anything.

"The dear!" said Mrs. Tarrant, becoming aware of her, presently. She went over and selected a doll, radiant with yellow hair and a pink dress. "That's for you, darling," she said; and put it into the child's hand.

Jo looked at it in stony disfavour. "Hijjus fing!" she remarked. She gave it back to Mrs. Tarrant. "Jo doesn't like it."

"Not like dolls! But all little girls like dolls."

"Not Jo doesn't," said that lady, firmly.

"Then what would you like?"

Jo did not hesitate.

"Vis," she said. She pointed to a riding-whip. "Jo is going to ride on a horse at Man's place."

"Good kid!" said John Anderson, with great satisfaction. "Let it go into my bill, will you, Mrs. Tarrant?"

"That's my present," said Mrs. Tarrant, laughing. She gave Jo the whip, and watched the grave little face break into a smile. It was plainly a great possession. Jo held it in triumph as the Ford moved away at last. She waved it at Mrs. Tarrant in farewell.

Had his companion been either a chatterer or a wriggler, John Anderson would probably have been thoroughly weary of her before half the journey was done. Already he was worried and tired; he had slept badly, and the thought of his new responsibilities lay like lead upon him. But Jo sat beside him, quietly observant, but saying nothing; it was as though she understood his mood, and knew he did not wish to be disturbed. Not until he reached the gate of his own paddock did he realize that they had not exchanged a word since leaving Summers' Flat.

"Well, you're a quiet little mouse," he said, as he climbed back into the car after shutting the gate. "Feeling all right, Jo?"

She nodded, but suddenly he stooped his tall head to look into her face. She was pale, with quivering lips, and eyes full of tears. But there was more

than that in the childish face. Anderson caught his breath as he saw that it was terror. With a quick movement he swung round and put her on his knee.

"Why, what's up?" he cried. "Tell me, Jo. Is anything hurting you?"

She put her face against him. "Not going back?" she whispered, with an effort at self-control that was very pitiful. "Not taking Jo back to that place?"

"To what place? My poor little kid, you're not going to any place but mine. To my home, Jo, where the sheep are. You know, I told you." He was half incoherent in his effort to explain—to free her mind of whatever fear could put such a look into a child's eyes. "Where did you think I was taking you, Jo?"

"I fought—I fought it was the gate," she said, tremulously. "The gate of the place where Mrs. Harrap lives. It isn't that gate, really, Man? Do say it's anuvver gate."

"I should just about say it was," spoke John, hotly. His arm tightened round her. "Look here, Jo, will you remember something? You're going to my place, because Mother trusted me to take care of you. That's my gate, and you're never going into the Harraps' gate again: never as long as you live. Do you understand?"

There was sufficient answer in the face that looked up into his—tears mingling in utter relief. "And only just you at your place?" she asked hopefully.

"Only me and Mrs. Collins: and Mrs. Collins is the best ever. She'll be awfully kind to you if you're good: and you've got to promise me you will be good to her."

"Does you like her, Man?"

"I should say I did. We're friends: and if you and I are to be friends you must like Mrs. Collins, too. Is that a bargain, Jo?"

"What's a bargain?"

"Something two people promise to do. I promise to be friends with you if you promise to like Mrs. Collins. If you agree to that we shake hands on it like men."

Without any hesitation she put her small paw gravely into his.

"Jo'll promise," she said. "Jo doesn't like women much, but she'll have to like vis one, she s'pecs." There was resignation in the tone. "An' Man'll keep Mrs. Harrap away for ever an' ever Amen?"

"I will," said John, slightly shocked. "So that's all settled, and now we'll get on."

When a Ford half-ton truck, lightly laden, comes across a rough paddock track the whole country-side knows of it; so that Mrs. Collins, warned by rattling and banging of her employer's approach, was at the yard gate to meet them. She was more anxious than she would have cared to admit. For John Anderson's judgment in all ordinary matters she had a profound respect; but

the best of men may be led into error by unexpected softness of heart where a woman and child are concerned, and since Mrs. Collins regarded the Harraps and their children as the scum of the earth she felt that she had reasons for lively apprehensions regarding any child who might come from the house of Harrap. But her brow cleared as she saw the small person in blue who sat by Anderson in the driving-seat of the truck. This was no roughly-bred child—this dark elf who came to meet her as soon as she was lifted down. Jo greeted her with grave courtesy.

"Is you Mrs. Collins?" she asked. "Man and me has made a bargain about you." She put out her hand to the old woman.

"And what's that, my dear?"

"It's a funny promise about being friends. Man says we've all got to be friends, so I've promised. Mother says a promise is a 'normous fing. Will you promise, too?"

"To be friends with you? That's a promise easy to keep, my dear, I think." They shook hands solemnly.

"Jo can't stay talkin', 'cause she's awful busy," the visitor went on. "Man needs a hand with the sheep; he told Jo so at that place with rude women where my mother went away. So Jo'll come back after a bit and talk to you." She turned to John, who had paused in unloading the truck. "Where do you keep your sheep, Man?"

It was long since John Anderson had laughed; so long that the old housekeeper had forgotten what the sound was like. Sometimes in their daily life he was known to smile in his grave fashion, but life had long ago ceased to be a thing for open laughter. But he laughed now, looking down from his great height upon the would-be shepherd. Jo, having carried out her bargain in gentlemanlike fashion, was anxious to be off to the real business of sheep: she looked in a puzzled fashion at the man who laughed. Then she laughed too; for, even if John Anderson's mirth was creaky and stiff—as it had every right to be, so long had it been disused—it was still an infectious sound. Listening to it you guessed that once, long ago, he must have been a merry lad when he was happy.

"What's you laughin' at?" Jo asked, still dimpling herself.

"You."

The dimples vanished and the brow darkened. Signs of storm developed rapidly. John, whose education was proceeding apace, hastened to avert trouble.

"I'm laughing because you think I can go after sheep in these clothes. We don't do that on Peak Farm. You've got to change, too—there are real working togs in this bundle of yours. If the sheep saw you in that smart blue frock they'd never stop running."

"Oh!" said Jo. "Jo'd like to see vat!"

"That may be, but it's not good for the sheep. You give me a hand in with these parcels and we'll have dinner before we go out to work. Where's the visitor to sleep, Mrs. Collins?"

"I put a stretcher in the little room next to mine, Mr. John."

"You're pretty grand, to have a room of your own," John said. "Will you like that, Jo?" He was doubtful on the point. But Jo nodded her head delightedly.

"M—m! Once Jo had, an' Jo loved it. 'Cause when you go to bed you can tell yourself all sorts of stories, an' the fairies come an' play with you till you go to sleep." She capered in her joy. "May Jo see Jo's tiny room?"

"Come along, my dear," said Mrs. Collins, who had watched her silently.

"Jo got to carry parcels." She snatched two from the heap and followed the housekeeper, while John brought up the rear with the new suit-case.

It was a pleasant little room. Jo said, "It's nice—an' clean:" a remark which did much to establish her in the affections of Mrs. Collins. She inspected every corner with lightning swiftness, and then flashed out to bring in more parcels. John Anderson met his housekeeper's eyes as the sound of the flying little feet died away on the veranda.

"Queer sound, in this place," he said dryly.

"It is, Mr. John. I wouldn't say it would hurt us to hear more of it," she answered.

"Perhaps not; but I think we're pretty set in our quiet ways. Anyhow, she's not a bad little youngster, is she?"

"You might say so," said Mrs. Collins, cautiously.

"One couldn't leave her to the Neglected Children's authorities. At least, that's how it seemed to me."

"I would look at it in the same light," said she. "And the poor mother's anxiety must have influenced you."

"Well, naturally," he said. It was a relief to find this calm comprehension. "One couldn't refuse the poor soul. And, as I have told the matron, Mrs. Collins, there is no need for us to keep Jo for long. I have asked her to make enquiries; in her position it is quite probable that she may hear of kind people who want to adopt a child."

"Oh, quite," agreed Mrs. Collins.

"I wouldn't think of giving you the trouble of her for any length of time," he said. "And if you want any help, just tell me. I dare say we could get a girl from the township. Or we might send the washing away. I won't have you knocking yourself up over her."

"Thank you, Mr. John," said she, primly. "You are always considerate. But I am very well able for the work. I have a great deal of time on my hands. And

where charity to a child is concerned—” She stopped. They looked at each other squarely, and a smile hovered round John Anderson’s mouth.

“Well, that’s all right—and thank you,” he said. “I’d better see what she’s up to now. She’s like a bit of quicksilver.”

From the kitchen window Mrs. Collins watched him cautiously. Jo, having carried all the parcels under which she could stagger to the veranda, had returned to the truck and clambered into the driving-seat. There she sat, riding-whip in hand, and drove imaginary horses. Her gay little voice was uplifted in song: it rang strangely over the place that was usually so silent. As Anderson came she moved to let him take the wheel. Mrs. Collins saw his face as he bent to speak to the child: saw it light up in response to Jo’s laugh. She drew a long breath as the truck moved off.

“Charity to a child!” she uttered. “If ever there was charity to a lonesome man it’s what you’ve done for yourself, John Anderson—you that were growing older and harder every day. I wonder now, how much chance that kind family will have when it comes along and wants to adopt that baby!” She chuckled delightedly, drawing back from the window. Had it been anyone less sedate and sober than Mrs. Collins one might almost have said that she capered across to the stove!

CHAPTER V

THE BURDEN GROWS LIGHTER

But whatever Mrs. Collins's ideas as to the future may have been, she kept them to herself, being a prudent woman, and little Jo Wilson, regarded as only a temporary guest, settled down speedily into the life of Peak Farm. From the first she took to it as a young duck takes to water. It was all new to her; they gathered from her talk that she had always lived in the city. Horses she had seen, and dogs; but she knew nothing of lambs and calves and chickens, except from pictures, and her delight in them was a pretty thing to see. It gave John Anderson a queer feeling of half-angry pity to learn that she had never known an animal intimately. Life without animals as friends seemed to him a poor parody of existence.

Certainly, Jo took swift steps to remedy this lack in her upbringing. She was quite fearless with animals. From the first day, when John's heart leaped into his throat at the sight of the child snuggling down beside Boss—a dog of notoriously bad temper towards every one but his master and Mrs. Collins—she took every dumb creature to her heart. Boss, surliest of collies, became her slave and followed her wherever she went. There was no horse that would not let her catch and fondle it, and within a week she had learned to milk Daisy, John's prize Jersey cow, and might often be found riding her in the paddock. Quicksilver as she was, with a temper that flashed into fury at the slightest provocation, she treated animals with a gentle fearlessness that very quickly established confidential relations. Mrs. Collins dreaded that she would be hurt, but John knew better. "No animal is going to hurt that sort of kid," he said, and left it at that.

Moreover, it was through animals that Jo's education began. After her first outbreak of temper, a somewhat devastating occurrence on the third day of her new life, when some trivial matter had suddenly turned her from a happy elf to a raging tornado, John put things plainly before her. It was characteristic of them both that he never treated her as a child. Always they were man to man.

"You have to remember," he said, "that if you can't keep your temper you can't go near the animals."

"Why can't Jo? Jo's good now." She was penitent and very weary.

"Because animals can't understand people who can't keep hold of themselves. They will not like you unless they trust you: and they only trust people who are gentle. I wouldn't have a man on my place who showed temper with animals. Boss likes you now, but if he saw you behave as you did a little while ago, he wouldn't think you were fit to have for a friend."

"Oh!" she said, round-eyed. "Jo likes Boss."

"Then you have got to make Boss trust you: and Daisy and Prince and all the others. That's a pretty bad sort of a temper you've got, Jo; it will land you in no end of trouble if you don't beat it. I know, because I've just that sort of temper myself."

"You? But you don't hit an' squeam, Man."

"No, I don't, because I've learned how to beat it. How do you think I'd run a farm if I let it beat me? When I want to hit things I light a pipe and walk away, and I keep my mouth shut. You can't light a pipe, but if I were you, when that temper of yours begins to blaze, I'd clear out to the end of the orchard, where no animal could see me, and keep my lips tight together. That bottles it up, and it dies. See?"

She nodded. "Jo'll do that," she said, and it was soon a familiar thing to see her racing from the house with a face of scarlet wrath and lips closely compressed. Sometimes it was necessary for her to hold them together with her fingers, and even then an angry sob would occasionally burst out at the corners; and as for what went on at the end of the orchard, well, only the apple-trees knew that. But gradually the excursions grew less frequent, and the time of seclusion shorter—though the far corner of the orchard remained Jo's place of refuge in distress for many a long day. No one ever made any remark when she came back to the house. Probably there would be a glass of milk, with a tiny cake, that would appear unobtrusively; Mrs. Collins had a way of shedding such things where she thought them needed. But nothing was said, and there was no preaching. When a small sinner practises the gospel of shut lips, any further sermon is out of place.

She did not fret much for her mother. A child accepts things easily; and so Jo accepted the belief that Mother had gone to a far country where she would be made better, and where some day she too would go. Now and then, at night, she would wake and sob for her; and when this happened John was always the first to hear her. He would sit by the little bed and comfort her, telling her, in his quiet voice, of the happy country where Mother was being cured. It was called Heaven, and Jo pictured it as something like Peak Farm.

There was one night when he did not hear her. It had been a long day, and he was sleeping heavily. He woke to find her by his bed in the moonlight, little and lost and sobbing. "Jo lonely," she said, "take Jo into your bed an' tell her about Mother." He gathered her in beside him, and she cuddled closely while he comforted her: falling asleep so suddenly that he had no time to take her back to her room, and then was afraid to waken her. So he kept her there. He did not sleep much; the moonlight from the open window was bright across the bed, and he lay watching the little face on the pillow—with who shall say what thoughts filling his mind of all that he had missed in life. Towards dawn he fell

asleep, and Mrs. Collins, coming in later with his early tea, found them together. The tea grew cold while she looked at them, her old face pitiful. Then she went out and returned with two cups, one of milk. She put them down by the bed.

"Your tea, Mr. John," she said, and vanished. In a moment she heard Jo's voice, high and clear and merry.

"Why, Jo's slept in your room, Man! What a lark!"

"And that, I think," said Mrs. Collins, viciously, to the porridge-pot, "settles the chances of the Kind Family. I'd like to see them try to take her now!"

Nothing whatever had been discovered at to the child's parentage. The battered suit-case at the hospital had contained, beside clothes, only a Bible; a good copy, bound in dull, soft leather—not the sort of Bible the ordinary servant-maid carries in her box as a rule. "Doris, from Philip," was written on the fly-leaf; beyond that there was no scrap of evidence, and the suit-case itself bore no name. The employment agency in Melbourne could give no information: they had engaged Mrs. Wilson to go to the country, and had put aside the question of references, since she was evidently a superior type of woman. Beyond that they knew nothing.

Jo, indeed, spoke of some one she called "Daddy," but her memories were too vague to be of use. He had gone away a long time ago, she said, "and now poo' ol' Daddy's dead." It did not seem to trouble her, and she had no knowledge of his name. He was just "Daddy," and Mother's name for him had been Dear. But he was dead: of that she seemed certain, and John Anderson derived from the certainty, a deep satisfaction. Whoever the father had been, he had evidently left his wife and child to starve: such a one was far better dead and out of the way.

John paid one more visit to Jim Harrap's farm, when he went to return the grimy mattress and blankets that had helped to ease a dying woman's last journey. He found him surly; the police had been prying and inquisitive, and at the inquest the Coroner had said stern things about the evident neglect that had hastened his servant's death. Harrap and his wife resented the fact that they had not been permitted to explain in the Court that they hired a servant to work for them, not to be nursed. "B'lieve they expected me to 'ave washed 'er!" grumbled Loo Harrap. "An' me thinkin' she was just foxin', to dodge 'er work. That old Coroner ought to have five kids of his own to wash!"

The district, however, shared the views of the Coroner, and the wives of the neighbours—kindly souls who worked from dawn till night, but were never too busy to do a good turn for anyone needing it—looked askance when they met Mrs. Harrap on the road, and did not find it convenient to pull up and gossip. Men cold-shouldered Harrap at the sale-yards: even at school popular

feeling made itself felt, and Billy and Dick came home complaining that other children called them unpleasant names and would not play with them. Thus the house of Harrap was deeply disgusted over the matter of the sick servant who had been so tactless as to die publicly, and resented any allusion to her as a personal matter.

Harrap came up just as John had unloaded the mattress and blankets from the truck, and had hung them over the fence of the back yard. He nodded grumpily.

"So y' did bring them back, did y'?" he said. "Thought we weren't goin' to see them things again."

"I thought you'd have come for them," said John stiffly.

"Me? oh, I'm too busy. I got no time to be drivin' round the country." He looked cautiously at Anderson. "I hear you've got that kid over at your place."

"We're looking out for some one to adopt her," was John's careful answer. It was not exactly true. No one could say that he was looking very hard for the "Kind Family" whose very existence Mrs. Collins resented so deeply. But it was true enough, he thought, for Jim Harrap.

"Lor!" said that worthy. "Wouldn't the Salvation Army have taken her, or the police?"

"Oh, I suppose so, but the mother seemed keen for her to go to private people," John answered. He lit his pipe. "By the way, I suppose nothing more belonging to them turned up after they left? I know your wife must have had a very hurried packing. I don't mean clothes, of course; the youngster doesn't need them; but papers, or letters, or any scrap of jewellery: anything to show who they were. The people who adopt the child will ask us."

"I thought you'd heard me asked that at the inquest," Harrap said, unpleasantly.

"Well, I did. But something may possibly have turned up since."

"Loo!" Harrap raised his voice, and his wife's slatternly figure appeared. "Here's Mr. John Anderson wanting to know if you've stuck to anything belonging that servant of ours or her kid."

"He's got a nerve!" stated Mrs. Harrap, her arms akimbo.

"I have said nothing of the kind, Mrs. Harrap," Anderson's voice was cool, but his eyes were dangerous. "I have merely suggested to your husband the possibility of some small article turning up: something to give a clue to her people."

"An' what's it matter to you?"

"Merely that the child is in my care for the moment, and that I may be handing her over to people who will certainly ask the same question."

"Well, you needn't come hinting that we've chosen to steal a servant's things. Mighty few things she had, an' them only old rags," said Mrs. Harrap,

her eloquence unimpaired by the fact that at the moment her Ruby was wearing little Jo Wilson's best shoes. "An' I'll thank you, Mr. Anderson, not to spread your nasty slanders about us. You haven't got much to do, I sh'd think, takin' tip with servants' brats from goodness knows where. I'd have more pride—"

"I'd hate to interfere with your pride," said John Anderson, with a short laugh. "Good morning." He started the car and drove away across the paddock, while Mrs. Harrap's voice, still engaged in prideful remarks, shrilled in the rear. It might have been noticed that his lips were shut tightly.

They relaxed presently, and he laughed.

"Well, I suppose I ought to be glad that little Jo escaped alive," he said. "Lord, what a woman!" His pipe had gone out, but he lit it again when he got out at his own gate. He drove up the track—looking, it must be confessed, for the first sight of a blue jersey running through the trees to meet him. The blue jersey, with Jo inside it, never failed.

The days slipped into weeks, and the brief tragedy of the lonely woman who had come to the district only to die began to fade from the memory of the people, but still little Jo remained an inmate of the Peak Farm. Neither Anderson nor Mrs. Collins ever spoke of her as being anything but a visitor. From time to time they discussed the chances of the Kind Family appearing, all agog to adopt a small girl of six, and even went into the question of what they should do if the family aforesaid failed to turn up. "We might advertise," said Mrs. Collins, artfully: chuckling within herself to see how little enthusiasm her employer felt for the suggestion. Always the discussions ended in agreeing to do nothing for the present. John would say, "If you're sure she's not too much trouble for you, Mrs. Collins?" and the lady would answer, "Dear, no, Mr. John; but if you're sure you don't find her a nuisance about the place?" And having agreed that the burden was not unbearable—for a time—the matter would be put aside. It was noticeable that as time went on it was revived much less frequently.

And meanwhile, the small subject of their talk "dug herself in" at the Peak Farm more deeply each week. From the first she fitted extraordinarily into her new surroundings. Quicksilver and excitable enough when occasion demanded, she had, however, a curious power of remaining still and silent. A book would keep her happy for hours, and she had all the lonely child's skill in making plays that demanded no companionship. When Anderson took her out into the paddocks with him—an experiment first tried with some misgivings on his part—she gave him no trouble, nor did she worry him with chatter unless he showed her that he wanted to talk. He grew to like the feeling that the little figure in jersey and brief knickerbockers was there, playing somewhere near him as he worked, and often would put down his tools to

watch her quietly, so busy at her silent play. Her very quietness was companionable—not that she was less so when it was time for lunch, and he ceased work to boil the billy, for which she always had a supply of dry sticks ready. That was Jo's great moment of the day, and she made the most of it. She had a hundred things to tell him then, a hundred questions to ask: they would sit on logs facing each other, talking as they ate. Lunch-time with John Anderson had formerly been a matter of as few minutes as possible before he lit his pipe and picked up his axe or spade again; now the time was often an hour, and he scarcely knew that it had gone until he looked at his watch. He called himself a fool for it; but he did not shorten the time next day. She loved his work, and liked to know all about it; and gradually it became a custom that he should inquire gravely into what her play had been, and go to inspect the houses she had built of sheets of bark, or the dam she had constructed in a creek shallow; sometimes to plan another room for the house, or to make a waterfall below the dam. He played awkwardly enough at first, but it is astonishing to find how easily the habit of play grows, even with a lonely man.

Best of all Jo loved the days when they went after sheep or cattle. For that meant riding; and riding was a thrill that nothing else could give. Nothing, in Jo's estimation, came up to a horse: and Prince, Anderson's favourite horse, was a being of especial majesty and delight. He was a big black, fast and kind and steady, with whom she had made friends on her first day at the farm; her pride, on the occasion when she first bestrode him, was beyond all expression. Perched on a cushion in front of John, loosely held by one arm, and grasping the end of the reins in her brown fist, she rode up and down the hills, her face a study of silent ecstasy. She grew knowledgeable, too, about the stock. John declared to Mrs. Collins that she never failed to recognize a bullock, and could even pick out individual sheep. "Remarkably intelligent, for a town youngster," he would say: and Mrs. Collins, assenting quietly, would chuckle to herself in silent delight. When Mrs. Collins thought of the Kind Family now, it was with feelings of something like compassion, as of worthy people bereaved of a possession that had never been theirs.

The habit grew upon them both of recounting to each other Jo's sayings and doings; there was always something to tell, either of mischief or naughtiness or intelligence. She was certainly naughty, except when she went out with John. Then, as she herself gravely said, "Jo's got to have sense." At home there were many scrapes to fall into, and occasionally it seemed to Mrs. Collins that she never missed an opportunity. But she was always honest in her wickedness: she would "own up" like a man, and take her punishment without resentment. To punish her was not easy—she seemed so pitifully small and defenceless. If they did not swerve it was because they knew very soon that she set an extraordinary value upon a promise. Whether a promise was for a

reward or a penalty, it had to be kept.

And so the curtain of silence that had hung so long over Peak Farm drifted, tugged aside by the impatient fingers of a little child, and something of youth came back to John Anderson’s starved heart. He did not admit to himself how different his life had become, any more than he ever thought of Jo except as an inmate who would soon be gone, leaving him free to slip back into the old ways. Sometimes, when she had been troublesome, he would wonder that he had not already taken steps to end the arrangement. And then would come a memory of the penitent arms round his neck, the wet cheek against his: and perhaps another memory of the baby who had slept her midnight loneliness away beside him. His pipe would go out as he sat thinking—thinking.

CHAPTER VI

THE PAINFUL INCIDENT OF MRS. CLISSOLD

"Will John be long?"

"I think you ought to say 'Mr. Anderson,' my dear."

"But he said Jo could call him John. Jo doesn't like Mr. Anderson. Jo likes John. Will he be long, de-ar Mrs. Colly?"

Mrs. Collins looked down at the upturned face, and failed to keep back a smile.

"I'm dear Mrs. Colly when you want to know something, and I'm horrid old Colly when I won't let you play with matches. Isn't that it, Jo?"

The brown face flushed.

"Jo did say she was sorry. Won't say horrid old Colly any more. You won't tell John, will you?"

"Not If you promise you'll never touch matches. A big, solemn promise, Jo."

Jo nodded.

"Mother said all promises were big. Jo won't—truly won't, Mrs. Colly. You put vem up on a high shelf, so Jo can't see vem."

