

# ROUGH PASSAGES

ALICE PERRIN



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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The Anglo-Indians.  
The Woman in the Bazaar.  
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Red Records.  
The Stronger Claim.  
Idolatry.  
A Free Solitude.  
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The Vow of Silence.

# ROUGH PASSAGES

By  
ALICE PERRIN



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## THE BRAHMINY BULL

# Rough Passages

## THE BRAHMINY BULL

At the time of Miss Trent's arrival in India, to join her proud parents, those days had long passed when "spins" were so scarce that each new-comer was instantly besieged by suitors, and, however plain or ungifted, was sure to be married before she had been many months in the country; when young ladies not only brought out their trousseaux as a matter of course, but sometimes, with still greater forethought, layettes as well.

Now, even at Magpuri, a station of not much importance, damsels abounded; and nobody quite believed Mrs. Trent when she said she hoped Avice would not marry for some time to come.

All the same, it was admitted that Mrs. Trent's hope, whether false or true, was hardly likely to be realized, since Avice was unpardonably pretty, with manners and accomplishments that increased her attractions. She entirely eclipsed the other girls; but never mind, there were enough bachelors to go round, given time, and Miss Trent couldn't marry them all.

As it happened, she showed small inclination to favour any one of her admirers more than another except, perhaps, Captain Maxwell who, though deservedly popular, was not extra eligible. Indeed, the girl puzzled and sometimes vexed her fond parents by declaring her indifference, which almost amounted to contempt, towards the many young men who paid her attention.

They were pleasant enough, she conceded, to ride and to dance with; as partners for tennis and so forth, particularly Captain Maxwell; but when it came to intellect—why, none of them had any to speak of, and look at the rubbishy books they chose from the station library, when they read anything at all!

Avice's passion was reading, and her tastes in that direction dismayed her father and mother. They could not understand why any well-brought-up girl should like to study works on old Eastern faiths, anthropology, folk-lore, magic!



It was all the unfortunate result of her having spent part of her last holidays in England with a school friend whose father was an eccentric professor; for it now transpired that this gentleman was a keen investigator of the occult, among other branches of learning, and his young guest's curiosity had been aroused concerning mysticism, psychic phenomena, matters pertaining to ancient religions and supernatural beliefs.

It shocked Colonel and Mrs. Trent that their darling daughter should evince interest in Buddhism, theosophy, and such-like; talk nonsense about reincarnation and Hindu wisdom, and proclaim her disgust that no one in the station should be alive to the mysteries that surrounded them.

To the perplexed parents it all savoured of paganism, and was most undesirable, not to say unwholesome, but it was difficult to forbid her to dabble in such subjects, and they consoled themselves by agreeing that it was just a youthful craze; it would pass, and meantime could only be discouraged; she would forget all about it when they took her to Simla for the season.

Consequently it was extremely annoying when, towards the end of the winter, a civilian arrived in Magpuri, transferred from another district, who was apparently imbued with the same tiresome ideas as Avice, and of course the two made friends. Quite apart from his mental peculiarities, Mrs. Trent strongly disapproved of Mr. Vassal.

For one thing, his appearance repelled her; he was coarsely handsome and so dark that he might have been a foreigner, or worse—a Eurasian, though there was no reason to suspect that he was either. For another, he did not seem to her well-bred; true, his name sounded good enough, but that was no criterion, and she could discover nothing about his family.

He never spoke of his people to anyone, not even to Avice, as far as Mrs. Trent could gather; they seemed to talk of nothing but the objectionable books they both read, and the odious man lent Avice stacks of them, which she devoured in her bedroom.

She became less disposed to join in healthy amusements, and instead of playing tennis and dancing, permitted Mr. Vassal, who did neither, to monopolize her; she sat about alone with him, and seemed engrossed in their conversations, which left her moody and reserved, so unlike what a natural, light-hearted girl should be.

Poor Mrs. Trent remonstrated, scolded; and at last Colonel Trent put his foot down, said he wouldn't have it any longer. And one morning there was

a distressing scene in the spacious, well-ordered bungalow because Avice had dared to go out with the fellow, who had actually taken her down to the river front that she might watch the Hindu bathing ceremonials!

“You are never to do such a thing again!” stormed the colonel, when Avice confessed where and with whom she had been.

The girl stood, flushed and defensive, a picture of beauty in her white linen habit, and said she could see no harm in her late escort or the expedition.

“You don’t understand,” she argued. “It’s only natural that I should talk to Mr. Vassal when we are both interested in the same things. Our friendship is purely platonic.”

“Oh! Platonics be—— I won’t have you getting yourself talked about with a bounder like that. All the more impudence on his part if he means nothing by following you about, encouraging you to disobey your mother and me with his blasphemous books and ideas. And to take you to look at a lot of naked natives—pah! I don’t know what girls are coming to nowadays!”

Then, because he could not bear to see the sweet face quiver and the blue eyes fill with tears, he strode from the room.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Trent, in tender reproach, “you really mustn’t be so tiresome. It worries me to think you don’t realize how conspicuous you are making yourself with this horrid creature. Mrs. Chatterton asked me only yesterday if you were engaged to him. I felt so annoyed. Surely you must know that he isn’t the kind of man we could ever allow you to marry?”

“Good gracious, mother,” cried Avice, beside herself with exasperation. “You and dad are too old-fashioned for words. Can’t a man and a girl be friends without thinking of such things as love and marriage?”

Mrs. Trent sighed and shook her head. She had no faith in such friendships. “I don’t like him; I don’t trust him. I can’t tell you exactly why; and I don’t know what to call it, but there is something—something uncanny about him. His eyes—well, they’re not the eyes of a Christian, and I don’t believe he is quite sane.”

The girl glanced swiftly at her mother, then turned away. In her heart she felt, too, that there was something odd about Mr. Vassal; and despite the absence, so far, of any sentiment in their friendship, she had once or twice been almost frightened by the look in his eyes, especially when he talked about the transmigration of souls.

She recalled with a qualm their conversation this morning during their ride back from the river front. They had been discussing the wonderful spectacle of a multitude washing away their sins in the sacred water of the Ganges, praising their gods, praying; every act of whose lives was bound up with religious observance.

“And most of them,” he had said, “believe that they have lived before, and will live again on earth in some form or another, either better or worse, according to their deeds. I believe it, too. I believe it, because *I* can remember my own previous existence.”

Startled, amazed, she had begged him to describe what he could remember; but he had only regarded her strangely, and a curious red gleam had come into his prominent dark eyes as he muttered that he would rather not speak of it at present; he would tell her more when they knew each other better. She had remained silent, disturbed by a vague sense of fear she would hardly acknowledge to herself.

This same mental disquietude, the suspicion that her mother’s instinct perhaps had some grounds, now caused her to assume an air of independence that she was far from feeling.

“You needn’t alarm yourself,” she said, loftily, “Mr. Vassal and I are not in love with each other, and never will be. I can’t and won’t cut him.”

“There is no reason for you to cut him. All we ask is that you will avoid him politely.”

“Then if I do this to please you and dad, and he asks me why, I shall tell him the truth. I hate humbug!”

With this rebellious speech Avice rushed to her room, there to weep tears of anger and self-doubt; while her mother sat gasping with apprehension. The poor lady felt a conviction that this dreadful man would never rest until he had won, and perhaps broken the child’s heart; and if Avice were to carry out her foolish threat it might easily bring matters to a disastrous climax.

The only comfort was that in another ten days from now she would be taking Avice to the hills, beyond the reach of Mr. Vassal’s pernicious influence. Yet, much mischief might be done in ten days.

She began to regret that she had not encouraged Philip Maxwell’s attentions to Avice; though only in a line regiment, and with but small private means, he was at least of their own class; they had known his people; he was presentable in the right kind of way, and had a nice, honest disposition.

There was no doubt about Captain Maxwell's feelings for Avice, and Avice had always liked him until this detestable Vassal man had appeared on the scene to make trouble. She decided, on the chance of his being disengaged, to invite Philip Maxwell to the dinner party they were giving next night before the last dance of the cold-weather season.

Then and there she sent off the note, and, whether engaged or not, he accepted the invitation and came, looking radiant, and in the highest spirits, because his one wish in the world was to be near Avice Trent.

Lately he had seen so little of her, and spiteful people had suggested to him that her parents had no use for suitors other than Brass Hats—that he had no chance in *that* direction. Therefore, hope rose in his heart when Mrs. Trent made much of him, and he found himself placed next to the light of his eyes at the dinner table.

Moreover, Avice was really nice to him, just as nice as she had been before something had interfered with their ripening intimacy—either Colonel and Mrs. Trent's disapproval of his attentions to their daughter, or else the obvious efforts of that villainous-looking brute Vassal to cut every other fellow out. He hated Vassal.

Now he ventured to wonder if, after all, Avice did perchance like him rather more than a little, and had persuaded her mother to ask him to dinner. She seemed so pleased to see him, and was really interested in hearing about his shooting trips, anxious he should show her the snapshots he had taken; both of them were keen on photography.

And didn't she look lovely in her gown of white and silver. She promised him three dances, explaining with an adorable smile when he begged for more, that three was the limit she was allowed to give anyone; this he took to mean that but for absurd conventions she would have promised him more, and he could hardly conceal his joy.

As for Avice, she was feeling happy in the young man's company, which drove away the thought of that disturbing little "row" with her parents, and kept the recollection of Mr. Vassal at bay. Somehow, Philip Maxwell was comforting and she did like him very much, liked his manliness, his frank, unaffected nature, and his nice attractive face; he appealed to that side of her temperament which Mr. Vassal, with all his intellect and uncommon tastes, could not touch.

In fact, she was finding Captain Maxwell a relief from the other man's weird personality and the effect he produced on her mind and will; it was as

though she were freed from some spell.

Involuntarily she looked round for Mr. Vassal when they entered the ballroom, and shrank a little as she perceived him standing with his back to the wall against the gay decorations of pink and blue muslin. His broad, dark head was bent forward, the massive shoulders seemed to slope, his whole form betrayed a sort of lazy slackness and reminded her unpleasantly of something—she could not decide what—something that wasn't altogether human. Apparently he had not yet seen her, and she allowed an eager crowd of young men to scribble their names on her programme until it was almost full.

Then from the corner of her eye she saw the big, loosely built figure slouching heavily towards her, purpose in his advance, in his sombre, blunt-featured face. A little shiver ran down her spine as he stood beside her, asking in a low, soft voice if she had anything to spare to sit out with him.

He made no protest when she hesitated, said she was sorry, but he was rather too late; he only gazed at her until she felt her will ebbing, and finally she gave him a dance low down on the list. After that he left her; and it was with a sense of safety and protection that she floated off down the room in Philip Maxwell's arms.

Vassal disappeared until the moment arrived for him to claim his dance, and then he did so in silence, hurried her out of the ballroom, and, before she had time to realize his intention, had taken her to the far end of a back corridor where a couple of chairs were concealed by a screen. The spot was deserted; the strains of the band hardly reached it; the seclusion was complete.

"Now tell me," he began, when they were seated, "tell me what is the matter?"

The dim light of a Japanese lantern suspended above their heads shone on his sleek black hair as he bent towards her, took her fan from her hand and waved it gently to and fro.

"What do you mean?" she asked, and added nervously: "there is nothing the matter."

"Oh! yes there is. Directly I saw you come into the ballroom this evening, I knew something had happened. Have your people made a fuss about our ride yesterday morning? Have they told you to give me the cold shoulder?"

She could not suppress a little start of surprise. How had he guessed?

“They don’t like me,” he continued. “I have known that all along. But the question is—do *you* like me, and how much? Enough to continue our—our friendship in face of their opposition?”

After an uncomfortable pause she said, hastily: “Of course I like you. I have so much enjoyed our talks. But you see, they don’t understand our kind of friendship.”

“They are afraid I may want something more than mere friendship?”

“Oh! why do you force me to say it! Perhaps that is partly it; but they have a prejudice against the interests that we share. Don’t let us talk about it. But if I do seem—well, if I do appear rather to avoid you, I hope you will believe that it’s only because I don’t want to vex them. They are such old dears!”

“Then it comes to this—you wouldn’t marry a man of whom they disapproved?”

He bent closer, and a sudden physical abhorrence of him assailed her. She would have sprung up but that he laid his hand on her shoulder, pressing her down into her seat, and began to speak rapidly.

“You must listen. I want you to understand. The whole of my future, not only in this life, but in the next, depends on you. You know what I told you—that I could remember my previous existence? It is true. It was a period of punishment; and though I have come back on probation as a human being, the lower instincts still cling—hamper me. Until I met you I couldn’t fight against them, and I didn’t care if I had to go back eventually to the old form. There are worse things on the whole than the life of a beast, such as I was. But now—now with your help I *want* to progress!”

Avice, petrified with fear, heard his deep, heavy breathing when he ceased to speak.

“Oh, don’t!” she moaned. “Don’t talk like that. Let me go, you frighten me!”

He passed his hand over his forehead. “I’m sorry. It all came back so vividly for the moment. You know something of these mysteries. With you as my wife, I could redeem my soul, climb upwards, make good. Without you I can’t do it. Avice, I love you! Take my fate into your white keeping; save me from myself. It is my only chance.”

Terror held her helpless; she recalled her mother’s doubt of the man’s sanity. If she moved he might kill her. What a fool she had been to interest

herself in matters that now seemed to her of the devil; never again would she think on them, read about them, if only she could escape from this revolting man, who, looking like an animal, was gazing at her with great burning, bloodshot eyes.

His voice grated on, hoarsely. “Our life together would be perfect. I will teach you the full meaning of love. We were made for each other; it was intended. You will marry me, Avice, beloved.”

Then he caught her to him fiercely, and in desperation she wrenched herself from his embrace. Her very fear and revulsion lent her courage.

“No, no!” she cried. “Never! I don’t want your love. I’m sorry I ever met you. I will never speak to you again. I don’t believe all the things we have talked about, but if they are true they should be left alone.”

As he rose, huge, massive, his head lowered menacingly, she screamed and fled, like a white wraith down the long, dimly lit corridor, her hands outstretched, seeking refuge. Someone caught her hands as she stumbled, saved her from falling, and she looked up, scared and shaking, into the concerned face of Philip Maxwell.

“What is it? Who has frightened you?” she heard him asking.

“He—he——”

“Who? There is no one. Look, we are alone. You are quite safe.”

Fearfully she glanced over her shoulder. Yes, the long passage was empty; Vassal had vanished. She drew a deep breath of relief.

“I want to go home,” she said, half in tears. “Will you please take me to my mother?”

Tenderly, lovingly, he guided her back to the ballroom, to where Mrs. Trent sat watching the door through which she had seen Avice pass on the arm of the man she so disliked and distrusted.

“Miss Trent isn’t feeling quite the thing,” explained Captain Maxwell. “She wants to go home.”

Mrs. Trent rose. “She has been doing too much lately. Thank you, Captain Maxwell. Will you kindly find my husband, I think he is in the card-room, and tell him the carriage will come back for him? Come along, Avice, my dear.”

She asked Avice no questions until they were on the way home.

“What upset you? Was it Mr. Vassal? Did he propose to you?”

The girl shuddered, and said “Yes.”

“And you refused him?”

“Of course. Oh! mother, it was dreadful. I am sure you were right; he is out of his mind. He frightened me. I never want to see him again.”

“Thank goodness!” exclaimed Mrs. Trent. “Now let us hope he will go away until we have left for Simla. He ought to, if he has a spark of right feeling.”

Vassal did go away. Next morning the whole station was shocked by the news that he had shot himself at dawn in the compound of his bungalow. He left no letter, no clue as to why he had taken his life, and the general opinion was that he had suddenly gone mad; he had never been quite like other people—a queer, morbid sort of creature.

It was all very terrible, of course, but no one felt much regret; and though it was whispered that a hopeless attachment for Miss Trent might have been partly the cause of the tragedy, no one considered her to blame.

People said that if she had refused him she had done quite right; and it was as well, if the dreadful event was to happen at all, that it had happened when the Trents were so soon off to Simla for the hot weather; the whole ghastly affair would have been forgotten by the time the Trents returned to Magpuri.

\* \* \* \* \*

Six months later, when Avice returned to Magpuri, she returned as a bride. Captain Maxwell had fought hard for long leave and obtained it, spent it at Simla, and in face of Olympian gods and Brass Hats had won the heart of the beautiful Miss Trent, together with the consent of her parents to the marriage.

This evening Mrs. Trent had just left them, despite their affectionate protests, and they stood on the veranda together looking out over a luxuriant garden that was fragrant and green after the rains. The cold weather had hardly begun, the air was moist and warm; a little mist rose from the earth, sucked up by the still powerful sun.

“Oh! isn’t it all perfect!” exclaimed Mrs. Maxwell, with a happy sigh.

“*You* are perfect!” returned the young husband, rapturously. “Just stand where you are—like that, against the pillar, and I’ll take a snapshot of you, a



memento of our first evening in our new home.”

“And then I will take one of you, Philip. Get the camera quick, before the light begins to fade.”

“Hallo!” said Philip, suddenly, “here’s our first caller. Now you superstitious little person—is it a sign of good luck?”

Avice turned and saw, walking slowly and majestically along the curved drive, a big black Brahminy bull; a sacred animal seldom seen away from the bazaars, where they wander at will, helping themselves to grain set out in baskets for sale, blocking the street, upsetting wares, a general nuisance, but tolerated on account of their sanctity. This was a truly magnificent beast; the smooth, sleek skin, without flaw, shone like black satin in the evening sunlight.

Astonished, they watched its leisurely progress, and Philip remarked that he had never seen such a fine specimen. “They’re generally so mangy, covered with sores and scars. What is he doing in cantonments? Better not have him driven away, sometimes they’re savage. He’ll go out of the other gate if he is left alone. Perhaps he’s come to be photographed. Shall I take him?”

Avice did not answer. As she gazed at the great bull an extraordinary sense of fear turned her cold from head to foot; and all at once her memory switched back to that night of the ball when, for the last time, she had seen Vassal alive.

The bull reminded her of him horribly; she heard again the low, thick voice making mad love to her, and terror gripped her as the bull halted in front of the house, turning its liquid eyes with a red gleam in them, full upon her.

Click—click—and again click, went the camera. Philip was bending over it, unconscious of his wife’s silent distress.

“There,” he said, “that’s used up the reel.” Then he shouted in Hindustani to the bull, “Salaam, ji! How many copies does your honour desire to order?”

“Philip! Philip!” cried Avice, hysterically, and sank, shivering, into a chair. “I can’t bear it. I can’t bear it!”

He looked round, came quickly and knelt by her side. “Why, darling! There, there, it’s all right. Look, the beast’s going; he’s tired of us. He means no harm; come and have a good rest before dinner.”

But she covered her eyes with her hands; seemed unable to move. “Has it gone?” she whispered. “Don’t go and drive it away, it might kill you.”

“Yes, it’s off, making for the other gate. Cheer up, sweetheart, there’s nothing to fear. Now he’s out on the road, and he won’t come back. There’s no grain to steal here.”

She clung to him, sobbing. “Oh, Philip, the bull made me think of that man——”

“Who? You don’t mean Vassal?”

“Yes, it was so like him. And he said, that night before he shot himself—I’ve never told anyone—he said he could remember being an animal in his previous existence—and that if I didn’t help him, marry him, he should have to go back to that life. Oh! you don’t think—it *couldn’t*, it couldn’t have been *him*.”

He laughed. “Dearest, that kind of thing is all rot!” (Inwardly he said: “Damn the fellow!”)

“I know, I know—and I hadn’t thought about it; but directly I saw the bull, I remembered. Philip, *don’t* keep the photos you took of it, don’t let me see them.”

“All right, darling, there’s nothing to worry about. Come along now, and have a rest.”

A few days afterwards, when Avice had gone over to spend the morning with her mother, Philip Maxwell shut himself up in the spare store cupboard he had converted into a dark room, and began to develop the snapshots. Those of his wife and himself were highly successful. As for the Brahminy bull—the last three films showed the lawn, the drive, the background of shrubs and garden, all perfectly clear and distinct, but there was no bull.

Mystified, astonished, he kept repeating to himself: “The brute was *there* right enough; I saw it; she saw it. What on earth can it mean?”

Then aloud he said angrily: “Oh! Bosh! Those last films were defective, or the light had got in——”

Viciously he destroyed them, deciding to say nothing to Avice about the failure; it might only upset her.

\* \* \* \* \*

No Brahminy bull ever wandered again into the compound. Sometimes, driving through the bazaars, Avice and Philip encountered one of the sacred

animals, blocking the way, raiding the grain shops. None of these even faintly resembled the handsome black specimen that had strayed to their compound on the evening of their return to Magpuri as bride and bridegroom; but invariably, when they did pass one of the loitering, privileged beasts, an uncomfortable feeling held them both silent.

## THE FAKIR OF THE FOREST

## THE FAKIR OF THE FOREST

“This jungle is a bad jungle,” complained Ayah, “full of evil spirits. All say it. Were it not better to move on quickly, lest misfortune befall the camp?”

She was a buxom brown being loaded with silver ornaments—anklets, armllets, bracelets; toe-rings, finger-rings, earrings; a jewelled stud in one nostril. Her petticoat swirled voluminously, her shawl was gaily bordered, and she smelt of camphor and cardamoms. How she hated camp life! the long marches, the makeshift accommodation, the lack of bazaar society, above all the difficulty of obtaining the rich, highly spiced food she preferred. But for her devotion to the memsahib she would never have endured this barbarous manner of existence that not only damped one’s spirits and upset one’s digestion, but brought one (as in the present instance) within regions that were beset with demoniacal dangers as well.

The memsahib seated on the veranda of the little forest rest-house, made no reply to Ayah’s warning; she was engrossed with a letter that had but recently arrived by hand from the camp of some sahib in the neighbourhood, a venturesome sahib, so the messenger had informed the servants, who had come forth from the station to shoot wild beasts.

Ayah shuffled her bare feet and coughed artificially. If only the memsahib would pay attention! Ever since the arrival of the camp on the outskirts of this particular bit of forest, Ayah had been perturbed by reports of the ill-fame of the locality. The head cartman had declared that he knew it well, and that nothing would induce him to go one yard beneath the trees, even should the sahib order him to do so. The cook, too, corroborated the cartman’s statement that this area was full of ghosts and demons; and the inhabitants of the miserable little village that lay a mile or so away had also told tales, when they brought in primitive supplies, of people being spirited away never to be seen or heard of again; though a patriarch, whose curiosity had impelled him to visit the camp, had spoken of an antidote in the person of a fakir who had the power to render himself invisible at will, and had been known to protect and aid lost wanderers, guiding them back to safety. He himself, he avowed, had in his youth seen service as *shikari* with a sahib who was lost in the jungle for three days and three nights, at the end of which period the sahib had returned to his camp exhausted, and in company with the mysterious guide. The patriarch had also related to the company

how the fakir had been supplied with food and with fuel, that he might cook himself a meal, but in the morning he had vanished, and the spot whereon the fire had been lighted was found to be covered by a miraculous growth of young green grass.

Undoubtedly this jungle was bewitched, and Ayah felt it her duty to acquaint the memsahib with its evil atmosphere. She repeated all she had heard, loudly, and with emphatic gestures, concluding with the horrible apprehension that the sahib who had ridden forth on his work but an hour or so since, might never return!

Mrs. Leyland listened vaguely to these outpourings. She herself was distressed and perturbed, but for a different reason. The letter she held crushed in her hand was from a man whom she believed and hoped she was never to meet again, but who now, by all the laws of mischance, was actually within reach of the camp. From her own point of view there would seem to be truth in Ayah's contention that some evil influence dominated the place!

As Ayah padded away grumbling and disgusted with the memsahib's lack of response, Mrs. Leyland smoothed out the crumpled note and read it again. Her small, sweet face was troubled, clouded with fear; what wicked fate had brought Anthony Dane to India on a sporting expedition, and, moreover, had led him to the station that was her husband's official headquarters; there, very naturally, to be supplied with an introduction to the forest officer as the individual who could best help him in his quest for big game?

According to his note, which was addressed to herself, he had been overjoyed to discover that the forest officer's wife was none other than his old friend, Miss Bengough, whom he had known so well in England before her marriage! How curious, and what a piece of luck! He looked forward eagerly to meeting her again, and making the acquaintance of her husband. His camp was within easy reach of theirs, he would ride over this evening in the hope of seeing them. . . .

The faint breeze of the Indian day had died down, long shadows came creeping over the bare stretch of ground in front of the wooden rest-house, the hot weather was at hand, and a warm stillness lay over the little encampment, broken only by the crackle of dry foliage, and at intervals the cry of a brain-fever bird. Lydia Leyland would have revelled in the peace, the remoteness from the world, had it not been for this bombshell of a letter reviving memories, recalling a secret, filling her with apprehension. She

only trusted that the writer of it would appear before her husband's return, that she might know how she stood in regard to the past, ascertain if the man meant mischief. That he was not to be trusted she knew, to her cost. What a fool she had been to conceal the unhappy episode from Tom, her dear true-hearted man! Yet, had she told him, what would he have thought of her with his rigid standards of honour and truth?—and who would have anticipated that any reminder of her mad folly could follow her like this, to the end, so to speak, of the earth?

She sat tremulous, expectant, her pulses throbbing, hearing the sound of bird and insect life around her, yet listening only with strained impatience for the beat of horse hoofs in the distance. Time seemed non-existent as she waited; she could hardly have told whether hours or minutes had elapsed before a horse and rider came into view, and she recognized the lean, long-limbed figure seated so easily in the saddle, self-confident, purposeful as ever. As he approached she caught the gleam of the light eyes set deep in the resolute face. How well she remembered those eyes! Once they had power to hold her heart, to deaden her conscience, to wipe out her sense of loyalty to the man she had promised to marry, the man who was now her husband.

He said nothing as he dismounted; came in silence up the shallow steps to where she stood in the veranda, her heart beating painfully with dread. Then he held out his hand and looked into her eyes, his own half-laughing, questioning, provocative.

“Well,” he said at last, “to think of our meeting again, and in such different surroundings—who would have believed it! You expected me? I see you got my letter——”

She tore her hand from his grasp, turned from his gaze, and pointed to a chair.

“Now you are here,” she said, controlling her voice. “I suppose I must ask you to sit down.”

Instinctively she moved her own seat to the opposite side of the folding-table as Dane settled himself comfortably in a deep camp chair; he stretched his legs, put his hands in his breeches pockets, and regarded his hostess with whimsical attention.

“You don't seem as pleased to see me as I am to see you! That's not kind of you, Lydia!”

“How can I say I am glad to see you?” she burst out. “And please don’t call me by my Christian name.”

He raised his eyebrows and smiled.

She felt, helplessly, that she had made a false start; she should have welcomed him with surface politeness, ignoring the past—should have behaved as if there had been no past beyond ordinary acquaintanceship.

“Can’t you understand,” she said piteously, her lips trembling, “that I hate to be reminded of my—foolishness?”

“Why make a mountain out of a molehill? Why shouldn’t we renew our old friendship, especially if——” He paused, and a mischievous gleam shot into his handsome eyes.

She did not speak, and he went on:—“especially if Dick—Jack—Bob—I’ve forgotten his name, knows nothing about what happened at home?”

In desperation she lied. “Of course he knows, of course I told him!”

“Oh!” He gave a low, soft whistle, whether of surprise or incredulity she could not tell. She dared not look at him. “So you told him that while he was waiting in India for you to come out and marry him you fell in love with another man! Did you tell him before or after you were married?” He asked the question with an insolent air of interest.

“Oh! be quiet!” she cried angrily.

“Well, you *know* I would have married you if it had been possible, and you can’t look me in the face and say you wouldn’t have married me in spite of your engagement, had I been free. Come, now!”

“You never told me you were married until—until——” she put her hand to her throat; the words seemed to choke her.

“Until we had fallen madly in love with each other. Yes, I know. And finally you decided that you did not love me sufficiently to chuck the world for my sake, and there was an end of it. After all we did nothing so very dreadful, and I dare say you were right to choose matrimony without love instead of the other way on. I have never quite forgiven you, but, all the same, I hope you are as happy as you of course deserve to be, buried in the jungle as a respectable married lady!”

“Yes, I *am* happy,” she said loudly, defiantly. “I love my husband. I know now that I loved him all the time, all through our long engagement



and separation. It wasn't *love* that I felt for you, and thank goodness you *weren't* free to marry me." She stopped, breathless.

"You say it wasn't love that you felt for me?" he inquired, as if he had not quite understood her words.

"No, it was not. I know it now."

Deliberately he took a leather case from his breast pocket, opened it, and drew out a letter.

Lydia's heart sank. Her own letter. The only letter she had ever written to this man, unwisely, in a moment of madness.

And he had kept it—brought it here to-day. Even devil though he was, how could he have done anything so cruel!

"Now then——" He spread out the letter. She leaned forward over the table, in a futile attempt to snatch it from his hand. Of course he frustrated the effort.

"Don't be silly! I only wanted to remind you that you were not speaking the truth just now. Listen——"

He read out a sentence that stabbed her memory.

"Oh, stop!" she besought him, as he read on. "I was a fool, a wicked fool. Why can't you let me alone? What is your object in coming here to torment me like this?"

Slowly he folded up the sheet of paper and returned it with care to the leather case.

"My object?" he said. "Perhaps an instinct of sport; also a fellow may have some sense of sex pride. Would you wish me to imagine that you were making a fool of me all that time? That you deliberately embarked on a hot flirtation while your heart was honestly given to the man you had promised to marry? If you think I have forgotten that you allowed me to believe you loved me heart and soul, until you discovered that immediate marriage was impossible for us, you are very much mistaken. You are the only woman I have ever really loved, or ever shall love, and I have *not* forgotten—neither have I forgiven!"

"What have you to forgive!" she gasped. "You deceived me, led me to be untrue to my future husband, and now you come to terrify me——"

"Why should you be terrified if What's-his-name knows all about it?"

He grinned maliciously, and she realized that he had not for one moment believed her false statement. Was he capable of an intention to make the truth known to Tom? What would he gain by such heartless revenge. She saw Tom's faith in her shattered, the destruction of her married happiness and peace, the loss of all she most prized in existence; and she had only herself to blame. If Tom knew, even if now she told him herself, he might forgive her, might condone her disloyalty, but would their life together ever be quite the same again? Tom had never doubted but that she had endured their long separation in the same steadfast, faithful spirit as he himself had done. Any revelation to the contrary would wound him past healing, however he might strive to understand. It was unthinkable! She felt that she would do anything, almost anything, to avert such revelation, and she divined with horror that Dane scented this feeling. He meant to take vindictive advantage of it—somehow!

“What are you going to do?” she asked. “What is it you want?”

“Merely a little reparation on your part for the lack of cordiality in your reception of me to-day,” he said, suavely. “You can have the letter if you want it very badly, but only on condition that you come to my camp and fetch it yourself. After that, if you like, I will go away.”

“And—and if I refuse?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Oh! well, then I stay. I should like to meet your husband, and perhaps you would prefer me to give him the letter as a proof, *as a proof*, mind, of your constancy to him during your long engagement?”

“Are you human?”

“Quite human,” he replied, “or I shouldn't want to get my own back.”

“Tom would kill you if he knew!”

“Ah! yes, Tom—*that* was the name! Very likely he would want to kill me, and you too, if he is also human. But he doesn't know, and if you do as I ask, he need never know. You can bury the past if you choose. Is it worth while?”

He rose, standing before her smiling, relentless. She covered her eyes with her hands. The shriek of the brain-fever bird rent the silence. The sun was sinking fast; at any moment Tom might return, and it would be beyond her strength to act a part in the presence of her tormentor.

“How could I come to your camp?” she said wildly. “It would be quite impossible.”

“Not at all,” he argued. “A short ride, say, after tea, when your beloved is out, as he is this afternoon, apparently.”

“I don’t ride.” She felt faint with despair, and her own voice sounded to her as though someone else had spoken.

“Then why not walk? I’ll come and meet you—like old times, when we used to meet in the woods, eh? Don’t you remember—how each of us used to start at a certain time and meet at a certain spot, punctual to the minute?” He took a few steps nearer to her and repeated: “Don’t you remember?”

Quickly she moved away, and called to a *peon* who sat snoozing outside beneath a tree. The man sprang to attention, and she bade him order the sahib’s horse.

Dane made her a little ironical bow. “Thank you, I understand. I am dismissed. All the same you will come? Listen—I will start to-morrow at four o’clock, and I will walk along that path.” He pointed to a narrow track which skirted the forest, a track that was visible for some distance before it was lost to view by a bend of the trees. “It leads towards my camp. If I don’t meet you, I will start at the same hour next day; and, well yes, on the third afternoon, too, if you have not come.”

His horse was led round the corner of the bungalow, but still she did not speak, and he waited.

“Is it too much to ask?” he went on, a tender inflexion in his voice. “Just a walk, a meeting, for the sake of old days, and in return I give you a letter—a letter I have treasured, that I still treasure. You can’t think I shall like parting with it? It is all I have of you, except memories. But there—you want it back, you know you do, even though”—he paused, then added slowly, looking at her sideways—“even though your husband knows everything?” He went down the veranda steps. “*Au revoir!*” he called over his shoulder.

She stood motionless, her eyes fixed on the darkening edge of the forest as Dane mounted his horse and rode away. Once he looked back, but Mrs. Leyland was no longer to be seen in the veranda.

It was dark when Tom Leyland returned to the camp. He found his wife lying on her bed; the lamp in her room burned dimly; it had not been turned

up.

“Hullo! Anything the matter?” he inquired anxiously.

“Just a little headache,” she told him. “It’s nothing. I didn’t know it was so late.”

Reassured he went off to his bath, and she forced herself to rise. During the interval between Dane’s departure and Tom’s return she had suffered agonies of mental misery. At one moment she resolved to confess her secret to her husband; then, again, she was for holding her peace, doing nothing; perhaps Dane had only been bluffing, amusing himself? But no, she could not risk betrayal, the strain would be too great. If he should fulfil his threat—what then? For three days at least she was safe; she would give herself time to think, strive to summon all her courage, and if she could not bring herself to face confession, well, there was always—the track at the edge of the forest! Once the letter was in her possession, and Dane had taken his departure, there would be nothing further to fear. Yet—how could she feel certain that he would keep his part of the bargain? She knew he was capable of anything. . . .

Heartsick and wretched she sat through dinner that evening, pretending to eat, now talking fast to conceal her distress, now listening with simulated interest as Tom told her of his doings that afternoon.

“We may have to stay here a bit longer than I expected,” he said. “There’s a lot to be seen to. Luckily this is a decent little bungalow. You don’t mind, do you? You won’t feel bored? I shall have to be out all day for the next three days.”

She started involuntarily. To her the words sounded ominous—“*the next three days!*”

Controlling herself she answered easily:

“Of course I don’t mind. I know it can’t be helped, and I’ve plenty to do. But the servants don’t seem to like this part of the jungle. Ayah was full of alarms this afternoon—she came to me with all sorts of tales about demons and ghosts and people disappearing in the forest, and something about a fakir who could make himself invisible.”

“Oh! that’s an old jungle story! I remember hearing about the gentleman last year. His invisibility is the only true part about him I should imagine; and as for demons and ghosts, where aren’t they, according to the natives? Ayah will have to put up with them, even if they happen to be more numerous here than in any part of the forest. If she had mentioned tigers and

leopards there would have been some sense in her attack of nerves. I came across some big pug-marks to-day. If there was time I would have the fellow tracked, though probably he's miles away by now. Tigers travel so quickly."

"Oh! Tom, be careful!" said his wife in sudden alarm. "Do go on the elephant while we are here!"

"I shall have to; a horse would be no use where I have to inspect."

"And take a rifle."

"Of course, that's a sure way of seeing no big game—like umbrellas."

"Umbrellas?" queried Mrs. Leyland.

Tom laughed. "Oh! well, you know what I mean; take-out-an-umbrella-and-it-doesn't-rain sort of thing."

He lit a cigarette as the servants left the room, and leaned back in his chair contented, well fed, without a care; the light from the table lamp fell on his frank, pleasant face reddened by the sun; he smiled tenderly at his wife.

"Headache quite gone?" he asked.

"Quite," she said with an answering smile; but she clenched her hands beneath the table, worn out as she was with her efforts to speak and behave naturally. The sight of him seated there so unsuspecting, so ignorant of what she ought to tell him, was almost more than she could bear. Supposing she were to blurt it all out then and there! She visualized the change in his happy face, his amazement, his recoil, his suffering; she could not deal him such a blow; yet something impelled her to speak of Dane—the words seemed to force themselves from her dry lips.

"A man called here this afternoon——" she began.

Tom looked up. "A man called here? Who was he?"

"A—a globe-trotter, a Mr. Dane. He said he had been given an introduction to you—he's out here shooting——"

"Oh! hang these chaps! I suppose he wants me to show him some sport, put him in the way of bagging a tiger. I hope you told him I'm up to my eyes in work. Where is his camp?"

"I don't know where exactly; not far off, I believe. I had met him before—at home."

"Oh, well, if he is a friend of yours——"

“But he isn’t—he isn’t!” she protested, speaking excitedly; then she bit her lips, holding herself in, fearful of what she might say next.

“All right,” he said, slightly surprised; “don’t worry. We needn’t bother about him. Anyway I couldn’t do anything for the next three days, and I don’t want to stop here longer than I can help, there’s too much to do farther on.”

There it was again—three days—three days. She felt if she opened her lips again she must scream.

Tom took his cigarette from his mouth and regarded her with concern.

“Why, darling—you’re shaking—what’s the matter?” He rose and came to her side, felt her hands and her forehead. “Why, you’re stone cold!” he said. “You must be in for a touch of fever. Let me take your temperature—where’s the thermometer—the quinine——”

She burst into tears, her head on his shoulder. He fussed over her, petted her, blamed himself for allowing her to get up for dinner when she had owned to a headache. Persuaded her to go to bed, called Ayah to bring hot bottles, gave her a dose of quinine, could only be induced to leave her when she declared she felt better and inclined to sleep. He tiptoed from the room, bidding Ayah sit by the door till he came to bed, and to call him at once should the memsahib need anything.

For a moment Ayah lurked in the room before obeying the sahib’s order.

“It is even as I said—this is a bad place,” she whined. “There is misfortune in the air. All say it—and I die of fear. The cartman and the cook \_\_\_\_\_”

“Oh, go—go!” cried the memsahib, cowering beneath the bedclothes. And, muttering to herself, Ayah stepped over the threshold to squat in the veranda with much jingling of jewellery and stifled yawns.

Lydia ached all over; cold water seemed to be trickling down her spine; undoubtedly she was “in for a touch of fever,” as Tom had feared. She only prayed that as her temperature rose she might not lose control of her tongue. Soon Tom would be coming to bed—what if she talked, betrayed her secret!

Later, when he crept cautiously into the room, she feigned deep slumber, holding her breath, as for a moment he bent anxiously over her. It seemed an eternity before he lay down, taking care not to disturb her, before his regular breathing told her that he slept. Once Tom fell asleep it took much to rouse him. She sighed with relief; but now she had reached the hot stage of the

malady, and until dawn she lay burning and aching, her pulses racing, her head feeling as if it must burst.

Mercifully, before Tom awoke, the worst was over, blessed moisture had broken out on her skin, and by the time the early tea-tray appeared she was sufficiently herself to assume cheerfulness, to assure Tom she had slept splendidly, and that there was absolutely no need for him to put off his inspection as he suggested.

“But I shall have to be out all day,” he said doubtfully. “And I might be late getting back. I hate leaving you alone.”

She pleaded, protested, promised to stay quiet, to take care of herself, declared she should only worry if Tom neglected his work for her sake; finally she succeeded in convincing him that he would *not* be behaving “like a brute” if he left her, and diverted his attention to the orders that must be given for the stocking of his tiffin-basket. At last he went to dress, then came to bid her a reluctant farewell, and a few minutes later she heard the sounds of his departure outside—the hurried footsteps of the servants, the *mahout's* order to the elephant to kneel, the great beast's ponderous movements, the familiar swish of its trunk, and the slow pad-pad of its feet as it lurched heavily away.

Exhausted, she lay, hardly thinking, hardly feeling, until Ayah came to tell her that her bath was ready; she dawdled over her dressing, could not eat her breakfast, only drank thirstily. Afterwards she sat idle in the veranda, and all the time her mind worked in a hopeless circle. What was she to do!—she would wait till to-morrow. No, if she did, something might prevent Tom from going out. To-day he could hardly avoid being late; she knew he had many miles to traverse. Hours passed, and the drowsy silence of the mid-day heat encompassed the camp, servants and animals slept—and presently, from sheer fatigue, her own eyelids drooped.

She awoke with a start—what was the time? Her watch had stopped. She hastened into the dwelling-room to find that it was nearly four o'clock. Unsteadily she went into her bedroom, and as she put on her hat with trembling hands, the sight of her face in the looking-glass startled her—so white—so haggard. But was it any wonder! On reaching the veranda steps she hesitated, nearly turned back, then looked about her, cautiously. No one was stirring, the *peon* on duty dozed beneath his tree. Now was her time—if she was to go at all. She heard the clock within the bungalow strike four.

Once or twice, as she crossed the open space in front of the rest-house, she glanced back; then she ran till she knew she must be concealed from

view by a thick clump of thorn bushes. Pausing to take breath, she decided to walk a little way into the forest, and then to keep parallel with the track that could be seen from the bungalow; else one of the servants might catch sight of her, and follow with the idea of protecting the memsahib on her walk; or point out the direction she had taken should Tom return earlier than he was expected.

The undergrowth was not very heavy; ordinarily she would have found it easy enough to get along, but the attack of malaria, though not severe, in addition to her distress of mind and the lack of food, had weakened her, so that every step was an effort. Nevertheless, she pressed on, anxious to reach the bend in the forest edge that would permit of her regaining the open track unseen from the bungalow. Now it was not far off. The gloom of the forest frightened her; once or twice she halted, peered this way and that, listened intently with nerves ajar. Furtive sounds seemed to be pursuing her. Something rustled loudly in the undergrowth; and in a panic she dashed forward, caught her foot in a trailing creeper, and fell.

For a space she knew nothing; then, as she struggled to her feet, she was conscious of a dull pain in her head—had she struck her head, in falling, against a tree? Blindly she took a few steps, but she had lost her sense of direction, could not tell which way to turn, and the forest was growing darker, darker. A dim recollection floated confusedly through her mind of Ayah standing in the veranda talking some nonsense about people being lost in the forest, spirited away, never to be seen or heard of again, unless—what was it?—unless a ghostly fakir came to their aid, guiding them back to safety! She had always been afraid of fakirs; semi-mad creatures who appeared to her scarcely human when occasionally they hung about the camp. Tom would talk to them, give them *baksheesh* when they held out their begging bowls making weird sounds; for her part she could feel no interest in them. They only filled her with horror and disgust.

Again she stepped forward, stopped, frozen with fear. What was that?—a human form outlined against the trunk of a tree, a gaunt, half-naked figure, with long matted hair and ash-smearred body gazing at her with bloodshot eyes! It moved, beckoning to her Eastern fashion, palm downwards, and slowly, involuntarily, as if impelled by some mysterious influence, she felt herself drawn towards it. The figure walked away, looking over its shoulder, and helplessly she followed, spell-bound. It was like a nightmare. Unaccountably her weakness seemed to have left her; she felt light in body, able to move quickly as though treading on air. She saw nothing but this



faint, dim outline ahead of her, turning and beckoning, drawing her in its wake.

Then all at once there was light—she was out of the forest, out on the dusty track, and before her, across the open space, was the bungalow, home-like, familiar, a welcome sight in the rays of the setting sun. She passed her hand over her forehead that ached distractingly, looked about her, bewildered, for the fakir. He had vanished.

With feeble steps she crossed the open space, and staggered up the steps of the veranda. The bungalow was quiet, deserted, but she was vaguely aware of some disturbance at the back of the building; servants were chattering excitedly, running to and fro. She steadied herself against the camp table; something lay on the table—it was a leather case, the letter-case she had seen in the keeping of Anthony Dane! Who had put it there? Her hand crept towards it; she heard the scrape of her nails on the wooden surface of the table as she grabbed at the case. Trembling all over she opened it, looked inside, picked out her own letter from among other papers, and tore it into shreds, again and again; then, with the swiftness and the cunning of a thief she darted towards a plant that grew in a pot at the head of the steps, and pressed the scraps of paper deep into the mould. Only afterwards did she see that her hands were stained, stained with something that would not rub off like the mould; horrified she looked at the letter-case on the table; the case was stained too, and there was a dull red smear on the table. . . . Fainting, she sank into a chair.

When she opened her eyes she was lying on her bed. Tom was beside her; how thankful she was to see him! She smiled at him, tried to speak, heard herself stammering. Tom spoke soothing, endearing words, held a glass to her lips, and she drank obediently.

Strength and memory returned to her slowly.

“What—what happened?” she said.

“Never mind now. Thank God you are safe. Don’t try to talk; drink some more of this.”

“I was lost,” she quavered; “lost in the forest!”

“Darling, what possessed you to go out alone like that! The servants said they did not know you had gone out. They could not find you when——” He checked himself, and went on hurriedly: “You must have had a fall; there’s a big bruise on your forehead.”

“What were you going to say? Do tell me!” she entreated as he hesitated. “That case on the table—I—I touched it——” She shuddered, looked at her hand; the stain had been wiped off. “Was the case really there? Is it there still?”

“Yes,” said Tom reluctantly. Then he made up his mind to tell her of the horrible thing that had happened; sooner or later she would have to hear of it.

“It must have been soon after you went out for a walk that a villager came into the camp with that letter-case. He said that as he was coming along the track through that bend in the forest he saw a sahib walking a little distance in front of him; he thought the sahib was me, as he knew our camp was here——”

He paused, unwilling to continue.

“Yes?” cried Lydia breathlessly. “Yes?—Go on!”

“I hate telling you, but it seems that a tiger sprang out, and killed the poor chap, carried him off before the villager’s eyes! The letter-case was left lying on the track. It belongs to the man you told me of, who called here yesterday—Dane.”

For a few seconds silence followed. Then to Tom’s Leyland’s alarm and dismay, his wife sat up and burst out laughing.

“That story was true!” she cried, rocking herself to and fro in delirious mirth. “I saw the fakir of the forest; he turned me back, took care of me, and if you will look in the flower-pot——”

She fell back on her pillow babbling senselessly.

It was a long illness. Mrs. Leyland nearly died during the difficult journey from the camp to the station where doctors and nurses were forthcoming. When she was fit for the voyage her husband took her home to complete her recovery. He never spoke to her of the tragedy in the jungle, and she hoped he imagined that her illness had wiped it from her memory; yet sometimes she wondered if there could be another reason for his silence on the subject—that she had, in her ravings, told him her secret? But if she had, she felt she was forgiven.

## A PLANTER'S WIFE

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Mrs. Sylvestre was saying her prayers.

There was silence in the vast Indian bedroom save for the monotonous flapping of the punkah frill, and the friction of the rope through a hole in the wall. The kneeling figure looked like a wraith in the dull lamplight, a light that just caught the heavy plait of hair lying across one shoulder. The heat was very oppressive, mosquitoes hummed about the woman's bare feet; yet still she knelt, indifferent to physical discomfort, absorbed in her passionate petition for deliverance from danger, from misery, from fear.

A little brown hand laden with silver rings drew aside a curtain that hung before one of the many doorways, and Mrs. Sylvestre's ayah slipped into the room; her bracelets and anklets jingled lightly as she darted to her mistress.

"Memsahib!" she whispered, breathless. "Memsahib—the sahib comes."

Mrs. Sylvestre rose from her knees, fair and slender and young in her white nightgown; she quailed as she heard her husband's uncertain footsteps in the veranda. The ayah fluttered to the wardrobe to busy herself with some fictitious duty; she meant, faithful soul, to be at hand should the sahib make a more terrible disturbance than usual, though there was little she could do to protect her mistress from his violence when he was drunk. Screened by the wardrobe door she watched the sahib blunder into the room, and even in her trepidation she thought what a beautiful sahib he was!—so big, so strong, with such a handsome face; his eyes were not always aflame with drink, nor his cheeks brick-red with rage as now. He could be kind and gentle, and even generous; all the servants and the employees on the plantation knew that; they also knew and were sorry that when he was sober the memsahib could not forget his having been drunk, and would not forgive him.

Conrad Sylvestre stood swaying before his wife, cursing in a mixture of English and Hindustani; then he lurched towards her, and, impelled by terror, she did the worst thing possible, as she had done before time after time—ran from him dodging and doubling, now into the dark drawing-room, on into the dining-room where the lamps were still alight, her bare feet scratched by the coarse matting, her limbs bruised by contact with the furniture; always the hoarse voice behind her.

Suddenly, outside, came the scuffle of a horse's hoofs, and the customary call of the visitor in India "*Quai hai?*" ("Is anyone there?") A servant, hitherto crouched trembling in the veranda, rose with an answering cry and pattered, relieved, down the steps, swinging a lantern.

Malcolm Moore could hardly credit his senses as he entered the bungalow anticipating the hospitable welcome to a stranger, proverbial in that part of India at whatever time of the day or night. He hesitated on the threshold, for it seemed to him that he must have stepped into a scene from some melodrama. A woman clad only in her nightdress, stood at the end of a long, badly lit room. Her face white with terror, and a big, handsome bully, flushed and furious and drunk, was steadying himself, swearing, against a table.

The man turned then and saw the stranger; the interruption appeared to sober him slightly.

"All right! Come in!" he shouted. "Come in, don't be shy. Plenty of room, plenty to eat and plenty to drink."

Though Moore had been wandering in the jungle for hours, having lost his way, he felt more inclined to remount his pony than to accept the rough invitation; but the conviction that a helpless woman was in danger held him to the spot. He heard his horse being led away, and as he stood silent in the doorway the woman disappeared—he was alone with his tipsy host.

"Oh, come in—come in," repeated Sylvestre. "Where do you come from, what do you want—a bed, a meal, a drink? All to be had here; make yourself at home." And he bellowed for servants, for more light, for food and whisky, anything that it was in his power to offer.

Weary and thirsty and hungry, Moore took the chair that was pushed forward. "I must apologize," he said civilly, "for turning up like this so late at night. I'm staying at Rajghat. I went for a ride after dinner and somehow missed my way in the jungle. I ought to have kept to the road."

"Meet any puss-cats?" inquired the other flippantly.

"Tigers, leopards, do you mean? No, but I heard some caterwauling, and rather too near to be pleasant."

It would seem useless to add information concerning himself and his doings when the fellow was obviously too screwed to understand explanations; but, when refreshments appeared, an astoundingly stiff peg rather cleared the "fellow's" senses than befuddled them further; so Moore stated briefly that he was merely a globe-trotting sportsman on his first visit

to India, that he was waiting at Rajghat for a friend who was to join him from Burmah, and they were then to proceed to Nepal, where sport had been promised them.

The host nodded amicably over the top of a tumbler, and informed the guest that he himself was a planter, and that what he did not know about big-game shooting in India wasn't worth knowing. "You wait," he continued, "and to-morrow you'll see the finest collection of skins and horns you ever set eyes on."

Then he began to babble of tigers and rogue elephants, of man-eating leopards, and so forth, while Moore sat silent, attending, for he recognized that the babbler was undoubtedly an enthusiast and an expert in big-game shooting. When a bedroom was ready for him they parted good friends, but as Moore undressed and got into the night suit he found laid out for him he wondered what had become of the poor frightened lady, and recollections of the painful scene he had interrupted kept him awake, despite his weariness. He listened intently, prepared to go to her defence should there be ominous sounds, but he heard nothing more unpleasant than the shriek of the brain-fever bird outside, and the persistent yapping of pariah dogs in the distance.

Early next morning through the open doors of his room, he saw her wandering about the luxuriant garden that surrounded the bungalow—a slim graceful figure in white, against a background of flaming shrubs and creepers. She was escorted by two or three native children, a couple of dogs, and a little chinkara deer that performed antics around the party. Evidently she was a gentle soul, beloved of children and animals. He finished his toilet in haste (every convenience had been supplied to him) and hurried out to join his hostess and her little court. She coloured sensitively as he approached, he felt embarrassed himself; they shook hands, and he thanked her for the kind hospitality that had been extended to him. She murmured something stereotyped, and then there was a pause. The native children goggled at the strange sahib, their fingers in their mouths, the dogs made kind advances, the chinkara danced and squealed; only the English girl stood motionless, regarding him with pathetic blue eyes. She struck Moore as the prettiest creature he had ever beheld—so dainty, so fair, so sweet—and to think of her being tied to the violent brute he had seen and heard threatening her the previous night! A wave of chivalrous pity and anger swept over him.

On an impulse he said in a low voice: "Can I help you? Is there anything I can do? I don't mean to be interfering, but last night——"

She turned to him with a stifled sob.

“Do tell me, for Heaven’s sake,” he urged, moving nearer.

For answer she whispered hurriedly: “Hush! he is coming.”

And Moore, looking round, saw the planter advancing towards them across the lawn. He could hardly believe that it was the same man he had seen and talked with last night, dishevelled, half drunk. Truly the creature was a splendid specimen of young manhood—tall, broad, muscular, with the features of a Roman emperor, and close curling hair; his eyes were almost too brilliant, too heavily lashed, at a distance they looked as if they were painted. Involuntarily Moore glanced at the fair, beautiful girl who was wife to this man. What a couple! What children they should produce! Yet there was no sign of a nursery; and the woman shrank and paled as her husband approached and laid his hand for a moment on her shoulder. Moore observed that the native children showed no fear, that the dogs had run to meet him, that the chinkara continued its antics, even butting at him playfully. Mrs. Sylvestre seemed to be the only one who had no welcome to give, yet apparently he had forgotten his behaviour of the night before.

Then Moore was hurried into the house to see the sporting trophies that plainly were the man’s delight and pride; and, indeed, they proved worth inspection. Never had Moore beheld such results of “good hunting” as were collected and arranged in a large room that might have been built to receive them at the back of the bungalow. Little had been spent on mounting or on setting up, no staring glass eyes, or unnaturally scarlet mouths were to be seen; but, as Sylvestre vulgarly expressed it, the measurements of the horns and the size and beauty of the skins were enough to make any sportsman dribble with envy! He acted showman with frank enjoyment, pointing out his principal treasures, relating their histories. That tiger, the one with the huge head and the strongly marked skin, had killed about fifty villagers before he was finally tracked and shot; apparently he had slain human beings through pure love of mischief, for he had seldom been known to devour the bodies of his victims—preferring his natural prey for food, and the killing of people for fun. No, Sylvestre did not care about shooting from elephants, though he kept one, a staunch old female; usually he followed up a tiger on foot. Wasn’t that a fine bull-buffalo’s head on the wall?—see the width between his horns—he had charged like a steam engine, and fallen dead with a bullet in his brain only a few yards from Sylvestre’s feet. And there, on the opposite wall, was the head of the rogue elephant that for a year had been the terror of travellers; he had held up a pass through the lower hills, and had even attacked and practically destroyed a village.

So the inspection and talk went on. Moore was absorbed. There seemed to be hardly a wild beast indigenous to India that Sylvestre had not hunted and shot; and although he kept only the finest specimens, according to their size and perfection and ferocity, the collection was enormous—almost unique. It raised all the sporting instincts in Moore's composition to boiling point. He was shown boxes full of boars' tusks, tigers' teeth, claws, and "luck bones"—the curious little crescent-shaped bone found embedded in the shoulder muscles. Sylvestre said the natives regarded them as lucky.

"Like to have one?" He selected a good one and handed it to Moore. "You could have it mounted as a brooch for your missus, if you have one. Sheila's got a beauty I had set in gold for her, but she never wears it," he paused, and added bitterly, "just because I gave it to her!"

The words seemed to have escaped his lips involuntarily, and, as though to draw attention from the slip, he began to talk hurriedly of news he had received that morning of the arrival of a notorious cattle slaying tiger in the district.

"It's only a matter of time for me to bag him," he said confidently. "Would you care to stop and help me get him? I shall be sending my tracker out for news of his whereabouts, and he ought to be marked down in a day or two; but he may kill within reasonable distance, and then be off miles directly afterwards, though he is sure to return sooner or later."

Moore caught eagerly at the chance; and he was conscious that mingled with his keen anticipation of the sport was a satisfaction that he would now have a valid excuse for remaining, in case he could be of service to Mrs. Sylvestre.

"We'll send into Rajghat for your things," went on the planter, well pleased. "Rajghat's only ten miles from here by road; you must have wandered in a circle last night in the jungle when you missed your way, it's a thing that can so easily happen. I suppose time does not matter as you're only in India for amusement—lucky beggar that you are."

Breakfast was not altogether a comfortable meal. Sylvestre was restless and irritable; Moore concluded that he was feeling the effects of his last night's over-indulgence. He snubbed his wife when she spoke, and when she was silent he asked her why she was sulking. The dogs and the servants were abused, and when the chinkara came into the room, searching for its



mistress, he threw a plate at its head, though it was obvious that he missed it on purpose.

“Bad shot!” he exclaimed, and then to Moore’s relief he rose from the table and left the bungalow, grumbling, to attend to his work.

Moore stood by his hostess in the veranda as they watched the tall figure out of sight; then he turned and met her eyes. The look in them pierced his heart. He felt helpless, desperate, and all at once it struck him how ignorant he was of women and of their outlook on life.

As an only child of good birth, left orphaned and rich at an early age, his thirty-five years of existence had merely passed pleasantly, comfortably, undisturbed by serious trouble, unruffled by love affairs, save of a fleeting nature. For the first time he looked back over the years of his manhood, and marvelled at their ease, how he had taken it all for granted—the usual round of manly amusement and desultory duties, season after season. Even among his many friends he had never come up against tragedy, never, as far as he knew, encountered real misery; and now, as he looked into this woman’s unhappy eyes, he experienced a sort of mental shock, as though he had been jerked roughly into a different plane where all was sinister, bewildering.

Who was she? How had she come to marry this handsome drunkard who seemed to hate and adore her at the same moment, and would probably end by murdering her, indirectly if not in fact? It was horrible—something must be done to save her. But in Heaven’s name what? Perhaps, now that they were safely alone, he might induce her to confide in him.

“Shall we sit down?” he suggested; and he moved a couple of chairs into position. She sank into one with a little sigh, and he seated himself beside her.

The morning was comparatively cool for this time of year, roses still bloomed in the garden, the grass on the lawn was still green. Sweet, heavy scents floated in the air, and the birds were busy—bathing in the dust, flying in cheerful parties from tree to tree. The peace of it all! What a mockery!