"Now what good's that?" demanded Mrs. Collins. "I can put the kitchen matches up high, easy enough, but I can't stop Mr. John leaving his boxes about all over the place. People have got to look hard at temptations and then trample on 'em. So you'd better ask me to leave the matches down low, and you go and look at them a dozen times a day, and say, 'Aha, I'm not touching you, however nice you look!' How's that for a plan, Jo?"

Jo dimpled with laughter.

"Vat's a jolly good plan. I'll do it, Mrs. Colly. An' I'll keep my hands behind me when I do. Will John be long?"

"Never did I see such a child to stick to a point!" murmured the housekeeper. "No, I don't suppose he will, but you never can tell on sale days. If he buys sheep he won't be home until after you're in bed, and if he doesn't he'll be home any minute. So there you are."

"Then he'll be home any minute, 'cause he told Jo he wasn't going to buy sheep."

"That's what he said this morning, and of course he meant it. But you'd better remember, long as you live in the country, that you can't ever depend on that. A man may not want another sheep on his place, but if he sees a tempting lot going cheap, and he's got his dog with him—well, there it is, and he comes home with 'em like Bo-Peep, only before instead of behind him. And if he

does buy them—well, that means a busy day in the yard to-morrow for you, Jo, helping to draft them, to make up for going to bed without seeing him to-night. And you'll come in as grubby as grubby, with your curls all full of dust, just like last time."

"Vat would be jolly," Jo said, much cheered by this prospect of Paradise. "Would vere be any chance that John'd buy sheep *an'* be home before Jo goes to bed?"

"Not the least in the world, so you might as well make up your mind to that. It's nine or ten o'clock before he ever gets home if he's got sheep to drive; they're always slow, and after a day in the yards they're slower still. And mind you, Jo, Mr. John generally comes in a bit tired; just you be steady and quiet, and not worrisome. Men don't like a child acting like a jumping-jack when they're tired. You and I have only got one man to look after, so it's up to us to study him."

Jo nodded wisely.

"Jo'll 'member," she said. She scooped up the last fragments of bread-and-milk, and suddenly paused, her spoon in mid-air.

"Vere's Boss!" she cried. The spoon clattered into the bowl, and she was gone.

"Now, I never heard the dog," said Mrs. Collins, thoughtfully. She peered out of the window. "There they are, sure enough. That child has an extra pair of ears where Mr. John's concerned. Look at her now! Did ever I see such a pair of legs?"

The legs in question were making wonderful time along the track to the gate to meet John Anderson, who rode through the twilight, his dog at his heels. Mrs. Collins saw him stop to greet the little flying figure; saw him stoop and swing her up to the saddle before him. Then they came up the track at a hard canter, Boss racing alongside, uttering short, sharp yelps. Jo's curly head was thrown back; her shout of laughter came clearly in the evening air. Mrs. Collins could see the answering smile on Anderson's face.

"There!" she murmured. "And a month ago he had no more notion of laughing than if he was a suet-pudding. To think of all the evenings I've seen him come in, sour and solemn, with not two words out of him. Goodness knows, I'd near forgotten myself how to talk. It's a sight for sore eyes now, when he walks in all smiles."

But that night, although he came in with Jo on his shoulder, and answered her chatter cheerfully enough during his evening meal, John Anderson was certainly not all smiles. He ate little, and very soon left the table. Drawing his big chair close to the fire, for the spring evening was chilly, he smoked in silence, only rousing himself to say good night to Jo—who, warned by a glance from Mrs. Collins, went off with exaggerated quietness. He had not

moved when the housekeeper returned from tucking her in. Mrs. Collins cleared the table, lit the lamp, and was retreating as quietly as Jo had done, when he spoke.

"I want to talk to you, Mrs. Collins. Sit down, won't you: don't stand there. It's about Jo. I saw the matron of the hospital to-day."

Much to her astonishment Mrs. Collins was conscious that her heart was beating quickly. Were her plans coming to nothing after all?

"Oh!" she said, vaguely. "I s'pose the Kind Family—?"

"Yes, the Kind Family has turned up. People named Clissold, at Monorook: the matron heard of them last week, and has been making enquiries: and she saw them a few days ago. They're middle-aged people, childless, and fairly well-off: nice folk, she says. They want to adopt a child—a girl. And they want one that hasn't been in an institution, and that has no awkward relations likely to appear. Jo seems just about what they're after."

"You might say so," said Mrs. Collins, striving to conceal the extreme malevolence of her feelings towards the unconscious Clissolds. "Of course you wouldn't let her go, Mr. John, would you, without making all sorts of enquiries about them?"

"Oh, no," he said. "But the matron seems certain that I should approve of them."

"Well, matrons don't know everything. Jo's a sensitive little soul, and I'd like to be very sure of the people she was going to. She hasn't yet got over her week with those horrible Harraps."

"Oh, but these Clissolds are not in the least that type," John said, impatiently. "I know their place; fine farm it is, too. They'd be all right as far as comfort was concerned. And they must care for children, or they wouldn't be wanting to adopt a child. Anyhow, I'm committed, to a certain extent; the matron made an appointment for me to take Jo over there on Friday, if that suited me."

"Made—an—appointment!" uttered Mrs. Collins. "Well, I never!"

"Oh, I haven't got to leave her there, if I don't want to," he said. "The matron has only done what I asked her; when I took Jo from the hospital I told her to let me know if she heard of nice people wanting to adopt a child. She has very kindly done everything to save me trouble." He knocked the ashes from his pipe, and stood up, his face more gloomy than it had been for weeks. "Well, I think I'll turn in," he said. "Will you have her ready to go over on Friday afternoon, Mrs. Collins?" He paused half-way to the door. "It will seem queer to be back in our quiet ways again, won't it?" he remarked. "Oh, well, good night."

"And this is Wednesday!" uttered Mrs. Collins. "Friday: two days." She muttered to herself over the fire. "And the poor mite not knowing a thing. . . .

Wonder if he wants me to tell her? Well I won't, that's flat; he can do his own telling. . . . And she looking out for 'John,' and racing down the paddock to meet him; and he with that live bomb up his sleeve, so to speak, all the time. . . . Men are queer; you never know when you have them and when you haven't. I thought he was getting that fond of her he'd never let her go; and oh, Miss Helen, my dearie, I knew you'd be glad to see him happier, seein' how faithful he's mourned you. . . . But I s'pose all the time he was thinking it out and deciding it wouldn't do, in that quiet way of his—a child from nowhere. But what 'ud it matter if she came from Injia's Icy Mountains, if only she made him young and happy again, as he's a right to be! . . . Them Clissolds!" she muttered, with supreme scorn. "I'd argue, if I thought it 'ud be any good; but always you might as well argue with a battering-ram as John Anderson. Nothing's any use." She got up drearily. One might as well go to bed as do anything else.

Thursday was a weary day. Anderson went off to the paddocks directly after breakfast, taking Jo with him. He looked stern and unapproachable, and Mrs. Collins, who had almost nerved herself to the point of pleading with him, felt her courage die within her, and decided to hold her tongue. After all, if he did not wish to be bothered with a child, to what end should she plead? Jo would be far better in the home of people who really did want her—even the hated Clissolds. She gathered up the child's scattered possessions, washed and ironed the little clothes, and packed the new suit-case with sorrowful care. At least the Clissolds should not have the chance of saying that Jo had not been properly tended at Peak Farm.

They came in at dusk, tired and hungry. Jo almost fell asleep over her supper, though she roused herself to chatter, as Mrs. Collins undressed her, about the glories of a day that seemed to have been chiefly spent in playing in the creek with "John." Mrs. Collins tucked her up gently, and stooped to say good night.

"Good night, de-ar old Colly!" murmured Jo. "John and Jo's goin' for a dwive to-morrow. In the truck." She was asleep even as she spoke. Mrs. Collins retreated to her room, and wept. When she returned to the dining-room to clear the table she found that Anderson had already disappeared.

A heavy sense of impending loss hung over the house next morning. "We'll start directly after dinner," Anderson informed her: to which Mrs. Collins responded, "Very well, Mr. John," and wondered that the words did not choke him. She brought Jo from her play in the orchard at twelve o'clock, and considerably astonished her by giving her a bath which for thoroughness exceeded all other baths of Jo's remembrance, followed by a grooming of the dark curls equal in horror to the scrubbing. Jo objected vigorously, until assured that when little girls went driving with gentlemen like John extreme

cleanliness was expected of them: when she became reconciled, and forebore to yelp except at an extraordinarily painful tug of the comb. And after all, Jo reflected bitterly, John did not seem to notice her shining elegance when he came in to dinner. He stared at her, certainly, but he said nothing: an omission that hurt the small maiden's pride. Dinner passed in an unusual silence, and as soon as he had finished John went out to get the Ford.

Jo danced out to the gate joyfully and climbed up into the seat. Behind her came Mrs. Collins, carrying the suit-case. Anderson's eyebrows went up at the sight. He stared in silence for a moment, and then strode forward.

"You—you're sending her clothes?" He said. "You think I'd better leave her to-day?"

"What's the good of making two bites at a cherry?" responded Mrs. Collins, angrily. "She might as well go now as next week. If she's wanted there more than she's wanted here, that is."

"If you think so," he said slowly, his voice cold. He took the suit-case and stowed it in the back of the truck. Jo waved a gay farewell as the car started.

"Good-bye Colly, darling!" she cried. "Jo'll soon be back."

"Good-bye, my pretty," said Mrs. Collins, brokenly. She went back into the empty house. Never had it seemed so echoing and lonely.

"It usen't to feel so bad before," she muttered. "But I don't know how I'm going to stand it now." She put her apron over her head and rocked herself to and fro.

John Anderson drove the car furiously, his heart hot with anger. He wouldn't have thought it of Mrs. Collins, his thoughts ran. Jo was fond of her: he certainly thought she had become fond of the child. But to let her go willingly, without a word of protest, when she must have known—women always knew these things—that a word from her was all he wanted to make him keep the little thing—it wasn't like Mrs. Collins. Of course, she was getting elderly, and all the trouble fell on her: still, she hadn't seemed to feel it a trouble. And Jo loved her. She needn't have said that bitter thing about not wanting her: it wasn't necessary. That was going to rankle between them for many a day. The old silence would fall upon them, but now there would be memories and bitterness beneath the silence. It would have been better if he had never brought Jo to Peak Farm.

Jo prattled merrily beside him for a time: then, comprehending something of his dour mood she became quiet also, only singing softly under her breath, since it was not possible for six years old to be quite silent in the ecstasy of driving alone in a rushing motor—with John. They passed through Summers' Flat and began to mount the hills on the farther side. It seemed all too soon for the man who drove when they turned in at a big white gate and up a steep track to a house on a wooded rise.

Mr. Clissold came out to meet them: a short, stout man, with kind eyes. John liked him and hated him at the same moment. He introduced himself briefly.

"And that's the little girl?" Mr. Clissold said. "A pretty little thing: I'm sure the wife will like her. Come in, and I'll find her."

The room in which they waited was far finer than any room at Peak Farm. It was large and well lighted, and there was heavy, solid furniture, kept with a shining specklessness that told of much polish and elbow-grease. Jo seemed somewhat overawed by it. She sat close to John on a sofa, swinging her small, sandalled feet and looking about her, curiously. John, she decided in her own mind, was unduly quiet: she wanted to hurry him away from this big, heavy house. "Must we stay long?" she whispered. "Jo doesn't like vis." Then, before he could answer, the door opened, and the Clissolds came in.

Mrs. Clissold was rather imposing: a tall, heavily-built woman who somehow matched her house. She wore a far finer dress than Jo had ever seen, of black silk: there was a gold chain looped round her neck, and she had several rings with bright stones that rather fascinated Jo. It was, the child decided, easier to look at them than at her face, for she had large, prominent eyes that gazed very steadily at you, and made you want to wriggle—if you were six. Indeed, they had something of the same effect on John Anderson. He greeted her awkwardly, and introduced Jo, who made an unfortunate beginning by sidling behind him and refusing to shake hands.

"She's shy," John apologized. "Don't be silly, Jo."

"Shyness is soon cured," Mrs. Clissold said, kindly. "Never mind. What is your name, dear?"

"Jo," said that young lady curtly.

"Jo? But that is a funny name for a little girl. I suppose it is Josephine, really, Mr. Anderson?"

"I suppose so," John answered. "I don't think I ever thought about it."

"Jo's not Josey-phine," said the owner of the name. "Jo's Jo."

"Oh, we'll see. And how old are you, little Jo?"

"Jo's six," she scowled.

Mrs. Clissold looked at her steadily.

"She's quite pretty," she said. "She does not look common at all. One could really make something of her. Has she nice ways, Mr. Anderson? Is she cleanly?"

John flushed. He was hardly prepared for this. Still, it was only to be expected, he supposed. He answered civilly.

"My housekeeper, who knows more of these things than I do, says she has been quite well trained." (Hang it! he thought—I might be talking of a puppy.) "She has a hot temper, but I think she could easily be taught to control it. I

have found her very responsive in that way."

Mrs. Clissold nodded.

"And you have no knowledge of her people?"

"None whatever. She seems to be quite alone."

"That, of course, is what we wanted. No tiresome relations turning up. I will not take any child with ties. Of course, the whole thing is a risk; still, my husband wishes it, and of course we have much to offer." She watched Jo steadily. "I don't know that we could do better than take this one."

John Anderson began to feel as though he were in a dream. Three days ago—even yesterday—it had seemed that Jo belonged to him; and now she was slipping away, and he was powerless to prevent it. In a few minutes she would not be his little brown elf any longer: she would belong to this big, black-silk woman who appraised her with her cold eyes as though she were buying an animal. And she did not want to know if Jo were happy, or if she woke and cried at night, or anything about the real Jo—the Jo that mattered. Instead, she asked if she were *clean*. How could he let her go, his little brown elf? But if Mrs. Collins did not want her, how could he take her home?

Mrs. Clissold was speaking.

"Very well, Mr. Anderson. It was so good of you to bring her over—I hear you have been wonderfully kind in the matter, throughout. Will you leave her to-day?"

"I suppose so. I brought her clothes," John stammered.

"Then—" She turned to Jo. "You're going to stay with me, Joey dear—did you know? Such a nice room you are going to have, with a pretty bedspread: and I will teach you to keep it neat and tidy."

"And there's a big doll somewhere," said Mr. Clissold brightly. It was the only part he took in the interview.

Jo had gone suddenly white under her tan. She stood up, holding tightly to John's knee, and faced him.

"What's she mean, John?" she asked. "What's she talking about? Not Jo?"

John Anderson cleared his throat. This was going to be worse than his worst fears.

"Mrs. Clissold wants a little girl very badly, Jo, old chap," he said. "She hasn't anyone to look after her, and she wants you. You'll stay with her and be a good kid, won't you?"

"Not go home—with you?"

"Not to-day. I'll come and see you some other day."

Jo looked at him steadily. Then she tried to force a smile.

"You're just having a game with Jo, aren't you?" she asked, pitifully. The baby lip quivered. "It's only funning, isn't it, John? *Say* it's only funning—say it quick, John, please."

But he could not say it. For a moment he could not say anything: could only look at her in shamed silence.

Mrs. Clissold broke it briskly.

"Come, come!" she said. "Such a fuss for a little girl to make! I think you had better say good-bye nicely now to Mr. Anderson—or shall I say it for you? Come with me now, and see your new room."

She rose, taking the child's hand firmly, and tried to pull her away. Jo uttered a choking little cry; and then, twisting from her grasp, she fell upon her like a fury—a small, half-crazy tornado, kicking, scratching, biting. Anderson sprang forward in dismay, for a moment quite unable to check the furious assault, since to hold Jo at the moment was like holding a maddened electric eel. He dragged her away at length, his voice angrier than she had ever heard it.

"What do you mean, Jo! Steady yourself, you little villain!"

Jo was scarlet now, and panting.

"Jo won't go with her—Jo won't! She's horrid an' nasty an' black—Jo hates her! an' she hates vis house and the room an' the beastly bed-spwead! Jo's goin' back home with John. Take her away!"

She twisted out of John's hands, and picking up the first thing she could see, which happened to be a work-basket, she hurled it with horrible accuracy at the outraged Mrs. Clissold. It struck that unfortunate lady's massive chest, dissolving, as a bursting rocket dissolves, into a rain of lesser missiles—reels of cotton, scissors, lumps of beeswax. In the hideous silence that ensued Jo burst into bitter crying and fled from the room. The noise of her sobs mingled with the pounding of her sandals and died away in the distance.

"Dear, dear!" said Mr. Clissold, faintly.

"I—I'm awfully sorry," John gasped. "I had no idea—she had never—I do hope she hasn't hurt you, Mrs. Clissold." He was on his knees, retrieving scattered spools.

"Please do not trouble, Mr. Anderson." Mrs. Clissold recovered her dignity with an effort. "Please—the maid will sweep those things up. No, I am not much hurt. But of course, I should not *dream* of taking her. I could never cope with such a terrible temper. A mercy I found it out in time. I should really doubt whether she is quite sane—such a murderous attack. Had she been stronger—"

"Well, I suppose if she were stronger she'd be older, and then she might have more sense," said John, rising with his collection. "But I can only repeat that I'm terribly sorry. I had not the least idea that the child would behave in that fashion, and I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds." He was conscious of a rising cheerfulness that made apology a little difficult: cheerfulness that he realized to be quite disgraceful, but which nevertheless rose within him

inexcusably. Jo had behaved like a little devil, beyond doubt. But he was taking her back! She was still his!

Somehow he made his escape, borne out on a tide of apologies. Mrs. Clissold had omitted to shake hands, but John was past noticing so slight a thing. Her husband trotted beside him.

"I'm very sorry—very sorry indeed," the little man said.

"You couldn't regret it more than I do, sir. I only hope your wife is not really hurt."

"Oh, I think not," said Mr. Clissold, comfortably. "So small a child could not do very much damage, after all. But I'm very sorry we are not to have her. Such a spirit! There is plenty of character there, Mr. Anderson."

"Mostly bad, at the moment, I'm afraid," John said, grimly. They reached the Ford. A bare brown leg stuck out from under the driving-seat, whence came the sound of sobs.

"Come out of that, Jo," Anderson said. "You're going home. Mrs. Clissold would not let such a bad girl stay."

The sobs ceased.

"True, John?" There was a convulsion under the rug, and a very dirty, tear-marked face appeared.

"Certainly it's true. Mrs. Clissold doesn't want anyone like you."

"What luck!" ejaculated the culprit, wriggling into view. "Jo's glad I kicked her, or she might have wanted Jo. Oh, vere's the man!" She disappeared again. Little Mr. Clissold chuckled.

John Anderson plucked the rug impatiently away.

"Get up at once," he commanded. "I'm going to take you home, but not because I'm pleased with you. You know what I think about people who can't hold on to their tempers."

She scrambled to the seat obediently.

"Jo did clean forget to keep her lips shut," she said. "An' vere wasn't any orchard to go to. Jo'll always *have* to kick any woman what wants to take her away from you, John. Will you please beat Jo when she gets home, an' let Jo say she's sorry?"

"We'll talk about that when we get home," said Anderson, shortly. "Good-bye Mr. Clissold: I can only apologize again for her."

"Good-bye—and don't be too hard on her," said Clissold. "Remember, you gave her a very unexpected shock. You must make allowances. Next time you want to get her adopted, try warning her beforehand. I've heard you're a good man with horses, Anderson—is it your custom to put an unbroken two-year-old into harness and expect it to pull quietly from the start?" He laughed and stood back as the car turned. But it was a wistful-looking little man that watched them out of sight.

"That was a game little girl!" he said to himself. "I'd like well to have kept her. Eh, but didn't she fight like a tiger-cat for her freedom! Poor child—poor child!" He sighed as he made his slow way into the house to appease the just wrath of his wife.

If the journey to the Clissolds' had been silent, the home trip was more silent still. Jo, conscious of being in deep disgrace, felt that her best hope lay in not being a nuisance. Moreover, she was spent and tired, with a great longing for her own little room and for "Colly's" kindly arms. She would tell Colly all about it. Somehow, she felt that though Colly would strongly disapprove of the kicking and biting, she would not be altogether sorry that Jo had fought to come home. And, no matter what anyone thought of it, even John, Jo knew that she would always fight. No one should take her away from Peak Farm without a struggle.

John Anderson's thoughts were more complicated. His mission had failed, failed in ignominious and complete disgrace; and he was glad of it. When he reflected upon the work-basket that had hurtled into Mrs. Clissold's bosom he felt pangs of shame: and yet his heart sang for joy, and he knew well that if he allowed himself to slip from the heights of righteous indignation against Jo for her assault upon that blameless lady he would be guilty of feeling pride for the fight she had put up. A better fighter than he—John Anderson. He had not moved a finger to keep her, badly as he wanted her, although Mrs. Collins was not nearly as overpowering an antagonist as Mrs. Clissold must have seemed in Jo's eyes. And that brought him back to Mrs. Collins, and he groaned in spirit.

What was he to do? The child was back on his hands, and he was glad of it; but Mrs. Collins did not want her, and his house revolved round Mrs. Collins. Should he ask her to have Jo, as a favour? But he knew himself a bad hand at asking favours. Should he offer Mrs. Collins a holiday and—horrible thought—get a substitute from Melbourne while she was away? He thought of a dozen possible courses to pursue, none of them satisfying: and slowed to a crawl to put off as long as possible the evil hour of return to the farm.

A little head leaned against his arm, and a very miserable voice spoke.

"Jo wants to be friends, John—please."

He looked down at the tired, dirty face. She did look a poor little misery—and Mrs. Collins had sent her out so spic and span. He could not take her home in such a state. Just ahead a creek crossed the road, spanned by a little bridge. He turned the car aside into the bush, and stopped; then, lifting Jo out he carried her down the steep bank and sat her on a log while he dipped his handkerchief in the water and washed her face. She smiled at him timidly as he finished.

"Vat's nice," she said. "Is you friends with Jo, John?"

He felt a pang of remorse as he looked at her—she was so small. Clissold's parting words had stung. The little fat man had more sense than he had shown. Still, discipline must be maintained. He made a strenuous effort to maintain it.

"If Jo is sorry. Are you sorry, Jo?"

She looked at him longingly. It would be so easy to say she was sorry, and be done with it. But Mother had said that decent people didn't tell lies.

"Wouldn't it do if you beated Jo, and then she needn't say it," she asked, hopefully.

"No, that wouldn't do at all, Jo. People who lose their tempers and are rude must say they are sorry."

"Jo is sorry about the temper," she said. "But not for kicking the lady." She sought for words—surely he could not understand the terrible urgency of the case. "She was a bad lady, John—she wanted to take me away. She was hollible." Sobs began to rise again, but she choked them back and faced him steadily. "She had *got* me, John—she was pulling Jo away. And you wouldn't help. Jo *had* to kick an' bite an' frow things."

"And does that mean you would always kick and bite and throw things if I gave you to anyone else?"

She pondered this.

"Yes," she said. "If they tried to take Jo away from you. Jo couldn't go away with hollible people an' leave you. You'd want Jo."

"By Gad, I would!" he said, between his teeth. "You're a better fighter than I am, little Jo!"

He picked her up in his arms, and she clung to him, hiding her face in his neck. Discipline, it is to be feared, fled to the winds: so had fear of the future. If his little fighter had faced her dragon unflinchingly, surely he could deal with Mrs. Collins. At any rate, one thing was quite clear in his mind—the events of the afternoon had shown him just where he stood. Whatever happened, no one should take Jo from him.

"Jo, we're going to make a bargain," he said. "We won't say anything more about what you did, and you needn't say you were sorry, because it was all a mistake. But you're to try harder than ever not to let your temper beat you again. Promise?"

"Oh, yes, Jo'll promise," she said, cheerfully. "Vere's always the orchard to run to at home. Jo'll only lose her temper with wicked ladies."

"Then you won't lose it at all, because there won't be any more wicked ladies," he responded. Discipline had evaded him, but at least he had made a clutch at her skirts.

Evening was drawing near when they pulled up at the yard gate. Jo was out over the wheel like a flash, her tiredness all forgotten.

"Vere's Jo's old Colly!" she cried, in her high, sweet voice. "Colly,

darling, a bad lady tried to catch Jo, but she didn't!"

Mrs. Collins caught her in her arms.

"She didn't get you!" she exclaimed.

"No, but she tried. And Jo fighted an' kicked her." The pagan joy of a Viking possessed her. "Awful hard, an' frew her basket at her. An' Jo's back!" She wriggled out of the old woman's arms. "Jo must go and tell Boss." She danced off across the yard.

John Anderson and his housekeeper faced each other—both defiant.

"So you didn't get rid of her, Mr. John?"