“Well?” he said in gentle encouragement.

Her hand lay on the arm of her chair, a slim white hand with tapering fingers and pretty pink nails; and suddenly he felt tempted to touch it, to take it in his own. The temptation annoyed him, it increased his mental disturbance, he resented its intrusion, when, but a moment before, his only desire had been to help his companion as a man would wish to help any woman, whether old or young, who was in danger, in difficulty.

He was thankful when she spoke. "There is nothing you can do," she told him, in a level monotonous voice.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked her.

"For nearly two years. I didn't realize when I married him." She bit her lips. "Oh!" she added, with suppressed emotion, "no woman ought to marry just for the sake of a home, without caring in return."

"Haven't you any people?" he asked helplessly.

"Oh! my people!" She gave a hard little laugh. "They consist of an uncle and aunt who were glad to get rid of me. I felt it was a sort of triumph for me when they found I was going to marry a man who was well enough off—who would take me to India and make me independent of them. If I am a coward, I still have some pride—I allow them to think I am as happy as the day is long—I write them hypocritical letters. I couldn't tell them the truth—that my husband is a drunkard! After all, when he isn't drunk or in a rage he is kind enough, he means to be kind. But then I can't forget, or bring myself to respond, and that incenses him and sets him off again. It's all a sort of vicious circle."

For a space neither of them spoke. Moore began to comprehend the situation. Two people utterly unsuited—the man lawless, undisciplined by nature, rendered reckless by the knowledge that his wife did not love him, even despised him; and the misguided girl who had rushed into marriage for more or less selfish ends, unable to assume an attitude towards her husband that might have brought about contentment if not actual happiness between them. Truly, as she said herself, it was a sort of vicious circle! Moore could see no way out of the tangle. What evil fate had plunged him into the midst of such a complication?

"Haven't you any friends you could go to out here?" he inquired; but even as he put the question he knew instinctively what the answer would be.

She shook her head. "He brought me straight here—to the plantation, after we landed. Nobody belonging to me had ever been in India. And we have no neighbours at all, except another planter a few miles away—and he has a native wife and family."

She made a plausible effort to control her voice. "Don't worry about me," she said lightly; "now that he has a tiger to think of he will be fairly all right, and things may go on comparatively smoothly for some weeks, until something upsets him again. Last night he was in a rage with a coolie—and if you hadn't turned up there would have been scene after scene for days."

“Then he *can* pull himself together when he likes?”

“I suppose so,” she replied.

Moore cursed Sylvestre in his heart; yet, reluctantly, he felt a measure of sympathy for the man, a sympathy he could not have explained had he been called upon to do so—and as he pondered the problem Sylvestre came back, striding across the lawn. Moore caught himself envying the creature his physical perfection.

There was no news of the tiger, bad news from the point of view of the sportsman. The cattle-killer had decamped after inflicting damage on a herd, as was the usual custom of such marauders—killing here one hour, killing again miles away after an incredibly short interval.

“Can’t be helped,” said Sylvestre philosophically. “We must wait till he comes back.”

“Will he come back?” Moore inquired.

“Certainly. It may be in a day or two, or it mayn’t be for a week. Anyway, if you’re not in a hurry I hope you’ll stay on till he gives us a chance.”

And Moore agreed, readily, to do so.

That night after dinner the trio sat outside on the masonry platform which was transformed for the occasion into a sort of open-air lounge; there was a carpet, a punkah, easy chairs, and a table. Moore sat between husband and wife, the one noisy and reckless, the other silent, apathetic; the moon was rising, and Moore could trace the outline of Mrs. Sylvestre’s fair head and the curve of her slender neck; one hand lay like a white patch on her knee. There was a sensuous influence in the hot night air, disquieting perfumes, a heavy silence. The impulse that had assailed him this morning in the veranda now returned with redoubled force. Just then Sylvestre stood up, calling for drinks; Moore felt rather than saw how Mrs. Sylvestre shrank; he knew she was dreading the hours to come. Swiftly, softly, for a moment, he laid his hand upon hers; it trembled beneath his touch—but she did not withdraw it, neither did she make any response. Presently he knew that she was crying, quietly, hopelessly.

All that night, half waking, half sleeping, he dreamed of her—dreamed of her tragic blue eyes, the pale gold of her hair, of her danger, her desolation. In the morning he rose, unrefreshed, irresolute, unable to conceal

from himself that now he wanted to stay on at the plantation not so much for the chance of the tiger-shoot, not even for the sole purpose of protecting Mrs. Sylvestre should occasion arise, but simply because he longed to remain where she was, to see her, to be with her, to—(yes, it was the truth)—to make love to her! Aghast at the situation, he almost decided to make some excuse and go back to Rajghat while yet he had the backbone; and, if he did, what would she think? That he was disgusted with his host, that he repented of having proffered her his sympathy and championship, that he was afraid of becoming involved in some tiresome complication between man and wife? In face of all this, Moore dreaded yet longed for their next meeting; alternately he dawdled and hurried over his dressing. Last night his things had arrived from Rajghat, and his servant. It would seem so extraordinary if he sent them all back at once, unless, indeed, he could pretend that his man had brought word of his friend's arrival in the station, and that he felt compelled to join him there without delay. . .

When he left his room he had come to no decision; neither had he done so by the evening, for Mrs. Sylvestre did not appear all day; he was told that she had a touch of fever, and he spent the tedious hours with her husband, who made himself pleasant enough and seemed glad of his company, dragged him all over the plantation, and all over the factory, which was a flourishing concern and Sylvestre's own property. The day was nearly done when he saw her again; Sylvestre had been called away to his office, and she came into the veranda looking white and wan, yet to Moore even a thousand times more attractive! He arranged her cushions, fussed about her with concern, and she smiled at him happily as he told her how interminable the day had seemed without her. Was she really better? Oughtn't she to see a doctor? Did she often have fever like this?

She declared that it was nothing, and to his joy she gave him the impression that because he was there she was able to get up—it had made all the difference. With an apologetic little laugh she said she hoped the tiger wouldn't come back just yet!—and fervently he echoed the hope. They sat together in blissful companionship until Sylvestre appeared, flustered and vexed; something had happened, gone wrong at an outlying depot, he must ride out at once and see to it—would Moore excuse him? He wouldn't be long, not more than an hour or two at the most. Moore excused him with hardly disguised delight; secretly he wished with all his heart that neither Sylvestre nor the tiger would ever come back!

How he contrived to master his feelings during that interval alone with Sheila Sylvestre he could not have told; not for the world would he agitate

or distress her now, though he fancied she must know, must guess, what he longed to say. He would wait.

Moore waited. Two precious days went by, increasing his new-born passion; and then came the news of the tiger's return! The beast was back at its work of destruction, had killed a bullock in broad daylight, within sight of the village, within easy reach of the plantation. Now was the time to do things.

It was early morning when Sylvestre went off in high spirits to make the needful arrangements; and of purpose Moore beguiled Mrs. Sylvestre to the shelter of the patriarchal pipal tree that stood guardian, as it were, over the compound. Above their heads rustled the flat, spade-shaped leaves that are seldom still, at their feet a family of seven-sister birds fluttered and scolded in the dust, and a couple of hoopoes with brilliant crests and plumage made love, shamelessly, wings outspread, uttering little calls of enticement.

Malcolm Moore looked at the woman by his side, at her sweet, sensitive face, the sheen of her hair, the slim grace of her figure—he could keep silence no longer.

“Sheila!” he said; and next moment he was beseeching, commanding her to let him take her away from the terror she lived in by day and by night. As she wavered and wept he poured forth every argument he could think of—they were made for each other, it was Providence that had guided him to her through the jungle that night; he had no ties, plenty of money—how happy they would be! As long as there was breath in his body his life would be devoted to her service. It wasn't right that she should go on living with a man she could not love, could not even respect, though by law he was her husband—“the more so,” he urged, “now that you know you love me! Can you deny that you love me?” he cried. “Can you?”

She made no attempt to deny it, but she was frightened; it would be very wrong; if she left Conrad he would kill himself.

“He will kill *you* if you stay!” cried Moore, beside himself; her hesitation, her scruples inflamed him still further. “And what about me? Never in my life have I ever loved any woman as I love you, as I shall always love you. Am I to suffer, are we both to suffer, and to be miserable for the sake of an empty vow to a brute and a devil who makes your life a hell upon earth?”

She sank on to the roots of the tree and hid her face in her hands.

“Oh!” she wailed. “I don't know what to do!”

Moore paced up and down in front of her with quick, impatient footsteps. Never till now had he been balked of anything he wanted. More than ever did he realize how little understanding he had of women, at any rate of "good" women, who would condemn a true lover to lifelong torture rather than imperil their own souls! If only Conrad were dead! At the moment, if wishes could have killed, Sylvestre would have been lying lifeless at his feet. Instead, the noisy sound of the planter's voice in the near distance recalled the fact of his existence more hatefully than ever; and at the sound Mrs. Sylvestre rose, terrified, speechless, and hastened towards the house before Moore could speak again. He watched her with an aching, angry heart; but at least, he reflected, she had given him no final answer, and he did not intend to abandon his purpose; he swore to himself that when he left the plantation she should go with him, whatever her scruples, whatever her fears.

He found no opportunity of a word with her in private before he had to start with Sylvestre at sunset in pursuit of the tiger. She had avoided him during the day—he knew it; no matter, to-morrow should see the end of all doubt and hesitation.

Sylvestre was excited, not altogether sober. He turned and waved to his wife, who stood in the veranda as they left the compound, and called out something about its perhaps being good-bye for ever—"And jolly glad she'll be to get rid of me!" he added beneath his breath.

The plan was that they were to sit up in a tree overlooking a pool where the tiger was likely to drink after a heavy meal and a siesta, for it was the only water to be found in that part of the jungle.

Moloo the tracker preceded them to make preparations, and the two went cautiously, skirting the fields and the village that lay between the plantation and the forest, their rifles in their hands. It was a jumpy sort of walk! Moore had a suspicion that Sylvestre was testing the courage of his guest while parading his own. Certainly he could not but feel relieved when he found himself seated safely in the fork of a tree, the tracker behind him. Sylvestre was perched alone on a branch close by. And then the watch began—a silent, almost breathless watch during which every heart beat, every crack of a twig sounded abnormally loud. About an hour went by, while the moon rose to her zenith, gleamed on the dark water, sparkled on the tips of grasses and weeds that quivered in the warm night breeze. In the distance echoed the yells of a pack of jackals; now and then the bell of a sambhur, the mournful

hoot of an owl. Then a sounder of wild pig came down to the pool to drink, wallowing in the mud, snuffling, grunting, all unaware of the watchers in the branches. They were followed by a stag and half a dozen does, nervous graceful creatures that raised their heads warily between each sup, ready to bound away at the first sound of the enemy's approach. So time passed till Moore found himself drowsing and his limbs felt stiff; he had begun to dream fitfully of Sheila, when an almost imperceptible movement of the *shikari* behind him brought his senses to attention, alert, watchful. A faint, low sound caught his ear from the farther side of the pool, something between a moan and a snarl. It ceased, came again, nearer—nearer; there was a stir among the carpet of dry leaves, stopping, and advancing—moments passed. Then Moore thought he espied a long low object moving slowly towards the pool. Yes, he was not mistaken; it halted, and he lost sight of it amid the tangle of undergrowth. His heart beat fast as he watched the thing steal forth again and crouch at the edge of the pool. A shot rang out from Sylvestre's rifle. It was answered by such a furious roar as seemed to shake the earth, and deadened the sound of a splintering crash, the thud of a heavy body striking the ground.

Out on a bright patch of moonlight Moore saw the tiger, bleeding from a wound in the shoulder, crouching to spring, ears back, teeth bared, eyes aflame; and on the ground, face downwards, stunned by the fall from a rotten branch, lay Sylvestre, defenceless. Moore heard the *shikari* shout in his ear, "Shoot, sahib, shoot." His rifle was at his shoulder, his finger at the trigger, and then the vision of Sheila Sylvestre rose before him. He had only to wait and she was his—without any scruple, without afterthought, or self-blame on her part. Yet he aimed, and fired, and—through no fault of his own—missed; the *shikari*, wild with excitement and terror, had jerked his arm. The tiger pounced on the prostrate form, and at the same moment Moore sprang from the tree. Savagely, madly, he beat at the broad yellow head with the butt of his rifle.

Sheila Sylvestre sat in the dark veranda awaiting the return of her husband and of the man she loved. She had sat there when the sun went down, and the sudden Indian darkness descended; had watched the slow creeping of the moonlight over lawn and garden. She sat so still that the *peon* on duty thought she was asleep, and sneaked away to smoke and gossip in the servants' quarters. She felt hardly conscious of her bodily existence, given over as she was to the battle that raged in her heart. She saw herself in the past, an inexperienced girl, snatching at a chance of freedom

from a dull, uncongenial life devoid of pleasure, of sympathy. Conrad Sylvestre had hardly counted, save as a means of escape; had he been old, even repulsive, she would have married him all the same! Therefore who could blame her for accepting a man who was not only good-looking and young, but according to local standards a minor Cræsus as well? He had been home on a holiday from India, shooting partridges in the neighbourhood; the whole thing was so sudden, so unexpected, like a delirious dream. And then had come the real awakening, or rather the merging of the dream into a hideous nightmare, even before their departure from England as husband and wife. A cold shiver went through her at the remembrance of the first time she had seen him mad-drunk. And oh! the horror of these two years alone with him here!

She recalled how, on the night of Moore's arrival at the bungalow, she had been praying so hard to be delivered from the terror and misery that was warping her soul, sapping her health, till she felt she could endure it no longer. Her prayer had been answered. She had only to yield, only to say one little word, and her whole life would be altered. How different was the present chance of deliverance from the last! She had never imagined that love could be like this. Yet there was something that held her back, something that, strangely enough, was born of the very love she had given to Moore.

It was true that, at first, she had shrunk involuntarily from the notion of breaking her marriage vows, "for better, for worse," but now she saw, in the light of her love for Moore, that she had made no effort to keep them. She realized how sharply the man she had married must have suffered from the knowledge that he had never possessed her heart, from her cold condemnation of his failing, his vice, whatever it might be called. She had withheld her own sympathy, her forgiveness, not attempted to help him, though in the depths of her innermost being she had known that she was not playing fair—seeing that he loved her, that at core he was not all bad, not entirely "brute and devil"! Perhaps, had she done her part, she might have reclaimed him by now! Then came reaction; bitterly she rebelled against fate! Why should happiness seem incompatible with conscience, with religion? It was monstrous; she would not submit—she would take what the gods had got to offer—let conscience, religion, go hang! Still the pendulum swung; what hardship that this recognition of her failure to play fair should have come to her actually through love itself! Was it punishment, or retribution?



And as she writhed in an agony of self-condemnation she caught the sound of running footsteps—a cry of distress, and Moloo, the *shikari*, stumbled into the veranda. He beat his head and his hands on the floor, gasping forth the tidings, incoherently, of some terrible happening in the jungle—the tiger, the sahibs—he had run to the village for help—even now they were coming with a cart—God was his witness that he had done his best.

With the calmness of horror she roused the compound, made ready for what might be wanted; then waited, half-stunned with suspense, till a slow procession entered the gate—a bullock cart, and a crowd of villagers, shouting, chattering—a figure walked ahead, came swaying towards her in the moonlight; not till he was close did she recognize Moore, her lover, exhausted, covered with blood, clothes torn to rags—but alive, thank Heaven, alive! She could not speak, could not even think, she only stretched out her hands to help him, and as he caught at them he laughed, a harsh, dreadful laugh, and, like Moloo the *shikari*, stammered out that he had “done his best”! Then he fell forward, unconscious, at her feet.

Weeks later they stood together on the wide veranda. Moore’s pony waited for him at the foot of the steps. He was leaving the plantation, and leaving alone—leaving Sheila Sylvestre to nurse and watch over a husband who was crippled, disfigured for life. The big, strong man, that mighty hunter, slayer of beasts, must be helpless, dependent, all his remaining days. His spine had been injured by the fall from the tree; the tiger had done the rest, and, but for Moore, would have killed him as he lay—Moore, who perforce had risked his own life for the man who stood between him and the woman he loved. The irony of it all! Now there was nothing for them both but farewell. It was a silent farewell, too painful, too poignant for words; all had been said that mattered.

People wondered why Malcolm Moore did not marry. Why, as the years went by, no girl ever seemed to attract him. What a pity, said his friends, when he was so nice, so well off. No doubt there was some hidden story—they noticed that he was changed after that brief visit to India; he had never been quite the same since; a married woman, perhaps! Yet he was not that sort—as so many gay young matrons could have testified!

But the good mothers of marketable daughters did not altogether despair, until one day a bombshell fell in their midst—the news that, after all, Moore was going to be married!—and married, so report said, to a widow, a

nobody, of whom none of them had ever heard, a grey-haired widow no longer young, who, report also said, had been nursing an invalid husband devotedly for years, somewhere in India. . . . What a thousand pities!

SILENCE

## SILENCE

“Good-bye, darling, good-bye. Take care of your dear self. Try not to feel lonely. God bless you!”

The Reverend Henry Inglis kissed his wife in fond, lingering farewell. As always, it tried him sorely to part from her, and the fact that he must leave her in the isolated Mission bungalow so far from white neighbours, during his periodical peregrinations, added to the trial. But as Cause and Calling came first with them both, these temporary separations could only be faced in a spirit of cheerful self-sacrifice. It was not possible to take her with him, for the work meant rough travel, unencumbered save by actual necessities, through tracts of scrub jungle and heavy forest, across gullies and river beds, up and down the slopes of the low range of hills in the distance, camping at night beneath the trees; and all that he might bear his holy message, together with a few medicinal comforts, to semi-civilized people, jungle tribes, aborigines—poor, primitive souls and bodies as yet hardly higher than the animals, owing to the cruel barriers of caste and custom.

Now he set off with one faithful convert, a dependable jack-of-all trades, in a little two-wheeled vehicle drawn by a stout pony; and Isabel Inglis, watching the departure, waving to the last moment, hoped anxiously that nothing conducive to her man's comfort had been overlooked. She herself had stocked the well of the rude conveyance with useful stores, and had made sure that the kit-bag contained sufficient clothing, that the tiffin-basket and the roll of bedding were all in order, as well as the travelling medicine-chest. She only trusted that Henry would not forget, in his zeal and enthusiasm, to take the quinine pills as a safeguard against the deadly malaria that lurked in the unhealthy areas he must traverse. Each time he went off on one of these expeditions she feared for his safety, thought of fever, wild beasts, hostile races; he worked so whole-heartedly, was so indifferent to personal convenience in his eager desire to lighten the darkness of these miserable beings, to give them spiritual and physical aid.

Dear Henry! How she would miss him! Yet, as she re-entered the silent bungalow she was conscious of a vague relief, a sense of freedom that filled her with shame. On previous occasions she had been uncomfortably aware of a like sensation, but never quite so positively as on this bright, crisp Indian morning; and to combat it she started her round of domestic duties

with more than her usual vigour. It was almost a comfort to find that Sukia, the little orphan girl she was attempting to train as a sort of household help, and who, so far, was more of a hindrance, had taken advantage of the situation to investigate the memsahib's work-basket. The child was inquisitive and mischievous as any monkey; there she sat, on the floor, surrounded by Henry's socks and vests, strips of calico, and odds and ends, picking the needles from a case, chattering to herself; and with such legitimate excuse Isabel found temporary outlet for her feelings in scolding the culprit. Sukia bellowed and rolled herself into a tearful heap, while her mistress collected the debris and shut down the lid of the basket with a determined hand. It was a fine basket, handiwork from the little native Christian settlement that had been started by Isabel's father and developed by Henry till now it had become quite a good-sized village. It lay within easy distance of the Mission house, and the Inglises were proud of their pupils.

"Taru Mission" baskets were renowned throughout India, orders were never lacking; some had actually been received from England for missionary sales and bazaars. The industry earned useful sums of money for the converts after expenses had been strictly recovered.

Then, with Sukia trotting, whimpering and importunate, at her heels, Mrs. Inglis looked into the dispensary, with its shelves full of jars and bottles. Henry was as much doctor as missionary; he believed in ministering to sick bodies as well as to starved souls; moreover, it was a means to an end, for the peasants and jungle folk flocked from far and near, seeking remedies for themselves or by proxy for their relatives; and they would listen, while waiting for doses of castor-oil, chlorodyne and so forth, to the padre-sahib's simple exhortations delivered in the vernacular with a tolerant comprehension of their childlike intelligence and superstitious fears. For the most part, he knew, they regarded his preaching and prayers as some form of magic that added to the potency of his medicines; it was hard to uproot their common belief that death and disease and disaster were due to no natural causes, but to the malignant intervention of demons and devils. So that when a patient recovered, the padre-sahib's spells had the credit; when he died, the white man's god was to blame. But if perhaps one in a hundred showed a glimmer of understanding, and a desire to know more, it was worth all the toil and discouragement of years to Henry Inglis.

His wife was wellnigh as competent as himself in dealing with physical afflictions; but to-day, as it happened, no applicants squatted in the dispensary veranda, for which she felt thankful. Despite her training and her

courage she had never been able quite to overcome an innate shrinking from the sight of pain and disease, not to speak of the personal attention she was forced to extend to the sufferers when Henry was absent—the dressing of ulcers, washing of wounds, and the rest of it. Mercifully for her, the leper colony that existed in a secluded valley, known among the natives as “The Valley of the Unclean,” was too far distant for the wretched victims to find their way to the Taru Mission bungalow, and always she felt guiltily glad that it lay altogether beyond Henry’s range of travel; otherwise, she knew, he would have no hesitation in bearing what hope and consolation he could to the stricken community. He himself often bewailed the distance, and he maintained that the popular idea of contagion was greatly exaggerated, that it was doubtful if white leprosy was contagious at all; black leprosy—yes, in the event of contact.

Now, having dusted the dispensary, Mrs. Inglis proceeded to visit the kitchen, inspected the garden, fed the goats and the fowls, all the time hampered by Sukia, who pulled at her skirts and got in her way, alternately fibbing about her raid on the work-basket and obtruding her advice—as in the case of a kid that had a sore on its side. “Say a prayer, memsahib,” she urged as Mrs. Inglis applied a healing ointment, “else will the medicine do no good.” And when it was discovered that a mongoose had killed a brood of young chickens, she advocated the pronouncement of a curse on the marauder and all his relations and descendants, in order to inhibit a recurrence of such abominable conduct.

Sukia was irrepressible; she continued to chatter inconsequently while Mrs. Inglis seated herself at the big writing-table to deal with correspondence connected with baskets and Mission accounts, until, bribed into silence with a handful of native lollipops (what would Henry have said to such weakness on the part of his wife!), she fell asleep in a corner of the room.

There!—at last the letters were finished, the writing-table drawers had been turned out and tidied. The usual noonday peace had descended upon house and compound; everyone was either sleeping or eating, except the sweet-looking young Englishwoman who sat at her writing-table idle for the time being, outwardly composed, yet inwardly disturbed by recollections of the past. In sorting her papers she had come across a photograph, a group of Henry and herself with her beloved father—so wonderful, so brave, in the blindness that had come upon him in his declining years. It had been taken by a wandering half-caste photographer on the day of her betrothal to Henry; how vividly she remembered that day, and how long ago it now seemed,

though, after all, it was but barely three years. How pleased the dear old man had been, how he had rejoiced over the engagement! He had said that now he could die happily, readily, knowing that she would be safe in the keeping of his ardent disciple and helper in the great work to which both men had dedicated their lives; and soon after the marriage he *had* died, peacefully, willingly, worn out by his years of toil, comforted by the conviction that his only child had found a protector who was worthy of her in every way.

How thankful she felt that he had known nothing of the storm through which she had passed; that she had concealed from him all knowledge of her passionate adoration for the man who had flashed, meteorlike, across her tranquil life, handsome and bold and strong, yet, alas, how faithless!

She sat dreaming, the photograph in her hand, allowing the past to possess her mind till memory seemed to materialize, and Rex Lanark might almost have been standing beside her in the flesh, plausible, irresistible. With a smothered cry of pain she rose and ran blindly into her bedroom, impelled by a longing that from the day of her promise to be Henry's wife she had stoutly resisted. The temptation to pore once again over the contents of the little, locked box hidden at the back of her wardrobe became overwhelming; she knew she ought not to have kept the mementoes; now once for all she made up her mind to destroy them, and perhaps their destruction would bring her the peace she craved, allow her to yield her whole heart without reproach to Henry, whom she so honestly loved for his goodness, and his pure devotion to herself. . . . Suppose she were to die, suddenly, without having emptied the box, what a legacy of sorrow and suspicion would she have bequeathed to the kind, honourable man who was her husband!

She groped with trembling hands for the box; it was a little rosewood desk that had belonged to her dead mother whom she could not remember. Somehow she felt that her mother might have understood, might not altogether have blamed her for keeping these relics of a love that had ended only in pain and disillusionment. She placed the desk on the dressing-table, then sought amid a medley of odd keys in a drawer, found the one she wanted, and opened the desk. She took out a signet ring, a letter, a dried rose from a diary, her diary. Slowly she dipped into the pages, reading at random.

“Nothing particular. Helped father with his vernacular dictionary in the morning, and took the Bible class for Mr. Inglis who has gone on a preaching tour. Dust storm in the evening. . . .”

“Father not at all well. It worries him to have to finish his dictionary by dictation, and I am such a poor substitute for Mr. Inglis, though I do my best. A busy day with sick people. The school children very troublesome. Gave lessons in basket-making. Felt tired. Shall be glad when Mr. Inglis comes back, the work is too much for father with only me to help him. . . .”

“Such an excitement! To-day a gentleman arrived in a village cart asking our hospitality for a day or two. He was very apologetic, told us that he had cut his foot two or three weeks ago, when bathing in a stream; that he had thought nothing of it at the time, but suddenly it had inflamed and prevented his walking. He has only an old servant with him, a sort of tracker. Of course, we did everything possible and put him in the best room. He is very tall and handsome, but rather a mystery; so self-willed over his foot, and hates giving trouble. I wish Mr. Inglis were here to look after him. . . .”

“Mr. Lanark was able to hobble into the veranda this morning, and we had a long talk. It seems he is very adventurous and has been to places where no white man has ever penetrated before, shooting and exploring, and studying wild tribes and languages, even sometimes disguised as a native—a sort of Sir Richard Burton! For the last six months he has been camping all over the Satpura range. . . .”

“Mr. Lanark has been here a week to-day. He is very interested in father’s work on the dictionary, and has been of real help over one or two tiresome points. He is a charming companion, but somehow he unsettles me. I feel that I can’t attend to my duties while he is here, and yet I don’t want him to go. . . .”

“There is so much I can’t write about. All the little usual things seem hardly worth putting down. Everything seems different. Rex—Rex Lanark—it is a nice name.”

“Mr. Lanark’s foot is still bad. The wound does not heal properly. I fear it is my fault, because I let him go with me for a long walk too soon. I had to visit a village, and he *would* come too. He is so masterful and determined. He is always asking questions about Mr. Inglis, and this morning he said such a funny thing: ‘*I am jealous of the fellow!*’ . . .”

“I hardly dare write it. Last night, after father had gone to bed, he persuaded me to sit with him in the veranda. It was a lovely night, so warm and soft, and the scent of the mango blossom was heavenly. He told me he loved me! . . .”



“I don’t know what to do. I feel desperate, so happy and yet so miserable. How could I leave father, old and blind and helpless as he is! And how could I live without Rex! I believe I worship the ground he walks on. Is it very wrong?”

“At last he has agreed to keep our secret for the present. He will go away for six months—what an eternity! But it’s the only thing to do. I shall have time to think, to see my way clearly. While he is here I can’t think of anything except that I love him, and love him. . . . It is all so hard. Perhaps in time Mr. Inglis could take entire charge of the Mission, he is so capable and energetic, and then Rex and I might take father away with us. But would he come? And would Rex ever settle down? He says he is a vagabond by nature. Were I free I could ask nothing better than to be a vagabond with him. . . .”

“Mr. Inglis came back to-day, and Rex is going to-morrow. I wish Mr. Inglis hadn’t come now. Rather foolishly, perhaps, I asked him his opinion of Mr. Lanark, and he said, though anyone could see he was well born, he feared he had all the faults of his class, that he should say Mr. Lanark was self-indulgent, unreliable, and reckless. It was all I could do to keep my temper. I can’t help suspecting that Mr. Inglis is jealous!”

“He has gone. I feel half-dead. But we can write to each other, and in six months to the day I *know* he will return. I suppose I shall get through it somehow. His foot isn’t quite well. I made him promise to see a doctor; nothing would induce him to show it to Mr. Inglis! Oh, how unhappy, how wretched I am! I feel I hate the Mission and converts and baskets and Mr. Inglis, everyone and everything, except poor darling old father, and Rex, my Rex. . . .”

“I have had a letter. Oh! such a letter. I shall keep it always, my first letter from Rex. . . .”

“No letter. . . .”

“No letter. What can have happened? . . .”

“I have written and written, but no answer. If he had met with an accident, surely he would have let me know; if he has died, somehow we should have heard. . . . Can Mr. Inglis have been right? Perhaps he was only amusing himself, and has gone off on some wild adventure far more exciting than stealing the heart of a dull girl in a Mission bungalow. Perhaps he has met someone else. Oh, how can I doubt him like this? I will believe in him

and love him and pray for him; but if he does not come back, if I hear nothing, what shall I do? . . .”