"No, and I'm not going to get rid of her," he said. "I'm awfully sorry if it's going to upset you, Mrs. Collins. You've been a good friend to me, and I don't like doing anything that's going to make a difference between us. But—well, I've got too fond of the baby to let her go, and that's all about it. She's mine for keeps. I tried to make up my mind to part with her when I saw you didn't want her, but—"

"When you saw I didn't want her!" She glared at him. "When did I ever say so?"

He stared.

"Why—didn't you say so this very afternoon when we were leaving? 'If she's wanted there more than she's wanted here,' you said. Those were your very words. And you never said a thing against my sending her away."

"But I thought it was you who didn't want her," she said, blankly. "Why did you ever plan to send her to those Clissold people? You could have knocked me over with a feather the night you came home and said she was to go."

"I only said I'd had the offer. I was waiting for one word against it from you—only I thought it was a fair thing to give you the chance of being free of the bother of the child if you wished. And when you didn't oppose the idea of course I thought I was right. After all, you'd never expected to be troubled with a strange child."

"Me!" she said. "Me—that's thanked God from the minute the little thing came into the house to make us both alive again! I've watched her breaking off the hard crust from your heart and thanked Him every time I heard her make you laugh—and knew how glad Miss Helen would be. Me not want her! Oh, Mr. John, my dear, excuse me, but aren't you a fool!"

He caught both her hands in his.

"I suppose so, old friend," he said. "But Colly, dear, there were two of us!"

She picked up the first thing she could see

CHAPTER VII

AFTER SEVEN YEARS

"Is Miss Anderson ready?"

The little maid at the Highfield Ladies' College felt for a cap that she had good reason to believe was askew, and smiled at the big man as she answered him.

"I think so, sir. Leastways, she slid past me on the bannisters just now, an' she 'ad 'er 'at on."

"Well, that sounds hopeful, at all events," said John Anderson, exhibiting no symptoms of surprise. "Will you tell her I'm here?"

The little maid showed him into a sitting-room, and vanished. Anderson drew from his pocket a lengthy shopping-list and ran over it, ending with a sigh of relief; he seemed to have secured everything, from bacon to sheep-dip. He looked round for something to read: but the average sitting-room of the average girls' school is singularly ill-fitted to provide entertainment for the average man. He was studying a large photograph of girls with extremely tidy hair, and an altogether unearthly expression of goodness—a photograph which already he knew by heart from many weekly visits—when swift feet pattered on the stairs, crossed the hall in two bounds, and Jo was in the room.

"John, dear!"

"Well, my Jo?" He held her lightly after the force of her first wild hug was spent. "Had a good week?"

"Oh, scrumptious! Won my tennis-match, kept in twice for being an idiot in class, one dorm, supper, gone up two places. Will that do, John?"

"It sounds a mixed bag; but I suppose it will do," he said, laughing. "Some day I suppose you'll wake up to the fact that it doesn't pay to be an idiot in class. What did the idiot do?"

"Oh—played the fool. It's terribly hard to help it always, John, especially on a fine morning when you feel all tingly. Don't let's talk about it now. I want to get home. Are you ready?"

"I have been waiting for ten minutes," said he, resignedly. "I suppose you were brushing what's left of your hair." He looked with enmity at her Eton crop. "Don't like it, Jo: I want my curls back."

"Only in the summer, John, dear: I'll truly let it grow as soon as bathing is over. But wouldn't you hate it yourself if you had to dry a mop of hair after every swim?"

"I might," he agreed. "Well—are you ready?"

"I've been ready ever so long," she declared, with some heat.

“But where’s your hat?”

“Dear me!” said Jo, feeling the top of her head with an air of bewilderment. “I had it a few minutes ago. How queer! Wait a minute, John.” She flashed out, to return a moment later, duly hatted. “It must have dropped off,” she said, vaguely. Jo was always vague about her hats. She hated them, and never wore them unless compelled by force of public opinion.

John Anderson cast an approving glance at his companion as they went through the garden. The seven years that had gone since Jo had turned his existence upside down had not changed the essential features of the little brown elf who had won his heart. She was still a brown elf: very tall for her age, with long slender lines—more like a boy than a girl, most people said. At which Jo would sigh regretfully; her chief sorrow in life was that she had not been born a boy. Mrs. Collins considered that the accidental fact of girlhood had not hindered her much. She had, to all intents and purposes, lived the life of a boy: a free, open-air life, John Anderson’s constant companion in work and play. The Jo who, at six, had chosen a riding-whip in preference to a doll had not changed. Horses and cattle and sheep had always seemed to her the only things worth while, since her adored “John” spent his existence among these things. Because it pleased him and Mrs. Collins that she should not be ignorant of other matters she had submitted, more or less patiently, to the drudgery of lessons and housewifery: inflictions to be struggled through as quickly as possible so that she might get back to the paddocks and to John.

As for Anderson himself—under her eager, loving touch his starved heart had wakened to a new life. No one had needed him since his wife’s death, until the day when this grief-laden baby had turned to him as the one hope in her empty world. It was marvellous to the lonely man to find himself so desperately wanted. And she had understood him with a curious comprehension: his silences, his dourness, his quick temper. They were gone now, where she was concerned. In every sense of the word they were comrades.

She had not been spoiled: John and Mrs. Collins had loved her too well for that. Obedience and discipline were part of their creed, but they had worked on a basis of common sense, not by preaching, so that discipline appeared to Jo in the light of ordinary, reasonable behaviour, productive of good times all round. If you behaved badly, the sun went out, since John ceased to be friends: if you were good, the sun shone. When she had mastered this fact it followed that Jo was generally good. Underneath the fiery temper lay a nature of wholesome sweetness. Warned by his own difficulties John set himself to bring the sweetness out, so that the fireworks, never to be wholly quenched, took their proper place at the bottom. He believed that he had succeeded—what he did not realize was how greatly he had helped himself in the process of helping the

child.

School had not come early for Jo. The nearest State school to Peak Farm was just beyond the limit of distance for compulsory attendance, which pleased John, since he and Mrs. Collins had decided that Jo should have no regular lessons until she was eight. She was so tiny, such a thing of nerves and imaginings; moreover she had undergone a strain far too heavy for any child, and they agreed that she should run wild for two years. Those years were spent chiefly in the paddocks, at John's heels, or beside him on a pony, and they gave Jo a new fund of strength and a store of common sense and general knowledge that was to stand well to her throughout her life. When she did begin to study, the lessons were scrappy and intermittent, shared between Mrs. Collins and John, but she learned with peculiar rapidity. Books had always fascinated her, even before she could read. Now that they were no longer a mystery they were all the more friends, to which to turn when circumstances drove her indoors. John had no fears that she would be a dunce.

Even had it been easy he would not have sent her to the little bush school. The Harrap children went there, and for all the Harrap family Jo had an aversion that amounted to loathing. Anderson had never questioned her as to what had happened during her brief sojourn at the farm across the hills. His hope was that it would die out of her mind. But her mother's illness and death had stamped memories of horror on the childish brain, and even though remembrance of the mother faded, her dread of the Harraps remained a living thing. Beyond and above this, John had no mind to send her where her history was known—where other children would point at her as a foundling—a servant's unknown child, adopted out of charity. He had taken all legal steps to adopt her: she bore his name, and he looked upon her as his daughter. Later he intended to leave the district, settling where nobody would know anything of her past. But a suitable opportunity for selling his property had not presented itself, and when Jo was twelve, realizing that she should have other companionship and more advantages, he had sent her as a weekly boarder to a good private school in Highfield, twenty miles away.

He had not been able to persuade himself to consent to more than a weekly arrangement, although Miss Tremayne, the Head, had done her best to convince him of the advantages to Jo of being a permanent boarder. Already the prospect of separation was dark enough: of days on end without the gay companionship that had given him back youth and hope. And Jo begged hard for her week-ends at the farm, while Mrs. Collins hinted darkly that from Friday until Monday might be all too little to cure the wear and tear of five days of school. So the week-ends were theirs. Four o'clock on Friday never failed to see the Peak Farm car slide up to the school gate: the tall, dark man would stride swiftly up the path, looking so stern that the smaller girls, peeping

from behind the New Zealand flax-bushes, would wonder why it was that Jo Anderson was not more afraid of her grim-looking guardian: and presently both would emerge, Jo chattering as if the aforesaid guardian were a younger brother, and the car would vanish in a whirl of dust, appearing so anxious to get to Peak Farm, that township speed-limits had no meaning for it.

The old Ford truck was a thing of the past now, superseded by a newer and larger one; but John Anderson did not bring a truck for his daughter on these glad Fridays. The dark-blue car that stood by the gate was not imposing, but it had an engine that made light of the stiffest hill-tracks. Jo respected it, because it made week-ending possible, but she did not love it; horses were to her the only means of transport that a self-respecting person would choose, were a free choice to be permitted.

"Any shopping to do, John?"

"All done. Do you want to do any?"

"Me? Goodness, no! I see all I want of Highfield without wanting to stop there on Fridays. When you crocodile through a town pretty often you simply hate it," Jo answered. "They won't let me lead the crocodile with Amy Darke now, which is a pity."

"Why?"

Jo grinned.

"Because we go too fast. It's great fun to take them along at an awful bat, with poor old Miss Penn puffing in the rear. But we did it once too often, and now we're degraded to a place where she can reach us with a ladylike hail. John, darling, I'm afraid I'll never be ladylike!"

"I fear not," said Anderson. "Indeed, I should be almost anxious if I saw symptoms appearing. But that's for Miss Tremayne to attend to; it's out of my hands. Didn't you muster up some good behaviour to meet the Governor this week?"

"Oh yes—I forgot him." The State Governor had visited Highfield to open a new Town Hall, and the little town had seethed in consequence. "It was quite exciting. Why didn't you come in, John?"

"Too busy: I was dipping sheep."

"Much more interesting: I wish I'd been with you. We all marched down solemnly and lined up near the station, and had a great view. All the Light Horse men were there—some of them had ripping horses, too, but they weren't accustomed to the band and they danced beautifully when "God Save the King" was played. And there were speeches—oh, ever so many speeches! If I hadn't had a perfect duck of a police-horse to lean against, I should have gone to sleep."

"The police-horse didn't mind propping you?"

"No, he liked it. A huge bay, with a white star. He knew I was a friend.

And the Governor smiled at me. Of course, every girl in the school says he was smiling at her, but that doesn't matter."

"It merely shows that the Governor knows his job," said John, laughing. "I hope you responded with a low bow."

"I didn't—I laughed at him. He wasn't a bit majestic, John: just a nice, friendly man with a crooked tie. He kept an air of polite attention glued to his face while the speeches were going on, just the way we do in class when Miss Tremayne gets going about the Gulf Stream. It keeps her happy, and you needn't listen. But you could see how relieved the poor man was when they stopped and let him get into his car. That was when he smiled at me: my police-horse moved, and I had to bob under his neck to get a view."

"And was that all?"

"Then they made a procession, and the band played, and all the Light Horses danced again, and then we went home to dinner. There was another big outbreak at the Town Hall in the afternoon, but Miss Tremayne thought we juniors had had enough, and she wouldn't let us go. She took the Sixth Form, and they said it was very awful; twice as many speeches as there had been at the station. And the Governor looked very tired, and some one had straightened his tie. We were all very anxious to know about that. I suppose the Shire President did it. Would it be his job, John?"

"I don't know: I was never a Shire President," John said, cautiously. "I expect he led the Governor in an absent-minded sort of way before a looking-glass, and left nature to do the rest."

"I suppose he might be a bit nervous about offering to do it for him," admitted Jo. "Still, the Governor looked as if he wouldn't mind any kind action. He must have a noble heart himself, 'cause he asked for an extra day's holiday for all the schools, and we're to get it tacked on to the next hols. Jolly decent of him, wasn't it? We cheered like mad for that."

"I wouldn't doubt it," said John. He looked down at her, thinking how good it was to hear the cheery young voice again. Soon they would be home, and Peak Farm would wake from the quiet that fell upon it on Monday mornings. Her voice, her swift footsteps, her gay presence, would transform it, as they always did. Surely, he thought, no man had ever made a better bargain than he had made when, seven years ago, he had taken the baby thing that nobody wanted. She was so loyal, so stanch. Child as she was, he knew that he could always depend upon her. Just as she had fought Mrs. Clissold to come back to him, so she would fight for him now, if need be. And he—well, there was no need now for him to fight for her. But if there were—. His jaw set stubbornly at the thought.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked suddenly.

"Why, nothing much. Do you know it's your birthday to-morrow?"

"Ours, you mean." She laughed up at him. Years ago they had realized that they did not know what her birthday was; and as that was a serious lack in a person's life, he had gravely said that he would give her half of his. He had had to dig up his own birthday, an almost forgotten date, to make the curious presentation. She had accepted it with solemn delight, and they had always kept the day together.

"Isn't it luck that it's on a Saturday," she said, gleefully. "I've made you a present: it's a pretty awful tie, but you'll have to wear it. There, I didn't mean to tell you until to-morrow, but it's come out!"

Since the wisp of knitted blue silk had frequently come in John's way during the last five or six week-ends this announcement was hardly the complete surprise to him that might have been expected.

"Then I'll forget about it until to-morrow," he said. "Shall I tell you what I have for you, to make things even?"

"Don't you dare!" she flashed. "I'd ever so much rather not know. Amy Darke had a birthday on Wednesday, and her father and mother sent her a cheque. It was a whole pound, which of course was pretty gorgeous, but such a dull present! And it came on Tuesday, so the poor soul had nothing to look forward to on Wednesday morning. It must be simply horrible to be a boarder, with all your people far away. So all the dorm, clubbed together and raised two and threepence, and when we were crocking on Tuesday afternoon——"

"When you were *what*!" asked the mystified John.

"When we were walking in procession, darling. Awful thing boarders do. Well, Miss Penn was rather a brick and let me slip away when they were inspecting the Governor's decorations in the street, and I got a ripping box of chocolates: old Mrs. Carter was very decent, and gave me a half-crown box for the two and threepence. And we got blue ribbons out of Edith Wickham's nighty and tied the box up with them. Edith had been very sad because she hadn't had any pocket-money left to subscribe, so it was really very lucky she had the ribbons, which we generally scream at her for wearing. It made her feel right in it, though it hurt her pride to have to fix up her nighty with a safety-pin. And we gave Amy the box on Wednesday morning, and had no end of a time before breakfast!"

John chuckled.

"Warning to stupid parents and guardians," he said. "I must remember never to send you a birthday cheque, when the day falls in the middle of the week."

Jo looked suddenly grave.

"No, please don't, John," she said. "I'd rather have a sixpenny present you chose yourself than all the cheques out of the bank. Cheques don't really seem a present, do they? You wouldn't like me to give you one!"

"No, I'd rather have the tie, old chap," he said. "Oh, I forgot I was to forget about it. Never mind, I'll begin forgetting again."

They turned a corner, screened by trees, and came upon the Peak Farm gate. A man was lounging against the post, and as the car stopped he greeted them with a clumsy carelessness of demeanour.

"Hallo! Just in time to open the gate for you." He put his hand on the latch, but hesitated before opening it.

"Thanks, Harrap," said John, coldly. He felt Jo stiffen by his side, and wrathfully condemned the bad luck that had thrown Jim Harrap across their path just at the moment of her happy home-coming.

"Back from school, Josey?" Harrap asked, smiling unpleasantly. "Getting quite a young lady, aren't you?"

Jo did not answer. She stared directly before her, her lips closely set. John gave an impatient movement.

"Why, you're getting too proud to reckernize old friends," Harrap said. "Times have changed, haven't they? You weren't so fine when I knew you first. They do grow up quick, don't they, Mr. Anderson? By the way, I was just coming over to ask if you'd mind lending me your little plough: mine's broke, an' I haven't got time to go into the Flat and get it mended. I'd be very glad of the lend of yours, if you aren't using it." He swung the gate slowly open.

"Well, you broke mine last time you had it," John answered, frowning. "I don't mind lending things, but I want them back fit for use."

"Oh, I'll be careful with it. Well, I'll bring the cart over for it this evening, shall I?"

"If you like." There was no cordiality in his tone, but Jim Harrap was that worst type of neighbour, a persistent and conscienceless borrower, and a cordial reception of his demands would probably have rather surprised him. John drove through the gate with another curt word of thanks, and they were quickly out of sight among the trees.

"I do hate that man, John. He gives me the shivers," Jo said.

"Don't worry your little head about him. He's only a poor specimen—it's hard luck that he happens to be our nearest neighbour," John answered. He gave her hand a reassuring pat. "I'd buy the brute out if I could: or I might, if some one doesn't buy me out, myself. How would you like to leave this district, Jo?"

"I'd hate to leave Peak Farm, but I wouldn't mind leaving the district," she said. "It would be nice to go where there weren't any Harraps. Why, John? You aren't going to sell out, are you?"

"Well, it's possible. One of the agents was after me to-day with an offer for the place. I don't think it would be a bad thing to go, Jo. We might easily find a nicer part of Australia, with pleasant neighbours. I'd rather like to be near

some people with jolly youngsters who would be mates for you.”

“I’d like anywhere with you and Colly,” she said. Suddenly she was alarmed. “What about the horses? You wouldn’t sell Prince and Dandy, would you, John?”

“Not unless I sold you, too,” he said laughing. “And who’d buy my worthless Jo-boy?”

“I don’t suppose you’d get a single bid for me,” she said, with surprising meekness. She sighed heavily. “ ’Cause everybody would say I’d been so horribly badly trained!”

“We’ll tell Colly that, you monkey!” said John. “There she is, waiting for you. I wonder how many times Colly comes out to look for the car on Friday afternoons!”

He left them to the joy of reunion and the avalanche of talk that always signalized Jo’s return, and went to put away the car. Something was amiss with the engine; he got out his tools, and worked until the defect was adjusted and she was ready to take the road again on Monday. As he finished his task and locked up the garage he heard the slow creaking of a cart, and presently Jim Harrap drove up to the yard.

“Hope I’m not hurrying you?” was his greeting. “I thought I might as well get that plough before cow-time: it’s pretty late when I get finished. You’re one of the lucky ones, never milking more than one or two cows.”

John grunted: he had no desire to discuss the question of his luck with Mr. Harrap. All he wished was to get that gentleman off the place as quickly as possible. At any moment Jo might come running to find him.

But Mr. Harrap, despite the fact that it was well past cow-time, did not seem inclined to hurry.

“Got the place lookin’ pretty well, haven’t you?” he commented. “Everything up-to-date an’ ship-shape. Easy enough, I s’pose, if you haven’t got a family to keep you scratchin’.”

John might have retorted that it was easy enough if a man cared to work; but since this remark might have prolonged the conversation, he did not make it.

“It’s high time my boys were doin’ a bit to keep themselves,” Harrap went on, apparently not noticing his silence. “Bill’s seventeen now, an’ he’s a big strong lump. I s’pose, Mr. Anderson, you haven’t got a job you could give him?”

“No, I’m afraid I haven’t.” John’s opinion of the “big, strong lump” was only second to his contempt for the lump’s father. An unprepossessing youth was Bill Harrap: surly and awkward, with a passion for cigarettes and a rooted hatred of toil. John felt a thrill of disgust at the mere idea of having him on the place—and with Jo.

"H'm," said Harrap. "Well, I'd have thought you might find him some work: there must be plenty of odd jobs about this farm you'd be glad to save yourself—milkin' an' gardenin' an' all that. An' it 'ud be helpin' a neighbour."

"No, I can't help you to that extent," Anderson said, curtly. "I don't need anyone, and I wouldn't make more work for my housekeeper if I did."

"Why, she can't be overworked, now you've sent the girl to school. Makin' quite the lady of little Josey, aren't you? She struck it lucky when she got on the soft side of you."

John controlled his temper with an effort. "You'll find the plough over by the gate of the calf-paddock," he said shortly. He was turning on his heel when Harrap spoke again.

"Oh, you needn't be so short about it. I can't help takin' an interest in her, seein' she came from my place." He leaned forward, with a look of sly malice. "It 'ud be queer, wouldn't it, if her people turned up after all?"

"What do you mean?" John swung round, his eyes blazing.

"Oh, nothin' much. Only stranger things have happened. I s'pose it 'ud be quite a blow to you, now, Mr. Anderson, you havin' adopted her an' all that. An' she's a takin' kid: her father 'ud be quite proud of her, if he *did* turn up. Well, I will say he'd have a right to be grateful to you for all you've done for her."

"Her father is dead: died before ever her mother came to your place."

"Oh, you know that, do you?" Harrap's tone expressed polite interest. "Still, surprises come to the best of us. If I was you I wouldn't forget that. There's no doubt that if a mistake *had* been made, an' her father *was* alive, he'd be real glad to get hold of a girl like Josey's grown into. It might pay a man to start lookin' for him." He ended with a dry chuckle. "Well, I must be goin' after that plough." He slapped his horse with the reins and jogged away.

John walked back into the shed, too savagely angry to trust himself to speak. He sat down on an upturned box and stared before him. What did the brute mean? Did he mean anything, or was his talk the silly, empty malice one might expect from Jim Harrap? He forced himself to think calmly. If there were really anything at the bottom of Harrap's words, it must be that he had lied years ago: that he and his wife had kept back something that belonged to Jo's mother. That, of course, might readily be believed: certainly no finer scruples of conscience would be likely to hamper them in the matter, and they were of the cunning type that would wait years, on the chance of getting some advantage out of it.

But, on the other hand, what could they know that mattered? The mother had told the matron that Jo's father was dead, and only a living father could cause John Anderson any anxiety now. No one else could take Jo from him. As

the thought of that possibility took shape in his mind his heart seemed to stand still. Fathers, he knew, had their rights in law, even if they had been worthless swine. A father could take Jo from him—his little Jo. However he might fight he believed that the law would be against him.

Then he tried to laugh at himself. What could Harrap do? If he really had known anything it would have come out—in seven years. He dwelt with comfort on the dying woman's words—"There is no one. She has no one at all." At the time they had seemed pitiful; now he clung to them joyfully. A woman did not lie when she knew herself on the very edge of the grave. There had been absolute truth in her eyes.

"Harrap's trying to put up a bluff," he muttered. "But I won't be bluffed."

He rose, shrugging his shoulders. From the house a high, clear voice was calling him happily.

"John! Where are you, John?"

"I'm here." He came into view. Jo was standing on the back veranda, with Mrs. Collins beside her. It was easy, even across the little distance that separated them, to see the utter contentment of the old woman's face.

"Is it too late to go for a ride, John?"

"What does Mrs. Collins say? She's the ruler of the house."

He saw the young face turn coaxingly to the housekeeper. Then Jo's voice came triumphantly.

"She says it isn't, and I shan't feel I'm really home until I'm on Dandy!"

"Very well, I'll go and get the horses—hurry up and get ready."

He went off, whistling. But as he drove the horses towards the yard the whistle had ceased, and his brow was knitted in heavy thought.

CHAPTER VIII

JO'S WEEK-END

"Busy, Mrs. Collins?"

"Not if you want me, Mr. John. I was just doing a bit of darning."

"Which you shouldn't be doing by lamplight," Anderson said, sternly. "Put it up; I'll chuck my socks into the fire if I find you darning them at night!"

"Indeed, my eyes aren't that bad—old and all as I am," she said, with spirit. But she put the socks into her work-basket and smiled at him. Mrs. Collins was of the old-fashioned type of woman who loves a man to be masterful.

"You're not going to ruin them over my old working socks," he said, smiling in his turn. "There, that's better. May I sit here? I want to talk to you."

He drew a chair near the kitchen stove and sat down, and she waited for him to speak. Apparently, however, he was not in a hurry. He filled his pipe slowly, lit it, and saw that it was drawing well before he began: and she, knowing that something unusual was troubling him, watched him in silence.

"I've an offer for the place," he said at length. "One of the agents in Highfield spoke to me to-day; Bissell, you know, of Staines and Son. He's a reliable man."

"I remember," she said. "You brought him out here three months ago, to go over the farm."

"Yes. He could have sold it before if I hadn't wanted cash, he said. But when I go out of here I want to go for good, with no business left to tie me to the district. And I wasn't in a hurry. But he has a good offer now, cash down. His client is a sound man, who knows the place; he was here last year to buy sheep, and we rode round it then. Bissell says he's quite keen on getting it."

"And you'd like to sell, Mr. John?"

"I want to get away," Anderson answered. "There's nothing to tie me to this part of the country, and I've never liked it: Queenslanders don't take kindly to South Gippsland. When I came here first my only wish was to get as far as possible from every one I'd ever known, and be on a place where I'd have to work hard all the time. I didn't want to make friends, and naturally I never have made any."

She nodded. "I know, Mr. John."