Now she tore the pages into fragments with relentless fingers, though her eyes were dimmed with tears, tore the letter up as well; she dared not read it. The rose, a dead, unsightly object, needed no destruction; it fell to pieces of itself. The ring? The ring was heavy—solid gold, a weight in the palm of her hand. She thrust it, with sudden intention, in among the little heap of rubbish, wrapped the whole in her handkerchief, and set forth, hatless, into the compound, walking rapidly towards the well . . .

A servant pursued her, proffering a white-covered umbrella, but she waved him away; he hesitated, gazed after her in doubt, went back reluctantly to the bungalow. She stood, regardless of the hot afternoon sunshine that beat upon her head, at the edge of the well; birds flashed and twittered among the blossom-laden shrubs, little grey squirrels darted to and fro in the dust, lizards were basking on the stones. How long she stood there, the bundle still tightly held in her hand, she could not have told. Presently a brown monkey slithered from an adjacent tree, chattering, grinning, in cautious approach; and the sight of the wizened, wicked face, so grotesquely human, roused her to action. She raised her hand and flung the handkerchief with its contents into the well. The monkey fled, scolding, but amid all the restless sounds of life around her she heard only a faint splash.

Her purpose accomplished, she turned slowly and went back to the two-storied bungalow as though walking in her sleep. Her head ached, her limbs felt heavy, and she threw herself, exhausted, on her bed.

Later, the shrill voice of Sukia woke her from a dream-tortured sleep. The child stood by the bed, her black eyes wide with importance and excitement.

“Memsahib! Memsahib!” she piped. “There is one without who has need of thee.”

Dazed, rubbing her eyes, Isabel dragged herself up. “What is it?” she asked, stupidly. “Has the sahib returned?”

“No, not the sahib. It is but a sick coolie, very sick; he cannot stand, and he comes crawling in the manner of a snake!”

Next moment, still drowsed and confused, Isabel stood in the veranda, Sukia scuttling and chattering beside her. “There, memsahib, see? He approaches.”

She beheld a dilapidated scarecrow of a human form, crawling, scraping along the ground towards the veranda steps; his clothes were in rags, he was emaciated, disfigured, obviously, poor creature, at the last gasp. His head, bound about with a red handkerchief, dropped into the dust as she hastened to his aid. Then she almost shrieked aloud as she perceived the terrible truth—a leper—black leprosy! The man was literally falling to pieces. Sick with horror, she compelled herself to go nearer. Delirious mutterings came from the blackened lips; and her heart froze within her as, for one moment, she fancied she caught the sound of her own name. Of course it was fancy;—was she still dreaming? Was the whole thing but a hideous nightmare?

A shudder ran through the wreck in the dust; then it lay still, for ever still. With a strong effort, driven by a sudden suspicion, she bent lower, closer.

“Rex!” she called wildly, “Rex!”

The word echoed from the walls of the bungalow, and for a few seconds it seemed to Isabel that her capacity for emotion was paralysed. She felt as lifeless as the poor, dead body at her feet. Then something seemed to snap in her brain. She stood erect, a preternatural light in her eyes. Now she understood why Rex Lanark had kept silence, a noble silence, worthy of his wild, big nature. Her hero, her lover! At the last he had come to her, instinctively, unconsciously—oh, the miles and miles he must have wandered and crept, the agony he must have endured! . . . She might have guessed, she ought to have known, that some awful, insuperable barrier had held him from keeping his promise, from claiming her as his wife. Why had he sent her no message? Yet even as the question tortured her mind, the answer came swift and clear—because he had known that nothing, *nothing* would have kept her from him.

Proudly, calmly, as if turned to stone, she set about her duty to the dead man, to her husband, to herself, to the people in her charge. In an hour or two a little funeral pyre was ready at the farther end of the compound, and with every right precaution the maimed, diseased corpse was laid on its last bed, covered with flowers. And as the flames shot high, against a background of mighty trees, in the still, serene closing of the Indian day, the woman who knelt praying and weeping in her room fell forward, a huddled, unconscious heap.

When Henry Inglis returned, recalled from the first march of his pilgrimage by the news of his wife’s sudden illness, he found her lying white and wan on a long chair in the veranda, recovering from what she declared

was no more than a slight touch of the sun. Sukia was fanning her mistress sedulously with a broad palm leaf.

“The memsahib did not die,” bragged Sukia, “because I, Sukia, her slave, remained with her, constantly helping to give her water and milk and soup. Also did I say prayers and do *puja* that the spirit of the dead coolie might not take her from us!”

“What on earth is the child saying?” inquired Henry, bewildered. Isabel put out her hand to her husband; she felt almost too weak to talk.

“It was a leper, doubtless from the Valley of the Unclean, afar off,” prattled Sukia. “On the day of thine honour’s departure did he crawl here and die, and the memsahib caused him to be burned, away by the tamarind.” She waved her little brown hand. “It was a great burning, the flames so high!”—she pointed upward. “And then the memsahib was ill.”

The missionary looked at his wife in concern. “My darling, is this true?”

She nodded faintly.

“And you were all alone! What a horrible experience! I can’t bear to think of it. Isabel, you didn’t—you didn’t *touch* the poor creature?”

“No,” she whispered; “no, I think, I feel sure, I did everything that was right——”

He bent and kissed her, smoothing the hair from her forehead in tender devotion. “There is no one like you!” he murmured. “My treasure, my own dear wife!”

She laid her head on his shoulder, drew his hand to her lips, and peace, blessed peace, solaced her soul.

## THE MISSING SPOON

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“Talking of servants, dear Mrs. Dale——” began Miss North.

“Which we weren’t,” I interrupted ruthlessly. “We were talking of the occult.”

Miss North looked snubbed, and I felt faintly remorseful; but she was one of those deprecating, ultra-polite spinsters who provoke snubs. She never contradicted, and yet, while apparently agreeing with every opinion one expressed, she contrived to convey the exasperating impression that she was not convinced. We had been talking of the spirit world (not servants), at least I had, for, suspecting that in her heart she was a sceptic, I felt impelled to convert her. During the last half-hour she had listened meekly to various experiences of my own connected with the supernatural, as well as those of my friends whose veracity was beyond question, interjecting at intervals: “Really?” “How curious.” “Quite so!”—gazing at me with watery grey eyes that held no clue to her own ideas, till I had arrived at the point when I could have shaken her.

“Some people,” I remarked severely, “cannot disassociate their minds from the mundane, and the material matters of life. What made you mention servants? If you’re worried with them, why not follow my example—give up your house and live at a club. Be free!” I waved my hand to indicate the spacious, well-appointed room in which we sat, the waitresses in neat uniforms attending to the teas. Then I recollected with compassion that my guest, with whom I had been acquainted on and off for some years past, was homeless, lived in cheap boarding-houses, lodgings, or with reluctant relations. Coming away from a meeting of the Psychical Research Society that afternoon, I had run up against her in the street, and I had brought her back to my haven for a cup of tea. The invitation was hardly prompted by any instinct of friendship or hospitality; to be candid, I disliked Miss North. But I was not sorry to have encountered someone who would be likely to listen while I expounded my views on the vital subject that just then engrossed my mind, especially after hearing sworn accounts of strange manifestations reported by Mrs. W., Miss X., Mr. Y., and so forth.

Miss North coughed and looked into her cup. “As it happens,” she said diffidently, “it’s not quite the case of my wishing to give up a home——”

I hastened to make amends for my thoughtless remarks. “No, no, of course; for the moment I had forgotten your sad circumstances. Forgive me! But, after all, you are fortunate in a way not to be hampered with domestic worries.”

“It was our conversation—hauntings, apparitions, restless spirits that suggested to me——” She paused.

“Suggested to you?” I repeated, encouraging her.

“I have hardly had an opportunity of telling you,”—her eyelids flickered, I fancied, a trifle maliciously—“but since our last meeting my circumstances have changed for the better. I have been left a little house in the country. Quite unexpected, a delightful surprise! My sole difficulty is that I cannot get a servant to stay with me, because my poor little house is supposed to be haunted!”

“Oh!” I exclaimed, forgetting to congratulate her on her legacy. “How interesting! Do tell me!” *Now*, instead of itching to assault Miss North, I felt more like embracing her.

“I am afraid there is little to tell.” Her voice was apologetic. “I can’t say I have seen or heard anything unexplainable myself, but two maids have left me because of odd noises. I have to put up with a woman for the mornings; nothing will induce any of the village people to stay late or to sleep in the house. Once that kind of idea gets about—I suppose it’s suggestion more than anything else.”

“Why should it be?” I argued hotly. “I can’t understand such crass incredulity. Over and over again it has been proved beyond any shadow of doubt that disembodied spirits do return for some definite reason. What is the story? Who is it that is supposed to haunt your house?”

Miss North shrugged her thin shoulders and evaded my questions. “I haven’t inquired,” she confessed; by which I gathered she had been told without making inquiry, but for some reason of her own she did not intend to reveal the information.

This was maddening. I resolved to get into that house. If I could hear or see the “presence,” what a case to report to the P.R.S.—a chance not to be lost!

“Now, my dear old friend,” I said, in my most ingratiating manner, “you know my firm faith in such matters. Would you feel inclined to be very unselfish and invite me to spend a couple of nights with you? I should know if your house is really haunted or not, and, if it is, how best to procure peace

for the poor earthbound spirit, so that your difficulty about a servant” (what bathos!) “might be overcome.”

“Oh, would you?” breathed Miss North. “It’s just what I was wishing so much to ask you, only I hardly liked to venture, it seemed so presumptuous—*you*, who are so busy, so important!”

“Certainly I would,” I assured her, with fervour.

“And you would not mind the discomfort? A servant only in the mornings, no electric light, no bathroom!”

“Not a scrap. I should enjoy the little change, not to speak,” I laughed indulgently, “of my keen interest in your haunted abode.”

“Thank you, thank you very much,” she quavered, drawing on her gloves. “Then shall we say the sixteenth? I am returning this evening; I came up to get some mats for my spare room, and I should be quite ready for you by then. A great pleasure.”

I consulted my engagement tablets. “Let me see, the sixteenth—Mrs. Gill’s séance, and a lecture on spiritualism by Mr. O’Donovan. Never mind, I’ll get out of both. Yes, the sixteenth, dear Miss North, will suit me admirably.”

Before we parted it was arranged that I should travel down by an afternoon train, and that Miss North should order the village fly to meet me at the station, four miles distant from her home. When she had tiptoed from the room, like some nervous little animal, I sat and thought. Now why had she wriggled out of telling me that story? Obviously there was one, and obviously she was acquainted with it. Her reticence had only increased my interest; I felt I could hardly exist until I was in a position to investigate the mystery for myself. What a piece of luck—no doubt I had been “led” to do so by occult forces, that marvellous chain of communication in the spirit world always at work about us, ever seeking to make use of those still in the flesh who are sympathetic, who cultivate understanding, grope after enlightenment. I folded my hands, made my mind a blank, waited, so that, if perchance there was some message, it might reach me unhindered. And the conviction became overwhelming that *I* was the instrument chosen to set at rest the hapless spirit that disturbed the peace of Miss North’s unexpected inheritance.

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It was a beautiful evening when I arrived at the door of White Cottage, a genuinely ancient, oak-beamed dwelling, that stood back from the village in



a delicious garden, a soothing contrast to a couple of modern villas that had sprung up on either side. The wonder was that the little house had hitherto escaped destruction, for it must have been centuries old.

Miss North stood in the porch to receive me. She looked surprisingly different; no longer a hesitating downtrodden victim of fate, but a calm, self-contained hostess, sure of her position as mistress of this enchanting refuge from the world. Her dress harmonized with her surroundings; until now I had never seen her clothed in anything but drab, ill-fitting garments that proclaimed genteel poverty without hope or effort. And here she was, in a soft lilac gown with exquisite lace at her throat and wrists, and a lappet to match concealing her scanty grey hair. Her cheeks were pink, and her eyes tranquil. I could hardly believe it was the same Miss North.

We sat down to a high tea, waiting on ourselves, for which she made no apology; and she smiled serenely as I admired the antique furniture, the priceless old china, the taste with which everything was arranged.

“It is all just as I found it,” she told me, disclaiming any credit. “My great-aunt was close on a hundred when she died; she had lived here all her life, and her parents and grandparents before her. They never sold a thing. There is a chest full of plate; but I will show you that to-morrow. Come, now, and see your room. I hope you will like it.”

I should think I did! A low-ceilinged chamber, running the length of the house, with a latticed window at each end. The bed, a stout four-poster, hung and spread with delicate old needlework; real willow-patterned china on the three-cornered washstand, a folding dressing-table with a well, and a little Jacobean writing bureau that made my mouth water. Nothing modern in the room except the mats on the worm-eaten boards of the floor; and Miss North had made quite an inoffensive selection.

I looked about me with pleasure. “Delightful!” I murmured. “And is this—do tell me, you know I’m not nervous—is this the haunted room?”

Miss North sidled to the dressing-table, rearranged a couple of old glass candlesticks and a picture-topped pomatum jar, before she answered: “I really can’t tell which part of the house is said to be haunted. That is what I hope *you* may be able to discover. As I said before, I have never heard or seen anything I could not account for.”

“I understand,” I said civilly, though I felt cross with her.

“To-morrow,” she went on, “I will take you all over the house. Meantime it is a pity to waste this sweet evening. I will clear away the tea-things while

you unpack, and then we might take a stroll if you are not too fatigued?"

I should have preferred to explore the house then and there, but good manners as well as a certain obstinate note in Miss North's pernickety speech, forbade my saying so. Consequently we "strolled," wandered through the village that was incredibly Arcadian, almost stage-like, with its low thatched roofs clustered about a squat little Norman church; and there was actually a pound, and stocks, and a pond wherein, so said Miss North, a reputed witch had been ducked not so many years ago. But charmed as I was with the old-world atmosphere, I felt impatient for nightfall, yearned to find myself alone in my bedroom, free to lie and listen, my mind receptive, my whole being bent on extending help should some earthbound spirit be clinging to the premises.

It was still light, when, after a simple supper, we went to bed, carrying up our hot-water cans that Miss North filled in the kitchen. Possibly I was more exhausted than I realized, what with the heat and the tedium of the journey. Anyway, amid the profound peace and quiet I quickly and inadvertently fell asleep.

I awoke to hear a clock somewhere in the house strike two; and then I became conscious that something—someone unhappy, beseeching, insistent, had entered my room.

I held my breath, concentrating my whole attention on the uncertain sound that was like a faint footfall scarcely touching the boards. With all my mental strength I put forth sympathy, encouragement; and in the course of the next few minutes there came three distinct taps close to the head of my bed.

"Try to answer me," I whispered; "if anyone is there, tap again."

A long silence—broken at last by a succession of hasty taps on the farther side of the room, followed by a fluttering movement, so light, so furtive, that it might have been caused by a large moth. I lit my candle, rose and searched everywhere, found no moth, nor anything that could account for the sound; but as I shook curtains, groped and peered, leaving nothing to chance, the taps resounded all about me, and a chill breath passed over my hands and my face. I knew what it was, I had experienced it on other occasions; without doubt a disembodied spirit was attempting communication. But in spite of my efforts I could get no intelligible response to my patient inquiries, and in time the tappings ceased altogether. Until dawn began to creep in at the windows I waited, but heard nothing

further; and I feared that unless some clue to the manifestations were obtainable I should be powerless to give help.

Again I slept, and was awakened by a stout woman who lugged in a hip-bath and a can of hot water. I determined to pump her; she might be induced to impart the story of the “ghost,” if she knew it. But when I remarked brightly that it was a beautiful morning she made no reply, she was stone deaf.

Miss North evinced lively interest when I related what I had heard in the night-time; nevertheless she suggested rats, decaying woodwork, night breezes? I ruled out such solutions, reminded her that I knew what I was talking about.

“Something supernatural is certainly attached to this house,” I concluded, with emphasis, “and I can only hope that more definite manifestations may take place to-night.”

She echoed the hope, argued no more; and we spent a pleasant morning examining the treasures in every room. I found she knew almost as much as I did about old furniture. We ended up in the dining-room, where she unlocked a cupboard that contained a plate chest, and from it produced some rare bits of silver, among them, to my envy, *five* undeniable Cromwellian spoons—all in perfect condition, the marks on them as clear as if they had but lately left the silversmith’s hands.

“Nice, aren’t they?” she said. “But there ought to be six; one of the set is missing.”

“What a pity!” I exclaimed. “I suppose you have no idea what became of it?”

“I believe it was stolen, stolen by a maid-servant. Oh, not within my recollection! It happened ages ago, when people were hanged for theft.”

“And was the thief hanged?”

“I don’t think so. I have always understood that she was convicted and sentenced to death, but died in prison.”

“Poor thing! Perhaps she wasn’t really guilty, perhaps she died of a broken heart. Ah!” I cried, with growing excitement, “*that* might account — Now, why on earth didn’t you tell me this before? You declared you knew of no story! Of course, the whole thing is perfectly clear—a guiltless human being, falsely accused, and the poor creature’s spirit will never rest until her innocence has been proved.”

“Well, perhaps,” said Miss North dubiously; “it never occurred to me.”

She replaced the silver in the chest. Tiresome old thing! If she had only had the sense yesterday to tell me all about the spoon! And now there was so little time. I had to be back in London the following afternoon for a meeting at which I had to take the chair. I could only do my utmost to-night to get into useful communication with the being from the other side, and if I failed I must induce Miss North to invite me again for a longer visit.

The rest of the day we spent chiefly in the garden, knitting and conversing on commonplace matters; the air was invigorating, the peace welcome, and I gained strength for what might be required of me that night.

Never shall I forget that night! As before, we went to bed early, and I took up a book with me to keep myself awake, though, indeed, I felt anything but sleepy. For a space I sat beside one of the windows, enjoying the calm of the summer night, the scent of the honeysuckle that covered the porch, and allowed my mind to dwell with all the sympathy at my command on the melancholy story of the missing spoon. That unfortunate girl! I imagined her helplessness, her despair; visioned her white and trembling as she was taken away covered with disgrace, unable to prove her innocence; then the prison, the prospect of the gallows, death, and a poor soul crying out for justice.

Darkness fell, there was no moon, and I sat on, reluctant to light my candle; it might disturb the conditions, render communication more difficult. The silence became oppressive, charged with effort on my part, with effort on the part of another, for gradually I became aware that I was not alone. The strain was awful. Then I heard the faint tapping, first at the head of the bed, again at the farther end of the room, finally close beside me.

I spoke quietly, firmly: “I know of your trouble. If I can help you, give me some sign.”

No sound. I had almost abandoned hope when suddenly the door swung open, and I received the impression that I was being urged to go out on the landing. Without hesitation I rose, I felt my way to the door. I had not been mistaken, the door was wide open, and I passed out, stood to listen. Someone was crying at the foot of the staircase. Oh, the hopeless distress, the utter misery of that weeping! I crept down the stairs. The sobs ceased, but I was drawn as by a magnet along the narrow passage that led to the kitchen, and came up against the closed door. Passing my hand over the panels, I found the old-fashioned latch, raised it, stepped forward, saw the glow of live ashes in the range. Next moment there was a loud knock, just

beneath my feet, a knock so decisive, so commanding that I knew I had been guided to the very spot that held the key to the “haunting.” Then the tension weakened. No longer was I in touch with the spirit world, and I stood powerless, devitalized, yet in a sense triumphant. If I could prevail on Miss North to have the boards raised at this spot, just over the kitchen threshold, I had not a doubt but that something bearing upon the message I had received would there be discovered.

I went straight to the point when we met next morning, told her of my experiences, and urged her to have those boards raised without delay. At first she avoided my gaze and said nothing.

“I would willingly defray the cost,” I went on, feeling desperate. “The inconvenience for you would be trifling, and I’m ready to guarantee you would have no further trouble over servants. The proof of that wretched girl’s innocence *lies there!*”

“But think of the mess, the upset,” she protested. “I have a horror of workmen about the place. And if it was all for nothing? Rats *do* cause queer noises, and there’s a sick baby next door that wails; *I* have never heard or seen anything.”

I cut short this parrot cry. “*Can’t* you understand? Have you no pity?”

To my relief she looked slightly ashamed.

“Please don’t distress yourself,” she said, hastily. “I will think it over.”

“Do,” I besought her, “and, believe me, you won’t regret it if you have those boards taken up.”

“I will let you know, I will write and tell you. Yes,” with an air of capitulation, “I will follow your advice.”

“Bless you!” I said. And we exchanged friendly smiles.

I was to catch an early train; the village fly was already at the door, my suitcase on the box; I had tipped the deaf woman handsomely before leaving my room. Nothing now remained but to take leave of my hostess, and to await the fulfilment of her promise.

Three weeks later I opened an envelope addressed to me in Miss North’s handwriting, and read:—

“MY DEAR,

“I am so sorry to have to put you off, but drains are to blame. The inheritance of a very old house is not all pure joy. To begin with, as I told you, I was hampered with a foolish tale of a ghost which prevented my keeping a servant, but just as I thought I had captured a treasure with no nerves or fancies, I was laid low with a bad throat, and apparently drains were to blame. So now my kitchen is in chaos, and for the time being I am lodged in the village inn. But I shall soon be tidy again, and am much looking forward to seeing you. My last guest was our mutual acquaintance, Mrs. Dale. She is, as you know, a real crank, and a conceited, overbearing one at that!—besides being obsessed with spiritualistic rubbish. In a weak moment I told her my house was supposed to be haunted, and nothing would do but she must come here for a couple of nights in order that she might ‘investigate’ for herself. She came, and, of course, heard significant noises. Then I confess I played a trick on her—may I be forgiven! But she brought it on herself with her absurd beliefs and domineering ways. I invented a story about that missing Cromwellian spoon, said it had been stolen long ago by a maid-servant who was sentenced to be hanged for the theft, but died in prison. She swallowed it all, made up her mind that it was a case of false accusation, and that the ghost of the victim walked the house. Then she declared she had heard sounds at the foot of the staircase, and had been ‘led’ to a certain spot in the kitchen. She wanted me to have the boards taken up, and offered to pay expenses. Naturally I had no intention of doing anything of the kind; but now, owing to drains, I have been forced to have the whole floor of the kitchen raised. And what do you think?—wedged into a hole near the door the skeleton of a rat was discovered with the missing spoon in its mouth! I am writing to our psychic friend by this post to tell her of the find, though, needless to say, I have made no confession of my little bit of fiction, neither have I mentioned drains! It would seem cruel to deprive her of the satisfaction of believing that she had spotted a real ghost. Of course, it was nothing on her part but the result of what I understand is termed ‘expectant attention,’ otherwise imagination . . .”

Boiling with rage, I flung down the letter, which clearly was not intended for me, but had been placed in the wrong envelope. I now understood why I had always disliked Miss North. My instinct had not

deceived me; she was a mean, despicable character. So *I* was a crank, conceited, overbearing, with absurd beliefs! And to think of her having invented——

Then, all at once, in the midst of my anger and bewilderment, I began to see daylight. I collected my thoughts, re-read the letter, and bit by bit I realized that Miss North had *not* invented that story of the spoon, but that with diabolical cunning she had devised this underhand method of leading me to believe that I had wasted my time and my money and my energies, and had been fooled into the bargain! It was no case of wrong envelopes. “My dear” did not exist. She had written no other letter to me by the same post; the whole thing was a spiteful, contemptible ruse. Well, it had not succeeded. I did not doubt that drains had forced her to have her kitchen floor raised, nor that the spoon had been found in the jaws of the skeleton rat; but as for believing that she had invented the story of the maid-servant and the theft—no, a thousand times *no*! I only rejoiced that the truth had at last come to light, however accidentally, and that in consequence a tortured spirit must now be at rest.

But never shall I forgive Miss North, and the next time we meet I shall cut her dead.

## THE TIGER'S LUCK-BONE



## THE TIGER'S LUCK-BONE

The Government House ball was nearly over. Captain Mowbray had danced half the night with Mrs. Rivington, though this was nothing unusual; for the last few weeks he had, to quote public opinion, been making a fool of himself over Mrs. Rivington. A pity, it was agreed, when he was quite in a position to marry, and if he wanted to fall in love there were so many nice girls up at Pahari this season. Stella Dare for example—charming, unaffected, quick-witted, exceptionally pretty; the man who won that girl for his wife would be lucky! It was a marvel she hadn't been snapped up before now—not that she lacked eligible suitors; Mr. Walpole among others, a rising civilian, made no secret of his hopes and intentions, and was for ever at the Dares' big bungalow, attended all their "shows"—and they entertained freely, Mr. Dare being a mightily senior official, almost next in importance to the Governor himself.

But apparently Miss Dare did not wish to marry Mr. Walpole, or anyone else, as far as gossips could discover; and none of them guessed that the only man she had yet met who attracted her seriously was Ronald Mowbray.

At the beginning of the season a friendship had sprung up between the two; they had ridden, danced, played games light-heartedly together, until Mrs. Rivington arrived, straight from London, to astonish Pahari with her wonderful wardrobe and artistic ideas, her beguiling dark eyes, skin like white velvet, and her voice. Someone who posed as an authority on voices declared that she sang better than Melba and Clara Butt rolled into one!

In no time she had turned the heads of half the men in the station; they pronounced her "divine." This infatuated crowd included young Mowbray, and him she quickly appointed her vassal-in-chief.

Colonel Rivington, by the way, commanded a cavalry regiment somewhere in the plains; those who knew (and disliked) him, said he was an ugly, morose individual, and that it was no wonder his wife went home, or escaped to hill stations, whenever she had the chance.

Stella Dare showed no sign of disconsolation when Ronald Mowbray deserted her for Mrs. Rivington. If they met she greeted him naturally without hint or question of reproach in her sea-blue eyes—never seemed to notice that he looked shame faced, apologetic; for, despite Mrs. Rivington's allurements, he felt humbled, mortified by the girl's attitude towards him;

and often he hankered for her society, could not resist making for her side, when Mrs. Rivington wasn't looking, always with a lurking hope that Stella might betray some faint symptom of pique. Had she done so it was probable that Mrs. Rivington would have been forced to select a new head slave.

To-night he had asked Miss Dare for a dance, half apprehending a snub, but she allotted him one readily, low down on the programme, and now as they left the ballroom together, their dance over, he thought with a pang at his heart how angelic the girl looked in her white frock, with her crown of golden curls and delicately cut little face.

They had danced in silence, and in silence they wandered to a seat outside in the garden. All around bloomed honeysuckle, jessamine, roses; the air was heavy with scent. A full moon shed its glory over the vast Indian landscape, irradiating range upon range of mountains, bridging the deep valleys, glistening on the everlasting snow peaks that towered so high as to appear almost overhead.

Away, on the top of the opposite hill, among the ilex and oak and rhododendron trees there gleamed a white patch, the whitewashed walls of a forest rest-house that was a favourite honeymoon refuge when weddings took place at Pahari. And irresistibly, drawn by the golden magic of the night, by the pure sweet presence of the girl at his side, the knowledge stole trembling into the young man's heart of all it would have meant to him, could he have hoped to find himself in that solitary bungalow with Stella as his bride. What an unutterable fool he had been! A distress so great overcame him that he could have knelt in an agony of contrition and entreaty at her feet, beseeching her forgiveness, her understanding, her love.

As in a dream he heard her say: "What a night! Isn't it wonderful? Just look at the snows. One can hardly believe they are real."

Then, because he made no answer, she turned to him with a little laugh: "Why, I believe you're asleep!"

"I'm not!" he burst out. "I'm only miserable, wretched—I could shoot myself!"

"Dear, dear! Is it as bad as all that?" There was an impersonal note of concern in her voice. "I'm so sorry. Why don't you try going away for a bit; shoot tigers or something? Anything but yourself."

Bitterly he realized that she attributed his plight to a hopeless passion for Mrs. Rivington! He must indeed have sunk low in her sight if she could imagine him capable of an attempt to confide such a reason to her—of all

people. In any case, he had lost her friendship, destroyed all chance of ever gaining her love by his own weak yieldance to a passing temptation. And although it was true that the whole affair had merely been a matter of flattered vanity, silly senses bewitched for the time being, it came to the same thing as if it had been more wicked than foolish. Nothing could make any difference now.

“Stella!” he cried piteously, unable to control himself.

At that moment the band struck up within the big building; also at that moment another couple came strolling along the path—Mrs. Rivington with her last partner. She floated towards them, like a siren in her flame-coloured draperies; and Miss Dare stood up.

“Hark! There’s the next dance,” she said briskly. “And here comes Mrs. Rivington.”

She and that lady exchanged polite platitudes on the beauty of the night, and the four of them moved together towards the veranda. Suddenly Stella stopped short, her hand to the front of her dress.

“My brooch!” she exclaimed. “I’ve lost my brooch!”

“Oh! What a bore for you,” sympathized Mrs. Rivington. “What kind of a brooch was it, anything valuable?”

“Only of value to me—a tiger’s luck-bone, my mascot. I should hate to lose it. I’m almost sure it was all right when I left the ballroom just now.”

She turned towards the seat she had just left, and Ronald Mowbray turned with her; Mrs. Rivington turned too, keeping close to them.