"I should think you did know," he said, energetically. "I've often thought, in these last few years, how rough it was on you. It wasn't fair to tie you to my sorrow, and my loneliness, and my bad temper."

"The sorrow was mine too, Mr. John, and I didn't want anything but the

loneliness myself. As for the bad temper—” She laughed. “When did you ever show me that, Mr. John, my dear?”

“Oh, I was a surly brute enough,” he said. “I know that now. Only I was knocked out; something had died in me when Helen went. I did not realize what I had slipped into in those first ten years—until Jo came.”

“And that was a mercy from Heaven, Mr. John.”

“It was,” he agreed. “The little bit of a thing! Who would have dreamed she would make such a difference! Yes, it was a good day for us when we found her, Mrs. Collins. It’s chiefly on her account that I want to leave now.”

“Ah, well, I thought you would feel that sooner or later,” she said. “You wouldn’t want her brought up in a place where people would say she was nobody’s child. So many people like to drag up old stories—it’s wonderful how little they have to think about. If you ask me, Mr. John, it’s high time she started in a fresh place where nobody is likely to ask her who her father was, poor bairn.”

“I think so,” he said. “The farther we go from here, the better.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Collins. “The farther from Harrap’s.”

Anderson looked at her sharply.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because they are the people who will never forget. They like to think that your Jo was once a little ragged destitute thing belonging to their servant-maid; they like to feel that they can look down on her. It fair dithers me to see that Loo Harrap look at her. And the little thing dreads them yet. Let’s get her away, Mr. John: it isn’t fair to her to keep her near them.”

“And there’s more,” he said. “Jim Harrap has been dropping hints to-day that have worried me pretty badly: suggesting that he knows something of Jo’s people—of her father.”

“Any proof?” she asked sharply.

“Oh, the brute didn’t say so definitely, but I didn’t like his manner; he spoke with a kind of beastly enjoyment, as if he knew that he could give trouble if he chose. I don’t know what he expected to get out of it. Probably he was just feeling his way, to see how I would take it. It may be only bluff, of course. Still——”

“Of course. I’ve never believed that Jo’s mother didn’t leave some things behind that we never heard about,” Mrs. Collins said, after a pause. “It doesn’t stand to reason that there would not be some little personal possessions—some scrap of writing. The woman that made little Jo what she was—the woman that owned that well-bound Bible—well, anyone would know she had more in her possession than a few dirty rags. I hope I’m not un-christian, I’m sure, but in my own mind I’ve always felt certain that Loo Harrap only packed into that suit-case what she didn’t want to keep. Prob’ly she packed rags of her own,

and she certainly wouldn't have wanted to have the Bible. Not in her line. She knew well enough that the poor soul was dying, and that nobody could prove that she'd kept things. What was to hinder her?"

"Not her conscience, for she hasn't got any," John answered, grimly. "Why didn't you tell me what you thought?"

"What was the use? You'd been over to ask, and got sent back with a flea in your ear, and I didn't worry. I thought there was no doubt that Jo's mother spoke the truth when she said that her husband was dead, and that nobody else mattered."

"Well, it's the father's existence that Harrap is hinting at," John said. "I'd give a hundred pounds to know if the brute is simply trying to scare me."

"If he is, he'll make another try before long," said the old woman, shrewdly. "Mr. John, if there was such a miracle that Harrap was speaking the truth—if the father was alive—could he take our Jo?"

"I'd fight him to the last ditch for her. But—yes, I believe he'd have the law on his side," John answered, heavily.

"Then for goodness sake take this offer that's been made you for the farm and go!" she said, vehemently. "You needn't say where you're going; there's no need to leave anything that Harrap can track you by. Take the child with you, and go!"

John laughed without mirth.

"Sounds all right, but it's not so easy for a man to disappear nowadays," he said, "and just twice as difficult for a man with a thirteen-year-old girl."

"I don't know. It's my belief far more people disappear every year than are ever found," declared Mrs. Collins. "The cases that *are* found get into the papers, of course; but you don't hear anything of, say, Henry Brown, who goes quietly off to another State and calls himself Tom Smith. Who's to know? I'll wager it's often done successfully. And come to think of it, Mr. John, how few people there are who know you. You've only those distant cousins in Queensland, and you've never kept in touch with them. If you went to live in Adelaide, or any other distant place, and held your tongue, who'd be able to say that you were John Anderson who came from South Gippsland? Why, you might have called yourself Smith or Brown for the last ten years down in these parts, and no one would have been any the wiser!"

Anderson stared at her.

"But, good gracious, woman, you don't mean to suggest that I should go under a false name now!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I don't go as far as that," admitted Mrs. Collins, who had, indeed, been rather carried away by her own theories. "But I do say, Mr. John, that you could go away quietly and settle in some distant place, and it would be very difficult for anyone like Harrap to track you. He's got no money to make

inquiries. That's the advantage of being respectable," she went on, with a burst of shrewdness. "If a criminal slips away from justice, of course the law is on his track straightaway, and all the police are making inquiries—but no one would want to find you. Slip away quiet, Mr. John: you've no farewells to make—none that matter. If you say, sort of vague-like, that you're going for a bit to Melbourne or Sydney, or going to travel round before you settle down, who's to know where you go?"

"A man has to have some sort of an address," John objected, laughing. "Why, I——"

"You can have all your mail sent to your Bank's care. They can forward letters, but they aren't at liberty to give your address to anyone that asks. I know that's right, because it was you that told me!"

"Oh, yes, that's right enough, but if there were anyone who really wanted to find me—anyone with the right to make inquiries—well, your idea wouldn't hold good for a week. A man can't fade into nothing if he's looked for systematically."

"I suppose not," she said, with a sigh. "But if Harrap is only trying to bluff you, it would be enough to stop him. Anyhow, Mr. John, get away from here. Tell the man in Highfield that you'll take his offer."

"Yes, I'll do that," Anderson said. "I'd pretty well made up my mind to do it, even before Harrap showed his teeth. You can begin to pack as soon as you like. But don't pack much: we'll have a clearing sale and go out with as little baggage as possible."

"It won't take *me* long to pack," declared Mrs. Collins. "Far as I'm concerned I could say good-bye to the place within a week—and glad to do it!"

"I'm afraid you won't get away as quickly as that," he said. "Still, we might manage it in a month. I'll see Bissell on Monday, when I take Jo back, and get him to hurry things as much as possible."

He rose, looking down at her very kindly.

"Don't worry too much over it," he said. "I don't believe Harrap has anything definite: if he had, he'd never have bottled it up for seven years. And even if there is something—well, it may be no more than I can fight. Jo taught me something about fighting seven years ago, when she bombed Mrs. Clissold with her own work-basket, and I haven't forgotten the lesson."

"Well, she's worth fighting for, Mr. John." A tear trickled down the old woman's face.

"She's all that. Now, just forget about it for the week-end. We can't have Jo's week-end spoiled—especially when her birthday comes in it. I'm off to bed."

There were no shadows on Jo's week-end. The tie that she had knitted for

John he pronounced gravely to be the best that he had ever been so fortunate as to own. He appeared in it at breakfast-time, and so cunningly tied was it that nobody could have discovered the stitches that had insisted on being purl when they should have been plain. Jo herself shouted with delight over the plain leather suit-case with her initials—the very thing needed when one week-ended with beautiful regularity.

"No one in the school has got such a beauty," she declared, gleefully. "Not even Beryl Giffard, and she's the Captain!"

"It's hard to know what to give you, now that you're a young lady at a Seminary," said John, "and you never did like things that I'm told other girls like—frills and furbelows, whatever a furbelow may be. Anyhow, it doesn't sound in your line. But I didn't think I could go wrong with decent leather."

"I should think not," returned Jo, whose training had taught her to regard leather as one of the really desirable things of the world. "Where's the key, John, darling? I believe there's something inside it!"

There was; an exciting box of chocolates. When John had emerged, somewhat dishevelled, from the mighty hug that followed this discovery, it was to find Mrs. Collins beamingly displaying the white tennis-jersey she had knitted: a gift that compelled instant retirement, so that it might be worn at breakfast.

"A man must expect cold food on his birthday morning, I suppose," John grumbled with a twinkle, as they sat down to a belated meal. "Especially when he shares his birthday with an imp like you. And what does one do to-day?"

"Oh—ride," said Jo, happily. "Haven't you any work we can do with the sheep?"

"Well, as it happens, I have," he said. "Just the job for a day when I've got an extra hand to help me. I want to muster every sheep on the place and get them into the home paddocks. There will be a man out to see them next week, and I may as well be ready."

"Why—are you selling some, John?" She looked at him inquiringly. A general muster at that time of the year was not a usual thing.

"I'm selling everything," he said. "Sheep—cattle—house—land: all Peak Farm."

"Then you've made up your mind? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"You won't be sorry to leave the old place, then?"

"Yes, I will. It's home, and we'll always miss it, won't we? But we'll have another home that we'll like just as well, without—without any horrid neighbours!"

"That's quite true," he said. "And it will be rather fun to look for another place, won't it, Jo-boy? We'll go farther north, where there isn't as much rain—and then, I expect, we'll be wishing for Gippsland when a drought comes.

But we'll chance that. And we'll pick out a place with nice-looking homes near, that look as though boys and girls lived in them. I don't want you always to be without mates."

"I don't want anyone but you and Colly," Jo said, sturdily. "Boys wouldn't want me 'cause I'm a girl, and the girls at school say I'm half a boy as it is. So I don't fit in anywhere. But you and Colly don't seem to notice it."

"No—we don't notice it," he said, laughing. "Colly and I are pretty content with our urchin."

Measured by acres, you would not have thought that it would take long to muster Peak Farm. It was not a very extensive property. But you would have found your mistake had you set out to do it alone. Then you would have discovered that to get to a hill-top some distance away it was necessary to ride up and down so many deep gullies that it took half an hour to cover a distance that might have been cantered across in five minutes had it been straight going. And the gullies twisted and wriggled between the hills, often with a creek running in their depths; a creek that might not be wide, but was very often so steep-sided and deep that to cross it was out of the question except where the sides had been broken down at a shallow place to permit of fording. Great places for hiding sheep were those gullies, especially in the heat of the day, when the sheep lay close in the thick undergrowth and even crept into the butts of hollow trees and under huge shells of half-burned logs. John and Jo knew every one of these hiding-places, and no sheep escaped them: but hunting for them took time.

On the farthest hill-tops, so steep and rough that they had never been cleared, it was almost impossible to work with a horse. The great trees towered to the sky, thrusting their mighty heads out of a tangle of scrub—dogwood, musk, and hazel, wreathed and matted with a score of creepers, their tough stems and tendrils twisting from one bush to another, and the whole forming a mass that no horse could get through. It would have been difficult enough for a man. But the sheep-man trains his dogs to work alone in such a place. John would sit below the scrub, cracking his stockwhip until the echoes ran rattling round the hills—echoes that woke the hidden sheep and set them moving nervously. Then the dogs would dash into the scrub at the word of command, barking furiously. A good sheep-dog barks very seldom in ordinary country: but in these places they knew that it was necessary to alarm the sheep they could not see, and so the dogs ranged backwards and forwards through the tangle, pushing a way among creepers and leaping fallen logs, and all the time adding crisp, threatening barks to the ringing volleys of the whip-cracks. Not a sheep could bear it: they pushed wildly out of the scrub, out to the open where at least they could see their foes, and, uniting into little huddled heaps, they fled down the hill-sides, bleating a protest against being disturbed from their

quiet resting-places. Last of all, the dogs would come into view, very pleased and triumphant; and at John's whistle they would come leaping down to him, looking up as they reached him, with an expression that said very clearly, "We have the honour to report a clean muster, Sir, and not a head left." To which John would reply "Good dogs!"—and that is the equivalent to the V. C. in the sheep-dog's mind.

Old Boss had died years ago, bitten by a snake, and John and Jo had mourned him as a friend. But there was a young Boss, his son, and there was also Sam, a little red kelpie with an almost uncanny knowledge of what a sheep would do, so that in many cases he prevented it before it was done. They were wonderful allies in that steep country: stanch and faithful, uncomplaining, ready to work until they dropped, and always finding ecstatic reward in a careless word or a hasty pat. There should be a special Heaven reserved for the honest soul of a good sheep-dog.

Little by little all the steep corners and hidden gullies were mustered, John taking one side of a paddock with Boss, while Jo and Sam worked on the other; and gradually the scattered bunches of sheep came stringing along the ribbon-like tracks that scarred the sides of the valleys, converging upon the creek fords, until, uniting into one bleating mob, they could be driven to the gate and turned into the smaller paddocks near the house. The workers ate their lunch by the creek, in a shady corner where wattle-trees dropped yellow balls of fluffy fragrance into the hurrying stream that took them and played with them as it gurgled and sang on its way to the sea. Boss and Sam crouched near them, alert to receive their share.

"And to think that yesterday I was doing analysis!" Jo uttered. "Such silly stuff, John. You take a perfectly good sentence and break it up into little bits and put them into different paddocks!"

"Is that what Miss Penn calls it?"

"I don't suppose so. Miss Penn thinks it's a lovely game: I don't. What's the good of it? And yesterday she played us a low-down trick. She wrote sentences on the blackboard with something wrong in them."

"Sentences that were not perfectly good?" John queried, lazily.

"Yes, there was a catch. You were supposed to find that out when you tried to break them up, because there was a bit that shouldn't have fitted into any paddock."

"And did you find it out?"

"I did not. I've been brought up to believe that if something didn't want to go into a paddock, you just made it. Certainly, some of them seemed a bit queer, but I wasn't going to be beaten by a silly old sentence, so of course I paddocked every bit, somewhere or other. The sad part was that it was the only analysis lesson I've really found interesting, and I was quite pleased with

myself. But Penny wasn't pleased. I'd have been kept in to do it again after school, only that it was Friday—Blessed Friday!" She rolled over on the grass, and laughed up at him.

"And will it be kept in pickle for you until Monday?"

"Oh, I suppose so. But Monday can take care of itself: I don't want to think of it now. And of course it won't be hard, now that I know what Penny's driving at. But how are we ever going to trust her again? We'll never know whether she is playing us the same trick, whatever the subject may be. It's like sending Boss in to muster a bit of scrub when you know quite well there are no sheep there. We held a meeting in dinner-hour, and decided that it wasn't cricket."

"Did the meeting convey its decision to Miss Penn?" said John, laughing.

"Not much! Meetings aren't really any good, except to relieve your soul. Where will I go to school after we leave here, John?"

"I don't know yet. Where would you like to go?"

"Somewhere near you," she said. "I do love our week-ends, John, dear."

"We'll do our best to keep them, old chap," he said. "I'm no keener on giving them up than you are." He held out his hand and jerked her lightly to her feet. "Come along: we've plenty to do yet, and it won't do to be late in to-night: Colly has a wonderful tea planned for your birthday." They mounted, and cantered off along a steep and narrow sidling—in that country opportunities for cantering are few, unless one takes chances on the sides of the hills, or sheep-tracks that one would think almost too narrow for a horse. But the hill-bred horses are sure-footed, and the hill-riders grow accustomed to taking chances.

The sheep were all mustered long before dark, and the musterers came in hot and dusty: glad of a bath before facing a table that displayed all Jo's favourite dainties, crowned by a birthday cake gay with pink and white sugar. It had been a mighty cooking indeed; so mighty that Jo declared that only an all-day picnic would suffice to finish all that was left—and accordingly, next day they packed into the car and drove twenty-five miles to the sea, where the huge rollers pound unceasingly on the yellow sands of the Ninety-Mile Beach. There John and Jo bathed, while Mrs. Collins twittered at the edge, fearing lest they should be tempted too far and be carried out by the terrible undertow that makes naught of the efforts of the stoutest swimmer: until she ended by being caught unawares by a breaker which soaked her to the knees while she strove unavailingly to escape to higher ground. Much mirth having been excited by this occurrence, they left her to dry and explored the beach until it was time to return for lunch: and then bathed in the hot dry sand until it was clear that only another swim could ever cool them. And then home, in the dusk, with the evening dew bringing a hundred fragrant scents from the scrub on either side

of the winding track, and the barking of the dogs to welcome them as they neared Peak Farm.

"Poor darlings!" said Jo. "I hate to leave them alone all day."

"Well, they would hate to run fifty miles," said John, practically.

"Yes, of course. I think we'll have to train them to sit in the car."

"Not much: they have to stay and look after the place. I wouldn't leave with an easy mind if I didn't know Boss and Sam were on the job."

"Well, that's true," said Jo. The car stopped at the gate, and she jumped out to receive the frantic embraces of the two dogs.

"It's been a lovely week-end," she told John, later on, when she had gone to bed and he came to tuck her in. "All week-ends are lovely, but this has been a birthday one, so it's 'specially exciting. And it isn't quite over yet, 'cause we have the drive in to-morrow. Oh, John, dear, wasn't it a fortunate thing you found me!"

CHAPTER IX

MRS. HARRAP HEARS NEWS

AFTERWARDS John Anderson looked back to Jo's birthday week-end as the parting of the ways. Certainly it marked the end of his peaceful life at Peak Farm.

He came back from Highfield late on Monday afternoon. Mrs. Collins had tea ready for him, and he welcomed it thankfully.

"I've had a busy day," he said, as she put the tray beside him. "Things have been moving, Mrs. Collins. I've sold the place!"

"Already, Mr. John?" she gasped.

He nodded.

"Yes. Cartwright—that's Bissell's client—knows what he wants, and he wants it quickly. He's going to be married in a few weeks, and he needs a place almost immediately for his cows—he's been dairying with his brother, and they're dividing the herd. He would like to get everything settled and put a man in to look after the farm while he's away getting married, so that he and his wife will find a home waiting for them."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Collins. "But will he buy without inspecting?"

"Oh, he's coming out to-morrow to go over everything. But it's only a matter of form: he knows the place already, and Bissell inspected it recently. It's practically sold. His father knows Peak Farm too, and as a matter of fact, it's the old man who is buying. He is a well-to-do old fellow, a storekeeper in Highfield, and he's giving the son a place as a wedding-present."

"Well, I'm sure I'm glad he's such a good father," said Mrs. Collins, dryly. "It suits us well, Mr. John."

"There's better yet. Bissell asked me if I'd consider the question of a 'walk-in and walk-out' sale—stock, furniture, machinery, and everything: the whole place as it stands."

"Oh, my clear!" said Mrs. Collins, faintly. "And you said——?"

"Why, of course I hummed and hawed, and didn't jump at the idea—and all the time stifling my desire to chuck my hat in the air. So finally we drove out to see young Cartwright, and went into the matter thoroughly. The girl he's going to marry lives in Adelaide, and he doesn't want to furnish a house without her to choose things—wise lad! He would like to settle down as the place is for a bit, to see how she likes it; then, after a year or so they can alter what they wish. Meanwhile, Bissell has told him that our outfit is pretty decent, and if he agrees with Bissell to-morrow—well, I've gracefully consented."

“And that means,” said Mrs. Collins, with subdued ecstasy, “no packing, no clearing sale, no horrible people trampling all over the house and garden—!” Words failed her. She turned her eyes skywards.

“And what’s better than anything else—no fuss,” said John. “No advertising the clearing sale for a month beforehand, and letting the whole district know that we’re going. It’s exactly what we want. We sell out quietly, pack our personal effects—thank goodness, they’re few—hand over the place to Cartwright, and simply drive away. By Jove, it’s more than I’d have dared to hope for!”

“But will there be feed for Mr. Cartwright’s cows?”

“I think so. He hasn’t a very big lot, and I’m lightly stocked: I’ve been saving two of the paddocks, and the lucerne I put in is doing splendidly. Anyhow, some of the sheep are very saleable, so that they could go to the yards if necessary. Oh, I think it’s all right. We shall know to-morrow, at all events.” He rose, stretching himself, “Well, I’ll go and milk old Daisy. He’ll have to pay me a good price for her, if he wants her: I’ll bet he hasn’t a cow in his lot that can hold a candle to her.”

Mrs. Collins trembled with anxiety.

“Oh, Mr. John, you wouldn’t make the cow a stumbling-block!”

John looked down at her and laughed.

“Bless you, Daisy’s the one thing he really does want. He’s seen her win prizes at every show in the district, and he’s nearly as anxious to have her as he is to have the girl in Adelaide! Daisy is the big factor in bringing off a ‘walk-in and walk-out’ sale: he knows very well that every farmer in the place would have a try for her if she came under the hammer. I’m going to groom her and tie blue ribbons on her when I’ve done milking!” He went out, still laughing, and Mrs. Collins collapsed into the nearest chair and endeavoured to collect her whirling thoughts.

The next day went as smoothly as John had predicted. Bissell appeared with the Cartwrights—father and son—after breakfast, and while the younger men rode round the paddocks and inspected the stock and fencing, old Mr. Cartwright prowled about the house and sheds and appraised everything with the shrewd eye of the storekeeper: driving Mrs. Collins to the verge of lunacy by examining the stove and the saucepans while she endeavoured to cook an unexpectedly large dinner, and at the same time to behave with the courtesy prudent to extend to a buyer. After dinner came a long discussion over prices, while Mrs. Collins, in the kitchen, wavered between hope and despair, and angrily wondered why men took hours to do what women would decide in a quarter of the time. Finally, just as she was feeling that human nature could bear very little more, she heard the tramp of heavy boots along the veranda.

“They’re going!” she uttered. “Oh, get away quickly, do!”

That, however, was too much to hope for, since naturally there had to be another talk at the yard gate, and still another when the visitors were settled in Bissell's car. However, at last the frantic Mrs. Collins heard the welcome sound of the starting engine.

"Now they'll go!" she said. "If it was horses they'd have another happy chat, but as it's wasting petrol they won't!"

This shrewd prophecy proved correct. The car gathered way and disappeared among the trees, and Mrs. Collins fled into the yard to meet John.

"Is it all right?"

"It's all right." He took her hands and pumped them. "Sold out, lock, stock, and barrel, and a jolly good price. All I've kept, beyond the car, is Prince and Dandy and the dogs; and Cartwright's going to look after them for me until I get another place. He says he doesn't mind if it's a year, as he hasn't a good sheep-dog."

"And when do we go?"

"He can take over in a fortnight. Can you be ready by then?"

"Oh—that's easy," said Mrs. Collins, loftily.

"That's all right then. By the way," he added, "I warned Miss Tremayne yesterday that Jo would probably be leaving. She was very sorry—said that she is often in mischief, but that her complete honesty and good temper make her a fine influence among the younger girls. I suppose all head mistresses say that of a departing pupil!"

"How can you say such a thing, Mr. John?" protested Mrs. Collins, indignantly. "Don't we ourselves know there never was a truer word spoken than—" She glanced up and caught the twinkle in his eye; and subsided, with a giggle. "There now—I might have known you were seeing if I'd bite!"

"And you did, of course," grinned John. "Well, we'll take it as true. Anyhow Miss Tremayne begged hard that Jo should stay on as a boarder while I'm finding a new place."

"You wouldn't leave her, Mr. John?" said the old woman quickly.

He shook his head.

"No. I might have done so, before Harrap sowed his beastly seed in my mind, but I can't now. I wouldn't feel that it was safe. Possession is nine points of the law, and I'm going to stick very closely to Jo. We'll all migrate together."

The week went by as if on wings. Even with a complete sale there was much to be done, since John was not the man to hand over his property without having made sure that everything was in order. Peak Farm was sold as a going concern, and he relaxed no section of his ordinary work, even to the planting of vegetables in land already prepared: which Mrs. Collins, in her secret heart, considered going a shade too far—except that it was like her "Mr. John" to do

it. There was much sorting out of possessions: much burning of the hundred and one valueless articles that are put by on a farm, "in case they'll come in useful." A bonfire blazed daily in the back yard, and Mrs. Collins regarded every basketful flung upon it as a happy release. Sacks stood open on the back veranda, yawning to receive old garments and stray possessions for the poor of the Salvation Army. There was business to be seen to; the car made more than one trip to Highfield for the signing of documents and other legal matters. Jo, coming home on Friday, added a fresh note of excitement, and detached John from his work by begging to ride over every corner of the paddocks, since it was for the last time—for it had been decided that she was not to come out again.

News does not travel quickly in the hill-country, and John Anderson's household might have left Peak Farm without his nearest neighbour's having become aware that he was going, had not Mrs. Jim Harrap decided upon a Saturday expedition to Summers' Flat. She returned earlier than her husband had expected her, with an excited expression on a face that the years had only made more rat-like. Harrap came to help her to unharness the horse from their decrepit old buggy.

"Jim!" she said eagerly. "You'd never guess what I heard in the Flat. John Anderson's sold out. He's goin' away almost at once!"

"Go on!" said Harrap, incredulously.

"True's life, he is. I heard it in Tarrant's shop, an' at the blacksmith's too. Everybody knows it. He's sold to young Len Cartwright—the feller who's goin' to be married."

"Lor!" said Harrap, a look of anxiety settling on his heavy face. "By Jove, I never thought of him doing that."

"Well, you know jolly well I did. I was always scared he'd go. But you wouldn't see there was a chance—you always thought you knew best. An' now he's off in no time. Leastways he isn't goin' to have a clearing sale—it's a 'walk-in, walk-out' arrangement. Ford says Cartwright's to take possession next week."

"You don't say! But is he leavin' the district?"

"You bet he's leavin' it. Nobody knows, of course; he isn't the sort of bloke to tell anyone his plans. But you can take your oath he's goin' as far away as he can. It's my belief you scared him into doin' it when you talked to him that day. An' now, what are you goin' to do? You'll lose your chance if you don't move quick."

"I wonder what I'd better do," Harrap mused, knitting his brows. " 'Course I could write to that address."

"Much you might get out of that. We ain't got no proof that the other chap wants the kid. He might, but then again, he mightn't. And if he don't, where do

you come in? Even if he does, I don't see that we're likely to make much out of it."

"I guess he'd be willing to pay for information."

"You guess a lot," said his wife, contemptuously. "But you don't *know* nothing. Anyhow, our game is to get something out of Anderson first. After he's gone we can deal with the other man. But I reckon Anderson's far more likely to pay up. He's just dotty about the kid, an' he'll do anything rather than lose her."

"I s'pose that's so," admitted Harrap. "You always had a better head for business than me, Loo. Well, I'll go over an' see him to-morrow. We'll talk it over after the kids have gone to bed to-night, an' you put me up to what to say to him. He ain't the easiest man to talk to."

"Not as a rule, he ain't," said his wife. "But he's scared this time, you mark my words, Jim!"

CHAPTER X

THE TALE OF MR. HARRAP

Jo was "at a loose end." Young Cartwright and his father had taken advantage of Sunday afternoon, and had driven out to Peak Farm to discuss the actual day for taking over the property—a day which the younger man was anxious to put forward, so that he might get away earlier to his waiting lady in Adelaide. They found John unexpectedly easy to deal with on the point: pleasantly anxious to meet them in any way. The Cartwrights considered him the most agreeable of men, and marvelled at the reports that had reached them that he was not a friendly person. Old Mr. Cartwright, driving away later on, said to his son that, whatever people thought, there was no denying that they had found Mr. Anderson quite the gent.

However John might approve the object of their visit, to Jo it came as an unexpected annoyance, since it was evident that she was not wanted in the conclave. Not that she desired to be in it: all she wished was a ride with John, and the fact that she could not have him left her stranded. Mrs. Collins, having placed tea beside the talkers, had retired to sleep the Sunday afternoon sleep of the woman who has worked hard all the week. Jo took a book and went off to the loft.

The loft over the stable was an old refuge. It was half full of hay, soft and fragrant. Light came in through a little window, sending a long ray in which dusty motes swam like tiny golden insects. Jo loved its quiet peace. She settled herself happily with her book, one she had brought from school. But it was a dull book, or the afternoon quiet was too much for her; for presently it slipped from her hand and she fell asleep.

Voices awoke her, and she sat up, rubbing her eyes. One was John's voice, and she frowned; the troublesome visitors had not gone yet. But the answering tones were unpleasantly familiar. This was another visitor, and a worse one. Jo would at any time have gone a mile out of her way to avoid meeting Jim Harrap, and he was below her place of concealment. There was nothing to do but wait.

"He's come to return the plough," she said to herself. "He won't be long; John never lets him stay. He doesn't like the old pig any better than I do."

John had met Harrap as he pulled up outside the stable-yard and had helped him to unload the little plough—marvelling as he did so, at its speedy return, and glad that he should not have to go for it himself, as he had expected to do. But having thanked him surlily Harrap showed no wish to leave. He lit his pipe slowly and remarked upon the weather and the dairying prospects and the hard

times; until John cut him short by saying good-bye, adding that he must go to milk. But Harrap followed him into the yard.

"Oh, there was something I wanted to say to you, Mr. Anderson," he said, brought to his point—which he regretted, since he had not yet found the exact words in which to approach the matter. "You know what I was sayin' the other evening about little Josey's father?"

"Well?" John's tone was not encouraging.

"Well, I suppose you guessed I wouldn't have spoke the way I did unless I'd had something to go on. Fact is, he's alive all right. I've known that this good while."

"What proof have you?"

"Oh, I got me proofs," Harrap laughed nervously. "Matter of fact, we've always had them. Mrs. Wilson had a little box of things me wife found in a drawer after she'd gone."

"Then you were lying when I went over to ask you?"

Harrap moved his position uneasily.

"Well, we'd had enough bother already, with the police an' all. We didn't want any more people trackin' round the place an' sayin' we hadn't done the right thing—after all the trouble we'd had with the woman, too. An' you'd taken the kid an' were lookin' after her: she was well off. So we held our tongues."

"Then why are you not holding them now?"

"Oh, well, we're pretty hard up, Mr. Anderson. Times are hard, an' it's about all I can do to get along. I owe a good bit of money, too. An' seein' you've adopted the kid, an' every one knows you're fond of her—well, we thought you'd be willing to pay a bit if we went on holdin' our tongues. I don't want to see Josey took away from you, but a man's got to look after himself."

"I see," said John, the calmness of his voice giving no hint of the raging anger that filled him. "But you admit that you lied once, Harrap. How am I to know that you're not lying now?"

"Them ain't a lie," Harrap said. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out something—a little box. He opened it, and John saw a ring, a scarab set in a queer twisted setting of silver. Beside it was an ear-ring of old-fashioned pattern, long and slender, made of pale filigree gold.

"Them was among the things we found. They ain't much value; it's only silver in that queer beetle ring, an' the gold of the other thing is poor quality. But they're curios an' old-fashioned; anyone 'ud reckernize 'em."

"They're interesting, no doubt," John said, coldly. "Almost as interesting as your expecting to make something out of them with me. Old jewellery is no proof, Harrap. Whether you found it in Mrs. Wilson's room, or whether you bought it in a Bourke-street pawnbroker's, you can't prove anything by it."

"Oh, I ain't quite such a fool as that," Harrap answered with a sneer. "I wouldn't come talkin' unless I had better exhibits to back these up. Only I'm not quite such a fool, either, as to show you everything—it's a bit too valuable to trust in your hands. You'll have to pay for the rest if you want it."

"You had better make yourself clear," John said. "You can't expect me to pay anything unless I know exactly what I'm getting."

"There was papers, too," Harrap said. "A marriage certificate, and Josey's birth certificate: and a bundle of letters. Nothing we could make anything out of, though: no addresses that were recent. So it struck me wife that she'd get her sister, who lives in Melbourne, to watch the papers, an' sure enough, within a few months some one was advertisin' for the woman an' the kid."

"And you answered the advertisements?"

"Not me. I knew too much. But me wife's sister answered—very guarded-like—not givin' her name, you understand, but just a jumble of initials, an' the reply to be sent care of the paper. She got it too, pretty quick. It was Josey's father, tryin' to get hold of them."

"Well?" John's face was white.

"Well, we left it at that. We found out somethin' about him, an' it didn't seem there was much money in it from his side. So we simply shut down on answerin' any more ads; we didn't owe him anything, an' you'd adopted Josey by that time. Me wife said it might pay us better to wait."

"And now that you have decided not to wait any longer, what do you propose?"

"Well, it's up to you, Mr. Anderson. We don't want to upset you, you regardin' Josey as your own child, an' bein' fond of her——"

"Cut out my feelings, will you?" said John, between his teeth. Harrap shrank back, but recovered himself, smiling evilly.

"It won't pay you to get wild, Mr. Anderson. We hold all the cards. We reckon that—well, considerin' everything—it ought to be worth five hundred pounds to you if we turn over everything we've got—letters an' certificates an' all. Then nobody can ever get at you. Five hundred pounds ain't too much to pay for a daughter—when you've got it." He grinned. "Wish I could get that much for one of mine."

There was silence for a moment. John's mind seethed within him; it was hard to face all that the news meant. Then he mastered his anger and the fear that lay beneath the anger, and spoke quietly.

"Blackmail isn't a pretty game, Harrap. You don't seem to realize that you put yourself in the power of the law by attempting it."

"Where's your witness?" Harrap asked coolly. "It's only your word against mine, and you're no more anxious to have the law in this business than I am, Mr. Anderson."

Again John's temper surged within him. But the gospel of the shut lips that so long ago he had taught to Jo, was still strong enough to hold him back.

"And if I paid you," he said, "If I paid what you ask, what guarantee have I that you hand over all your precious proof? You're a liar and a thief on your own showing, Harrap, and I haven't the slightest doubt that you're ready to lie again."

"Not me—I swear, Mr. Anderson—"

"Oh, keep your swearing. Even supposing you did hand over everything I should still be at your mercy—if I intended to recognize it. You know who the other man is, you say—Jo's father. When you'd got through my money you'd either come to me for more, or you'd decide to go to him."

"Aw, no, I wouldn't do that," Harrap said. "Five hundred 'ud shut our lips for good an' all."

"I won't give you five hundred pence," said John. "You and your precious wife best know how you treated that woman when she lay at your mercy: how much mercy you had for that little child. Your mercy is a poor thing to trust to. I may be anxious to dodge the law, but by jove I'm not low enough to be willing to make terms with you!"

Harrap's face twisted in a grin of anger and disappointment.

"Better think it over," he advised. "You'll be sorry you didn't agree to my terms when you have to give up the kid to her lawful father: an' I tell you, I'll have him on your tracks in less'n no time. Nice kid, too: it'll hurt to hear her callin' him 'Daddy,' an'——"

"Something will hurt you first!" said John, between his teeth.

His long arm shot out. Warned by that instinct of self-preservation which is said to be the first law of nature Mr. Harrap ducked, and turned to fly: but a steel-like grip caught him by the collar, and he found himself shaken backwards and forwards until it seemed to him that every tooth was rattling in his head. The world spun round him; the remarks he would fain have made came but as gasps of fury. Then he was suddenly released, and a kick, scientifically applied, shot him forward. Another came, and another: and, so propelled, Mr. Harrap fled through the stable-yard gate, and scrambled, sobbing and cursing, into the haven of his cart. He did not look round: his one idea was to escape from that devastating boot. The cart rattled away, with Mr. Harrap caressing his person and still striving unavailingly for words.

John Anderson stood in the gateway and laughed aloud.

"Well, at least I've had something out of it," he said. "And so has Harrap." He found a bucket of water, and washed his hands energetically.

"The brute!" he muttered. "I'm glad I didn't lose my temper." Mr. Harrap's views on this pious belief might have been worth hearing. "And now, what's to be done?"

Turning, he saw Jo. She was standing in the stable doorway; a little pitiful figure, her eyes wide with terror and dismay. Anderson needed no telling that she had heard and seen all that had passed. He took two great strides and caught her in his arms.

"Jo!" he said. "My little Jo!"

She clung to him, shaking from head to foot.

"Don't dear!" he whispered. "It's all right, Jo. Don't worry."

"John—he can't get me! Say he can't, John! He can't take me away!"

"No one shall take you from me," he said. "You're mine, Jo-boy—do you think I'm going to give you up if fifty fathers came after you? And it may be all a lie—who'd believe a sweep like Harrap? Anyhow, if it were true, it's all years ago. How is he going to find a man of whom he knew nothing but a name—and that nearly seven years back? Even if your father were alive: even if he had wanted you when you were six—well, everything has changed since then. He wouldn't want a great lump thirteen years old." He tried to laugh.

"But if he did, John? If he came after me?"

"Then I'd fight him for you, and I'd win," he said, fiercely. "But he won't find us; we're going away, and we won't leave any tracks behind us, either. You're not to worry: you're not to be afraid, Jo, dear."

He sat down on a box, taking her on his knee, and tried to reason her back to calmness, and gradually she ceased to tremble, and took comfort. Was he not John—so strong, so utterly trustworthy. It was hard to think that he would ever be beaten in any fight that he had sworn to win. She sat up after a while and smiled at him.

"Well, if he ever did get me I'd run away and come back to you," she said. "And then you'd run away with me, wouldn't you, John?"

"To Timbuctoo, if necessary," he said cheerfully, "but he won't get you. And now you're not going to think about it one bit more than you can help. I'll do all the thinking that's necessary. And Cartwright wants the place sooner: we'll be out of here before Mr. Harrap recovers sufficiently to make his next move—if he has any move to make, which I doubt. Ten to one the whole thing is bluff."

Jo pondered this, and presently broke into an irrepressible giggle.

"It was awful!" she said. "But oh, John dear, it was lovely when you kicked him! How beautifully hard you kicked!"

After which, things moved rapidly. It was three days later before the united genius of Mr. and Mrs. Harrap, whose strong point was not correspondence, had produced a letter breathing honest desire to restore a long-lost child to her loving parent. It was a long letter, and incoherent: its composition took two evenings of severe and anxious toil, since it was difficult to show why a desire

so honest had been allowed to lie fallow for nearly seven years. But at last it was completed, to the mutual satisfaction of the writers, and was placed upon the kitchen mantel-shelf, to be posted next day: after which Mr. and Mrs. Harrap retired thankfully to bed. Bed was, indeed, the only place where ease of body was, at the time, possible for Mr. Harrap.

But the letter was still on the kitchen mantel-shelf when the blue car, laden with luggage, slid for the last time through the gate of Peak farm. It was so early in the morning that nobody saw it. It ran through the quiet country, skirting the township of Summers' Flat; pausing in Highfield just long enough to pick up some more luggage and a bright-eyed small girl. Then it headed swiftly for the north.

CHAPTER XI

J. P. SPENCE

JOHN ANDERSON sat on a rock on the east coast of Tasmania and looked out across a sea of dancing blue. The tide was coming in; the waves ran in hurrying little eddies among the rocks, lifting the seaweed that clung to every cranny: and then, retreating, left a line of silver bubbles that caught the sunshine for a moment and winked brightly before they broke and died. Then, in a moment, the waves came back, impatient to reach a higher spot, and danced across the waving line that they had left, making a great fuss and swirl when they found themselves caught in a narrow cleft, and tearing back to sea as though they feared that they would be trapped for ever if they stayed: and the red-legged seagulls that had hopped disdainfully out of their way, ran hurriedly after them as if to assure them that it was really quite a safe place. It was an old game between the waves and the seagulls; they played it regularly twice a day, and were never certain who had won.

The rocks jutted out into the water at either end of a little bay. Between them the sand was clean and fine; looking down, John could see it under the water, in hard white ridges that shelved gradually until they were out of sight, lost beneath the blue depths. It was a splendid place for bathing—for even very little people, or very timid grown-ups, could paddle happily near the shore, while bolder spirits could wade in a few yards farther and find water deep enough for any ordinary swimmer. There was diving, too, off the eastern rocks, when once you knew the safe places where there was no risk of hitting your head on a submerged crag. John and Jo knew all the diving-places now.

Behind the little bay a grassy lane led up to the tiny hamlet of Seacombe. Years back it had been a mere collection of fishermen's cottages, straggling along the shore; now the sea-road was dignified, by bolder spirits, as the Esplanade, and there was an hotel—and a surprisingly good one—and half a dozen boarding-houses; for the people of Hobart and Launceston had found it out, and even visitors from the Australian mainland, touring up the East Coast, were advised by the Tourist Bureau officials to make it a port of call. A gay place, now, was Seacombe, in the summer-time, with its sands dotted with girls in brief bathing-suits, wearing gay caps and gaudy cloaks, and with matrons who sat beneath vivid Japanese paper umbrellas and watched their paddling infants in sleepy peace. Then motors flashed up and down the Esplanade, and twice a week moving pictures occurred in the Mechanics' Institute, convulsing the inhabitants of Seacombe with excitement. So that the people who had known and loved the little place when it was young sighed

over vanished days and cast farther afield to look for a township that had not yet begun to grow up.

But Seacombe was still peaceful enough before December released innumerable boys and girls eager for holidays, and the boats from the mainland began to double and treble their runs to bring hordes of tourists to Tasmania, best and dearest of all summer playgrounds for Australians. There were not many people there on this day of late November when John Anderson sat on his rock, basking in the rays of the brilliant afternoon sun. He wore a light coat over his swimming-suit, but it had seemed good to him to climb up to the hot smooth rock to enjoy a lazy pipe before taking his afternoon bathe. Below him, in the water, Jo was splashing about with three little children, occasionally calling to him to hurry up to join them. But John was in no haste to finish. He liked to sit there quietly, revelling in the peace, and the hot sunshine, and the safety.

For he felt safe. It was over three months since they had made their hurried flight from South Gippsland, and not once had there been the slightest sign that Harrap had been able to make good his threat—that Jo's father was making any effort to trace them. Nobody seemed to care where they were: nobody showed the least interest in their journeyings or in their sojournings. For all these weeks they had roamed from place to place, staying here and there in the cities or in the country, neither trying to hide themselves nor to make friends. Mrs. Collins was staying with a sister she had not seen for many years, in Queensland: ready to join them whenever they might want her, but quite content to wait. Such letters as came to them were addressed to John's Bank in Melbourne, which held them until he wrote giving instructions to send on a budget. He did not write often: letters were the last thing in the world he wanted. Even now he felt a twinge of uneasiness when the big Bank envelope did come.

There had been times when he had felt badly frightened, especially in little towns, where he fancied that a policeman looked curiously at him and Jo. It had always been imagination, but a man's nerves play him queer tricks when he has much at stake. In cities he felt safer: it is very easy to be lost in a hurrying crowd, where everybody is too busy to wonder about strangers. They had spent most of their first two months in Melbourne and Sydney. But neither John nor Jo were townsfolk, and the roar of the streets wearied them after a time; so that when the first tension of anxiety began to relax they went farther afield and wandered to many places that had only been names to them. "We're 'Seeing Australia First!' as the Government posters tell us, aren't we, John?" commented Jo, delightedly.

To Jo, it had been all a delight. At first she was nervous, trembling whenever a strange man looked at her; waking in the night, shuddering and

crying. But very soon she accepted the view John steadily put forward, that the whole thing was merely a bluff on Harrap's part. It was easy enough for a child to accept it, especially when John was always beside her, serene and untroubled, so far as she could see. John had made up his mind that, whatever his own private anxiety might be, Jo should see nothing of it: he laughed at her fears, and always managed to find something to turn aside the current of troubled thought. So that gradually the shadow faded from Jo's mind and became part of the gloom that had always been associated with the hated name of Harrap. The Harraps were part of the old life, left behind for ever.

It would have been difficult not to feel happy—with John. For John was the best of companions; always interested, always eager, a mine of information and the cheeriest of playmates. From the first he had determined that Jo should forget, and he saw no way of ensuring this except by filling her mind with happy things. But a child's mind needs a playmate, and so John found that he must play. It was not hard, because he had learned much since Jo had first come to him—when, as he once told her, he had creaked all over if he tried to laugh. There were no creaks now. Laughter may be the gift of the gods, but it comes to those who seek it.

For all his hidden anxiety John Anderson looked a younger man as he sat smoking above the dancing water. It had been his first holiday for more than seventeen years: years that he had spent in ceaseless hard work, with little relaxation either for mind or body. Now, change of air and scene had done much for him: he was tanned and healthy, his eyes clear, his whole bearing alert. Jo had noted the change, and rejoiced openly in it. "Colly won't know you when she sees you, John," she had told him. "It's been awfully good for you to come away and play!"

She called to him again, and he knocked the ashes from his pipe, slipping off his coat as he stood up. Before him the rocks ran out to sea in an irregular chain: he strode across them, sometimes leaping a gap where the waves eddied tumultuously, until he came to deep water, and then dived down into the cool embrace of the sea. Jo swam out to meet him as he came up, and they dived and frolicked together, practising every known stroke, until John declared himself drowning and in need of succour. He turned on his back with a docility not usually shown by those in peril, and Jo "life-saved" him scientifically and swam shorewards, towing him with her. They reached the shallows, where they sat down in the water, looked at each other, and laughed.

"My preserver!" said John, dramatically, "How shall I thank you?"

"You make it too easy," said she. "I'm not learning anything. Drowning people struggle like mad."

"Not if they're sensible, like me."

"But I must learn to deal with the unsensible. You'll have to struggle and

catch me round the neck, and yell and get mouthfuls of water——"

"Never!" said John, firmly.

"Well, to do all the other things. Then I can apply the knock-out blow, like you taught me, and haul you in by your hair. It's not long enough now, but you can let it grow."

"It's a nice programme," he said, "especially for you. The charm of it isn't quite so apparent to me, but no doubt I might come to recognize it. Suppose I practise on you every day while my hair is growing? You'll know all about it when I have enough forelock for you to grasp."

Jo looked at his close-cropped hair and shook her head, laughing.

"It would take too long. I think, after all, it would be better if I began with some one smaller. Coming out again?"

"No," he said. "It's beginning to get chilly, and you've been in the water for ages. Where are the youngsters?"

"They've gone up to their tea," said Jo, as they rose and began to wade ashore. "Dickie is coming on splendidly, John: he swam two strokes this afternoon. Then he went under and swallowed ever so much water, but he didn't seem to mind."

"Great youngster. What about Ena?"

"Oh, she kicks and struggles and says she's drowning, and says "Let me put my feet down just for a minute!" And once you let them go down, there they stay. Ena isn't happy unless her feet are on solid sand. But she's only five, so you can't expect much."

"And a girl at that!" remarked John, making a dive for his bathing-box. He reached it just in time and banged the door in the face of the outraged pursuer. Jo laughed and went off to her own box, whistling in a way that would certainly have been condemned as unladylike by Miss Penn.

They walked slowly up the grassy lane to the hotel, when they were dressed, and presently the little children with whom Jo had been bathing came running to meet them: a boy of seven and two younger girls. They were fair, rosy youngsters, belonging to an English officer and his wife who were travelling. As in their own case, Seacombe had laid its spell upon Captain and Mrs. Winter, and although they had meant to stay there for only a week, they had remained for three; the fishing was good, the hotel comfortable, and the children had all fallen in love with young Jo Anderson. They took possession of her now, all talking at once, and John picked up the baby of the trio, a curly-haired three-year-old, and carried her on his shoulder for the rest of the way. Mrs. Winter was sitting on the hotel veranda. She rose as they came up, protesting.

"You spoil that monkey, Mr. Anderson." She was a slight, pretty woman, with the pleasant English manner. "Do put her down. Babs, you'll make Mr.

Anderson tired."

"He likes me," said Babs, confidently, encircling John's head with her arm.

"She has wonderful insight, Mrs. Winter," John said, laughing. He swung the baby to the ground, at which she vehemently protested, and endeavoured to climb up his leg. "Have you heard that your son has swum two strokes? Jo is seething with pride."

"So is Dickie," said Dickie's mother. "And his father has brought home a huge basket of fish, so all the family is uplifted."

"Great sport to-day, Anderson," said Captain Winter, coming out with a man named Bevan: a quiet, grey man, something of an invalid, who had been staying at the hotel when they arrived. "You should have been out; I've never known the beggars bite so well. What have you been doing?"

"Oh—we drove to the Pulpit Rock with all hands this morning—and this afternoon we all recovered from driving to the Pulpit Rock," John said. "Usual sort of programme in these parts: one gets horribly lazy. And we bathed—I don't know how many times, but Jo and Dickie may. And I slept upon a rock. It doesn't sound as exciting as the day you and Bevan have had, but you may remember it was very much your programme yesterday!"

"Oh, I'm very seldom energetic," Mr. Bevan said. "If Winter hadn't dragged me out to-day I should probably have never stirred from a long chair. My age protects me as a rule—but Winter used force this morning, and I'm rather glad he did." He sank into a deck-chair, looking tired. "Do you happen to know if the coach has come?"

"No, I think not." The arrival of the motor-coach with papers, mail, and possible passengers made the great event of Seacombe's day. "She's late, as usual."

"Certain to be late to-night, because the English mail is due," Captain Winter said. "I don't know why, for I don't think it increases the Seacombe mail by a hundred letters—still it acts like a brake on the wheels of the coach."

"Oh, it all depends on whether the driver finds any special friends at the stopping-places," said Mr. Bevan. "He's a sociable soul, and likes a little chat. Ah, there he comes!"