“We’ll help you look for it,” she volunteered; and for a space they all stooped and peered, searching beneath and around the seat, up and down the pathway, but without success.

“Never mind,” said Stella at last, “perhaps, after all, it dropped off in the ballroom.”

“What on earth *is* a tiger’s luck-bone?” Mrs. Rivington inquired.

“It’s the little curved bone that is found in the muscles of a tiger’s shoulder,” explained her partner, a person addicted to big-game shooting, “and no one quite knows what’s the use of it. Natives think the bone awfully lucky, a sort of charm, and they always bag it if they get half a chance, just as they will the claws and whiskers as well. One has to supervise the

skinning business carefully after killing a tiger. If a native picks up your brooch, Miss Dare, I'm afraid you're not likely to see it back."

"I'll offer a good reward," said Stella. "I'd give anything, I'm so fond of that brooch. But it can't be helped now; we must go back to the ballroom."

She led the way, and Ronald Mowbray had no further speech with her that night. He was engaged to Mrs. Rivington for the rest of the programme, but he felt a wild desire to get away, to hide himself, no matter where or how, provided he could escape from her wiles.

Stella's words echoed in his mind: "Why don't you try going away for a bit, shoot tigers or something——" He thought of her distress at the loss of her mascot, the luck-bone brooch; and then and there he determined to spend the rest of his leave in the jungle after tiger.

At least he might gain the small satisfaction of sending her a new brooch; he visioned it, mounted in purest gold, studded with diamonds. That would be the main object of his expedition; and possibly the excitement of sport would ease his heartache, help him to bear the hard punishment for his folly.

But afterwards? He made no attempt to face that question. Tiger hunting on foot was a dangerous game; perhaps he would never return. Just as well if he didn't!

In desperation he lied, told Mrs. Rivington he had a touch of fever, said he felt rotten (which at any rate was true), and thought he had better clear out and go to bed. She regarded him with covert attention, noted that his eyes were following a slim white figure that swung round the ballroom in the arms of Mr. Walpole. Not for a moment did she believe in the touch of fever; of late she had had her suspicions, and now she felt positive that, given the opportunity, he would once more devote himself to Stella Dare. She had no notion of permitting this to happen. Her pride was at stake.

"I'm tired, too," she said. "Come and have supper before you go; some champagne will do us both good."

Relieved, he assented; in the supper-room they would not be alone, and a drink might steady his nerves, brace his decision to announce that he intended to go to the plains, though he knew this would sound absurd. People did not leave the hills in the middle of the hot weather for the good of their health! But he lacked courage to tell her the truth, and he could think of no other excuse.

Mrs. Rivington looked exquisite, seated opposite to him at the little table they had chosen in a corner of the brilliantly lit supper-room; and again for the moment her enchantment laid hold of his senses as she gazed at him caressingly, said in her low, seductive voice: "Poor dear boy! You certainly don't look quite the thing. Ah! if only, if only I could take you in hand and look after you!"

With an effort he resisted her spell, avoided her eyes. He was on the point of blurting out his decision when she sighed, and went on sadly: "How difficult life can be. I never realized it before. I suppose because"—her voice trembled—"because I never really cared——" She paused, then smiled, a wistful, pathetic little smile, and he felt a despicable, dishonest brute. This wonderful woman loved him, believed that he loved her, while for his part he only yearned to escape from an awkward and painful situation.

"There!" she murmured tenderly. "Don't look so miserable. Who knows what the future may hold for us? It's only when I see other people——" She cast her eyes round the room. "Look at those two, for instance; they are clearly in love, and nothing stands in the way of *their* happiness!"

He followed her gaze, to see Stella and Mr. Walpole seating themselves at a table. The pair looked content in each other's company, and the sight proved too much for the nerve-racked young man. He rose.

"My head feels queer," he muttered; and, indeed, the lights of the room seemed to spin round him. "If you don't mind I will slip away."

Mrs. Rivington laid her hand on his arm as he stood, hesitating, beside her.

"Yes, do go," she said softly. "I shall be all right; don't worry about me. Come and see me to-morrow if you're better; if not, let me know. I shall feel so anxious, so unhappy until I see you again."

Unsteadily he left the room amid the babel of voices and the clatter of service, thankful that she could not read his thoughts. By this time to-morrow he would be well away from Pahari, far from her toils, free from the torture of witnessing Walpole's successful courtship of Stella Dare.

"Sahib, sahib, sahib——"

The low, monotonous summons roused Mowbray from a heavy sleep, to see the wizened countenance of the old tracker he had engaged peering into

the single-poled tent. Dawn had broken, a hot, dry dawn, and already the sun blazed fiercely over the parched tract of country stretching to the dark line of the forest in the distance.

“What is it?” he asked, still hardly awake.

The answer dispelled his drowsiness, and he listened eagerly as in primitive patois the old man related how, the previous evening, one of a party of villagers driving home cattle had been struck down by a tiger and carried off into a patch of jungle close to the forest. A number of the villagers had arrived at the camp with the object of imploring the sahib to set forth at once and destroy the enemy.

As Mowbray left his tent, having dressed hurriedly, he was assailed by a pitiful crew, almost naked, half starved, who crawled embarrassingly at his feet to make their petition. The spokesman poured forth a terrible tale; for weeks past, he said, the village had been at the mercy of a man-eating tiger, a malignant devil of fearful appearance and size, who had power to render himself invisible, and was doubtless protected by the spirits of his numerous victims.

At nights the people barricaded themselves into their huts; they dared not go forth except in large bodies, and even then the fiend had more than once held up parties while he rolled and purred in the dust, or would walk round them deliberately, making his choice.

Work was almost at a standstill, cattle and crops were suffering grievously from enforced neglect; a neighbouring village had been altogether deserted by the inhabitants on account of the tiger's depredations, and until the beast was killed no human being could feel safe. As it was, they had journeyed to the sahib's camp at the risk of their lives; but so far as was known the murderer was still concealed in the patch of jungle into which he had borne his last prey; he had not been seen to leave it, though his cunning was such that none could be sure of his movements. One hour he might be heard of as having killed a man or woman miles away; the next he would be prowling round the village.

Mowbray was ready, and they all started for the scene of the tragedy. Arrived on the outskirts of the forest they advanced cautiously step by step until a point was gained, protected by a clump of bushes, from which a view could be commanded of the fatal patch of scrub. Just outside the patch lay a torn, blood-stained piece of cloth, a sickening token of what had happened.

Mowbray stood, rifle in hand, his pulses athrob with excitement as the tracker threw a clod of hard soil into the cover, but there came no stir, no rustle, nothing happened. Was the tiger still in his ambush, or had he gone to seek water and lie up beside a pool digesting the ghastly meal?

Suddenly the tracker touched his arm and pointed. Something was moving along the edge of the forest, something as yet indistinct, but in a few moments there was no mistaking the long striped body and square head of a very large tiger, creeping, crouching stealthily, then sinking flat on his belly, like a cat stalking a bird. What was he stalking, on what was he so intent?

Mowbray raised his rifle, yet he felt reluctant to fire, it was too long a shot for certain aim; and as he hesitated one of the villagers cried out: "My child, my son!" and threw himself face downwards on the ground. Instantly the tiger slid back into the undergrowth, disappeared, and next moment Mowbray saw, with horror, what the tiger had been watching, understood why the man had cried out. A little naked child was straying fearlessly across the open space from whence the tiger had vanished. Truly a helpless tempting bait!

He started forward.

"Wait, sahib, wait!" cautioned the tracker.

But regardless of the warning, Mowbray raced over the rough ground, leaping tummocks of dry grass, brushing through thorny scrub, making for the child, which now stood still, finger in mouth, startled by the sight of the strange apparition bounding towards him, shouting. Then with a squeal of terror, the mite took to his heels in the direction of the forest, and fell down.

Exactly what followed Mowbray could never afterwards remember very clearly. He knew he reached the scrap of humanity screaming on the ground; that he was standing astride of it when, with a hissing, growling roar, the tiger sprang out, ears flat, eyes glaring, fangs bared, a frightful spectacle of ferocity; that he fired both barrels, saw the beast leap into the air. The huge body seemed to rise above him, and he went down beneath it, crushed to the hard, baked earth.

Next he found himself in what he took to be a species of oven, dark, malodorous, stifling. He tried to rise, but sank back, overcome with agony in his right shoulder. Dimly he perceived a crowd of lean, brown forms, surrounding him, jabbering, keeping the air from his lungs. Were they devils! Where was he? With his left arm he struck out, gasping, swearing, and the demons melted away, only to gather again.

Someone held a vessel to his lips, and he drank greedily of water that was tepid, none too sweet, but the draught revived him, and slowly he became aware that he was lying on a rude string bedstead that sagged beneath his weight; the “devils” were merely hapless villagers who, long ages ago, had besought him to rid them of a man-eating tiger. Since then, where had he been?

His mind wandered again. He was groping in the moonlight for something he had lost, something he held dear. He could not recollect what it was, only that he had lost it through his own fault. It had been spirited away, far off, to where a white patch showed on the slope of a distant hill. He made an effort to reach the spot, but some being in flame-coloured draperies held him back, mocking him, weighting his limbs with golden chains. He struggled on; now a little brown child lay in his way, a child in hideous danger. Nothing could save it but a mascot, a tiger’s luck-bone—tiger, tiger—bursting from the jungle, ears flat, eyes glaring red—with a roar like thunder!

“Sahib, sahib, sahib!”

With difficulty Mowbray turned his racking head, and beheld his old tracker, distraught with anxiety, squatting beside the bedstead. There he was, quite distinct and in the flesh, backed by an agitated cluster of jungle people.

“Where is the child?” he inquired, his brain clearing.

A small brown object was pushed forward, reluctant, terrified, but living, safe. A quavering grateful voice reached Mowbray’s hearing.

“By thine honour’s favour, the little one be here, and unhurt.”

The quaint speech made him laugh weakly, but the laugh ended in a groan, for the pain in his back and shoulder was excruciating.

“And the tiger,” went on the voice, “the evil one lieth dead without—also by thine honour’s favour.”

“That is well,” he muttered, endeavouring desperately to keep hold of his senses; not that he minded if he was to die of his injuries, or from blood poisoning, but he should prefer to die in his camp rather than in this suffocating hole, where every breath was a torture. Also, there was something he wanted—the little bone from the tiger’s shoulder. Surely the villagers would not grudge him the treasure. And if only he could retain strength to get back to the camp, there to pencil a message——



Feebly he beckoned to the tracker, gasped out his wishes, and, in consequence, as the sun sank in a haze of red dust, a little procession started for the sahib's camp. In front, hoisted bier fashion on men's shoulders, a string bedstead on which lay a helpless, unconscious form; walking beside it the tracker, carrying a pith hat and a couple of rifles; behind, a crowd of people who no longer glanced about them in terror, for in their midst, slung on a pole, was a skin roughly peeled from the carcass of a huge tiger.

Stella Dare sat idle and unhappy in the verandah of the hill bungalow. Her sweet face was troubled, but not because she had just refused Mr. Walpole's proposal of marriage. A few moments ago he had left her, had ridden resignedly down the hill-side, and she knew she had done right in telling him she could never marry a man she did not love; he knew it, too, and had taken her answer in the right spirit. For that she was grateful to him, and, perhaps in different circumstances, her answer might not have been quite so decisive. As it was, she could think of no one but Ronald Mowbray. Where was he? What had become of him? Would she ever see him again?

And then, as though in miraculous reply to her distressful queries, a coolie came toiling up the path, bearing a note that presently was handed to her by the orderly on duty. It was from the matron of the station hospital, who wrote that Captain Mowbray had been brought up, very ill, from the plains the previous evening. He was asking for Miss Dare.

In less than half an hour Stella was at the hospital.

"He was mauled by a tiger in the jungle," the matron told her, "and his servants only got him into the nearest station just in time. He all but died. When he was strong enough the doctors sent him up here, and he has stood the journey well enough, but we can hardly tell yet—" She paused, sympathizing with the girl's obvious tribulation. "Anyway, come and see him. It can't do him any harm. He keeps saying he has something he wants to give you."

Dumbly Stella followed the neat, blue-gowned figure up the staircase and into a large, airy room, where lay what looked like the ghost of Ronald Mowbray. He opened his eyes, smiled at her weakly.

"It's here," he whispered, with feeble triumph, and tried to grope beneath the pillow.

The matron came to his aid, produced something wrapped in a piece of rag that smelt evilly as Stella unwound it and saw a small curved bone,

scraps of dry flesh still sticking to it—a tiger’s luck-bone!

Tears rushed to her eyes. She could not speak as she knelt beside the man she loved, the little bone with its wrappings in her hand, and he added pitifully:

“It isn’t set in gold, with diamonds, as I meant—your brooch——”

She laid her hand in his, and as though all in a moment she had given him strength, his fingers tightened on hers, his eyes, dimmed and sunken with sickness, lit up.

“I did what you said—Stella!”

At this point the matron intervened with some draught in a cup, and ordered the visitor away, but gave permission for her return next morning, provided the patient had passed a good night. The patient looked volumes of promises, and next morning had so far progressed that when the visitor arrived, he was practically sitting up, looked a different being, and for a precious space the two found themselves alone.

Then Stella made a confession.

“I can never forgive myself,” she said humbly, tearfully, “and perhaps you won’t forgive me either. I *didn’t* lose a brooch. I made it all up. I never had a tiger’s luck-bone till now!”

“Then why—what——” he began, bewildered.

“Oh, don’t you *see*?” she interrupted. “That night at the ball, when you said ‘Stella’ like that, I suddenly understood. And then that horrid woman came along the path and I felt desperate. I thought, if I pretended that I’d lost a brooch, we could have gone back and hunted for it, you and I alone together. But she stuck to us. I’m sure she did it on purpose. I don’t know why I said it was a luck-bone brooch, except that you’d said something stupid about shooting yourself, and I’d said something about tigers, so it just came into my head. And then you went away. I didn’t know where——”

She broke down and cried, her head beside his on the pillow, and with tender words he stilled her sobs, his wasted arms about her.

Later he said: “The natives must be right about tigers’ luck-bones. You see, even the very thought of one brought us luck!”

“But at what a price! Oh, Ronnie, get well quickly!”

“I’m well now,” he boasted. “Take care of that blessed bone, darling, till I can send it down to Calcutta to be set in gold and diamonds—my first gift

to you.”

“No, no; not when it was my fault that it nearly cost you your life. I’ll keep it as it is, though at present it does smell horrid. Unless,” she added slyly, “you’d like to send it to Simla?”

“To Simla? Why Simla?”

“Well, you see, Mrs. Rivington’s gone there, and she’s not coming back \_\_\_\_\_”

“Thank the Lord!” he exclaimed, with astonishing vigour. “Another piece of luck!”

## THE GOOSEBERRY

## THE GOOSEBERRY

People in Jheelpore were surprised when they heard that Sylvia Spence had been invited to the Cloudsleys' Christmas camp. As a rule Mrs. Cloudsley ignored the station when she entertained under canvas in the district; she preferred to collect her guests from the big military cantonment that was half a day's journey from Jheelpore—Jheelpore being the humble headquarters of civilians only, and in the opinion of Mrs. Cloudsley a very dull lot of civilians too. With the exception of Mr. Nixon, her husband's assistant who timidly admired Mrs. Cloudsley, all were married; and all were intensely domestic, which is not so unusual in India, whatever may be said or written to the contrary.

Mrs. Cloudsley was a gay little person who got her clothes from Paris, went to the hills for the hot weather, and regarded herself as wasted on the elderly, brainy official she had married in order to escape a life of stagnation at home. She told her friends that Edward loved his work more than he loved her, which was not true, for he loved her sincerely in his own quiet fashion. He was indulgent, and did not mind how much money she spent within reason; he liked her to enjoy herself, but he drew the line at anything approaching to scandal. Therefore on occasions he could be tiresome, even make himself unpleasant, as for example when he arrived on leave unexpectedly at the hill station his wife had selected last year. He said that though he saw no harm in a pack of puppies for ever at her heels he strongly objected to a solitary jackal.

"You can act and dance and amuse yourself as much as you please," he had added, "but I won't have you talked about. Other people don't realize as I do that you mean no harm, and I'm not going to be labelled as a complaisant spouse. I told you so before, when you began playing the fool with that boy in the Ghoorkhas, whatever his name was—I've forgotten."

"But it's so *good* for a man out here to have a nice married woman for a friend," was Mrs. Cloudsley's time-honoured defence, delivered with the air of an injured innocent.

"All the same, it is not good for the nice married woman," was her husband's unfeeling retort. "So mind!"

Mrs. Cloudsley "minded" in more senses than one, but she dared not defy Edward; he had an odious habit of meaning what he said, and on the

occasion of “the boy in the Ghoorkhas” episode he had actually threatened to send her home to her people if she could not behave herself! Such a prospect was sufficiently appalling to reduce her to instant submission; the favoured one was dismissed with sorrowful hints of the hardships of some women’s lives, bondage to an unreasonable tyrant, and so on. Much the same tactics had to be employed with “the solitary jackal” last summer in the hills, and for the time being peace prevailed between the Cloudsleys.

Then at the beginning of the cold weather Mrs. Cloudsley went on a visit to the big military station that was half a day’s journey from Jheelpore; and there she attracted the attentions of a Major Tryng who was in India, under protest, with his English regiment. As a consequence Mrs. Cloudsley incurred the envy and hatred of those ladies in the station who were of her particular type, pretty, irresponsible females who, until Mrs. Cloudsley appeared with her original frocks, piquant face, and elegant figure, had been competing for Major Tryng’s company, the loan of his ponies, invitations to his entertainments, and the nice presents he gave.

But from the moment he was introduced to Mrs. Cloudsley on the polo ground, the very day of her arrival, he had no ears or eyes for any other woman; he drove with her, rode with her, danced with her only, and was clearly “hard hit.”

When it came to the date of her return to Jheelpore, that horrible hole where the exquisite being was incarcerated with a dull unappreciative husband, matters reached a climax. The two had ridden out together in the early morning.

“Our last ride!” as Major Tryng reminded his fair companion, pathos in his voice. “And *when* shall I see you again! You will write to me, Nina, won’t you—I shall live for your letters!”

She trembled and flushed. It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name. Nervously she glanced at him; how handsome he was, how well-bred, how English, how rich!—so different from the homely Indian official she had married, a man immersed in his work, who did not understand her, who never would understand her however long they might live together.

“I can’t write often,” she faltered, “and I can’t write freely.”

“Why, does your husband see your letters? What an intolerable state of affairs!”

She bent her head. “He is so jealous,” she murmured.

“I can’t wonder! But still, it’s rather hard luck on you—not to speak of myself. Why do adorable women always marry the wrong men!”

She sighed, then brightened. “Do you think you could manage to come to us for Christmas? We are having a Christmas camp in the district, and I can at any rate ask whom I like. Meantime, perhaps you had better not write anything—I mean anything private—I know you understand?”

“Yes, yes, of course. Only don’t forget you’ve asked me to your Christmas camp!”

But about Mrs. Cloudsley’s invitation to Sylvia Spence. Sylvia was the police-officer’s sister; she had come out from home six months ago to live with her brother and his wife because, so it was understood in the station, she had been left stranded, homeless, on the death of her mother. It was also no secret that her sister-in-law rather resented this addition to the household; hard enough for Mrs. Spence to manage on their pay with three children and debts, and now the burden of a girl whose miserable inheritance had only sufficed to pay her second class passage and provide a meagre outfit! And in addition the girl was plain, almost ugly. No hope of getting her married; what man in his senses would choose a portionless maiden with a turned-up nose, a mouth from ear to ear, and eyes that were green if any colour at all, though certainly her teeth were good, her complexion not so bad, and her expression intelligent. She was amiable, too, as even her sister-in-law admitted; she helped with the children and the housekeeping, was quite a clever dressmaker, and knew a lot about cooking and nursing. She had picked up the language surprisingly, and Mrs. Spence could now stay in bed with a headache, feeling that all would be well in Sylvia’s charge.

When Sylvia received Mrs. Cloudsley’s invitation for the Christmas camp Mrs. Spence felt aggrieved.

“I call it extraordinary, not to say rude,” she complained, “when so far she has never asked *us* to anything but tea and tennis. Do you want to go, Sylvia?”

Sylvia’s green eyes narrowed and her mouth turned up at the corners. She said: “I wouldn’t tell a lie for the world!”

“Which means, I suppose, that you accept the invitation. I think it rather selfish of you I must say, when you know that the Deputy Inspector General will be in the station and we shall have to give a dinner party; and the ayah says she wants ten days’ leave for her son’s wedding—of course she will

stay away a month, or never come back. I'm sure I don't know how I shall manage."

Quite unexpectedly Mr. Spence intervened. He said he thought Sylvia ought to go; it was a chance for her to have a little fun—she might even make a conquest of one of the bachelor guests! His wife thought this extremely unlikely, though she withheld the opinion, only remarking that she could not imagine why Mrs. Cloudsley should have pitched upon Sylvia when she must know so many attractive girls she might have invited instead. . . .

All the same Mrs. Spence talked about the invitation with a certain secret pride that evening in the ladies' room of the little club, while Sylvia took the children for a drive in the bullock shigram. The attitude of her audience annoyed her. The doctor's wife suggested that perhaps Mrs. Cloudsley wanted a foil; the wife of the Canal Engineer said that probably Mrs. Cloudsley only meant to be kind, knowing what a dull time the poor girl must have; and Mrs. Clapp, whose husband was Roads and Buildings, voiced a theory that Sylvia was to be employed as a blind! Mrs. Cloudsley might have some dangerous admirer she wished to pair off with a safe female so that the husband's suspicions might not be aroused. Mrs. Clapp went on to relate a harrowing story in illustration of this theory—how a very fast lady of her acquaintance had resorted to such a stratagem, the result being suicide of the broken-hearted cat's-paw! Whereupon Mrs. Spence, as she told her husband afterwards, "got her back up," and informed the company that Sylvia was a remarkably clever girl, highly educated and accomplished, who would be an asset at any social gathering, as Mrs. Cloudsley had of course recognized; Sylvia could easily earn her own livelihood in any capacity, only her brother was so old-fashioned in his ideas about women that he wouldn't hear of such a thing, and so on. But her hearers sat silent, incredulous, exasperating. . . .

How Mrs. Clapp would have chuckled could she have overheard the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Cloudsley on the first day of the Christmas camp, while the guests were settling into the tents prepared for them.

"Edward dear, I don't think you will like Major Tryng very much, I can't say I do myself; but when I met him last month he confided to me that he wanted to get married, and I immediately thought of Sylvia Spence, a nice, good girl. That was why I asked her. It would be a splendid thing for her if she took Major Tryng's fancy; he's just the sort of man who wouldn't mind a plain wife. A bother for me chaperoning them and trying to make up the



match, but I'd like to do Sylvia a good turn, poor dear; she has had such a rotten time with those horrid relations."

Edward agreed and wished her success, but he said that Major Tryng did not look to him exactly the sort of fellow who wouldn't mind a plain wife! However, there was no knowing—he might regard it as convenient?

"What a nasty thing to say!" cried his wife in righteous reproach.

Later in the day Mrs. Clapp would have chuckled again had she been a fly on the tree beneath which Mrs. Cloudsley and Major Tryng were loitering.

"You see what I mean," Mrs. Cloudsley adjured her companion. "I am supposed to be match-making. You must pretend to be awfully fetched with Miss Spence."

"All right. Which was Miss Spence?"

"The ugly girl with a wide mouth and green eyes. I introduced you to her when everybody was arriving."

"What am I to do? Squeeze her large hands and gaze into her green eyes, I suppose. Am I obliged to kiss her wide mouth?"

Humour was not one of Mrs. Cloudsley's strong points; she grew a trifle impatient. "No, of course not! Only just sit by her in public and talk to her, so that the others, particularly Edward, may think you are paying her attention. The girl herself doesn't matter, she's a nonentity."

Major Tryng promised to obey orders; then, after a cautious glance round, he kissed Mrs. Cloudsley and was weakly rebuked for the dangerous indiscretion.

Next morning the whole party set forth on elephants to shoot small game, all in good spirits, enjoying the clear cold weather air and the brilliant sunshine. Major Tryng and Mrs. Cloudsley were in the same howdah, Miss Spence seated behind them. While her two elders conversed in low tones the girl was absorbed in all the new sights she beheld; the marvels of the jungle, the birds of gay plumage, the creatures that scuttled away from the elephant's path; little hog-deer, furtive jackals, an old boar that caused the elephant to smite the ground with his trunk and use bad language; once an enormous snake. Also the sport interested Sylvia keenly. Major Tryng was a good shot; he brought down partridge, sand-grouse, quail,—never a miss—and his was the biggest bag when a halt was called for luncheon in sight of a chain of swamps; waterfowl was to be shot afterwards, on foot.

During luncheon Major Tryng sat beside Miss Spence. He carried out orders implicitly, talked hard to the girl and they both laughed a good deal. Mrs. Cloudsley caught her husband's eye and smiled significantly. Edward only shrugged his shoulders, and that evening in their tent before dinner he told his wife she was only wasting her time.

"It's not the smallest use," he said. "Why should a fellow like that want to marry out here when at home he can pick and choose? Heir to a title, isn't he?—and with a fine fat income. If you're death on match-making, much better palm the girl off on young Nixon. He followed her about I noticed after tiffin."

"You don't know what you are talking about," his wife assured him, and he did not trouble to contradict her.

At dinner she placed Major Tryng and Miss Spence together, not too far from herself, but Mr. Nixon had somehow contrived to get the other side of Miss Spence though it was not the seat allotted to him; and the tiresome girl talked to the younger man the whole time, while Major Tryng sulked—because he had not been permitted to sit next his hostess.

Edward proved exasperating next morning. He arranged, without consulting his wife, that Major Tryng and Miss Spence should join him on his elephant, and Mrs. Cloudsley was forced to endure the company of Mr. Nixon and one of the least lively of her camp guests. To add to her annoyance, after dinner that night, somebody produced a banjo to which Sylvia Spence sang a charming little coon song delighting the company; then a gay French ditty that seemed to amuse Major Tryng hugely. Mrs. Cloudsley did not understand French, and she wished she had never invited the girl to the camp; the little wretch was not so plain after all, she made quite an effective picture in the lamplight with her wealth of ash-coloured hair, her slim figure and long white neck; undoubtedly she possessed a certain style, charm—whatever the curious something that can compensate for the most irregular features. Mrs. Cloudsley could have boxed the pretty pink ears.

Mr. Nixon gazed at the singer entranced, and glued himself afterwards to her side, so that Major Tryng had no chance to pursue his deceptive attentions; he assured Mrs. Cloudsley that he was only too glad of the respite, and in mercy she spared him Miss Spence's company in a howdah next day, arranging to go alone with him herself, at least that was what she told him, though as a matter of fact Miss Spence had already gone off with

Edward and Mr. Nixon without reference to her. Edward of all people to make friends with the horrid girl, chaffing her, joking ponderously!

“That young woman is a born flirt,” she remarked to Major Tryng as they lurched along.

“Anyway she’s damned good company!” he replied indiscreetly; and it took him the rest of the morning to patch up the quarrel that followed.

For the next day or two Edward enraged his wife still further by contriving that the girl should go on the same elephant as Major Tryng, who seemingly made no attempt to balk his host’s plans. She even began to suspect that he was attracted by the little cat. . . .

On the last evening of the gathering, having failed to circumvent Edward’s interference, she went to bed with a bad headache caused partly by the sun, partly perhaps by temper and jealousy. She could not touch the food brought in from the dinner table by her ayah, tempting and well-cooked though it was; she only drank some champagne, which made her head worse; and she lay feeling injured, forlorn, furious, especially when she caught the sound of laughter from the dining tent, and later the tinkle of the banjo with Sylvia Spence’s voice upraised in song, followed by loud applause.

Presently she heard the whole party leaving the tent, laughing and chattering; somebody shouted for wraps—they must be going for a walk in the moonlight. What a crazy idea!—that devil of a girl had demoralized them all. . . . Surely Edward would come to see how she was? But Edward did not appear, and the echo of voices and laughter grew faint in the distance.

Mrs. Cloudsley rose and peeped out from the flap of the tent. Though the moon was bright, a haze hung in the air, blurring the group of receding figures. Then she noticed that two of the figures lagged behind the rest; the couple halted, turned back, and disappeared in the shadow of a great tree—the same tree beneath which she and Major Tryng had stood together on the opening day of the camp. What ages ago that day seemed!—and as far as she was concerned the whole week had been a disappointment, entirely owing to that dreadful girl. . . .

The suspicion, nay the certainty, came to her that it was Sylvia Spence and Major Tryng who had disappeared in the shadow of the great tree! Not pausing to think, she threw on some clothes and slipped out of the tent. Stealthily she threaded her way through the mango grove. Now she could

just distinguish the two figures, and the man's hand was on the girl's shoulder; he was speaking earnestly in low tones. She could not catch the words, but she knew—yes, she knew. . . . With a little noiseless run she was upon them, to find herself facing Sylvia Spence and—Good Heavens, the man was Edward—Edward!

She stumbled; the ground seemed to rise and whirl about her head, and she knew nothing more until she found herself on the bed in her tent with Edward beside her holding a glass to her lips. She pushed his hand away and sat upright.

“You!” she gasped. “You! I couldn't have believed it. I will never forgive you!”

“My darling girl!” he protested, “what on earth do you mean?”