The big, rattling coach came in view, and presently pulled up at the doorway. Three or four passengers got out, looking dusty and tired. The last, a tall man, did not wait to see to his luggage, but went inside at once, the others following with the light suit-cases that marked them as birds of passage—tourists, staying only a night, and going on up the coast next morning. The odd-job man of the hotel came out in a few moments and helped the driver to unload a couple of heavy leather travelling-bags which he placed on the veranda before returning for the "little chat" that was part of the evening routine. Captain Winter glanced at the name in black letters on the luggage.

"J. P. Spence," he read out. "Looks as if he meant to stay. No rods, so he can't be a fisherman." At which his wife laughed and called him Sherlock Holmes.

Presently the tall man reappeared, accompanied by the landlord, at the sight of whom the odd-job man reluctantly gave up the pleasures of conversation and advanced upon the luggage.

"Put 'em in twenty-two, Tom," said the landlord, following him in. The new-comer did not go too. He stood on the veranda, looking out to sea and across the lawn at the side of the house, where Jo and the little English children were playing, tossing a tennis-ball from one to the other. The baby always missed her turn and trotted after the ball with shrieks of delight, holding it tightly for a minute before she could be induced to throw it back: when she aimed with great deliberation and flung in an exactly opposite direction. The others bore with this peculiarity patiently; Babs was evidently too well-beloved to be criticized by ordinary standards. The stranger appeared to forget the sea in the interest of watching the game. Finally he turned, cast a quick glance in passing, at the occupants of the veranda, and walked into the hotel.

"Seems more interested in the youngsters than in us," said Captain Winter, lazily.

"Oh, no doubt we have that forbidding look that old inhabitants always bestow on a new-comer," said his wife, laughing. "It's peculiar to the white race; we think an hotel belongs to us after we have been in it a week, and glare angrily at guests who arrive to disturb our peace."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bevan anxiously, "I hope Anderson and I didn't look like that when you came."

"Why, of course you did, especially when you saw the three babies. I felt that you were wondering if they would play ball in the smoking-room or leave sticky marks on your pet chairs; and of course we hated you both. It was only when I came out next morning and found Babs investigating your watch and Ena playing pick-a-back with Mr. Anderson that I began to think you were human!"

"Just imagine it, Anderson!" said Mr. Bevan, "two mild and inoffensive people like you and me!"

"We were merely shy, and terribly embarrassed by your scornful glances," said John. "You were so English, too! Bevan and I felt at once that we were merely poor Colonials, and nearly fled the district, but I fell in love with Ena before breakfast, so I determined to brave your scorn!"

"I'm so glad you did," she told him. "And now we shall never be able to go away unless you leave first, because the three children utter maddened protests if we suggest going away from Jo. Look at them now!"

The tall stranger had strolled back to the veranda, with the cigarettes he had

presumably gone to secure. He overheard the remark and cast an inquiring glance towards the speaker, perhaps puzzled by the boyish name applied to the long-legged girl romping with Babs. Then he; sauntered across the lawn and established himself upon a garden seat. The ball rolled near him in a few minutes, and he picked it up and tossed it to Dickie: and presently had become involved, more or less, in the game, and in a fair way to becoming friends with all four children. Those on the veranda watched the little scene, smiling.

"They all do it," said Mr. Bevan, in a resigned tone. "Youngsters are the recognized way of getting acquainted with parents, away from home. Anderson would never have looked my way if I hadn't succeeded in scraping acquaintance with Jo. I did it by the underhand method of pretending that I was interested in sheep, when, as a matter of fact, I had come here to get away from the beastly things: I have too much of them at home. But Jo regards a sheep as something great and sacred. We discoursed on the finer points of Shropshires, and established a muttony alliance; so that her father had to join in whether he liked it or not. This new chap has done just the same, only he has used a ball instead of mutton!"

"That's very discerning of you, Bevan," said Captain Winter. "I hadn't thought of it. How do you manage if there are no children?"

"Generally I don't manage at all; I remain wrapped in a heavy silence. But there are dull ways of getting acquainted, if one is driven to it; if a man comes in his own car you open fire by saying how abominable the roads are, which goes straight to his heart; or"—he twinkled—"if he hasn't children you can say what a nuisance it is to allow youngsters at hotels! Oh, there are ways, if you want them."

"If you talk like that I shall have to discard one of my own pet methods, which is to say how extraordinarily nice the Tasmanians are to strangers!" Mrs. Winter told him, laughingly.

"I won't have that shaken, because it's one of my great discoveries," said her husband. "We'll regard Bevan as the horrible exception in an island of delightful people. Up to this we had regarded the Tasmanian Wolf and the Tasmanian Devil as the only unpleasant natives we had seen. But now—!" He looked ferociously at the mild little man, who bore his glare unmoved.

"Now you can add me to the list, when you write a book on your travels, as the Tasmanian Ogre," he said. "And I'll have to retire to my little place beyond Launceston and live there in solitude, to keep up the character. Come and visit me when Jo is at school, Anderson. I believe you could be a pretty good ogre yourself if you wanted to!"

John laughed, a trifle grimly.

"Why, I believe I was a first-class imitation of an ogre for about ten years of my life," he said. "But it's a poor business; its joys are greatly overrated.

There's much more fun in learning to play the fool. Look at the new man now; he's rapidly becoming a mere babe in Ena's hands."

The new man, indeed, seemed in danger of being swamped by the children, who had swarmed over him in the attempt to find the ball, which had mysteriously disappeared. A high shout of laughter rose as Ena ran it to earth in one of his pockets. Only Jo stood a little aloof, smiling, but shy.

"Jo is feeling the dignity of thirteen years," said Mrs. Winter, smiling. "Poor man—there will be nothing left of him. You two have taught my three disgraces the most terribly friendly methods of treating strangers. Oh, he's emerging—what a relief! He's alive, even if untidy."

The stranger had shaken off the three children laughingly, and sprung to his feet. He stood towering over them as they scrambled about him, a tall, dark figure, lean and athletic.

"Good type of a man," said Captain Winter, looking at him with the eye of one trained to size up recruits. "He must be over forty, but he looks as fit as a boy of twenty. By jove, Anderson, he's rather like that little girl of yours. Look at them together; there's quite a look of Jo about him when he smiles."

Something snatched at John Anderson's heart. He stared at the group on the lawn, gripping the stem of his pipe between his teeth: searching with his eyes the face of the man whose luggage bore the name of J. P. Spence. A memory from the past drifted to him—a dying woman's voice that murmured a name—"Philip—Philip!" Then Mrs. Winter cut in laughingly. He could have blessed her for her reply.

"Oh, you're always fancying likenesses, Gervase. They're both tall and thin and dark, but so are half the Australians one meets. You met a chubby, fair-haired baby yesterday, and you were so astonished that you at once said she was the image of Babs!"

"And if he met a native bear, grey and benevolent-looking and woolly, he'd say he was the image of me!" said Mr. Bevan, with a dry chuckle. "These English! And then they go home and write books about us!"

"And there's the dressing-bell—just in time to save me from being torn to pieces," remarked Captain Winter, as the bell clanged loudly. "Oh, and here's the English mail—what chance have you and I of being dressed in time, Barbara!" He took a bundle of letters and papers from the servant who had come out, and the husband and wife hurried off to read undisturbed.

"Come on Jo—dressing-bell!" John called. His throat felt strangely dry: it was difficult to utter the words. He fancied that the stranger looked sharply after Jo as she came up the steps from the lawn. Just for a moment the eyes of the two men met. Then Anderson swung on his heel, putting his arm lightly across Jo's shoulders as they went into the hotel together.

CHAPTER XII

CRAYFISHING

THE NEXT few days passed slowly for John Anderson.

His mind had lost all the quietness and balance that it had gained during the three months of peace since they had left Peak Farm—lost it in the moment of Captain Winter's careless remark that the new guest at the hotel resembled Jo. But he knew that he had felt a pang of fear from the moment that the tall man had walked past him on his way from the coach, his glance turning quickly when he heard Jo's name. Fear had been only slumbering, lulled to quiet by the absence of any suspicion: at the least hint of alarm it leaped up, fully awake, and gnawed ceaselessly at his heart. He told himself that he had been a fool to believe that he could ever be safe.

Whenever he could do so unperceived he lost no opportunity of studying Spence's face. The name, of course, meant nothing to him; he had always recognized that Wilson was not in the least likely to be Jo's mother's real name. A woman who had fallen so low in the world as to be Jim Harrap's servant would scarcely have given her own name to the cheap registry-office which had sent her, without references as to character, to that wretched hill-farm. That one of the stranger's initials was that of the name she had breathed as she died, was far more significant and alarming. She might hide her surname: that was natural enough. But when death loosened her control upon her tongue, it would not be a surname that would spring to her lips. One did not breathe a surname with love, as she had breathed the word Philip.

Was Winter's casual speech justified? He asked himself the question a hundred times as he covertly watched the stranger: taking each feature separately, and comparing it with Jo's. That was not difficult, for Spence had lost no opportunity of making friends with Jo, and was often in her company. Certainly, they were both tall and dark, with crisp dark hair. Spence's was cut more closely than most men's, but there was in it that kink that showed that, given opportunity, it might curl like Jo's. Both had black eyes: but then, so had other people. Their noses were not alike, but the nose of a child is an indeterminate feature, and may show, at thirteen, no hint of what it will be in after life. Neither was Spence's mouth like Jo's; and yet, there was a hint of something similar when they smiled. Their hands and feet were long and thin; but there, again, was a characteristic peculiarly Australian, which might mean anything or nothing. And so John watched and feared and hoped, see-sawing between anxiety and confidence. There were moments when he told himself, angrily, that he was a fool: that he would never have thought of being worried

if Winter—hang him—had not tossed that fateful remark into the peaceful current of his mind. And then some chance circumstance would occur to make suspicion spring up again and bring fear hurrying back.

So far as he dared, he made inquiries about Spence, talking carelessly with the landlord. But there was little to be learned. He was a Victorian, the landlord thought, or—with pleasant vagueness—from New South Wales; but evidently he had been careful to give no account of himself. It was not necessary; tourists came and went every day without being expected or desired to give their history. He seemed to have plenty money, for, although he had come in the ordinary coach, he hired cars and boats freely, and liked nothing better than to make up picnic parties, taking out as many people as he could collect. After the first evening, he had made friends quickly with the other inmates of the hotel. He was a pleasant fellow enough, with plenty to say for himself. John admitted in his own mind that he could have liked him had he not been afraid of him. But as it was, his heart sank whenever Spence approached him, and he watched ceaselessly to avoid giving him a chance of solitary talk.

This was not easy, for the hotel was fairly empty and the few men were much thrown together—the more so because Bevan, never a strong man, had picked up a chill out fishing, and for some days kept to his room, leaving Captain Winter, John, and Spence thrown very much into each other's society. It was the more difficult to avoid him for another reason—Jo had taken a liking to him. Possibly she was flattered, as a child might easily be, at his evident interest in her. He played tennis with her, joined the bathing-parties, where he proved himself as good a swimmer as John, challenged her to draughts or chess in the evenings, and in a dozen ways tried to gain her friendship: and doing all in a cheery, offhand way especially likely to please a downright person like Jo. She would scarcely have been human had she not given her friendship to a man who showed so pleasantly that he wanted it. All the children liked him; he played with them, told them stories, and would have brought them chocolates every day, had not Mrs. Winter protested. John, watching him jealously, felt that this general good will was carefully calculated, to draw attention from his preference for Jo. It was clear enough, he thought grimly, to anyone who cared to observe.

Lying awake at night he pondered over the question of flight. Would he and Jo slip away quietly together? It would be easy to drive off, as if for a day's expedition, and to take the first boat from Launceston to the mainland, writing vague directions for their luggage to be sent after them. It would not matter if they never saw it again. He planned it all, to the last detail—and then put the idea from him. It was no use. If Spence were really the man he feared, there was no escaping him now; not in these days of telephones and wireless,

and highly-organized police. We might as well stay and face it out. Then, if he made his claim, he would fight him through every court in Australia before he gave Jo up.

He wished with all his heart, sometimes, that there were some friend with whom he could talk the matter over. It was a hard burden to carry alone, trying all the time to keep a brave front, so that no one should suspect him of any hidden worry—least of all, Jo herself. He had never cared to get a legal opinion on the matter; silence had been his only refuge throughout. But now he felt utterly lonely—perhaps because the habit of silence in which he had lived so long had been broken in other respects. He had learned to talk, to like to exchange views with other men: men with whom he felt a friend, like Captain Winter, or quiet little Mr. Bevan, with his kind eyes. But on this one subject he dared not speak, because speech meant confession. Jo passed as his daughter: no one ever questioned, or dreamed of questioning, that she was not his own. If anyone asked about their home, he had given vague answers: true enough, but misleading. He had come from Queensland, he would say: had no home at present, but meant to look out for a place soon. It had never failed to satisfy the idle questions of travelling acquaintances. Gippsland, he and Jo had agreed, was to be a forgotten word.

It had all been so easy that he had built up an idiotic belief that it could last for ever. Then this stranger had dropped from the clouds and a chance word had shattered his dream.

He slept late one morning after a restless night, and was hurriedly dressing for breakfast when quick feet pattered down the corridor and impatient fingers tapped at his door three times.

“Come in,” he called, knowing Jo’s signal, and she entered, with Dickie Winter at her heels.

“Aren’t you the disgraceful one?” she greeted him, merrily. “We’ve all been bathing, and you didn’t turn up.”

“I didn’t; I slept like a hippopotamus,” he said, submitting to a kiss that lodged on the tip of his ear. “Take care, Jo—keep that urchin away from my razor while I find a collar. Sorry I missed the swim. I don’t know what made me so sleepy.”

“I would have called you if I had known,” Jo said, repentantly. “But Dickie and Ena came and swept me off, and I thought you’d appear any moment. Oh, and John, we’ve got a great plan for to-day; a picnic up to Rocky Cove, crayfishing. Mr. Spence is getting it up, and every one’s going. We can go, can’t we?”

“I don’t see how we can,” John answered, wrestling with his tie. “Don’t you remember that the hotel car is getting overhauled? She won’t be ready until to-night.”

“Oh, I told Mr. Spence that, but he says it doesn’t matter: there will be plenty of room in the other cars. It would be tremendous fun. Do say we can go, John.”

John hesitated. He hated Spence and his picnics and everything he planned—hated being arranged for and directed by Spence.

“Oh, I don’t know, Jo,” he said, slowly. “Wouldn’t you be happy if we had a day in the boat, fishing?”

Her face fell a little, but she smiled back at him.

“Why, of course, if you’d rather,” she said. But Dickie broke into a wail of protest.

“Oh, I say, Mr. Anderson! That’s simply beastly! It won’t be any fun if Jo doesn’t go. You can fish any day, but this is a special picnic, an’ Jo’s promised to net my crayfish. Ah, do, Mr. Anderson. We’re going back to England soon, and you’ll never see us any more!”

This touching argument was too much, for John liked the cheery little English lad. He patted his head. After all, there was nothing to be gained by being a bear.

“Oh, all right, old chap,” he said, and both young faces cleared. “I suppose we can go fishing to-morrow. Will you net my crayfish, Dickie?”

“By jove, I will!” returned Dickie, blissfully. “Not all the time, you know, but quite a lot. Ena’s coming too, an’ Babs an’ nurse, an’ p’raps Mr. Bevan if he’s well enough, but he isn’t up, so we haven’t asked him yet. An’ we’re going to take lunch an’ boil the billy—that’s for the grown-ups, but mother says we can have bottles of lemonade. An’ drink out of the bottles! Which will you have, Jo?”

“Billy-tea,” responded Jo, promptly. “That’s the best drink in the world. I hate lemonade.”

“Gracious!” said Dickie, regarding her with amazement. “You don’t know what’s good for you, Jo Anderson!”

“Well, breakfast’s good for me—and there’s the gong!” said Jo. “I’m ever so hungry after that clucking you gave me, Dickie.”

“I did, too,” said Dickie, chuckling. “I satted on her in the water, Mr. Anderson, and she went straight to the bottom!”

“Yes, and I crawled round among the crabs for ever so long, and made friends with an extra big one, and next time Dickie Winter bathes he’s going to catch him by the toe!” said Jo, laughing. “Ready, John? Then come along, for I can’t wait another minute for my porridge.”

John found the preparations for the picnic in full swing. The Winters were going, and two girls from Hobart who were staying at the hotel for a week, pretty sisters named Gray. Mr. Bevan refused to be of the party, remarking, to the deputation that went to his room, that the only thing worse than influenza

was a picnic, and he had just had the influenza! The deputation retired in confusion stating that as a just penalty no crayfish would be brought to him, but was cheered on finding two new recruits, a man named Brereton with a seventeen-year-old son. They were but one-day tourists, staying only thirty-six hours in the hotel. Such birds of passage were generally regarded with lofty scorn by the "old regulars," but the wistful looks of the boy prevailed on Mrs. Winter's motherly heart, and she contrived to have the pair included, to Jack Brereton's unconcealed joy. They immediately demonstrated their fitness to be chosen by offering their car, an important contribution to the expedition; and finally, after much bustle and packing of hampers, the party got under way.

They were crowded, but cheerful. Mr. Spence drove Mrs. Winter in a little single-seater, which also accommodated the hampers. They were looked on as the luxurious members of the array—all the others being stowed as well as possible in two larger cars driven by Captain Winter and John. The hotel turned out to bid an enthusiastic farewell to the procession. This enthusiasm was not shared by Mr. Bevan, who sat on the veranda in a big chair with a rug over his knees and informed them, as a parting benediction, that he had never heard of a crayfishing party at which at least half the company did not fall head-first into the sea—those who were catching crayfish falling in because their prey pulled, and those who watched following them in the excitement of the moment. With this cheering information to gladden them, the picnickers departed, singing as they went.

The way led for many miles along the coastline, sometimes passing behind high bluffs or long promontories, sometimes running quite close above the water's edge. Then suddenly they turned from this main road, and struck inland, following a track that seemed to have known little use, for there were few wheel-marks on its firm, hard sand. It twisted among the gently rolling hills: not the steep bare hill-sides that John had known in Gippsland, but wooded slopes separated by shallow valleys where fern-fringed creeks rippled softly. The cars rolled noiselessly through an enchanted country. Trees bordered the road, twined with flowering creepers, and full of birds that twittered and sang as though they had never been taught to fear man. Now they were in dense bush: now it parted suddenly and they had an unexpected glimpse of a sapphire sea, sparkling in the sun, with little golden islands showing sand-banks where sea-birds stepped daintily. Then the veil of trees would shut them in again. The track grew more and more difficult, with sandy slopes and hollows that needed watchful driving. It turned into a paddock at last, through a slip-rail entrance, and they bumped over ridges and tussocks across a dry flat that showed signs of being a marsh in winter: and finally climbed to a height that overlooked the whole stretch of the ocean.

"Here's the end of Tasmania," said Captain Winter.

They tumbled pell-mell out of the cars and went to the edge of the low cliffs. Beneath them stretched a beach of dazzling white, the whitest sand John Anderson had ever seen. Such a beach! It was broken into innumerable little coves and inlets, where the blue water lay deep and still; and everywhere were rocks in great masses of brown and grey, sparkling with flecks of mica. They were smooth, rounded rocks, never sharp or jagged; and where the sea washed them they were fringed with heavy festoons of brown kelp, that lifted and fell with the movement of the waves. Farther out were little isles and rocky stretches, half submerged at high tide: sanctuaries where the sea-birds rested, and now white with colonies of gulls. Beyond, in the open water, two little schooners lay at anchor: a third was in view, sailing slowly towards the anchorage. Already they could see the deck-hands stowing away some of the brown sails under which they had run from Victoria. As they watched, she drew near her companion boats, the last rag of canvas fluttered down, and in a moment the splash of the anchor and the rattle of its chain told that her voyage was over.

"What are they—fishing boats?" asked Mrs. Winter, curiously.

"Crayfish-boats from the mainland," Spence answered her. "This is their regular ground: all this water is trapped, with the result that poor old Tasmania doesn't get much of its own best fish. It's quite a profitable industry for everybody but Tasmanians. They're little boats, and they take big risks, but they make lots of money. How would you like that life, Jo?"

"I'd love it," Jo responded fervently. She was gazing wide-eyed, at the schooner, which now lay rocking quietly on the ocean swell, while its crew were busily employed in making everything ship-shape. From one of the other boats two men put off in a dinghy and rowed towards the new arrival, and cheery cries of greeting were being exchanged between all the vessels. "They must have a gorgeous time. Do they sleep on board?"

"They do—and in pretty close quarters, too. You wouldn't like that, I give you my word."

"I'd sleep on deck," was Jo's prompt answer. "That would be airy enough, Mr. Spence!"

"It would—almost too much so at times. And how would you feel if a big green sea came curling quietly in over the rail and came down on you—plop—without any warning?"

"She'd feel wet," said Dickie, solemnly.

"Most true, Richard. All the men on those boats, from the captain downwards, know plenty about that method of getting wet. It really isn't much of a picnic, even in fine weather, but in rough seas—well, it takes pluck to be a crayfisher. They have some very wild trips across Bass Strait."

"So'd I," said Dickie, shuddering. "In the *Nairana*. It stormed and rained,

and the ship jumped up an' down, an' Ena an' Mother an' me were all dreffully sick. Babs and Daddy weren't, but we were. Weren't we, Mother?"

"I would be just as glad if you didn't call up unpleasant memories," said his mother, screwing up her pretty face. "It was a night of horrors. Do let us come and catch crayfish and forget about voyages. You promised to show me how Mr. Spence."

They had brought all the necessary tackle, laden with which they clambered down to the beach, where the small Winters cast off shoes and socks and fled, yelping gleefully, to the nearest rock-fringed pool.

"Crayfishing isn't exactly a dainty sport," said Spence, plunging his hand into a sack from which he extracted a blood-stained newspaper parcel. "This is bait—good chunks of tough meat, nice and large; the cray doesn't think much of a small bait. You tie a stout cord to a big hook—so; then you bait the hook; and then you dangle it in the water, close to the rock. And when you feel the cray—well, you pull him out. That's all, Mrs. Winter!"

"But he doesn't get that great hook into his mouth?"

"He does not. He holds the bait lovingly to him in his claws, and being a person of determination, he hangs on rather than give it up. Only when he finds blue sky over him instead of blue water, his heart sometimes fails him, and he lets go and drops back, muttering bad language. That's where quickness with the net comes in. As a matter of fact, unless you're very well used to the game, it's almost impossible to net your own fish. You have to handle him very delicately while you're bringing him up, because any jerk frightens him, and it generally takes two hands to pull quietly; if you detach one hand for the net you telegraph a message of danger to him, and he departs for other spots. We have three nets, so three of us had better be ready to go to anyone who gets a fish on his line."

He was baiting hooks rapidly as he spoke, and soon most of the party were equipped. The Grays preferred to watch, for the present, and the tiny children were left happily paddling in their nurse's care; but Dickie manfully demanded a line, and was soon lying flat on a rock, dangling it in a promising pool, while his mother fished in easy grabbing distance of his leg, lest excitement should be too much for him. The others scattered over the rocks choosing their own pools, while Spence and John and Mr. Brereton, armed with strong nets mounted on long handles, patrolled among them. Jo was the first to raise a cry for help.

"Oh, I've got something! He's pulling! Shall I haul him up?"

Spence was beside her in a moment.

"Steady—take him quietly. Let him get a good grip and become really interested." He watched the jerking line keenly. "Now I think you could begin to haul up—very gently."

Jo obeyed, quivering with excitement.

"I see him," she whispered. "Look—down among the kelp. He's coming Mr. Spence; there he is! Oh, do net him; I know he's going to drop off. There!"

The crayfish had decided that this new food was not healthy, and had let go. They could see his shadowy form float back among the kelp. Jo looked up with a woebegone face, but Spence only laughed.

"You'll get him yet. Let your bait sink back—very slowly. He'll come again."

Sure enough, in a moment there was another tug, and then another; and Jo, palpitating with excitement, gently pulled in. This time the crayfish was bolder. He kept his grip on his prey; and was doubtless disagreeably surprised when the net was deftly slipped under him just as his head came above water, and he found himself high and dry on a rock.

"Oh, isn't he a beauty, Mr. Spence!" cried Jo, capering with delight.

Not every one would have called the capture beautiful. He struggled frantically within the meshes of the net; a great horny creature, with fierce claws and long spider-like legs.

"Two pounds if he's an ounce," said Spence, approvingly. "Doesn't the clash of his big nippers sound like bad language? I'm certain he's making rude remarks. Well done, Jo—you handled him splendidly. I was backing you to get the first."

Jo flushed with pleasure.

"I wouldn't have got him but for you, of course," she said. "What do we do with him now?"

"If I were really heroic I'd pick him up by the back and put him in a bag. But I am not heroic. I never was where a crayfish or a lobster was concerned. So if you will hold that sack open, Jo, I'll drop him into it from the net."

This was accomplished, not without some shrinking on Jo's part, for the claws of the captive were wide-spreading and active, and it seemed not unlikely that he would land outside the sack instead of within its murky depths. By the time he was housed Dickie was shouting with delight over his first fish, which John had netted for him. Mr. Brereton was struggling to perform a like office for Captain Winter, and howls for "Net! Net!" came from two other quarters. Thenceforward the unfortunate net-holders spent an exhausting hour, springing from rock to rock in response to agonized entreaties. Finally they organized a general strike, and declared that their union rules forbade them to work until fed. Lines were drawn in, the bag of crayfish tied securely and sunk in a little pool, and they climbed back to the car to boil the billy and prepare for lunch.

"If we managed to net every cray we pulled up we'd have a carfull," said Jack Brereton. "Hungry beggars, aren't they? It's a pity they're so shy."

"Rather a good thing, I think—there wouldn't be any sport in it if you got them too easily," John remarked.

"Well, that's true, of course," the boy admitted. "Still, it's pretty madding to see them drop off just when you've held your breath for three minutes while you coaxed them up to the surface. I lost one monster that must have weighed four pounds."

"I landed one all by myself," Dickie declared proudly. "There wasn't any net handy, an' I couldn't wait, 'cause I was sure he wouldn't, so I just pulled an' pulled, an' he hunged on all the time an' never let go, an' I got him out on the rock!"

"And what did you do then?" asked Mr. Brereton. "If I were a small boy I should hate to be alone with a wild crayfish on a rock."

"I yelled, an' mother yelled too, 'cause he was near her ankles. An' Jo raced over with a sack an' we threw it over him until Mr. Anderson came. Then he got him all right. Mr. Anderson is very brave with a wild crayfish."

"I wasn't," said Mrs. Winter. "It was one of the most harrowing moments I remember. Possibly one might be heroic if one had leather gaiters, but silk stockings are a poor defence."

"Just picture meeting one of those awful creatures if you were bathing!" uttered one of the Grays.

"Oh, you won't," Spence said, reassuringly. "They don't lurk in the good open bathing-places. You won't meet anything more awful than a crab."

They lunched with the huge appetites born of sea-air and fishing, and then explored the white beach until it was time for bathing. The rocks provided scores of dressing-rooms, and, as Spence had promised, there were plenty of open swimming-places free from the kelp the crayfish love, and from all unpleasant creatures of the sea. Afterwards they fished again, until it was evident that the cars had room for no more shellfish unless passengers were prepared to hold them in their laps; and as nobody manifested any desire for this pastime, the gear was put away, and reluctantly they began to think of returning to Seacombe.

"It has been a lovely day," Mrs. Winter said to John. "My bairns won't like coming away from these beautiful rock-pools. Look at that monkey, Babs—she has run away from Nurse." She raised her voice. "Come back, Babs—don't go there!"

The child had capered out on a tongue of smooth rock that jutted away from a huge boulder. She stood there for a moment, a tiny figure against the sky. The nurse called to her sharply and she gave a little start. Then, to their horror, they saw her slip. She cried out once, a little, pitiful call, and then was gone.

Mrs. Winter did not speak. She ran wildly towards the rock, her lips set.

John went by her with long strides.

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Winter—I’ll get her,” he called.

There was sick fear in his heart lest Babs had fallen upon other rocks. But when he reached the spot where she had disappeared—passing the screaming nurse as he ran—he saw, with a great throb of relief, that only clear water lay below the tongue from which she had rolled. He caught a glimpse of a white frock, and slid in feet foremost, afraid to dive. As the water closed over his head he caught the little dress, and by the time Mrs. Winter and the nurse came into view he was scrambling out at a point where the rocks were lower, while Babs choked and screamed and spat out large quantities of water in a healthy rage very comforting for a mother to behold.

“There now, you’re all right, Babs,” John said, soothingly. “You were an old duffer to go diving with your clothes on, weren’t you? Better stop crying, or Dickie will say you were afraid—” at which Babs astonishingly stopped midway in a yell, and merely sniffed and rubbed her face against John’s wet hair. His hat had fallen off as he ran, and he was a sufficiently draggled spectacle as he stood on the rock, the sea-water pouring from his clothes and making a pool round his feet.

Mrs. Winter looked at them both, and gasped.

“Oh, Mr. Anderson! What *can* I say to you?” She held out her arms to Babs with a little sob.

“Oh, don’t take her,” John protested, laughing. “Whatever is the good of your getting soaked by this very wet young person? You stay with me, Babs, because we can’t make each other wetter than we are. Come along and we’ll pack up a car and get away as quickly as possible. I should advise you to slip off all her wet things, Mrs. Winter, and roll her up in a rug—then there will be very little chance of any chill.” He smiled reassuringly at the distressed mother and led the way along the shore.

Some of the party had scattered, hunting shells, but enough were at hand to make a car-load, and they set off for home with as little delay as possible. Jack Brereton was sent to tell the others what had happened. John called to him as he started his engine.

“I don’t see my young Jo anywhere,” he said, frowning. He looked worried; somehow he did not like leaving Jo. “Find her, won’t you Jack? and put her into your father’s car. See that she puts a coat on if it’s cold!”

The boy promised, and went leaping down the hummocks, while John turned the car and bumped off across the rough paddock. Mrs. Winter, sitting beside him in the shelter of the wind-screen, with Babs curled on her knee, scarcely visible in the folds of a rug, looked up and noted his knitted brow.

“I do hope you are not cold, Mr. Anderson,” she said.

“Not a bit,” he told her.

"Poor man, and you can't even smoke!" she said. "Everything you have must be soaked. Gervase will be horrified when he hears what this monkey of ours has done to you." She hugged Babs closer to her. "But are you sure you are not cold? You don't look happy."

"I'm quite warm, thanks," he said. "I think I was just wondering, where Jo was. There was no sign of her."

"Oh, she is quite safe. I saw her on the rocks with Mr. Spence, exploring a pool. He will look after her."

"I suppose he will," said John, rather gruffly. The assurance gave him little comfort.

"Mr. Spence is greatly attracted by your Jo, isn't he?" she said. "We all notice it. Poor man, I don't wonder."

"Why do you say that?" John's tone was sharp.

Mrs. Winter glanced down at the little face on her arm. Babs had fallen asleep and was breathing quietly, almost hidden except for one rosy cheek.

"Well, he is a childless man, you see," she said, gently. "He told me he had lost his only child. I don't know how. But he seemed to feel it deeply, though he said very little, and I don't even know when it was. But I gathered that Jo reminds him of his own child." She paused. "And she is such a dear, isn't she?" she added. "We have all fallen in love with Jo."

John murmured something—he hardly knew what. His heart pounded heavily for a moment, and then seemed like lead within him. He drove the car along the sandy track mechanically, scarcely seeing where he was going, while a thousand miserable thoughts whirled through his mind. All his worst fears were realized; the fight was upon him, and he could see only one ending. For if Spence had lost his child there was no doubt in John's mind that he had found her again—and that he wanted her.

CHAPTER XIII

JOHN FINDS A FRIEND

THEY COVERED the miles to Seacombe in excellent time. John drove fiercely, and Mrs. Winter, seeing that he was disinclined to talk, did not trouble him with conversation. She begged him, when they arrived, to lose no time in getting a hot bath and dry clothes; and herself hurried into the hotel with the still sleeping Babs in her arms.

John followed her advice; by this time he was feeling distinctly chilly, and the idea of a hot bath was very alluring. But he hurried through it, and dressed quickly afterwards, listening all the time for Jo's step. She would be sure to come racing to find him when she heard what had happened: every moment he thought he heard her quick light footfall in the corridor. But it was always his fancy; she had not come when he finished dressing and hurried out to the veranda.

The cars had not arrived. Mr. Bevan sat in his long chair and looked at him whimsically.

"Well, I hear you have been acting as heroic rescuer, Anderson," he said. "Gallant conduct, Humane Society's medal, and all that. Did you get wet?"

"Extremely wet," said John, smiling. "The sea happens to be moist at the point where young Babs chose to dive. If I had had time I could have fished her out on the end of a stick, but you can't practise delay with a distracted mother preparing to jump in. Some one had to jump, and it happened to be me, because I was nearest."

"Dear me, how disappointing!" said Bevan, regretfully. "I understood from Mrs. Winter that you'd been very heroic."

"Mrs. Winter's an unreliable witness in this case," said John, laughing. He liked the frail little man; liked him the more because he suspected that there was always suffering under his dry good humour. To-night he was looking unusually pale and drawn, but the twinkle in his eye never failed. "The mother of the submerged infant is apt to be prejudiced. I should discount ninety-nine per cent of her remarks if I were you."

"Very unpleasant of you," said Bevan, shaking his grizzled head. "We thought Seacombe would figure largely in the district news in the *Examiner*. You'll probably have the local correspondent on your trail any moment, with a glowing paragraph dripping from his pen!"

"He'd better keep out of my way!" said John, much horrified at the idea. "There will be blood dripping instead of ink if anyone tries to make a paragraph out of me!"

“Fear never deters an *Examiner* correspondent,” said Bevan, unfeelingly. “He’ll probably be inspired to write rather more—on the subject of modesty mingled with heroism. You can’t escape glory nowadays if the Press decides that you shall have it. Never mind, Anderson: I’ll come to see you get your medal!”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to wait a good while for that inspiring sight,” said John. “I shall flee the country, if necessary.”

“So valiant, yet so shy!” mourned Bevan. “Where’s my friend Jo? I’m sure I should find her more responsive about it all. Was she scared when you plunged into the brine?”

“She didn’t see the painful occurrence; and I didn’t plunge, I slid. Jo didn’t know anything about it; she was somewhere along the beach, and I had to leave her to come home with the others. They should be here by now.”

“Oh, they’re probably photographing the tragic spot from different angles,” said Bevan. “Plenty of time; it’s not nearly dark yet. By the way, did you get any crayfish? I haven’t been able to find that out in the excitement over you and Babs.”

“Oh, a mighty haul,” John answered. “We really had a very good day. Spence is an old hand at the game, and seemed to know all the best places.” The thought of Spence brought back his anxiety in full tide. His face grew very gloomy as he stared up the track, watching for the cars.

“Smart chap, Spence,” said Bevan. “I should say he was pretty efficient at anything he made up his mind to do.”

“I dare say you’re right,” said John, gruffly. “Is that a car?” He rose and went to the edge of the veranda. “Yes—there they come.”

Mr. Brereton’s motor, laden with excited people, came out of the trees that masked the road, and pulled up before the hotel, and in a moment John was the centre of a ring of eager questioners demanding news of Babs. He looked anxiously for Jo, queerly impatient to see her. But Jo was not there.

“Your small daughter is coming along with Spence,” Captain Winter told him. “She has taken my wife’s place in the little car. By jove, Anderson, old man, I don’t know how to thank you: jolly lucky for us that you were so near, and so quick. I must go and see how the youngster is.” He hurried into the hotel, and the group melted away, leaving John watching for the second car. He was conscious of a new pang of uneasiness. Why had Spence kept Jo behind all the others? Why were they so long?

The dinner gong sounded while he was still asking himself useless questions. He went into the dining-room mechanically and made a pretence of eating, all the time listening for the throb of a motor that did not come. Every one was in high spirits over the day’s picnic; every one congratulated him upon his rescue of Babs, and Mr. Brereton proposed his health in a whimsical

speech that made the long room echo with laughter and cheers. They drank his health, and he had to make some kind of a reply, feeling the most hopeless of fools. As soon as he could manage it he escaped from the room and hurried out to the veranda.

“Not back yet?” It was Bevan’s voice; all the chaff had gone out of it. He had been watching John quietly. “I wouldn’t worry, Anderson; Spence is a good driver, Brereton says. Probably they have had a puncture.”

“Well, they’ve a spare wheel: it doesn’t take long to change one,” John said, harshly.

“Oh, anything else may have detained them. You can never be certain with a car. I don’t think you need be anxious. But if you’d care to go out to meet them, my car is at you disposal.”

“Thanks awfully, Bevan,” John said, gratefully. “I suppose it’s foolish to get uneasy. At any rate, if they don’t turn up within half an hour I’ll take your car and go to look for them.”

“Do. Here’s the key. I must go in, or I’ll have the doctor on my trail again,” Bevan said, coughing. “You might come to my room and let me know when they turn up.”

John thanked him again, and turned away, to pace up and down the veranda. He must seem a fool to every one he thought—anxious because a car was delayed. But his fear was beyond anyone’s guessing. If what he suspected were true: if Spence was really the man he dreaded—were they coming back? Might not the accident that had made Jo his companion for the trip home be the very opportunity Spence was looking for? Long ago, on Peak Farm, he had himself said defiantly that possession was nine points of the law. It might easily be that Spence held that belief too—that he had turned his car from Seacombe and was heading for Launceston and the mainland. Jo would be helpless. He ground his teeth at the thought.

“Oh, I’m an idiot!” he told himself. “That sort of thing isn’t done nowadays.” And yet—if he were in Spence’s position, might he not do it? He could not answer.

The half-hour he had allowed them dragged by while he paced up and down. Others were becoming uneasy now. Captain Winter and his wife came to join him, offering to go with him to search. Then, just as he was turning to go for Bevan’s car, lights flashed into view, and in a moment the little single-seater had stopped at the hotel and Jo was out, pell-mell, and clinging to him.

“Were you very worried, John, darling? I’ve been so afraid you’d be worried.”

“I’m very sorry, Anderson,” Spence said, quietly. “We had a breakdown—I don’t know this hireling’s engine, and it took me an age to get her going again. I’m afraid you must have been anxious.”

“Oh, it couldn’t be helped,” John’s voice was stammering; he had been so sure of trouble that he could scarcely believe that Jo had really come back to him. “Bad luck for you; an unknown engine is an awkward thing to go wrong in the bush. Thanks for bringing her home.” It did not seem to be John Anderson who was forcing the careless words. But it was Jo’s hand he gripped; it was Jo who leaned against him with her old confiding gesture. “Better come in and get something to eat, dear,” he said, and they went in together.

He sat in the dining-room while they ate a belated dinner, doing his best to talk unconcernedly, and making a poor job of it. Under lowered eyelids he watched Spence’s face, trying to read some answer to the questions and doubts that thronged his mind. The man was quieter than usual: a shade less friendly, though his manner to Jo had lost nothing of its usual charm. Possibly he was tired; perhaps a little out of temper at having caused anxiety, however unavoidably. Certain it was that a shade of stiffness could be felt, and all three were glad when the meal was over.

Jo declared that she was too sleepy to sit up, and went off to bed. When John went in to say good night she held him tightly for a moment.

“John, dear—you aren’t cross?”

“Cross?” he said. “No: why should I be cross, Jo-boy? I was very worried about you, but that couldn’t be helped, and nothing mattered once I knew that you were safe.”

“It was really quite an adventure, but I was ever so glad to get back to you,” she said. “I like adventures best when I have them with you.” She kissed him again, and cuddled down into her pillow; and John sat beside her until her quiet breathing told that she had fallen asleep.

He stole out quietly and went to his room, not wishing to meet anyone else. Then he remembered that he had promised to tell Mr. Bevan of Jo’s return, and he put on the coat he had taken off, and tapped at his door.

Mr. Bevan was in bed, propped up by pillows, and looking worn and tired. But his eyes brightened when he saw his visitor.

“That’s right,” he said. “Sit down and light a pipe, if you’re not in a hurry; I find being an invalid a dull game. So they got back safely? I heard Jo’s voice.”

“Oh, yes,” John said. “Sorry I forgot to come and tell you sooner. They had a breakdown—some sort of engine trouble. You’re not any worse, I hope, Bevan?”

“Oh, I’m never brilliantly fit, and this wretched influenza has pulled me down,” Bevan said. “Crocks like me shouldn’t inflict themselves on strange places: I’m thinking of going home as soon as I feel fit to drive the car. My own home is lonely enough, but I’d be better there, I believe.” He changed the

subject, and talked of other things, while John smoked and answered in monosyllables, finding it hard to keep up a conversation with a black cloud of depression weighing upon him. Finally, he pocketed his pipe and rose.

"I'm bad company to-night," he said, forcing a smile; "not much good to you, I'm afraid. I think I'll be off to bed."

Bevan looked at him keenly.

"You're worried about something, aren't you?" he said. "I don't want to butt in—but if it's money, and I could help—" he paused. "Rather pushing of me, I know: still, I'm an older man than you, and if . . ." He paused again, uncertain of his ground.

"It's jolly good of you Bevan," John answered warmly. "But it isn't money, thanks. Suddenly the longing to take counsel of some one else surged over him. This was a wise little man, and one who could be trusted to hold his tongue: it would be an untold relief to talk things over. He sat down again.

"I believe I'll tell you, if you don't mind," he said. "It's rather a long story, and I'm afraid you'll be bored—still, it will do me good to talk. And you may me able to advise me."

"Go ahead," said Bevan. "I'm a good listener."

Once started on his story it was easy to tell. The relief of long pent-up speech was intense; he told all, from the time Jo had first come to him until to-day, when Mrs. Winter's story of Spence had seemed to confirm all his fears. Bevan listened in silence, nodding now and then, making no comments, but evidently keenly interested.

"I'm no lawyer," John finished. "I don't know how I stand in law, and I haven't cared to find out. But I don't think I'd have a chance if it came to a fight to a finish. And I haven't a notion as to what is the best thing to do."

He ceased, looking grimly at Bevan. He had refilled his pipe, but it had long ago gone out, and was cold. Now he lit it again and smoked savagely in the quiet room.

"It's pretty rough on you," Bevan said, after a long silence. "And I don't see what you can do, but wait. If Spence is the man you fear he is, he will show his hand sooner or later. Meanwhile there is nothing to be gained by running away. As you say, you can't run far from the law in these days."

"Well, I'll have to move on somewhere," John said. "I can't stand being in the same hotel with him; it's making me jumpy, and I can't stand seeing him with Jo. I'll go on to Launceston, I think, and see if he makes any fresh move."

Again Bevan was silent for a long time. When he spoke again, it was almost nervously.

"Look here, Anderson—I've an idea. Going from one hotel to another isn't much use to you; you'd be watching the door all the time, wondering if Spence were going to walk in. And Jo would begin to notice things; you won't be able

to hide your jumpiness much longer from her. That young lady has sharp eyes."

"She has," said John. "She's got one on me already."

"Well, this is my idea. Will you come home with me? I've a big empty house beyond Launceston, no one in it but servants: it's jolly country, and you and Jo could amuse yourselves with the car and horses. Jo could tear about on a pony all day long."

"Oh, but Bevan, I really couldn't," John began.

"Is there any real reason why you couldn't, beyond the notion that you would be giving me trouble? You can put that idea out of your head. My housekeeper likes looking after people; my chief disadvantage in her eyes is that I have nobody belonging to me. As for me, I wouldn't make guests of you: if I'm seedy you won't see much of me, but you'll find plenty to interest you on the place, and I don't mind telling you it would be rather a godsend to me to have you and Jo. I like Jo."

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, people who say 'but,' make me tired. You're really only trying to show what beautiful manners you've got!" drawled Bevan—at which astonishing accusation John burst out laughing, despite his perplexity. "Think of it for Jo's sake; it would be ever so much better for that youngster, than hanging about hotels. She could have just as free a time as she had on your own place: horses and dogs and all the things she cares for."

"It would certainly be ideal for Jo," said John, slowly. "Only——"

"You can put it another way, if you like," Bevan said. "I want badly to get home, as I told you a little while ago. Home is the best place for me; but I'm honestly not up to driving myself any distance. You would be doing me a real kindness if you would drive me back. Then you could stay a while: long enough to know whether Spence is really going to worry you. And you'd have some one to talk to, if you wished. Beastly game, keeping things to yourself. I've tried it."

"You make it seem churlish of me to refuse," John said. "Very well, we'll inflict ourselves on you, Bevan, and I don't know how to thank you. But we won't stay long enough to make you regret that you gave way to a wild impulse!"

"To be called wildly impulsive is one of the things I'd never hoped for," remarked Bevan, dryly. "I'll try to live up to it: in which case my housekeeper will certainly have a fit. But I'd be uncommonly glad to have you both. We'll get away the day after to-morrow, if you like, and leave Spence to make the next move. At all events, I'm not going to be impulsive enough to invite him also!"

CHAPTER XIV

BEVERLEY DOWNS

There was tribulation in the Seacombe hotel when it became known that three of its “oldest inhabitants” were about to leave unexpectedly. The little Winters mourned loudly, refusing to be comforted, and followed Jo about like unhappy puppies. Their parents, if less loud, were no less sincere in their regret.

“It won’t be the same place!” said Mrs. Winter, sadly. “We’ve had such fun all together—even if Babs did give you a ducking, Mr. Anderson. I believe you’re afraid she’ll make a habit of it!”

“Well, I’d be delighted to fish her out as often as she went in,” John said, laughing. Somehow, things looked less dark to him this morning. Talking to Mr. Bevan had helped to clear the turmoil of his mind. “But it’s rather a good chance to get on, and I shall be glad for Jo to have some riding. Horses have always been a big part of her life, and she misses them.”

“Oh, I know; and speaking as a wise mother, I think you’re doing the best thing for her. But we are going to miss you terribly, and Mr. Bevan too. We must arrange to meet again in Victoria: and some day when you bring Jo to England, you’re coming to stay with us in Surrey. That’s all arranged!”

“It will be something to look forward to,” John answered. “You may be sure we won’t forget, Mrs. Winter. It has been a great thing for my little girl to be with you here.”

Spence received the news with a look of blank surprise.

“Why, I thought you were almost fixtures here,” he said, slowly. “You’re going to Bevan’s place? Will you be in Launceston after that?”

“I’m not sure,” John replied. He had decided, in consultation with Bevan, that it would be foolish to make any secret of their present plans; still, he saw no harm in being vague about the future so far as giving Spence any information was concerned. “We have no fixed ideas: I may decide to go down the West Coast to Hobart, or New Zealand is rather a tempting place for the summer!” He spoke with deliberation, watching the other keenly: in his mind the belief that what he said would certainly bring matters to a head. If Spence had any move to make he would make it before letting them get as far afield as New Zealand, and John had grown to think that even a hostile move would be better than doubt and uncertainty.

“Oh yes—good fishing there,” Spence said, vaguely. He looked troubled; rather as though he wished to say something, yet could not make up his mind to speak. “I’ll miss young Jo badly,” he remarked at last, with a touch of awkwardness.

"Jo is going to miss all her friends," John said, stiffly. He was glad that Babs arrived, clamouring to be taken up, and had to be lifted on his shoulder and carried round the lawn. Spence remained on the veranda, apparently thinking deeply.

John was in a frame of mind that scented danger in the slightest hint, and the little incident, unimportant as it was, roused all his fears and put him in a fever of anxiety to be gone. He did not breathe freely until next morning, when all their good-byes had been said, and they left Seacombe behind them. Spence had said nothing more. "He may not be ready to speak out yet," said John. "Well, he can find me whenever he likes."

They journeyed peacefully through the exquisite country that lies between St. Helen's and Launceston, and came in the evening to the beautiful little city at the mouth of the Cataract Gorge. Bevan was very tired, so they rested that night in a comfortable hotel, and after lunch next day took the road again towards the west. A few hours' run brought them to a wide park-like paddock where English oaks and elms mingled with the Southern gum-trees, while farther back a long irregular line of willows marked the winding-path of a creek. Bevan nodded towards a white gate a hundred yards ahead.

"That's my little place," he said. "By George, I'm glad to be home!" and under his breath he added, "I won't go away again."

They drove up a long, curving avenue and came suddenly upon the house: an irregular stone building, standing on a rise and half-hidden among trees. It looked solid and comfortable, and the grounds were well kept. A great orchard stretched away behind the house, down to the very bank of the creek. As they came up to the gate a number of dogs appeared, barking furiously. Bevan gave a low whistle and instantly their suspicion changed to delight, and as he left the car he became the centre of a ring of leaping forms, all struggling to welcome him.

"Down, Caesar!—get down, Bran, you old image!" he said, patting one after another. "Well, Jo—do you think I've a big enough pack?"

Jo was beside him, making friends with a game little fox-terrier and a beautiful Irish setter.

"What beauties, Mr. Bevan! How did you ever manage to stay away so long from them!"