She burst into stormy tears; her head was so bad, she felt so utterly wretched.

“I thought it was Major Tryng,” she sobbed, conscious that she only wished it *had* been Major Tryng.

“But why,” Edward inquired, mystified, “did you come running out like that if you thought it was Major Tryng?”

She made no answer and he added: “I thought you wanted the fellow to marry Sylvia Spence?”

“Oh! I don't care who the beastly girl marries,” she cried, “but I won't have *you* making love to her as well!”

“Nina, are you mad?”

“Well, what else were you doing under the tree with your hand on her shoulder!” she demanded shrilly.

Edward burst out laughing; there was tenderness as well as amusement in his laugh.

“My dear, am I the sort of man to make love to anyone but my own wife?”

“But you never do,” she whimpered.

“What?”

“Make love to your own wife.”

He paused for a space, looking into her tear-dimmed eyes. Then he took her hands firmly in his.

“Tell me,” he said gravely. “Would you really have cared if I had been making love to Miss Spence?”

“Weren’t you—weren’t you?”

“Now listen and don’t be such a little goose. Miss Spence was asking my advice. She’s a clever, amusing girl, rather a minx if you want my private opinion. She hasn’t much of a time with her relations, and she knows she is a burden to them. Both these men, young Nixon and that ass of a fellow Tryng, have proposed to her, and though she confesses she cares for neither she means to marry one of them. The question is, which? I told her that if she married Nixon I should be very sorry for *him*, and if she married Tryng I should be very sorry for *her*. It was just at that moment——”

Mrs. Cloudsley squirmed. “Yes, I know,” she interrupted, “but supposing you had found *me* with Major Tryng’s hand on my shoulder, how would you have felt?”

“I should have felt angry with him, not you, and still more angry with myself, as I do now, for being too old and dull and busy to keep your love ——”

“Oh! don’t, Edward, don’t!” She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him.

The camp guests departed early next morning, leaving sympathetic messages for Mrs. Cloudsley, who was too seedy to leave her tent and bid them farewell; a nasty little touch of the sun, *so* unfortunate!

Afterwards, when the Cloudsleys returned to the station and Sylvia Spence’s engagement to Mr. Nixon was announced, Mrs. Clapp was heard to say in the ladies’ room of the club that evidently they had all been mistaken about Mrs. Cloudsley. She was a dear, kind hearted little woman; and much more devoted to her husband than any of them had imagined! This last was a discovery that Mrs. Cloudsley had made, too; she was much more devoted to Edward than she had ever imagined. Never again did she tell anyone that Edward loved his work more than he loved her; and Edward had no further occasion to threaten that if she did not behave herself she must go home to her people.

Further than that, she remained at Jheelpore for the following hot weather and rains quite cheerfully because, she said, as they would be going home for good the year after, she considered it only right to economize.

FOR INDIA

## FOR INDIA

“And what do you think of India, Miss Talbot?”

Miss Talbot smiled, not altogether agreeably. “Oh! Everyone asks me that,” she replied, controlled impatience in her voice.

Mrs. Richards felt snubbed; she had merely asked the question by way of opening a polite conversation now that the female portion of the company had left the dining-room, the two having seated themselves by accident on the same sofa. She was tempted to retort that she did not in the least care what Miss Talbot thought of India. In any case this supercilious young woman could know little or nothing about the country, although during dinner she had been pleased to proclaim her inclination towards the view that it was high time the British cleared out and permitted the people to manage their own affairs. Of late, it appeared, she had been interesting herself in various societies and associations connected with Indian students in England, and as a result had formed the highest opinion of the Oriental’s capacity for self-government. At the same time (as Mrs. Richards had heard her informing John Cave), being of a particularly open mind, she had decided to come and judge for herself as to how far she might be right or wrong.

It had amused Mrs. Richards to observe Mr. Cave’s civil attention to his neighbour’s remarks; he had made no attempt at argument, but it was clear that whatever his opinion of her theories he was overcome with admiration of her appearance. Her gown was Parisian, her features Greek; her small head, crowned with dark chestnut hair, was set on a slender neck; the grace of her carriage, her composure and self-assurance, the diamonds in the lobes of her ears, the pearl necklace which fell almost to her knee, all combined to convey an impression of good breeding and prosperity which caused old-fashioned Mrs. Richards to wonder why she was still “Miss Talbot.” However, no doubt she was one of these modern intellectual young ladies who scorned matrimony; and if John Cave was going to fall in love with her, so much the worse for him. This type of girl would never look at an ordinary Indian civilian, however rising, hard-working and clever—and John was all that. Everyone in the station, civil and military, European and Indian, liked and looked up to him. He was the right hand of his chief, Mr. Malleson; when trouble threatened in the city it was always John Cave who proved best able to smooth matters down: he understood the people, their customs



and religions and superstitions, and out in the district the peasants regarded him as their “father and mother.”

“You see, it’s very difficult for me to say what I think about India when I’ve only been in the country a few weeks. Bombay was no experience of any value, and the visit I paid to the Resident of a native state only showed me one aspect of the question I came out to investigate. But now that I am to spend two months with my cousins, the Mallesons, I hope to gain a real insight into British administration.”

“And you couldn’t find yourself in a better position to do so,” pronounced Mrs. Richards, with emphasis. “Though only two months——” She shrugged her shoulders sceptically.

“How long is it since you were in England?” inquired Miss Talbot, with a kindly show of interest.

“Five years. I took the children home. Living is so expensive out here nowadays that we have not been able to afford leave since then. It is as much as we can do to find money for their education.”

“But look at the way you all live—such crowds of servants!”

“We don’t employ them for our own benefit, I can assure you,” snapped Mrs. Richards. “It’s entirely owing to their castes that they can’t do each other’s work. Wages have trebled, house rent is higher than we should have to pay on the same income in England. It’s the same with the price of food—with everything.”

“Well, but between ourselves, how about the dinner we had to-night? Twenty people and goodness knows how many courses.”

Mrs. Richards lost her temper. “A Commissioner’s position entails certain social obligations. Do you expect us to dispense with prestige? Our authority would suffer if we lived on rice and *chupatties*, and only employed servants of the scavenger class. The end of all this will be that the right sort of Englishmen won’t serve in India and small blame to them.”

Want of breath, and a helpless feeling that her outburst had lacked coherence and conveyed no conviction, brought Mrs. Richards to a stop.

“I think,” said Miss Talbot loftily, “that in view of our responsibilities out here we should consider the people of India before we consider ourselves.”

“Perhaps you will discover that we do,” was the tremulous answer. And then Mrs. Richards sat dumb.

It was a relief when at that moment the men straggled into the drawing-room. Mrs. Richards rose and chose more congenial company. John Cave at once took the vacant seat beside Miss Talbot, and did not leave it until the party broke up.

That night, for the first time in her life, Ina Talbot's thoughts dwelt upon a man with unaccustomed interest. There was something about this Mr. Cave which attracted her strongly; it was not altogether his keen, firm face, his good height and proportions—she had met countless men whose physical advantages were greater, but none of them had appealed to her in this curious fashion. In a manner that she resented she could not exclude from her mind pleasurable anticipations of the next morning, for she had promised to drive with him before breakfast. He wanted her to see the preparations of which he had charge for the great religious fair which was shortly to take place at the junction of the two sacred rivers, the Jumna and the Ganges; and she recognized reluctantly that it was not so much the opportunity of viewing preparations for a great Indian gathering which caused her this flutter of excitement, as the prospect of Mr. Cave's companionship.

She took extra trouble with her toilet next morning, and in consequence kept Mr. Cave waiting. He was on the veranda when she hurried forth, and the look of welcome and admiration at sight of her was so undisguised that, to her vexation, she found herself blushing. This was too tiresome. She had come to India, not to philander, but to investigate the wrongs of an oppressed people, that she might return and rouse the sympathies of the great British public.

As they spun along the broad, white road between rows of giant, dust-shrouded trees, she endeavoured to arouse a feeling of hostility within herself because her companion refused to be drawn into a political discussion; he evaded direct questions, and merely said that no one could generalise about India—that what might be true about one part of the country might be false about another. Purposely, she suspected, he switched off her attention with descriptions of the difficulties that beset English and Indian officials over these periodical religious festivals, the guarding against danger of epidemics, such as cholera, plague, or small pox; the prevention of overcrowding, riots, and so forth; until unwillingly she could not but feel that in the main the authorities did their utmost for the masses, although these efforts were often thwarted by the very people in whose interests they were directed.

On they drove, through patches of bazaar, through the teeming city, out on to a barren waste where the ground on either side was split into gaping ravines as it sloped towards the river. He gave her some conception of what the fair would mean, how special trains, packed with pilgrims, would cross the great iron bridge, how the roads from every quarter would be choked with native vehicles and foot travellers, how a mass of seething humanity would assemble, such a multitude that it would appear almost possible to walk on their heads.

“But what is it all for?” she asked helplessly.

“Piety, sacrifice, the worship of the gods, washing away of sins. Combined,” he added drily, “with an excellent excuse for an outing, and the squandering of a vast amount of money.”

A sharp turn brought them to the end of the made road, the pony’s hoofs sank deep into sandy soil, and presently they were in the shadow of a grim towering fort, built by Akbar, the Moghul Emperor when Elizabeth was Queen of England. Before them, in wide tranquillity, lay the sacred waters, glittering in the sun, streaked with yellow sand bars, melting into the opal of the opposite shore.

Cave pulled up and pointed to an island which was in process of being connected with the river bank by a bridge of boats.

“The fakirs will be quartered there,” he said, “and you can see that we are putting up temporary shelters all over the place, besides stalls and booths where idols and toys and sweetmeats can be sold. Our own missionaries will have a place allotted to them, where they will preach and sing hymns, and distribute tracts in the vernacular.”

Miss Talbot sat silent. She would wish to see all this ignorance and waste and corrupt ceremonial, as it seemed to her, swept away; just as she would advocate the abolition of polygamy, seclusion of women, child marriage, and other evils prevalent in the East.

“All this should be stopped!” she exclaimed.

“It would be infinitely worse if we deserted the country,” said Mr. Cave quietly.

“I hardly think so, from the things I have heard said by educated Indians at home; but their hands are tied. It is shameful——”

“Well, anyway, don’t let *us* quarrel about it.”

The tender appeal in his tone made her look up at him, and meeting his eyes a strange wave of emotion surged from her heart to stupefy her brain. Nothing else seemed to matter. Quickly she avoided his ardent gaze, clenched her hands which were trembling, fought hard to govern this sudden sense of entrancement which had set her pulses throbbing with mingled rapture and alarm. She would have been the last to admit the possibility of love at first sight; always had she derided the very idea as absurd; indeed, hitherto love had seemed to her nothing short of a contemptible weakness to which no man or woman in their senses need fall a victim unless from deliberate choice.

And now! Why should this very ordinary, unimportant human being, who was just a fly on the wheel of Indian administration, whom she had only met on the previous evening, have the power to make her feel like a foolish, sentimental schoolgirl?

Nothing should persuade her to surrender. How could she tell that he was not a fortune hunter? The fact of her being possessed of a large income was, of course, no secret.

“We had better go back,” she said, in a stifled voice. “I am feeling the sun a little.”

All anxiety, he turned the pony’s head. “You should have worn a sun hat,” he told her. “I ought to have warned you before we started. The glare down here is very trying. But I forgot that, in fact,” with an apologetic little laugh, “I’m afraid I forgot everything when I saw you again, except how wonderful you looked!”

“Then it was a pity I didn’t wear my sun hat,” she said, flippantly. “I look hideous in it.”

What a silly speech! She remembered painfully that she had changed her hat at the last moment from a desire to look her best. Rage rose increasingly within her, until she contemplated inventing some excuse which would shorten her visit to the Mallesons. When they were back on the smooth, metalled road she went so far as to say that she was expecting a cable which might necessitate her return to England.

Cave’s lack of consternation dismayed her. Was it possible that he did not believe her statement?

“It *would* be a pity,” he said, “if you had to go off without seeing the fair. Anyway, you cannot escape our forthcoming *tomasha*, the bachelors’ ball,

to-morrow night. If you were unfortunately obliged to leave by next mail you would not have to start for at least three days.”

She murmured that in all probability she would not be going to the ball; she did not dance.

“Neither do I, but I shall certainly go on the chance of your being there. Do come.”

She would give him no assurance, but already she began debating in her mind as to which gown she should wear at the ball.

“Remember,” he said, as they drove up in front of the Commissioner’s bungalow, and helped her from the trap, “I shall be watching for you to-morrow night. I have to make a dash out into the district to-day after my office work is done, and I shall only get back just in time to change for the ball. It will be a rush at that.”

“Oh! Please don’t ‘rush’ on my account,” she besought him, with mock concern, “or I shall feel so guilty if I don’t go! Good-bye, Mr. Cave, and thank you for a most interesting expedition.”

Miss Talbot went to the ball. She told herself that she could hardly do otherwise, since her host and hostess did not inquire as to her wishes.

Dancing had begun when they entered the ballroom. The decorations were effective and in good taste, though to one accustomed to London festivities they might appear somewhat primitive; the band was blaring forth a refrain that was comparatively new to India, while in England the air had become popular to satiety. It was not until two or three dances were over, and Ina Talbot had refused several would-be partners on the score of not dancing, that Cave suddenly appeared at her side. He seemed rather breathless, but added no word of delight or surprise at finding her there. She paled, then flushed as she took his proffered arm, and neither of them spoke as they skirted the room and came to a halt in one of the many open doorways.

“Don’t you want to go and find a partner?” she said at last. “I suppose as a bachelor you are one of the hosts.”

“And aren’t you one of my guests? I can’t dance, and you told me you didn’t. Do you want to get rid of me?”

She forced herself to reply in a conventional tone: “Of course not! It’s most kind of you to take me in charge. Do tell me, who is the agile old gentleman capering about with the pretty girl?”

“The general commanding the station; he has a weakness for pretty girls. That one stayed down with her husband in a famine district during the whole of last hot weather; the sights she saw and the risks she ran must have been appalling. Though you mightn’t think it, there aren’t many of us in this room who haven’t been through a rough time in some form or another, or who wouldn’t go through one in their turn without squealing. Mercifully, we can all play the fool now and then; it keeps us going.”

She made no comment; but she felt that for his part the man at her side had suffered experiences sufficiently hard to render him old for his years, to rob him of the measure of youth which at his age should still have been left to him.

Glancing furtively at Cave, she noted that he looked weary, his eyes were darkened, deep-sunk with fatigue. Perhaps he really had “rushed,” forgone necessary rest in order to be at this stupid ball on the chance of seeing her, in view of the untruth she had told him. A warm sense of remorse conquered her pride.

“Shall we find a comfortable seat,” she suggested, “where we can sit and talk?”

At once his face brightened; he was all alacrity. “Come along—quick, before the dance is over and the best places taken.”

He hurried her through the doorway into a long corridor which was fringed with flowers and palms, guided her to the end, where a broad couch, set well apart from the rows of seats, was concealed by a screen.

“Well,” he began, when they were seated, “has the cable arrived?”

“No,” she said, hating herself for deceiving him. Yet, she wondered again uncomfortably, *had* she deceived him? He was smiling as he took the ostrich feather fan with its jewelled setting from her hand, and examined it with exaggerated interest.

“This is a gorgeous fan,” he remarked, “I don’t suppose any other woman here possesses anything like it, just as no other girl or woman in India can touch you for beauty, or—or for brains! I’m not quite sure about heart?”

“Oh! Don’t talk like that,” she burst out. “I may be rich, but I’m not beautiful or clever, and as for heart—pray spare me your sarcasm.”

“Sarcasm? Good heavens, nothing was farther from my mind. I was merely stating the truth. By the way, talking of truth, are you really

expecting that cable?"

He returned her the fan, brushing her hand purposely with his as he did so, and she thrilled at his touch; it broke down her fortitude, left her humbled, a prey to the unfigurable attraction he held for her.

"Why do you ask? Why should you imagine——" she faltered, and got no farther; it was useless, she could not keep up the fiction, so conscious was she of his nearness, his strength of body and soul, of his feeling for her that she knew was no passing infatuation, just as she knew that her own feeling for him was real. There was no evading the fact. Once and for all she was in love.

"Why do you torture me like this?" she heard him saying reproachfully. "Can't you face what has happened? Why resort to such make-believe? You must know that I love you. It's one of those cases that come about suddenly, not to be explained; just a meeting and a knowledge that there is nobody else in the world, as if one had been *waiting* for it. Is it the same with you? Tell me. Don't raise up false barriers between us. If I am nothing to you, honestly and truly, say so, and I will believe it." His hand closed on hers; she did not repulse him. "Then it is all right?" he whispered, and bending forward, he kissed her.

Later on when Ina Talbot, the heiress, the would-be reformer (the busy-body, as Mrs. Richards did not hesitate to call her), left the building, it was as the promised wife of John Cave.

At her wish he had agreed that their engagement should be kept secret for the present. He understood, and she appreciated his understanding, that she shrank from the public admission of such a sudden and swift surrender on her part, the talk it would cause, the surprise. As to the future, they did not speak of that. Cave took it for granted that she would accept the position as the wife of an ordinary district official. Ina gave thought to nothing but the rapture of an imperishable love; she revelled in their rides and drives together, the stolen meetings, the delight of secret caresses, the vision of days to come when they should not be parted.

As the date of the fair drew nearer she saw less of him. All the mornings he was down by the river side, office work kept him late in the afternoons. This absorption in his work aroused in her a jealousy which she knew was unreasonable, but she could not shake it off, especially as he made no apology. For the first two days after the fair opened she did not see him at all.

On the third day, the great day of bathing, it had been arranged that she and Mrs. Malleson were to drive down to the fort to witness the scene below from the walls. The road, as they approached the river, was choked with people, and progress was unavoidably slow. Many pilgrims were still arriving, many had begun the return journey, being unable to spare the time from their farms and villages to wait for the crowning ceremonies and to see the big day through. The crowd grew denser, the dust was suffocating, for as yet no cold weather rains had come to satisfy the dry earth. The drought, Mrs. Malleson told Ina, was causing keen anxiety to the officials, for it increased possibility of sickness.

“And if cholera, for example, should start,” she said, “Heaven help us. The people would break and fly all over the country, spreading the disease, whatever precautions were taken.”

Fear chilled the girl’s heart. Should such a catastrophe happen, her John would be in the thick of the danger. If she lost him. . . . Dread sickened her as they entered the fort by the main gateway, and a few minutes later climbed countless steps and emerged on to the ramparts.

Then, what a sight met her eyes! The multitude passed description; nothing was visible for a mile or so along the river bank but a sea of heads. Most of the people were clothed in white, but occasional splashes of colour varied the monotony—the gay, triangular flags of the Brahmin priests with their different devices floated in the gentle breeze, little platforms and light umbrellas of cane and leaves lined the shore. In the midst of the throng below the fort walls a track was with difficulty being kept clear for the fakirs’ procession, which had been crossing the bridge of boats from the island since daybreak, and on either side of the narrow track two streams of figures came and went incessantly. The din that rose on the dry air was like the restless roar of a city.

The whole scene bewildered and astounded the English girl as she stood looking down on it, troubled with a sense of the mystery of far-off ages; and she shivered when, with a blast of trumpets and a steady swinging march, the long line of nude, ash-smearred figures wound its way from the bridge. She realized that she was beholding a ceremony that was still as much alive with religious belief and enthusiasm as it had been for the last two or three thousand years.

Presently, with relief, she followed Mrs. Malleson to where, farther along the walls, the colonel commanding the fort was entertaining a party of people. At Mrs. Malleson’s request he invited her to look into his quarters,



where once the ladies of the Moghul dynasty had lived and loved and intrigued.

And during all this time there was no sign of John, although the Commissioner appeared, hot, dusty, weary, shouting for refreshment. She longed to ask him what John was doing. If only she could see him, know that he was in no danger among this horrible, fanatical crowd; but she could not trust her voice to inquire, such a question might be deemed absurd—she did not know.

Late that night Ina sat with Mrs. Malleson in the comfortable drawing-room, waiting. Dinner had been delayed till the last moment, and yet the Commissioner had not returned.

“Bother these fairs!” Mrs. Malleson exclaimed crossly. “It’s so bad for Edward to go without food after such a long and exhausting day. Something must have happened.”

Something had happened, as they learned when Mr. Malleson arrived.

“We’re in for it!” he announced, mopping his forehead. “Over fifty cases of cholera, and all started by one wretched coolie. Give me something to eat quickly. Cave’s coming along as soon as he can to discuss arrangements for a segregation camp. There’s no time to be lost. We shall have to go back to the fair ground together.”

Ina looked at Mrs. Malleson; the other woman’s face was quite calm as she rose without a word to give her orders. How *could* she conceal the terror which must have gripped her. How *could* she permit her husband to return to the fair in face of such ghastly hazard. It was monstrous. John should not run such risks if she could prevent it. He must consider her first, and as the Mallesons went into the dining-room together, forgetful of her existence, she stationed herself in the dimly lit veranda to intercept John’s arrival.

When he came she met him at the top of the steps.

“John!” she gasped. “John!”

“Why, darling, how sweet of you to waylay me!” He caught her in his arms. “Isn’t this the limit—you have heard?”

She cried frantically: “Don’t go back to the fair, for my sake, don’t go!”

“But, dearest, I *must*,” he said in amazement.

“Nonsense! You needn’t. Surely I come first. Listen—listen”—she clung to him as his hold on her slackened—“I have such heaps of money, you

would lose nothing. We'll be married at once, and go straight home, out of this horrible country. I hate it, I hate it—it shan't take you from me."

"Ina, are you mad? Come, come, sweetheart, pull yourself together, be brave."

He stroked her hair, kissed her wet face, for she was weeping bitterly.

"There, beloved, don't cry. Don't worry. It's all in the day's work. I've seen this sort of thing through before, more than once, and here I am, still alive! As my wife you will have to get accustomed to duty coming first."

She withdrew herself, stood before him in the dim lamplight, lovely, defiant.

"You can take your choice," she cried furiously. "Either my wishes come first, or what you call your duty to India. The fate of the country does not depend entirely on you, whereas my whole life, my whole happiness does. I won't be put aside. If you really love me you will do as I ask."

"Ina!" he implored.

She waved her hand, relentless, and continued: "Supposing to-morrow had been fixed for our wedding day, what would you have done?"

"We should have had to postpone it," he said, without hesitation.

"You mean that honestly?"

"Of course."

In silence she turned from him, her head held high, determination in every line of her graceful form; and hopelessly he watched her go through a door farther down the veranda. She was lost to him, this radiant, beautiful girl, whom he had fondly imagined was ready to exchange a life of brilliance and ease in England for one of comparative trial and monotony in India as his wife. Now he questioned if she had ever cared for him at all. He made no attempt to call her back. Of what avail? India stood between them—India, and duty, and honour. There was no help for it, for him no choice.

Then he joined his chief, ate and drank with him because every ounce of his strength and vitality would be needed for the long fight with disease and death which lay before them.

The fight ended in victory. The scourge was overcome with the least possible loss of life, though the toll was piteously cruel. Miss Talbot left the station a day or two after the outbreak; the Mallesons had insisted upon her doing so, had banished her in all kindness. They said they could not accept

the responsibility of her remaining, with cholera rampant all round them. It had spread to the city, to the compounds; already servants in English employ were stricken down with it.

She seemed to be quickly forgotten by everyone, excepting John Cave; and he could not forget. For weeks after the epidemic was over he noticed that no one spoke of her, not even the Mallesons beyond telling him casually that their cousin had returned to England—"So unfortunate that her visit had been cut short!"

What a mercy, he reflected bitterly, that they had kept their brief engagement a secret!

Later, when the west wind had begun to roar and rage, and the hot weather was in full blast, he became aware, one evening in the club, that Mrs. Richards was stalking him sedulously.

"I want to show you something," she said, driving him into a corner.

He liked Mrs. Richards, she was an excellent sort; one of the real old bulwarks of Indian domestic life; therefore he submitted, expecting to be consulted upon some vital point connected with one of the many housekeeping difficulties prevalent at this time of year. Probably she was going to say: "I know that your head man is so good at getting supplies of quail, would you let him——"

Instead she produced a cutting from a newspaper.

"Read that," she commanded; and sat gazing at him attentively as he read the report of a lecture delivered by Miss Ina Talbot at the Caxton Hall on the subject of Indian administration.

To his astonishment the lecturer had been all in favour of British rule. She frankly admitted that she had gone out to the country last winter imbued with the notion that the English were cruelly oppressive—most unwilling to agree that any good could result from their continued domination. She had expected to find a vast deal of misgovernment, but close observation and experience had forced her to the conclusion that there was no country better managed than India, none in which the administration did more for the masses of the people. She only wished things were as well conducted in England . . .

"Well?" said Mrs. Richards, as he handed her back the cutting. "Whom do you suppose converted her?"

He reddened. “No one but herself, I should say. Her own sound sense and good judgment.”

“My dear John Cave, I’m not blind. I watched you and Miss Talbot carefully whilst she was here; partly out of curiosity, I confess, partly because I hoped she would prove worthy of you. I thought she was going to. But then something intervened. I can guess pretty well what it was—your work, and you went to the wall. Am I right?”

He nodded.

“You had better tell me about it. Come now, it will do you good to make a clean breast of the whole affair, and then I will show you something else; also give you a piece of advice.”

Gladly he succumbed to her sympathy and poured out the story, felt comforted, relieved, when he had finished. Mrs. Richards was right, the revelation had done him good.

“Now to continue in our next,” she went on. “Here is a letter I got by the mail yesterday from a friend of mine in London who happens to know Miss Talbot. The girl has lost most of her fortune, but the disaster hadn’t been made public when my friend wrote—it may never be made public; but the fact remains that she is no longer rich, though still not exactly what we should call poor.”

“Yes?” he said awkwardly, scanning the letter she gave him. “And what has all this got to do with me?”

“Everything, idiot, if you still care for her. In that case, go home at once; take sick-leave if you can’t get anything else—you look run down—and try your luck again. That’s my advice. Take it, or leave it. If you take it I prophesy that you’ll bless me to the end of your days. The girl has good stuff in her.”

John did take the interfering lady’s advice. And the first person he and his wife sought out when they arrived in India at the beginning of the next cold weather was Mrs. Richards, in order to tell her that nothing could prevent her prophecy from coming true.

Both of them would bless her till the end of their days; even when they should find themselves retired old Anglo-Indians, living goodness knew where, and had sent forth their children and grandchildren, as John crudely put it, “to do their damnedest for India.”

ANN WHITE

## ANN WHITE

The little English churchyard looked so peaceful, so cool, that I paused at the entrance; then made for a fine old yew tree to rest for a while in its shade on a flat tombstone that was age-worn, bespattered with lichen. I was tired and hot, having wandered farther than I had intended that sultry summer morning; people who have lived in the East feel the heat more severely than those who have never experienced months on end of stifling days and nights, pitiless metallic skies, the white glare of a death-dealing sun. It is a fact that is rarely recognized by untravelled folk; so I smile and say nothing when I am told that, of course, coming from India, I must revel in heat waves.

How pleasant I found it in this sacred green garden filled with the perfume of flowers, silent save for the humming of bees, the sweet, clear calling of birds! As I glanced about me I thought what a contrast to the arid cemeteries I had seen in India, with their neglected memorials to victims of exile, all the tragic inscriptions that told of untimely deaths; women and little children who in England might have recovered from sickness, men cut off in their youth, or when long-looked-for retirement was in sight; sometimes whole families swept away by cholera. Few white people die natural deaths in India; if they live they go home, and if they die there is seldom one of their kindred in the country to visit and attend to their graves.

Close to where I sat was a marble cross; at its base a wealth of blue flowers. I read that it was erected to the memory of Ann White, by her sorrowing grandchildren; and of a sudden it brought to my recollection a plain stone slab, in an Indian cemetery, that marked the last resting place of another Ann White, also an old woman. Drowsed by the warm perfume and peace, I let the curious history of that other Ann White steal through my mind slowly, dreamily.

The first time I saw her was at the beginning of the hot weather, soon after I had arrived in India to keep house for my brother. She was seated, with an untidy-looking ayah squatting beside her, on the edge of the old concrete bandstand that still remained at one end of the deserted parade-ground. Before the mutiny Jutpore had been a military cantonment; now it was no more than a small civil station, remote from the railway, out of all proportion in size to the teeming native city, whose turbulent and fanatical population caused ceaseless anxiety to the few European officials and an

inadequate staff of police. I remembered remarking to my brother as we rode past the bandstand, that it was surely unusual to see an Englishwoman of that age living in India—who was she? And Tom said, indifferently, he didn't know; he believed there was some legend about the old lady, but he couldn't remember. What did it matter?

Tom was an engineer, and mysteries connected with human beings held no interest for him. Had I made some inquiry concerning bridges or bricks, buildings or roads, I should no doubt have received voluble and animated information.

“But she looks so quaint!” I persisted; “a sort of early Victorian sketch. Do try to recollect what you have heard about her.”

“No use, my dear. Whatever I might have heard went in at one ear and out at the other. You'd better apply to the missionaries. I think she lives with them, but whether they're C.M.S., or Baptists, or Papists, I can't say. There are samples of all kinds in the country, much to the mystification of the natives.”

Being of an imaginative, or, perhaps more truthfully, an inquisitive disposition, I felt a longing to ferret out the old lady's history. What was she doing in India at her time of life, and looking like a ghost from the past, dressed in a poke-bonnet and a voluminous grey gown? She might almost have been wearing a crinoline. There must be some interesting story.

Consequently, next morning I started out alone, on foot, for the parade-ground, hoping to find her. Yes, she was there, seated on the bandstand, and with her the ayah, a stout, pock-marked person chewing betel-nut, who regarded me apathetically as I approached.

The old lady was crooning softly to herself; she had a small crumpled-up face that reminded me of a peeled walnut; her eyes were a faded blue, the loops of hair, beneath the old-fashioned bonnet, like fleece. I was struck by a certain daintiness about her appearance, a lingering grace in the way she held herself; one would fancy her being described years long ago as “a sweetly pretty young female.” She merely nodded and smiled when I greeted her with some polite remark, and continued her soft little song.

The ayah bestirred herself fussily, dragged her wrapper over her head, opened a large, white umbrella, and turned aside to spit forth red betel juice. Then, with the curious sort of respect that the lower classes all the world over seem to entertain towards mental affliction, she explained proudly that

the old lady was *paghal*. I knew the word, for I was learning Hindustani; it meant crazy, mad.

I nodded sympathetically, inquired where they lived, and the ayah pointed to a solitary thatched bungalow that stood facing the parade-ground some distance from the residential quarter of the station.

“Missun,” she said, through her nose. “Kristarn Missun-school.”

With that she bawled indulgently at her charge, helped her up, salaamed to me, and the pair started off across the bare plain. I watched their slow progress, the ayah clopping along in loose shoes, the old lady stepping feebly, supported by the native woman’s arm, the white umbrella bobbing up and down—watched them till they passed between the two gateless white posts to disappear amongst plantain trees and shrubs.

That evening I shirked the usual visit to the club, made some plausible excuse to Tom with secret satisfaction, since I played tennis and bridge badly; and also I was glad for once to escape the well-intentioned adjurations with which I was always deluged by the mem-sahibs regarding the correct management of servants and fowls, goats and cows, all the talk about charcoal and dusters and bazaar prices, the ordering of stores from Bombay, and so forth. Not that I was ungrateful for kindly advice, or undervalued the importance of good housekeeping, but beyond a point my interest in such matters failed; and I had never been good at games, mental or physical.

With a sense of adventure I drove to the white gate-posts I had noted that morning, boldly turned into the compound, and drew up before the thatched bungalow. As a new-comer to the station, it was quite in accordance with Anglo-Indian etiquette that I should make the first call on anyone I chose, a sensible custom among an ever-fluctuating official community.

One or two native children were playing in the veranda, who fled when I shouted the immemorial summons, “*Quai hai*.” Presently out came a neatly garbed little Englishwoman with a round, pleasant face and steady grey eyes, who proclaimed herself to be Miss Brownlow, assistant missionary to Padre Grigson and his wife; both, she said, were just now absent in the district “itinerating.” Rather to my dismay, she took it for granted that my errand was not to make a formal call, but to give an order for mission needlework.

“Come in, do come in!” she cried civilly, “and see all the lovely things made by our girls and women. What is it that you particularly require?”



I could hardly explain that I particularly required information about the *paghal* old lady! There was nothing for it but to pretend that I was anxious to buy something manufactured by the converts. As a result, I spent an hour, and a good deal of money, at the mission bungalow, allowing myself to be lured into purchasing mats and tidies, tray-cloths and handkerchiefs, none of which did I “require.” All the same, Miss Brownlow contrived to excite my interest in the work she and the Grigsons were doing for India, and so engrossed did I become in our conversation that I completely forgot the real object of my visit until, just as I was leaving, I caught sight of my bandstand acquaintance, the fat ayah, crossing the compound.

“Why there,” I exclaimed with cunning, “is the ayah I have seen in the mornings on the parade-ground with an old lady!”

“Yes, our dear old Ann White, and Tulsi, who looks after her. It’s their favourite little walk, across the parade-ground and back, with an interval of rest on the bandstand. Ann can’t walk far nowadays, and there is no other place within easy reach where she can sit down. I am afraid soon she will not be able to leave the compound, she is failing very fast.”

“Was she a missionary?” I asked, dawdling purposely at the top of the veranda steps.

“Oh no, poor old thing! She has been imbecile since her childhood. In fact, no one knows who she is, and we shall never know unless, as Mr. Grigson says happens sometimes in these cases, her memory should return in the hour of her death. She was named Ann White by the mission people who were here at the time of the Mutiny. It’s a sad story. Are you in a hurry? Can you wait while I tell you?”

I felt that not even the most desperate need for haste would have prevented me from waiting to hear about old Ann White. And this was what I heard as I waited:

When in ’57, the native regiment at Jutpore mutinied, murdering officers, women and children, the only Europeans to somehow escape death in the station, as far as was known at the time, were the members of the mission. But when, alas, too late, a British relief party arrived and were scouring the neighbourhood in search of the rebels, a little English girl of about ten years old was found in the jungle, starving, disguised as a native. What was her name, who had disguised her and hidden her away, could never be ascertained; she herself was too exhausted to speak when rescued, and though in time her bodily strength returned, both reason and memory had been lost beyond hope of recovery. The missionaries took charge of her,

and a small grant was made by the Government for her support. There, ever since, she had lived, handed on with her pitiful story from one succeeding mission family to another, in the thatched bungalow, well cared for, no trouble, unless, as Miss Brownlow confided to me with a smile, anyone should attempt to dress her differently; then she would cry, refuse to eat, until the poke-bonnet and full skirts were restored to her.

“So Mrs. Grigson and I make new bonnets and gowns for her when she needs them, copying the old patterns faithfully—the fashion she was accustomed to see in her childhood. It’s the only thing she seems to remember at all. And doesn’t she look an old darling!”

Cordially I agreed and departed, saddened by the pathetic history of Ann White, yet well pleased with my visit, because I felt I had gained a friend in the missionary lady, and that the embroideries were cheap at the price. (I sent them all home next mail to a relative whose mania was foreign missions.)

From that day I saw much of Emily Brownlow, also made friends with Padre Grigson and his wife when they returned from their tour in the district—an earnest, hard-working couple who yet were under no delusion as to the apparent hopelessness of their task in India. I grew to understand and appreciate their efforts, to share their conviction that though the work might seem but a scratch on the surface of idolatry, it was infinitely worth while, and must lead eventually to a deep undermining of ignorance and superstition among a people steeped in Nature worship, cruelly oppressed by higher castes, the priesthood, and indirectly by each other.

So far, the Grigsons admitted, the converts had been drawn principally from a class that had nothing to lose—indeed, everything to gain—by becoming Christians; but in the future the descendants of these converts would count, multiply into a strong community that sooner or later must rise to the top, triumphant. I found it all very interesting, though Tom chaffed and declared that I was fast going the way of our mission-mad kinswoman. The other ladies in the station assured me that when I had lived longer in India I should realize that the ardour of missionaries like Mr. Grigson did more harm than good, interfering with ancient faiths that suited the people, forcing new wine into old bottles, often making trouble in the bazaars where already trouble enough was brewing. Here in Jutpore, for example, it was well known that a strong feeling existed against mission influence. Anything at any moment might lead to a riot, the missionaries would be the first to suffer if the mob got out of hand, and then probably we should all have our throats cut.

I remembered their sayings with a sick sense of foreboding one morning when Tom was away on inspection, and I had ridden over, before the sun got too hot, to spend the day with my friends at the mission bungalow. I found Mrs. Grigson and Emily in a state of suspense and anxiety, for Mr. Grigson was out preaching in the bazaar, and the native Bible teacher who accompanied him had just raced back, scared and breathless, with ill news. The city, he said, was in an uproar, it had been over something to do with rival religious processions that had clashed; the police had come; there was fighting. What had happened to the padre-sahib he was unable to say; they were separated in the crowd, he himself had been attacked, knocked down.

The man could tell us no more. Exhausted with fear and his flight, he collapsed.

We all knew that there was grave cause for alarm. Quite recently there had been a ghastly affair of the same kind in another part of the province, a riot during which the mob had turned on a missionary, beaten him to death in the street, and a general massacre of Europeans and natives had only been averted by the strongest measures. Mrs. Grigson's behaviour was wonderful; not for a moment did she falter as she gave her orders. Emily Brownlow and I helped to collect the women and children from the outhouses and gather them into the bungalow, a chattering, frightened flock, for the bad news had spread in the compound. We kept them away from the side of the house where old Ann White lay asleep. During the past few days she had been ailing, nothing very definite beyond a slight temperature, and loss of strength.

Mrs. Grigson asked me to have a look at the old lady in case she had awakened. Tulsī was useless, she deserted her charge, wept, and declared her liver had turned to water, and resolutely joined the huddled throng in the living-room. I went and sat beside Ann White, who still slept undisturbed by the commotion, all the time straining my ears for sounds outside. Now and then above the ceaseless murmur of native voices within the bungalow I fancied I caught the echo of shots. What if the police should be overcome!

I looked at the peaceful, wrinkled old face on the pillow. When Ann was a child had her mother, possibly with other children about her too, gone through such an anxious period of waiting before the end came? I imagined the subsequent confusion, the cries, the horror, and shivered. Some faithful servant must have saved the little girl, fled with her, disguised her; but what actually had happened would never be known unless, as Mr. Grigson had said, Ann's memory should return before she died. For Ann's sake it was only to be hoped that it would not.

The heat became intolerable, for the punkah hung motionless. Presumably every coolie had fled, and the silence in the compound was sinister; no sound of the padre's return.

All the stories I had heard and read of the Mutiny crowded into my mind. Was history about to repeat itself at Jutpore? At last I could bear it no longer. Old Ann was all right, sound asleep, and I crept from the room, threaded my way through squatting groups of native women and children to seek Mrs. Grigson. I found her standing in the veranda, regardless of the hot wind that was like the blast of a furnace. She was shading her eyes with her hands that she might gaze over the bare parade-ground in the direction of the city. How long we stood there together in silence I don't know—to me it seemed hours—until suddenly, above a line of mango-trees in the distance, a flame shot up, paled by the strong sunlight, then a column of smoke.

Mrs. Grigson drew in her breath.

"They have begun burning, looting," she whispered hoarsely. "Oh, my husband, where are you?"

I passed my arm about her, fearing she might faint; indeed, I felt like fainting myself. But her courage held, bracing my spirit, too, even when there came to our ears the sound of a muffled roar, the roar of an angry multitude. The dull clamour grew louder, and a few moments later we saw a vast concourse of people pouring out from behind the trees, spreading over the opposite end of the plain.

Mrs. Grigson pulled me back.

"They will come here," she said, quietly. "We must go in and shut the doors."

The last thing I saw as we shut the long door-windows, bolting them top and bottom, was that mad, surging crowd making, as it seemed, direct for the mission bungalow. I had a dim recollection of hearing her voice, clear and strong. I think she was speaking to Emily Brownlow and me—telling us to be brave, to pray, asking us to help her to keep the knowledge of approaching danger and death from the little flock for as long as possible, and she started them singing a hymn. I tried to join in, but my throat felt dry, a mist swam before my eyes, my heart beat wildly with terror. I could see nothing, hear nothing, but that murderous crowd outside. The doors would be burst open, and then——

I know I called out "Tom! Tom!" in a frenzy, but my own voice sounded far off; and after that, to my shame, I must have lost consciousness, for next

I found myself on my knees in a corner, leaning against the wall. Slowly my senses began to clear. I dared to look up, and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the padre! As I struggled to my feet the room seemed to spin round, and I should have fallen but that Emily Brownlow caught hold of me.

“We’re all safe—*safe!*” she said loudly in my ear, half-laughing, half-crying.

I noticed that the “flock” were streaming out into the compound, dancing and shouting like children released from school, and that Mrs. Grigson was cutting away the coat-sleeve from her husband’s right arm. I heard him say:

“It’s only a flesh wound, no bones broken. Lucky it wasn’t my head!”

It was not until later, when the injured arm had been bathed and bound up, and we were all refreshing ourselves with tea, that I learned what had happened. Just as the mob were overpowering the police, and the padre, his right arm rendered helpless by a savage blow, believed that his last hour had come, a British infantry regiment had suddenly made its appearance as if by magic. Not a shot was fired; the soldiers had simply marched through the streets, thumping the butt ends of their rifles on the toes of the petrified crowd, driving it before them, until it broke and fled, scattering over the parade-ground. A sergeant had helped the padre into his trap and seen him off safely; but where the regiment had come from, what was the explanation of its merciful arrival, Mr. Grigson said he was too dazed at the time to inquire.

“We shall know all about it sooner or later,” he added.

And we did know, much sooner than we anticipated; for shortly afterwards we heard the sound of hoofs outside, and an officer rode up to the veranda steps. Of course, we all hurried out.

“The colonel wants to know if you are all right, padre!” he shouted. “A near shave, wasn’t it? A little longer and it would have been all U.P. with you, and probably everyone else in the station!”

No thanks! Very sorry, but he couldn’t come in; hadn’t time. The affair had delayed the regiment on the march; they must be getting on to the next camping ground. Anyway, these rascals in the city had learnt a lesson they wouldn’t forget in a hurry!

He saluted and turned his horse’s head.

“One moment!” called Mr. Grigson. “How did you hear of the row? The fellow who stopped the regiment ought to be rewarded.”

The officer drew rein, looked back over his shoulder.

“It was an old woman. She met us on the road; told the colonel we were wanted.”

“An old woman?” we chorused.

“Yes, an English woman, a queer-looking old dame in a poke-bonnet. I don’t know where she got to. By the time the order had been given to turn out of our line of march, she’d disappeared. We couldn’t see her anywhere. But, knowing what these riots may mean, we took her word for it. Just as well we did, eh?”

Again he saluted, and this time galloped off.

We looked at each other in amazement.

“Old Ann!” Mrs. Grigson exclaimed. “We’d forgotten all about her. She must have got up and gone out!”

Then we flew to Ann’s room, fearful as to what had become of her, expecting to see the bed empty. But there she lay, sleeping, just as I had left her, a serene smile on her old face. Nothing pointed to her having moved. The poke-bonnet and grey dress hung from their pegs on the wall; her underclothing lay folded on a chair. Certainly the small pair of shoes beneath the chair were dusty, but as no housework had been attempted that morning, dust was thick everywhere.

Mrs. Grigson bent over the pillow.

“Ann,” she said, gently, and again a little louder, “Ann!”

There came no stir, no response from the quiet form on the bed as we listened in the hot silence; and when, presently, Mrs. Grigson looked round, held up her hand, I knew from the expression on her face that Ann had gone to where memories cannot hurt, do not matter, where she would answer to her real name.

It is, and ever will be, my firm conviction, that Ann’s spirit went forth that morning to save the lives of those who had loved and taken care of her on earth, and, in their secret hearts, I think both Mrs. Grigson and Emily Brownlow were inclined to hold the same view. But, with the curious prejudice against belief in the supernatural shared by many truly pious people, the padre was entirely opposed to such an idea. Whenever we touched on the subject, he would repeat obstinately that the dying often displayed remarkable vitality shortly before the end came—the proverbial flash in the pan. He always maintained that Ann had risen and wandered out

on to the Grand Trunk Road, which wasn't far off; that having met the regiment on the march, the sight of English soldiers had just for the moment awakened her recollection of that day in '57, when the relief party found her as a little girl in the jungle, when her one overwhelming desire, could she have uttered it, must have been to bid them go on to the rescue of her people. There was plenty of time, he would argue, for her to return. She had come back to die quietly in her bed; as a proof, were not her shoes covered with dust?

To my mind, this explanation seemed far more unlikely, even more miraculous, than my own; but I never could get the padre to agree with me.

And now, as I sat beneath the yew tree in an English churchyard, the green mounds, the flowers, the tombstones faded from my sight. I only visioned the corner of a desolate cemetery, rank with coarse yellow grass, bounded by a mud wall. I saw an old monument, the inscription on it almost obliterated—"mortal remains . . . Ensign . . . of sunstroke . . ."—and close beside it a newly laid slab that marked the grave of one whose true name was not Ann White.

## THE SPELL



# THE SPELL

## PROLOGUE

The train started. Colonel Kaye leaned from the window of his compartment that he might wave a final farewell to his old servant who stood weeping and disconsolate on the platform of the big Indian railway station.

“Salaam, Gunga, salaam!” he shouted.

As he settled himself for the night, his thoughts dwelt affectionately on the faithful old bearer who had served him so well for the best part of thirty years. It had been a business to prevent him from coming to Bombay; the same painful tussle had occurred on each of their few partings—this time Gunga had even begged to be taken to England. Kaye smiled as he pictured Gunga in England. Of late the poor old fellow had been rather a trial, captious, almost ill-tempered; a long rest would do him good. Nine months hence, if still alive, he would be on the platform again to greet his master, whose next “going home” would be for good, and then Gunga must be pensioned—like himself!

Stupefied with sorrow, Gunga pushed his way through the clamouring, sweating throng of native travellers. Four times during his many years of service with the sahib had he seen his beloved master depart for England on leave; and always, in addition to the sore distress of parting, fear had tortured his spirit lest the sahib should return with a bride. A memsahib would destroy all the happy relations between master and servant, difficulties would certainly arise; so often had he witnessed terrible misunderstandings in households where the new wives of sahibs had come into conflict with their husbands’ old retainers. For himself, he knew he could never endure such misery and live. Gunga loved no one on earth as he loved his sahib, who was more to him than home and family. It is to be met with all the world over, this jealous devouring allegiance on the part of old servants towards their employers. Gunga did not doubt that the sahib returned his affection, valued his loyal devotion; but what if a woman should come between them? Women were the root of all trouble!

Wearily he tramped back to the deserted bungalow that he might collect his belongings and tie up his savings in his loin cloth, together with the little brass box containing a supply of the magic black pills that afforded comfort

and strength; for the last year or two he had grown to depend on them increasingly. Then he started north for the village of his birth, there to await with hungry patience the return of his adored sahib to India.

## CHAPTER I

### 1

Mrs. Denham could scarcely keep her eyes open; the sun blazed, the sea glittered painfully, and the pier was packed. Being a resident at Haven-on-Sea she seldom patronized the pier, especially during holiday seasons, but she knew that her week-end guest would feel defrauded did the visit not include a long morning on the pier, and Mrs. Denham was one of those rare and remarkable people who honestly enjoy giving pleasure to others, even at the sacrifice of their own comfort. Therefore she was now enduring the heat and the glare and the crowd, together with the noise of the band and the ceaseless trample of footsteps on the boards, for the sake of "poor old Miss Foster," who so loved the whole thing, and to whom it was such a refreshing change from dull lodgings in London.

For a blessed space Miss Foster stopped talking; Mrs. Denham permitted her eyelids to droop, only to raise them with a start when her companion shrilled in her ear: "Oh! what a pretty girl! Look, over there with an old lady. I never saw anything so sweet. Do you know who she is?"

Mrs. Denham blinked. "Oh! those," she said, rousing herself with an effort. "The girl is a Miss Maynard, Aline Maynard. Yes, she is extraordinarily pretty. All the same, I am afraid she has a dull time of it, poor child. She lives with her grandmother, the old lady, and they are very badly off."

"Then I suppose she gets little amusement. How sad! But I wonder some nice man doesn't——"

Miss Foster's thoughts meandered off into the regions of romance. Mrs. Denham's took a more practical turn. It certainly was a pity, as she had often reflected before, that the girl should have small hope of matrimony. Here, at the best of times, eligible men had always been scarce; and now, since the war, prospects of marriage were worse than ever for girls of Aline's age, even for those in well-to-do circumstances.

Mrs. Denham preserved old-fashioned ideas; her own married life had been serenely happy, and as a rich, childless widow she pitied all spinsters, whatever their ages. It disturbed her to think that probably the unfortunate

Aline would have to go on, year after year, with no pleasures, no pretty clothes, nothing to keep her young, bottled up with her detestable old grandmother who, no doubt, would live to be a hundred, until her beauty faded, and she would end her days as an old maid like Miss Foster, depending upon a charitable friend or two for an occasional treat. Mrs. Denham regarded the girl with renewed commiseration, noting the shabby neatness of her washing frock, the darns in her stockings, the severely plain straw hat—such a pitiful setting to finely cut features, exquisite complexion, violet eyes, and bright, auburn hair. No hint of discontent marred the perfect little face, but the natural joyousness of youth was lacking, the expression, though sweet, was patient, almost resigned.

Their glances met, both smiled, and the girl turned to her grandmother, indicating Mrs. Denham's whereabouts. The old woman bowed with a certain stiff dignity. Mrs. Denham sighed; she knew from hearsay, and from her own observation, how dreary life must be for the poor girl in the poverty-stricken basement flat situated in a humble quarter frequented by "little dressmakers" and the artisan class. The thought of this pretty young creature condemned to such an existence troubled the kind lady afresh; she felt vaguely that she was somehow to blame for having hitherto made no determined effort to rescue the unfortunate child. Yet, what could she have done? Mrs. Maynard kept everyone at arm's length, discouraged well-meant attempts at kindness to Aline; more than once she had refused Mrs. Denham's tentative overtures; it was as if Mrs. Maynard hated all prosperous people. Perhaps more harm than good might result from further advances; for example, visits to the pier might be stopped; Aline had once shyly confided to Mrs. Denham how much she enjoyed looking at the gay crowds and listening to the band, and how she wished she and granny could afford to do it oftener. Deplorable! Mrs. Denham almost repented having come to the pier this morning, and even felt a shade of annoyance with Miss Foster as the unconscious cause of this mental disturbance.

Miss Foster babbled on. "Look at that nice man. He is rather like your brother. I'm sure he's an Anglo-Indian, they always have such an air of distinction. By the way, when do you expect Colonel Kaye home?"

The question put a sudden idea into Mrs. Denham's mind, an idea so unexpected and absorbing that for some moments she failed to reply. Miss Foster turned to ascertain the reason of her friend's silence. "You told me he was coming home, didn't you?" she added, with impatience.

"Yes, yes," Mrs. Denham replied, hastily; "at the minute I was thinking of something else. He is sailing this week."

“And he will come straight here to you?”

“I hope so—after he has done his shopping in London. It’s a good many years since he was home last, and his clothes will want attention. He has promised me a long visit as soon as possible.”

“That will be nice for both of you.”

Miss Foster again gazed about her with lively relish, while Mrs. Denham pursued her new line of reflection. She was an incorrigible matchmaker, and had manœuvred several couples into matrimony; so far none of them had found cause to reproach her, indeed, quite the contrary. Yet, unwillingly, she asked herself if there might not be a measure of risk in this case?—a young, inexperienced, and very pretty girl; a man rather more than middle-aged. Yielding to temptation she banished the query from her mind; her brother, Nugent, was the dearest and best of men, Aline was a thoroughly nice girl whose correct behaviour was as undeniable as her beauty, and there was nothing to cavil at in her birth. Nugent would be all the better for a well-brought-up girl-wife to keep him young; Aline would have a husband in a thousand, and a future secured. What could be more satisfactory on both sides? The difficulty would be to throw the pair together in face of old Mrs. Maynard’s ridiculous hostility to patronage—such false pride! But surely the old lady was not such a fool as to stand in the way of good luck for her grandchild. It might be diplomatic to begin paving the way at once while there was no ostensible motive—at any rate, Mrs. Denham decided to make the attempt. How delightful to have a big wedding at Beach Lodge (the spacious villa that was her own property); how thrilling to guide and witness the courtship, just the kind of vicarious pleasure in which she delighted.

Then she blamed herself for not attending to Miss Foster’s prattle. Poor dear soul—how she was enjoying herself. And this afternoon Mrs. Denham was giving a tea party at one of the big hotels, which Miss Foster would enjoy even more; trays of cakes, a band, and the spectacle of a smart week-end crowd, well known Society people, actors and actresses, and so forth.

As they rose to return home for luncheon Mrs. Denham approached Mrs. Maynard and her granddaughter. The girl stood up respectfully, the old lady extended a reluctant hand.

“It looks as if we were going to have a fine Bank Holiday, doesn’t it?” remarked Mrs. Denham affably; “so nice for the people!”

“H’m—for my part,” grunted Mrs. Maynard, “I’m never sorry when it rains on public holidays. It serves the people right!”

“Oh, Granny!” protested Aline, with a deprecating smile at Mrs. Denham, as though to assure her that Granny’s venom was not to be taken seriously.

Mrs. Denham hardly knew what to say. “I was wondering,” she began, feeling quite nervous, “if you and Aline would come and have tea with me this afternoon at The Royal?”

“Thank you, but we do not go to parties.”

“Oh! but it isn’t a party, I assure you. Only my friend, Miss Foster, who is staying with me—let me introduce you—and one or two others; just to watch the dancing and hear the band. Do come, dear Mrs. Maynard. I shall feel so hurt if you won’t.” (Horrid old thing! Mrs. Denham could have slapped her.)

Mrs. Maynard wavered. It meant a good tea, and she and Aline could walk to the Royal and back.

“You will?” cried Mrs. Denham, cordially. “That’s capital! I’m so glad. Then I shall expect you both any time after four o’clock.”

She and Miss Foster moved off, nodding and smiling.

Said Mrs. Maynard to her granddaughter: “Now what is that woman’s object? I’ll be bound there’s something at the back of her mind. I could see as much by her manner. I wish I hadn’t accepted. We shall look like a couple of beggars among all her fine friends!”

“Oh, no, Granny, we shan’t. You’ve got your Paisley shawl, and your best bonnet. I can iron my white frock, it doesn’t look bad, though I made it myself—not at all as if it cost only five-and-sixpence.”

“Yes, and we could barely afford that,” snapped the old lady. “And then to talk of fine weather for the people—when everything under the sun is done for the people and nothing for deserving paupers like ourselves, who are *not* of the people—thank goodness!”

The party at the Royal Hotel proved quite a success. True, Mrs. Maynard sat stern and forbidding, but a notable figure in her handsome shawl (one of the last of her saleable possessions) and her old-fashioned, picturesque bonnet into which Aline had sewn a narrow white frill. As for Aline, she received such attention from the elderly company as her grandmother afterwards pronounced to be extremely bad for her.

“It was patronage, nothing else, so don’t let it fill your head with silly ideas,” she said, as they toiled home in the dust of countless motor-cars.

“What sort of silly ideas?” inquired Aline, absently. She had enjoyed the afternoon so much that nothing could spoil the remembrance.

“Well, that you are better-looking than most girls——”

“But I am,” interrupted Aline, calmly. “I looked at myself in all those lovely mirrors, and I was quite as pretty as any of those girls dancing. Besides, they were painted, and I wasn’t!”

“That’s nothing to boast about.”

“I’m not boasting. I’m stating a fact. But any way, what does it matter?”

“No, it doesn’t matter and never will. What is the use of hair and eyes and skin like yours with nothing but stark poverty behind it all? Given your rightful place in the world you might marry a duke. As it is, you will never marry at all.”

“Anyway, don’t let’s worry,” said Aline, comfortably.

At the moment she was not particularly interested in her good looks and bad prospects. She was thinking how nice Mrs. Denham had been to her, and that she liked funny old Miss Foster, and General and Mrs. Hope and all the rest of the elderly people who had smiled so kindly upon her and inquired what she had been doing lately; a question that necessitated evasive answers. She could hardly reply: “Cooking, sweeping, mending, washing, as usual!”

The tea and the cakes had been simply delicious; she had eaten a disgraceful amount, and Granny hadn’t done badly. Probably Granny was now suffering from the surfeit and that was what made her so cross. Mrs. Denham had told Aline that she would like to see more of her; Aline hoped she meant it—people often said things like that and then forgot, and nothing happened—not unnatural, considering that she never met anyone anywhere, except in the street, or on such rare occasions as to-day.

Oh! how dismal the flat looked when they got back to it, so dark, so bare. There were only two rooms and a little kitchen; the sole relief in the living-room was a row of silhouettes in black frames, Aline’s forbears on the Maynard side, people with straight profiles, short upper lips and long necks, a well-born line of ancestors to whom the girl owed her beauty. How she, the last of the line, had come to a basement flat and bare subsistence, Aline had not thought of inquiring, and her grandmother had never told her; the truth being that Aline’s father was the culprit, and Mrs. Maynard protected

her son's memory with a rigid silence. She argued that there would seem no necessity to warn Aline against any possible inheritance of undesirable tendencies; Aline was a true Maynard in appearance, but in disposition she resembled her mother, that sweet, unselfish victim to a handsome, weak-natured man who had spent every penny of her fortune and broken her gentle heart. She had died, deserted by her husband, when Aline was but two years old; and before his own death abroad, soon afterwards, he had reduced his mother and his child to piteous poverty.

3

During the next ten days Mrs. Denham became so assiduous in pursuit of their company that Mrs. Maynard found it difficult to be obstructive without actual rudeness, and Mrs. Maynard was never rude; she was sometimes disagreeable, that she considered allowable, whatever the conditions of one's birth! But even she could not bring herself to be consistently disagreeable to Mrs. Denham; it was impossible to mistake genuine kindness of heart for patronage, however perversely she might endeavour to do so. Mrs. Maynard succumbed to these constant attentions. Would they care to come for a motor drive? Would they use these tickets for a concert, or the theatre? They were bidden to luncheon, only themselves and one elderly couple, then to a "quiet tea—no party." Previous to the quiet tea Mrs. Denham took a ticket for Aline in a raffle, the prize being a pretty white frock, and Aline won the prize. What Mrs. Maynard would have said had she known that Mrs. Denham had purchased all the tickets in the raffle need not be recorded. She never knew; and she was secretly as pleased as Aline herself when the delicate garment was delivered at the door of the flat in a gay cretonne-covered box. It was a simple afternoon frock of exquisite cut and material; it fitted the girl as if she had been measured for it.