"Why, I don't know how I did," he said, smiling. "I thought you'd like them; you'll find old Bran the best of friends—he knows more than most people." He fondled the setter's head as he spoke. "Good old man! You've got to take care of this lady," and he lifted the dog's paw and placed it in Jo's hand. "Now he's adopted you, and he won't forget it."

Two men came hurrying, their faces alight with welcome. Bevan greeted them warmly, and then, leaving them to deal with the car and the luggage, they

went through the garden towards the house.

A tall capable-looking woman met them on the veranda, introduced by Bevan as Mrs. Drake, the housekeeper: and presently Jo found herself in a pleasant room overlooking the paddocks; a room gay with flowers and bright chintz-covered chairs, with a little white bed in one corner, and a shelf with an array of tempting books near an easy chair in the deep recess of the window. Next door she could hear John moving, and presently, just as she had washed her hands and face and was brushing her hair, he tapped on the door and entered.

"Well, you have jolly quarters," he said, looking round the room approvingly. "And I'm in almost equal luxury—and close to you in case you want me."

"It's a jolly place altogether—and *such* dogs!" Jo said. "I'm going to love being here, John. Let's stay ever so long!"

"All very well for us, but slightly overwhelming for Bevan," remarked John, laughing. "However, he seems anxious to keep us for a while. We'll see if he shows signs of needing solitude, and whenever he does we'll move on."

But the days went by, and slipped into weeks, and their host showed no sign of wishing to part with them. Indeed, he scouted the idea of their going whenever John mooted it, protesting that there were dozens of excursions yet to be made and a hundred places to show them, and that they could not possibly go until all this had been accomplished, which would be as soon as he felt better. It was hard to argue with him, for he evidently felt keen pleasure in their company and dreaded being left alone. Mrs. Drake backed him up vigorously, in private.

"It's just a new life for him to have you and Miss Jo," she told John. "He's so lonely; and, now that he can't ride about the place much, there's so little he can do. The men come and make their reports to him every night, but it isn't like you and the little girl riding all over the paddocks and seeing the stock and telling him all the little details when you come in. And he's a sick man, Mr. Anderson, even if he won't give in. Do stay just as long as ever you can: I tell you, I'm dreading the time after you've gone away."

John found it easy enough to yield to the double pressure. Jo was utterly happy. A beautiful grey pony, well-bred and well-mannered, was at her disposal, and the country was ideal for riding: not steep and slippery like the hills of South Gippsland, but great rolling plains and gentle slopes, where one might gallop for miles with sweet, springy turf like a cushion under the horses' hoofs. The dogs came too, sometimes putting up a hare, which meant a wild scurry over the paddock, taking logs as they went, until the hare escaped and the dogs hunted frantically for a time and then returned, looking disgusted. Bevan was forbidden to ride, but he took her out in the car and taught her to

drive; and although a motor never came near a horse in Jo's esteem, there was fun in the long drives along the quiet country roads, and in the feeling of power that comes from handling a big car, and learning its ways and moods. Sometimes there was work among the sheep, which she loved best of all. John was not the man to remain idle, and after a lazy fortnight he had begged for work; and Bevan, unable himself to oversee his men, was glad enough to make him his deputy: so that gradually John slipped almost into the position of a manager, and found much comfort both in the occupation and in his host's evident relief in knowing that things were being properly done. Beverley Downs was a large place, carrying many sheep and a number of well-bred cattle, with a large and carefully irrigated orchard: such a place as John had always longed to own. He found himself often wondering whether he could do better than buy a smaller property of the same nature, and settle down in the beautiful Tasmanian country.

The fact that Jo's education seemed to have lapsed, began to trouble him after a time. He began to give her lessons each day, and Bevan, discovering this, insisted on sharing the work, taking Latin and French as his subjects, together with a course of English reading. They spent many hours together in Bevan's den: a big, untidy room with an enormous writing-table and leather arm-chairs, and a beautiful litter of guns and fishing-rods and whips and dog-collars. Jo thought it a perfect room. She had been rather afraid of the lessons at first; but her host was a kind and patient teacher, with a rare faculty of making learning interesting, so that before long the hours of work became a pleasure to them both. John pretended to grumble that they left him little time for his share of the teaching, and then gave him only the dry paths of vulgar fractions and the hidden mysteries of $x+y$. But his gratitude to Bevan was very deep, and in his heart he rejoiced that Jo was putting new interest and pleasure into a life that held much of loneliness and pain.

Of Spence he had heard nothing. At first he had nervously awaited the arrival of every post: but as the weeks went by, he began to comfort himself with the belief that his fears had been unfounded. They seemed to have slipped into a back-water where their very existence was forgotten. Mrs. Collins wrote that her sister was ill and needed her: she was clearly relieved at being free to stay where she was, though she pined for Jo, and they exchanged weekly letters. There seemed nothing to call them away from Beverley Downs and its peace and safety.

There came a day, however, when the tranquil current of life was disturbed. Bevan grew worse, and had to remain in bed. The doctor, summoned by telephone, came out, and when he went away he looked grave. For a few days the household knew anxiety. Mrs. Drake went about with a troubled face, and Jo moped openly, refusing to go away from the house in

case Bevan might ask for her: he liked to see her and John, though it was often evident that he could not bear visits of more than a few minutes. Then the attack passed, and in a week he was able to be dressed, and sit on the sunny veranda, looking frailer and more grey than ever, but still full of the quiet dry humour that never failed him, even at his worst; and life went on as before, save that Mrs. Drake was a shade more watchful that her master did not tire himself or run any risk of chill. Indeed, they all watched him—a fact which occasionally moved him to amused remonstrance. "Jo treats me as if I were a fractious baby!" he said. But he submitted to her ministrations cheerfully enough. John suspected that he rather liked them.

It was Bevan who opened the subject nearest John's heart one evening. They were sitting together in the den: Jo had said good night, hugging John in her usual vigorous manner and dropping a shy kiss on Bevan's cheek. She had done this for the first time, almost by accident, some weeks earlier, and he had looked up with a quick smile. "That's rather decent of you, Jo," he had said, "Don't forget to do it again, will you?" And Jo had flushed rosily, and had not forgotten.

To-night he had sat quietly for some time after her quick steps had died away. John was smoking and plaiting a new stockwhip-lash out of long strips of kangaroo hide, an operation demanding care and concentration, and he did not notice his companion's silence. Indeed, they had arrived at that desirable stage of quiet friendliness when long periods of silence do not seem to matter. Bevan broke it at last.

"You've heard nothing from Spence, Anderson?" he asked, "or from any other troublesome quarter?"

"Not a thing," John answered. "I'm beginning to believe that I was bothering myself for nothing—at any rate where Spence was concerned."

"Good thing to believe," Bevan said. "You and Jo are quite happy here, aren't you? You like this part of the country?"

"We should be hard to please if we weren't happy!" John replied. "You and your people have made us feel as if we had been here all our lives. As for the country, I like it better than any other place I've been in. Tasmania strikes me as having unlimited possibilities: I don't know that a man with a little capital could find a better part in which to settle down."

"Then you would be content to live here?"

"Quite, so far as I'm concerned. Indeed, I've been thinking, Bevan, that I might look about for a place in this district. You have been more than good to us, but we can't make use of you indefinitely."

Bevan laughed.

"I was rather thinking I had been making use of you," he said. "Jo is my nurse and watch-dog, and you have been relieving my mind of all worry about

the place ever since you've been here. The obligation seems to be rather on my side; to say nothing of the fact that it's very jolly to have you here. I'm a lonely soul as a rule, and my own thoughts are most boring companions: you two have helped me over a hard patch on the road."

John looked at him steadily.

"It's good of you to put it that way," he said. "I might refer to the fact that you took a hand in all my private worries, which I should think must have bored you thoroughly, but you did me a lot of good."

"They didn't bore me," said Bevan. "They interested me peculiarly. But you're not allowing them to trouble you now?"

"Why, as to that, until Jo is twenty-one I'll never be free from anxiety," John said. "Then she will be her own mistress, and no unknown father will have any legal claim on her. But there are eight years to go yet. And Harrap is still in the background; it may take him time to make his unpleasant presence felt, but if it is any way possible he'll do it sooner or later. I thought he'd put Spence on our track. But if it isn't Spence—well, it may be some one else any day. Harrap comes between me and my rest a good bit, I can assure you. Thank goodness, Jo doesn't seem to be thinking about him now. But he's my old man of the sea, Bevan, and I fancy I'll carry him a good while yet."

"And a good weight, I suppose?"

"A dashed good weight," said John.

Bevan looked at him steadily.

"What if I told you that he isn't there at all?" he said.

John's heart gave a great throb. The whip he was plaiting slipped from his fingers.

"You mean—" he said, slowly. "Have you heard anything, Bevan?"

"You have no need to worry," Bevan said. "Jo's father won't trouble you, old man."

"How do you know?" John's voice was shaking.

"For the best of all reasons. He won't trouble you because he knows what he's talking about. I am her father, Anderson."

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF THE PAST

For a long moment John Anderson stared at his friend. Bevan was quite calm, but a little pulse could be seen beating in his temple.

"I'm not mad," he said. "And it is quite true. You told me Jo had her mother's Bible. Will you show it to me?"

John rose without a word and left the room. He returned in a moment with the Bible and placed it in Bevan's hands. And from that moment he knew that the man had spoken the truth, for he handled the book as though it were a living thing that he loved.

"I bound this for my wife myself," Bevan said. "In those days I used to do a bit of book-binding as a hobby, and she had a fancy to have this done. It has worn well all these years—all these long years. Better than I have. You don't wear well when you live eating your heart out."

He opened the back cover. "It should be here yet," he said, half to himself, and found with his fingers a tiny opening in the soft thick leather—a place that looked to the ordinary observer as though the lining paper had not been gummed down. Bevan's fingers moved as though he knew it well. He held the flap apart with a paper-knife and drew out a little unmounted photograph.

"She always kept it here," he said. He looked at it for a moment and handed it to John.

There were three people in the little picture. One was the woman who had died in the hospital at Summers' Flat—young and happy and pretty, as she must have been in the days when life was altogether good. She held on her knee, Jo; Jo at three years, a curly-headed laughing baby. Beside them stood Bevan. It was a young Bevan, hardly recognizable as the grey man who sat looking at him. But John did not doubt.

"Here is the other copy," Bevan said. He took from his pocket-book another print of the same picture, worn with much handling, and John took it mechanically, and stared at them both. "We had only these two copies; a girl snapped us in the garden and gave my wife these. She made me leave this little pocket in the cover of her Bible for hers; she liked to keep us there, she said. I knew it would be there."

He turned to his desk and, opening a drawer, took out other things: some papers, a little box with a few small articles of jewellery. John, glancing at them, recognized the scarab ring and the ear-ring that Harrap had shown him in the stable-yard at Peak Farm. But he shook his head when Bevan offered him the papers.

“There is no reason for me to read them,” he said, his voice hard. “What are you going to do?”

“Why—die peaceably,” said Bevan, with a dry smile. “Man, I told you you needn’t worry. And you need not worry, even if I were going to live. If all the laws of Australia gave me Jo to-morrow, do you think I would take her from you?”

They looked into each other’s eyes.

“You were kind to—her,” Bevan said, his voice low, as though he were speaking to himself. “You took care of her and let her die in peace. And you saved Jo from being an unloved child, and made her what she is. Well—she’s yours. That is the least I can do.”

John had no words. He could only look at the little grey man in stunned silence.

“I’d better tell you about it from the beginning,” Bevan said. “Then you will know what to tell Jo later on, if you ever care to tell her anything. I leave that to you. I have no rights where she is concerned: they are all yours.

“Well—I’ll cut it as short as I can. I married my wife when she was quite a girl, a good deal younger than myself. We had very little money; I was a mining engineer, and I didn’t earn much. We had a bit of a struggle, but we were very happy, especially when Jo came. She’s Jocelyn, by the way, not Josephine: that’s why she hates to be called Josey, though she doesn’t know why. We always called her Jo. My name is Basil, as you know, but my wife disliked it, and she called me Philip, my second name. It’s in the Bible there—you’ve seen it.”

John nodded.

“I knew, after I came here, that you were B. P. Bevan,” he said, “but I never thought of the name. And I worried like the mischief because Spence was J. P. Spence. I have been clean off the track.”

“Ah, you had other things to worry you beside Spence’s initial. That fancied likeness wasn’t all fancy; he and Jo were curiously similar. I often used to watch them and think how much there was for your suspicions to work on. Poor beggar, it was no wonder he was attracted to her: his only child, a boy about her age, was drowned a year ago. Jo is a boyish person, and he took to her from the moment he saw her. I knew all about him, though we had never met: he’s a Hobart man, and a very good sort. I could have relieved your anxiety about him as soon as you told me, and I’ve often wanted to do it since, but I wasn’t ready. I’ll tell you why presently.

“I got a good chance of a job up beyond Broken Hill when Jo was five. It was too tempting to decline, but the country was very rough: there was no chance of taking a wife and child there. So I raised all the money I could and left Doris and Jo in lodgings in Melbourne, and I went off. I didn’t think it

would be for long. But after six months the job suddenly ended because the people who were employing me went insolvent, and I was left on my beam-ends. Then I heard of a chance farther inland, and went after it: it was prospecting, with two other fellows, and it seemed good enough to try. Doris and Jo were all right, because I had sent them every penny I could spare. And I was desperately anxious to make a good strike. I was always dreaming of going back to them with plenty of money. Doris didn't mind being poor, but Lord! how I hated it for her."

He paused, thinking.

"It's bad luck to hate being poor," he said. "The only time in my life that I have ever been happy was when I was very poor. Now I'm fairly rich, and it has been dust and ashes in my mouth.

"Well—I went off with these fellows, and at first we did fairly well. Then our luck petered out, and we moved on, never striking much, but always enough to encourage us. And then, one day I tumbled over a rock and smashed myself up more or less. They did all they could for me, and got me to a little hut where an old hatter lived who promised to look after me until they could get help. As it happened I wasn't long in his hut: some fellows came by in a motor-truck, overlanding, and they took charge of me and drove me to the nearest hospital—a little place with a bush nurse. I was clean off my head and didn't know anything about it. My mates hadn't liked to leave any of my belongings—papers or valuables—with the old chap, so there was nothing to identify me. They had bad luck themselves; both got fever, and the best they could do was to send another man when at last they struck civilization. Meanwhile, the old man had died and was buried. No one knew much about it, and my mates' messenger got hold of a yarn that it was I who had died, and he came back and told them. It was likely enough; they had left me without much hope that I could pull through. And they wrote and told Doris that I was dead."

He got up and went to the window, staring out into the starlit night. It was some time before he came back to his chair.

"She had no one: no one but Jo. And she wasn't strong. I'd always had to take great care of her. She wasn't fit for work: a little delicate thing. What she did—where she went—well, I can only guess at that, and the guessing has been hard. I tried to track her movements afterwards, but without success, for she must have been too proud to give her own name when she went to work. It's so easy for a forlorn woman to disappear, swamped in a big city. She must have just struggled on, getting lower and lower, weaker and weaker, until she took the Harraps' place. I believe she went there, knowing she was dying, just hoping she was going to kind people who might be good to the child. And she struck—*Harrap's*!"

The agony of his face moved John Anderson to aching sympathy.

"It wasn't for long, Bevan," he said, gently. "That is the only comfort."

"That is one comfort," Bevan said. "But the other is that at the end of the weary road her little feet had trod she met—you. And you took off her burden and let her die in peace."

"I could do so little," John stammered.

"You did all a man could do. Not one in a hundred would have done as much. Some time I'll get you to tell me all you can remember. I know it can't be much, but a man who has been starved is hungry.

"Well—I pulled round in that little hospital after a long time, and found myself nameless and penniless and weak—I've never been physically fit since. I wrote and telegraphed to Doris, of course, but no answers came, and later on my letters were returned to me through the Dead Letter Office. You see, I had been ill for many months, and for a good part of that time I was off my head. Had I known it, Doris was dead before I came out of the hospital. I got over to Melbourne as soon as I could earn enough money, and I hunted and advertised, as well as one can if one is desperately poor. But it's only rich people who can track anyone who has disappeared. I had no luck. Once, and once only, I got an answer to my advertisements, and it gave me a wild week of hope. That was when Mrs. Harrap's sister took a hand in it. Then she shut down, and I couldn't track her, either."

"By jove!" said John, grimly. "And there was I, hoping I'd never hear anything of you. But if I'd known——!"

"I had got nearly to the point of ending everything in the Yarra at last," Bevan went on. "It was only the rags of hope that one always clings to that kept me going. Then luck turned from another point of view—the luck that had ceased to matter. An old uncle in Scotland died, leaving me his money. It wasn't a great deal, but because I had no longer any special use for being rich I found I couldn't go wrong—whatever I touched turned to money. It couldn't give me back my wife and my child: it couldn't make me a strong man again: but there it was. And after a while I could not stand being in Victoria, where we had had all our good times, so I came over to Tasmania and bought this place. There's more peace in Tasmania than anywhere else, I believe: not that there has been much peace for me anywhere."

"But how did you find us?" John asked. "You were at Seacombe before we came there."

"I was. But a detective was standing beside you a week earlier when you booked your rooms at Seacombe in the Tourists' Bureau in Hobart."

"Great scott!" said John, weakly.

"Oh, it was all easy enough. That sort of thing is really very simple when a man has money to play with. Harrap began it, of course. I had never closed any of the channels I had investigated in Melbourne. One has always heard stories

of newspaper advertisements answered in the most unlikely manner after many years, and if you have no hope you cling even to a mad idea. Particularly I had ensured that if the person who had written once should ever write again I could be found. Harrap got into touch with me quite easily. Once I found out his name and where he lived, I sent an inquiry agent to Gippsland to discover all about him, so that I should know exactly what manner of man I was dealing with: and I knew everything, and had Mr. Harrap thoroughly sized up before I went to Gippsland myself. Then I paid his farm a surprise visit with two detectives, and Mr. and Mrs. Harrap's dreams of acquiring wealth from me faded very swiftly. They were a very badly frightened pair before we had done with them. I found out all they had to tell—and they were scared into truth—and got all the things they had kept; and they don't know yet that the law won't deal with them some day. I do not think Mr. and Mrs. Harrap will sleep easily o'nights. Oh, I did all I could to make them unhappy. But I shall regret for the rest of my time that I wasn't a strong man—strong enough to kick Mr. Harrap. That sort of brute wants hurting physically."

"I did that for you," said John, with dry satisfaction.

Bevan's eyes suddenly gleamed.

"Did you?" he asked. "Oh, did you, Anderson? That is the best news I have heard for some time. Tell me all about it."

John told him of the scene in the Peak Farm stable-yard, and the little man leaned back with a contented sigh.

"That comforts me," he said. "Another mark chalked up to your credit, Anderson."

"It was purely selfish satisfaction, I assure you," said John, grimly. "Afterwards I knew it had not been prudent, but I never regretted it."

"No—you wouldn't. Then I shed my detectives, who had been only for the Harraps' benefit, and I went to the hospital in Summers' Flat and saw the matron. She's a good soul. She told me all she knew, and promised to hold her tongue. It was there, of course, that I got my first ray of comfort in making sure that Jo was in your care, and had been like your own child. That matron thinks a lot of you. She was rather sorry for me, but it was clear that her main feeling was that you shouldn't be worried."

"She thought I was a fool at first," John said. "But she knew better, later."

"So she told me. Well, then—the rest was easy. I tracked you and Jo through all your wanderings; a man of mine was never far from you. Twice I stayed in the same hotels with you—in Melbourne and Sydney. It was in Sydney I first saw Jo—" He broke off, and John looked at him pitifully.

"Ah, Bevan, I'm sorry," he said. "It must have been hard."

"Hard enough. But it was something to see what she had grown into: and so happy—so loved. I used to sit in a corner and watch you together. Then you

came down to Tasmania and arranged to go to Seacombe, and I thought I could begin to get to know you. So I went there and waited for you. It was right into my hands that you liked the place and decided to stay on. I wanted to study you both; to make up my mind as to what was best to be done. And then, to my great satisfaction, you came to me with your worry about Spence and told me your story: and I saw my chance of getting you here. I have never meant to take her from you, Anderson; not even to let her know I am her father. It wouldn't be fair. But do you wonder that I jumped at the chance of getting her to like me a little?"

"I wonder at your restraint," John said. "And she is yours, Bevan: there is no getting away from that. She's more dear to me than anything else in the world, but she is your flesh and blood. You must tell her."

Bevan shook his head firmly.

"No," he said. "She is only a child, and already there has been too much unrest in her life. It's far better that she should know nothing. And you see, my dear fellow, it isn't as if I were going to hang on indefinitely like a shadowy sort of nuisance in the background. I'm going to be out of the way before long. This last attack of mine has been a sort of "last-lap" signal—the bell has rung. Dr. Grattan doesn't give me more than a few months—six at the outside."

"Doctors make mistakes," said John, stubbornly. "A Melbourne Specialist might——"

Bevan interrupted him, smiling.

"The Specialists in Melbourne, and Sydney too, have done their worst and their best for me, old man. It's really not a matter of any doubt, and I'm not sorry. Life has been brighter since Jo and you came into it, but it's a burdensome old business: I'll be glad to go. Even for Jo, I haven't enough energy left to make me want to live. I'm not likely to become a nuisance, Grattan says: I'll probably keep about until the finish, more or less. And that makes it possible for me to ask you one favour."

"Whatever you wish is granted without the necessity of asking," John said. "What is it?"

Bevan's face had grown wistful.

"Will you and Jo stay with me? I have made my will, leaving all I have to her, of course, and if you like the country it would be as good an arrangement as any for you to live here after I'm out of the way: and meanwhile you might go on as you are now. I'm free to admit I like having you, even apart from Jo. And as for her—I do not want to distress her or hamper her free mind by telling her the truth. There isn't any need for her to know I am her father. But—well, you can understand that even the touch of affection I get now—even that once-a-day peck on my cheek—it means something."

He ceased, and John saw his face set in lines of unutterable sadness.

Suddenly he turned, wheeling his chair towards the table, and there sat, his head on his hand.

"Good night, old man," he said, in a muffled voice. "I'm tired—can't talk any more. We'll fix it all up to-morrow."

John got up. He put his hand on the bowed shoulder.

"Good night," he said, "and we're here just as long as ever you want us, Bevan." He went out of the room.

In his own room he sat down by the window, thinking deeply—scarcely able to realize the wonderful change in his own life, so shaken to the very soul was he with sympathy for the lonely man whose life had been such a sorry wreck. Presently he heard a light step, and Jo, in her blue dressing-gown, her hair rumpled with sleep, came in.

"Anything wrong, dear?" he asked, starting up. "You're not ill?"

"No," she said. She looked vaguely unhappy as she came to him, nestling against his side. "I woke up and I couldn't go to sleep again," she said. "I could hear your voice and Mr. Bevan's, talking for ever so long, and—and—I don't know what it was, but there was a kind of worry all round me. I'm feeling all puzzled and unhappy, and of course I know it's only silly. But I just had to come to you."

He sat down, drawing her upon his knee. A sudden resolve came to him, born of his utter longing to help the man he had left.

"Jo, can you stand hearing a big secret?" he said.

She nodded.

"I knew there was something. Tell me, John."

So he told her, in as few words as possible, and very gently: holding her tightly with a love in which there was no longer any room for jealously or fear. And Jo listened quietly, wide-eyed and pale. She gave a great sigh when he had finished.

"But I always felt he was different," she said. "One could be such friends with him. You felt that, didn't you, John? And I liked to kiss him when I said good night—and you know I'd rather die than kiss any other man, except you. I s'pose one knows, right down in one's mind, 'cause he was so very different. Oh, John, is he there now?"

"Yes, he's there," said John. "And he is very lonely, Jo-boy. He needs you."

She turned to him suddenly and flung her arms round his neck.

"I'll always love you better than anyone in the world, John, darling," she whispered. "I'll be your Jo always, won't I?"

"Always, please God," he said. "But he is your father, Jo. He loves you, too. And he lost everything in the world. We can't give him back what he lost, but we can help a little."

"We'll help all we can," said Jo. "You'd like me to go to him, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, old chap," John said. "You're the only person in the world who can do him any good."

They went to the door of the den together, John's arm about her shoulders. He gave her an almost imperceptible little push towards the quiet figure by the writing-table. Bevan had not moved. He sat with his head bowed on his hand.

Jo crossed the room, gently. She slipped her arm round Bevan's neck, laying her young cheek against his grizzled hair.

"Father!" she whispered. And John Anderson smiled, and went away, at peace.

The Eagle Presa Ltd., Allen St., Waterloo

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Anderson's Jo* by Mary Grant Bruce]