"If only I had a hat!" sighed Aline.

"There now!" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard, "that's what Mrs. Denham has done for you—made you want things you can't have! She'd much better have given you the half-crown or whatever the raffle ticket cost. How would it do to sell the frock? You would get enough for a really good cotton and a decent straw hat."

"Oh no, Granny, *no!* It's such a sweet frock. I've never had anything like it before. I *must* keep it. My hat will do if I wash the ribbon, and nobody will look at the hat if I'm wearing the frock."

Mrs. Maynard thought it unlikely that anyone would look at the frock when they could look at Aline, but of course she did not say so. She said, while conscious of a prick of surprise that her suggestion should have been flouted so emphatically: “Well, we won’t spoil the ship for a ha’porth of tar—I’ve got ten shillings in hand, and you can get quite a nice shape for that.”

There was a pause, and following the prick of surprise a sudden and unexpected apprehension assailed the old woman’s mind; not caused by the thought of the money, but by the question whether the child would try to resist the temptation. Aline knew well enough that the ten shillings could ill be spared. Was it possible that, after all, she *had* inherited something of her father’s weak nature?

At first the young face beamed with delight, then clouded, then beamed again.

“It’s awfully good of you, Granny——” she said, with obvious hesitation.

Now what was coming?

“I suppose I could get quite a good shape at that little French shop? Oh! Granny, how perfectly lovely! You *are* an old darling. Thank you such heaps and heaps.”

She flung her arms about her grandmother’s neck. Mrs. Maynard controlled and concealed her feelings. She had made Aline the offer freely; was it reasonable to have expected any form of refusal? What young girl would be so ultra-altruistic! The test was altogether too trivial to be regarded as a reason for the revelation of family failings. She was making a mountain out of a molehill. At the same time her heart misgave her.

4

On a broiling afternoon the pair started for Beach Lodge; shade was not one of the blessings of Haven-on-Sea, and they were thankful to enter the cool, spacious dwelling with its sun blinds and parquet flooring, and the perfume of roses massed in big bowls.

As Mrs. Maynard shook hands with her hostess she glanced about her at the well-dressed gathering that filled the drawing-room.

“So this,” she remarked, with a grim smile, “is not a party?”

“Oh, well,” apologized Mrs. Denham, guiltily, “you know how these things grow. I just mentioned as I met people that I should be in for tea this



afternoon, and I didn't realize, till I began to count up, how many people I *had* told! But it's quite informal, dear Mrs. Maynard. I know you hate crowds, but it's only just old friends—to meet my brother, Colonel Kaye, who has lately arrived from India. May I introduce him to you? He's been in India for years. He looks like it, doesn't he?—so brown!”

She beckoned to a tall, spare man with a sun-tanned face, prominent features, and crisp grey hair. He came forward, and even Mrs. Maynard was impressed with his friendly smile and pleasant blue eyes, an honest dependable human being who shared his sister's faculty for putting other people at their ease. If only her son had been like that, how different life would have proved for herself and Aline! Where was Aline? As they exchanged platitudes she felt she wanted Aline to know this man; he would be kind and talk to the child, perhaps take her to have some tea. But Aline had been captured by an old gentleman, and the two were seated on a sofa at the farther end of the room. What a picture the girl looked in the charming white frock and hat, responding politely to her aged companion's remarks; probably he was telling her about his gout, or something equally uninteresting to the young. Aline's manners were perfect; she was listening with apparent sympathy as, being deaf himself, he shouted hoarsely in her ear.

Becoming conscious of Mrs. Maynard's inattention to his civil observations, Colonel Kaye followed the direction of her gaze. He thought: “What a refreshingly pretty girl!” She was behaving so nicely to the semi-senile old person who had fastened on to her. He longed to go to the rescue—not that he was young himself, but at least he was not old enough to be her great-grandfather.

“Can you tell me,” he began diffidently to Mrs. Maynard, “who the young lady is, sitting over there on the sofa?”

“As it happens, I can. She is my granddaughter.”

“She can't be very much amused at present,” he said, a twinkle in his eyes. “I expect an ice would be more acceptable to her than conversation with her aged companion. Won't you introduce me?—and we might go in search of something that might please your granddaughter better.”

“Delighted!” Mrs. Maynard made her way through groups of chattering people, Colonel Kaye in her wake.

“Aline,” she said, and the girl rose with admirably concealed relief. “Colonel Kaye, Mrs. Denham's brother, has kindly offered to take us in to

tea.”

Excellent, thought Mrs. Denham, as she observed the introduction, and watched the trio leave the drawing-room. Later, when in the dining-room, she saw her brother seated in a corner with Aline while Mrs. Maynard was engaged in conversation with a spinster noted for her earnest interest in rescue work. The two would not agree; so much the better; argument would keep the old woman occupied. Passing, she heard Mrs. Maynard remark, acrimoniously: “I have no sympathy with bad girls. Look after the good ones, make it worth their while to behave themselves!”

“Oh, but my dear lady!” exclaimed the other, deeply shocked. “Surely you must allow that our duty lies . . .”

That was all right. Nugent and Aline would have time to become acquainted, and they appeared to be making good progress. Aline looked radiant, and Nugent was obviously laying himself out to be agreeable. He was talking about India, describing his old bearer; that much Mrs. Denham overheard as she lingered near them superintending the lavish supply of refreshments.

“Old Gunga has been with me since I went out as a boy,” he was saying, “and nothing would ever shake his loyalty and devotion. It was the one thing I minded when I came home—parting from Gunga!”

“And will he come back to you when you go out again?” asked Aline.

“Certainly, if he’s alive! He has gone to his home meantime; he won’t take service with anyone else, and he’ll be on the platform to welcome me. My present billet takes me to Simla for the hot weather, and most of the winter I travel about on inspection in the plains; Gunga goes everywhere with me and sees to my comfort. I don’t know what I should do without the old chap.”

“It must be a nice life. You like India?”

“Yes. I know the country so well, and I love my work. Of course during the War things were difficult, but on the whole we didn’t feel it out there so much as you people at home must have done. I tried my level best to get to France, but it was no good. I was too senior, and I was useful in India. You see, I left my regiment a good many years back for civil appointments, or I suppose I should have been shelved long before now.”

Silence fell between them for a space. Aline felt a little uncomfortable; she thought perhaps he was bored with her company and wanted to talk to somebody else, but she did not know how to release him. If she made a

move he might imagine that it was she who was bored, when she was really enjoying herself mightily! Colonel Kaye was so nice, and so kind. It occurred to her with a spice of amusement that he was about the youngest man in the company, and she quite the youngest female—yet what a difference in their respective ages! She wondered how old he was; anyway, he was charming. She cast a shy glance at his face and their eyes met; as he smiled she knew she was blushing. How stupid, how tiresome!

“Do you go to many dances?” he asked, tactfully, though he found himself wanting to ask her of what she was thinking.

“I have never been to a dance,” she said simply.

“Why? Doesn’t your grandmother approve of dancing?” He spoke with sympathy; at her age she ought to be dancing most nights in the week.

“We—we don’t go out much. You see, we know very few people, and—and——” she stammered, feeling instinctively that it would be bad form to parade their poverty. “I’m quite happy without dances. There’s plenty for me to do.”

“And what do you do?” He really desired to know, and could not refrain from trying to find out.

Aline coloured. “Oh, well, I look after the flat, and help Granny.”

He perceived her reluctance to answer his question, and made up his mind to elicit all the information he wanted from his sister when the party was over.

“Do *you* like dancing?” she inquired, boldly; it seemed the best way of evading awkward questions.

He laughed. “I? Good gracious! I’ve never danced in my life!”

“Like me!” she interposed, merrily.

“What about riding and tennis?”

She shook her head, left him puzzled. The grandmother must be an old-fashioned tyrant! His eyes travelled round the room in search of Mrs. Maynard. There she was, standing by the table setting down an empty cup—an extraordinary old bird in a shawl and sort of poke-bonnet, with a self-assured bearing. The pair interested him curiously. He repented having looked for her; she caught his eye, then perceived her granddaughter seated beside him, and approached with determination.

“It is time we were going, Aline.”

The girl rose obediently. Kaye wished she had shown a little reluctance.

“Oh, surely,” he protested, “it’s too soon to leave yet. What will my sister say?”

“We have some distance to go,” replied the old lady, decisively, “and I am not a good walker.” She held out her hand. “Thank you for looking after my granddaughter. Come along, Aline.”

He felt snubbed. No matter; his visit to Beach Lodge was likely to be a long one; some way of seeing more of the couple could be contrived later. He watched them as they stood exchanging farewells with his sister, who was evidently deploring their early departure; but Mrs. Maynard remained obdurate. Just as they were leaving the room Aline looked back, he had hoped she might; he smiled and waved, she did the same. An adorable child; no trace of vanity, no affectations, no consciousness of her beauty, as natural as a wild flower. Why was her existence so different from the majority of young people? it seemed such a shame, so pathetic. Then she and her aged relative vanished from his sight.

## CHAPTER II

### 1

Brother and sister met at the dinner table that evening, refreshed. The party over, Kaye had set out for a stroll on the sea front; Mrs. Denham had fled to her room for a rest.

She intended to say nothing about the Maynards to Nugent until he should mention them himself.

“Well, my little gathering went off all right, don’t you think?” she began. “I hope tea-fights don’t bore you to death. They rage here, and I shall be expected to drag you with me to them all. You were such a help this afternoon, and everybody said how nice you were.”

“Very kind of them. No, tea-fights don’t bore me particularly. Perhaps I’ve had too little experience in that line. Anyway, I enjoyed yours. I wonder,” he continued, “what the united ages of your guests would have amounted to. Does nobody ever die in this place?”

“Not often. It’s such a paradise for the aged that they don’t seem anxious to sample any other. When you retire you must settle here—Haven instead of Heaven.”

“And toddle about, or go in a bath chair, and fasten on to some young and pretty female, as I observed one of your guests did this afternoon.”

“Well, you accomplished the last item,” she could not resist remarking, with a sly smile.

He reddened. “Did I behave badly? I assure you it was only due to extreme pity. I felt I must rescue a damsel in distress. Though I’m afraid the exchange couldn’t have meant much to her. Anyway, she didn’t have to bellow at me, and I was just active enough to supply her with a good tea.”

“She is a pretty creature, isn’t she?—little Aline Maynard.”

“Pretty!” he exclaimed. “The child is lovely. And as far as I could gather, it’s a stark staring case of sweetness wasted on the desert air.”

“Ah yes,” sighed Mrs. Denham, with secret satisfaction, “poor little soul! I’m so sorry for her. I give her what little treats I can, but the old lady is inclined to be obstructive, she is proud and suspicious to a fault. I hardly thought I should entice her to bring Aline here to-day, and I only succeeded by pretending it wasn’t a party. Then, of course, when she got here and saw the crowd she was annoyed.”

“What an old devil! Fancy grudging any pleasure to that charming little girl.”

“You thought her charming? I’m so glad. I was afraid when I saw you walk off with her that you might find her stupid. She has seen nothing of the world; I believe her father, Mrs. Maynard’s son, lost all their money somehow—the old lady hinted as much to me once—with the result that the two have barely enough to live upon. That girl is angelic; they have no servant and she does all the work of their horrible little basement flat.”

“*What!*—do you mean she has to scrub and cook?”

With the outlook of an old Anglo-Indian such an idea distressed Kaye beyond measure. Even to be waited upon by white women caused him mental discomfort; it was all he could do to refrain from apologizing when his sister’s head housemaid brought in his early morning tea, or from springing up when the parlourmaids handed him dishes at table.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Denham, “it’s all that, but it won’t do Aline any harm. A very good thing for girls of our class to get accustomed to housework. It’s a branch of their education that is too much neglected nowadays.”

“But to think of that dainty child——”

“Don’t think about it, my dear, if it worries you. She is happy enough in her own way. She adores her tiresome old grandmother, who has certainly brought her up well, and they understand each other. Lately I have more or less broken down the ice of the old woman’s pride; in her heart she likes to see Aline enjoying herself, and I mean to continue my efforts to give the child what little pleasures I can.”

“Couldn’t I help?” he suggested, rather shamefacedly, whereat Mrs. Denham chuckled inwardly.

“Yes, certainly. We’ll take them out in the car. We might arrange a drive for the day after to-morrow.”

“Why not to-morrow?”

“To-morrow I have to go to a bazaar.” Mrs. Denham did not mean to rush matters.

“Will they be at the bazaar?”

“Of course not, silly! There’s no money for bazaars.”

“But couldn’t we treat them?”

“My dear, you don’t know Mrs. Maynard!”

“Do you expect me to go to the bazaar?” he asked, rather apprehensively.

“Of course not. You can go and get yourself put up for the club. You’ll need some relaxation from females and tea parties. You’re pretty sure to find someone you know among the list of members; if not, I can see to it for you.”

He agreed, having no desire to leave Haven-on-Sea. The air suited him; he had come home for prolonged change and rest, and what pleasanter quarters could he find than in the house of his affectionate and hospitable sister who he knew would welcome his company for as long as he chose to stay.

Mrs. Maynard soon became alive to the purport of Mrs. Denham’s tactics. Mingled hope and doubt disturbed her mind. From a material point of view it would be an excellent thing for Aline if Colonel Kaye proposed to her, but how would such a marriage turn out? The man was so much Aline’s senior, she might have to turn nurse as well as wife while she was still

young. Yet—better be nursing a well-to-do husband than a pauper grandmother; and her future would be secure. Rigid settlements could be insisted upon. Yes, it was wisest to let Mrs. Denham have her will and to place no obstacles in the way of a comfortable, if perchance morally perilous, future for Aline. Mrs. Maynard even dipped into her tiny capital and bought various garments for her grandchild, overriding Aline's amazed protests.

“But, Granny—we can't afford it! I've felt such a pig ever since the hat! I know I ought to have refused that—I feel ashamed whenever I think of it. I simply won't let you spend more.”

“You will do as I bid you, miss! I enjoy these outings Mrs. Denham is charitable enough to give us, and it will damp my enjoyment to see you looking like a charity-school girl. You can't go on wearing the raffle frock every day, it isn't suitable. Think of me for once instead of yourself.”

“Oh, Granny, how can you, when it's the other way? on!” cried Aline; she began to wonder if her grandmother could have a nest-egg concealed, or have come into a little money unexpectedly. What else could possibly explain such behaviour? With this explanation she quieted her scruples and found the keenest enjoyment in wearing the few additions to her scanty wardrobe; they made all the difference to her, mentally and physically, and the girl grew more attractive day by day to Mrs. Denham's elderly brother.

Yet, so far, the idea of making Aline Maynard his wife had not actually entered Kaye's mind; and when, inevitably, the moment came for it to do so, he put it away from him with a feeling akin to consternation. What an idea—as if a child of her age could be expected to love a Methuselah! He blamed himself for harbouring such a thought. He wished he could adopt her, take her out to India and give her the opportunity of finding some nice young fellow who would make her a good husband—a rising civilian, or a promising soldier. He could supply the outfit, make her an allowance, and provide for her in his will. What pleasure such an undertaking would afford him!

In the simplicity of his heart he propounded the scheme to his sister one afternoon when they were about to start on a motoring expedition, Mrs. Maynard and Aline, of course, to accompany them.

“But, my good fool!” exclaimed Mrs. Denham, highly entertained, “such a plan would be quite impossible, unless you took the precaution of providing a chaperon.”

“Couldn’t you do chaperon?—bring Aline out to India for six months?”

“Not me! I detest travelling. Besides, India has never appealed to me. Heat knocks me up.”

“It isn’t hot in the plains in the winter, nor in the hills in the summer—not nearly as hot as it is here, and there’s a vast deal more shade—why, you have hardly what can be called a tree in the place!”

“I can’t bear insects and snakes and wild beasts and black people. No, my dear, I am *not* going out to India even to please you, or to get a husband for Aline. If you want to adopt her you’d better marry one of the countless spinsters of a certain age who are as numerous here as the sands of the sea—on condition that she chaperons your little friend.”

“Good heavens!”

“Well then,” pursued Mrs. Denham, apparently engrossed in fitting on a pair of gloves, “why not marry Aline yourself?”

She glanced at him covertly, but his expression told her nothing.

“My age makes that impossible,” he said quietly.

“I can’t see why,” she argued, as though they were discussing some impersonal problem. “You are exceptionally young for your age, and Aline has never mixed with her contemporaries. She is accustomed to——” Mrs. Denham was about to say “old people,” but checked herself in time—“she is accustomed to people older than herself. You might do a great deal worse if you want to marry at all.”

“I’m thinking of her, not of myself.”

“Then may I suggest that *she* could hardly do better? You have a good position, you are comfortably off; you are—forgive personal remarks—quite nice-looking; and many men far older than you are have married girls of Aline’s age with the happiest results.”

Still he did not speak. She continued persuasively: “Of course, so much depends on the girl. A flighty butterfly wouldn’t do, but Aline isn’t flighty; she has a sweet disposition and has been well brought up. I am sure she would never give you the smallest reason to regret having married her. Personally I should be delighted; I may as well confess that I had it in my mind before you came home.”

“Oh, you schemer!” he exclaimed.



Involuntarily he glanced at his reflection in the big mirror on the opposite wall. Perhaps Amy was not so far wrong; he was strong and upright; not bald, not fat; he could ride and shoot and play games as well as most men twenty years his junior. No reason why he should not remain quite as energetic for a long time to come. He had seen and known men of even well over seventy who were hale and hearty, able to hunt and shoot with vigour—men, too, who had by no means lived the clean, careful life he himself had lived. Sometimes they married young wives and had families. Supposing he did marry Aline and they had children! The thought filled him with an astonishing rapture. He might see sons and daughters grow up, it was not even too late to think of grandchildren about him. Why raise imaginary barriers, why encourage vague scruples? Amy saw nothing objectionable in the plan, and she was a level-headed, sensible creature; if she considered it unfair to Aline she would never have suggested it.

“Well?” his sister’s voice roused him from his reverie; he turned from the inspection of his appearance in the mirror to see her smiling indulgently. “How much longer are we to keep the car waiting—not to speak of your future fiancée and grandmother-in-law?”

“Sorry,” he said, flushing, “but you gave me furiously to think.”

“And I hope you prefer my suggestion to your own, after all that thinking.”

“It is certainly the more attractive of the two. But it requires more thinking.”

“Think away then, but come along now with your thoughts; we are late.”

### 3

They motored to a ruined castle that topped a little old town, and while Mrs. Denham and Mrs. Maynard sat in the shade of a crumbling wall Colonel Kaye and Aline wandered about.

The man’s heart beat disturbingly as he looked down at the slim figure by his side. She was more silent than usual; of what was she thinking? He made bold to ask her.

For a moment she considered. “I hardly know. I am so happy I don’t believe I was thinking at all!”

“You like these excursions with my sister?” He longed to add—“and with me.”

To his delight she said: “Oh! *yes*, with your sister, and with *you*. Granny enjoys them so much, too. They do her no end of good. She has been quite different lately. You and Mrs. Denham are so awfully kind, and Granny doesn’t seem to—to mind. She used to be angry when people tried to be kind. Now she isn’t.”

“But we aren’t ‘trying to be kind’! We think it kind of you and Mrs. Maynard to give us your company.”

What a stilted, old-fashioned speech! Kaye cast wildly about in his mind for something more stirring to say. Then he rushed a fence.

“What would your grandmother do without you?”

Surprised, she halted to gaze up at him with limpid violet eyes. The darling! How sweet, how enchanting she looked!

“What would Granny do without me?” she echoed, puzzled. “But she will never have to do without me. Why should she?”

“You will marry some day.”

“Oh no, I don’t suppose so. Granny says I shall never have the chance!” She laughed, as if such a fate held no terrors for her.

“But if you had the chance—would you take it?”

“That would depend——”

“On what?”

“On the man, of course, and on Granny. If Granny didn’t like him I shouldn’t.”

“Supposing she wished you to marry somebody you didn’t like—what then?”

“I can’t suppose anything of the sort. What is the matter with you this afternoon? You ask such funny questions!”

“The subject interests me.”

“The subject of marriage?”

“Not in the abstract. The subject of your marriage.”

“It isn’t a subject. I’m not going to be married.”

“You will be, some day. Don’t you ever think of the possibility? What kind of man would you like to marry?”

“Good gracious! How you worry! Of course a sort of prince in a fairy tale.”

“Handsome and rich, and above all—young?”

“He needn’t be too young. I’m sure young men are silly. I watch them on the pier, and I wonder what the girls can see in them.”

That pleased him. He felt he had made progress; at least he now knew something of her views, and they were somewhat in his favour. If not handsome he was passable; as to riches he would seem a comparative millionaire to a girl in Aline’s circumstances, and he had it from her own lips that youth was not a condition. He was unable to resist a return to the charge.

“Another thing,” he said tentatively. “Must you be desperately in love with your prince?”

“Does it matter very much? I was reading a book the other day, an old book of Granny’s; it said that on the girl’s part esteem and liking, regard, was all that was necessary to begin with—that love came afterwards. Do you think that is true? You see, I know nothing about love.”

“Perhaps in some cases it is true, but only, I should say, if the young lady had never been in love before.”

Suddenly, to his embarrassment, she asked him: “Have you ever been in love? How does one recognize the real thing? Do tell me.”

His relief was immense when at that moment Mrs. Denham, brandishing her parasol, called to them that it was time for their picnic tea. They all joined up and busied themselves unpacking the baskets with the aid of the chauffeur. No further opportunity occurred for private conversation.

When, that evening, his sister inquired how he had got on with Aline, Kaye said he had made up his mind.

“In which direction?” she asked anxiously.

“Can there be any doubt?” he retorted, a trifle nettled.

“You mean you are going to marry her?”

“Yes, if she will accept me.”

“Of course she will ‘accept you.’ While you were wandering about together this afternoon I had a serious talk with Mrs. Maynard. I can assure you she will put no obstacle in your way.”

“But, Amy, remember—I don’t want Aline influenced. She must accept me of her own free will.”

“Why shouldn’t she? You are the first man to come into her life, and she’s more than half in love with you already, though she mayn’t have realized it yet. Mrs. Maynard says she is always talking about you. Nobody will influence her except yourself.”

“Do you know I have never asked any woman to marry me, so far?”

“My *dear* Nugent!”

“No; years ago I almost proposed to a girl, but another fellow got there first, and I found I wasn’t broken-hearted. Later I thanked my stars, for she led him an awful existence and finally bolted with a married man. I don’t say I haven’t had one or two mild affairs besides, but up to now nothing serious.”

“So that you have no dark secrets to trouble your conscience!”

Mrs. Denham regarded her brother with a certain amount of wonder. He must be rather cold-blooded; even now the prospect of marrying a young and really beautiful girl did not seem to set him on fire; he ate and drank, and smoked, and read the papers just as calmly as though he were heartwhole. Yet in love he undoubtedly must be; otherwise, knowing his straightforward nature, she felt sure he would never dream of marrying. Well, a steady, gentle courtship would suit Aline much better than a tempestuous wooing which might only have frightened her. . . . Except for the difference in their ages, which really did not count compared with other advantages, it ought to be an ideal union; and Mrs. Denham revelled in the prospect of providing the trousseau and having a really nice wedding from her house. She planned a marquee on the lawn, she would invite all her friends, who, for her sake, would send presents; a wedding at Haven-on-Sea was such an event that the excitement would stimulate them to generosity! Then what few Kaye relations existed must be bidden, and some of the Denhams would also enjoy coming down for a couple of nights; accommodation could easily be arranged beyond what the house might provide. Miss Foster, too, she would ask, and pay the poor old dear’s expenses. Was it not Miss Foster who had first inspired her with the idea of the marriage? She would tell Miss Foster this; how pleased she would be—something for her to think and talk about for ages!

Full of delightful anticipation Mrs. Denham sat beside her brother on the balcony overlooking the sea. Nugent had fallen into an exasperating silence.

“When are you going to get things settled?” she asked him impatiently.

“As soon as I have a good opportunity.”

“But you can make a good opportunity at any time. Take my advice and go and see Mrs. Maynard to-morrow. I can send a note to Aline asking her to come and help me over plans for a sale of work. That would leave the coast clear for you; not that I have a sale of work on hand, but never mind——”

He hesitated. Then he said: “Very well, that will do nicely.”

She rose and went inside to her writing-table, scribbled for a few moments, rang the bell and gave orders that the note should be conveyed, by one of the maids on her bicycle, to Miss Maynard. Wait for a verbal answer.

Yes, Miss Maynard would be with Mrs. Denham to-morrow afternoon, three o’clock, only too pleased.

“Then that’s all right!” pronounced Mrs. Denham. “Have a talk with the old lady, and then you’ll know exactly where you are.”

“I hope so. But it doesn’t rest with the old lady; it rests with Aline.”

Mrs. Denham reflected that it came to the same thing, but she did not argue the point. She went to bed with the agreeable feeling that all was now sure and certain.

### CHAPTER III

#### 1

On his way to Mrs. Maynard’s flat Kaye met Aline. He had hoped this might happen, and therefore he had dawdled deliberately; he would like to feel certain of Aline’s acceptance before his interview with her grandmother—not that he had very much doubt in his mind now, and what little there was dispersed swiftly at sight of the girl’s happy face.

“Oh! How nice to meet you!” she cried. “I thought you would be sure to go and hide somewhere while Mrs. Denham and I did the sale-of-work business, and that I mightn’t see you at all. Were you coming to fetch me?”

He looked at her with tender amusement, and decided that the moment had come.

“No, I wasn’t coming to fetch you, though I hoped we might meet. I am on my way to call on your grandmother.”

“What on earth for?” she asked, thrilled by his demeanour. “Do tell me. I feel as if there was some secret!”

“Come down here, and I’ll tell you,” he said, turning towards a deserted strip of road that lay at right angles, ending in a patch of waste ground; not exactly an ideal spot for a proposal of marriage, yet at least they had the place to themselves.

“Well?” she queried, full of curiosity. “What are you going to see Granny about?”

“About you!”

“About *me*! Why, what have I done?”

“Nothing, except make me want to marry you.”

“Oh!”—she stood still; her face flushing and paling by turns.

He watched her with a sensation of exquisite pleasure. She would be his, his very own, to cherish and treasure, and make happy. Gently he took her hand.

“Now you know why I am on my way to the flat!”

“To—to ask—Granny?” she gasped, bewildered.

“Yes, the correct thing to do, you know. Old-fashioned, no doubt, but just as well. What do you think she will say? Will she give me permission to pay my addresses to her granddaughter?”

He laughed, light-heartedly, at his own little joke; and the fact that Aline remained silent did not trouble him, so sure did he feel that all was as it should be, and as he wished. He took her other hand, held both closely in his own.

“Darling! how I long to kiss you—” he glanced round; she shrank aside. “No, not here, of course,” he added hastily; “stupid of me—but if only you knew how tempting you look! Well, I must be getting on, and my sister is expecting you. I’ll come straight back—and *then*?”

Her eyes were downcast, she was breathing quickly. Poor little pet, he had startled her. “There, there,” he said soothingly, and patted her shoulder. “Did I surprise you? Never mind, I’ll be with you again very soon.”

She hurried from him without once looking back. Smiling he gazed after her for a few moments; then walked on towards the dull road where Mrs. Maynard’s flat was to be found.

All the way to Beach Lodge, after parting with Colonel Kaye, Aline's mind was in tumult. He had seemed to take it for granted that she was going to marry him, when such an idea had never entered her head until now! She recalled her words to him when they met on the road—that she had been afraid she might not see him to-day; perhaps he had thought she was making up to him—how awful! Still, he had said he was on his way to see Granny, so it must all have been in his mind beforehand. How extraordinary! Was she engaged to him? He seemed to think so. What would Granny say! Aline hoped Granny would be civil, but she did not know whether she hoped Granny would encourage Colonel Kaye or not.

Gradually, as she loitered along the dusty road, light came to her. Mrs. Denham had been kind with this purpose in view; Granny must have understood and approved—that would account for her new complaisance, *and* the new clothes! It was a sort of conspiracy among the elders. Not fair; she felt such a fool! At any rate she knew now what they had been up to—Granny, and Mrs. Denham, and Colonel Kaye. And what about herself? None of them had tried to find out how she might feel about it, no doubt because they never imagined she could be anything but overjoyed. . . . And certainly it *would* be very nice to be married, and go to India; perhaps Colonel Kaye would give her some money so that she could help Granny out of her own pocket. But poor Granny!—left all alone.

Mrs. Denham rose from her writing-table when Miss Maynard was announced. The girl rushed at her.

“Oh! Mrs. Denham!” she cried tremulously. “I feel in such a muddle—I met Colonel Kaye on the road and he said—he said he was on his way to see Granny about marrying me—*me!*”

Mrs. Denham tried not to laugh. How like dear old Nugent to propose in such fashion—and in the road, too! She kissed the flushed face, then gazed at it, smiling.

“Well,” she said affectionately, “can you bear me as a sister-in-law?”

Aline whimpered. “I—can't believe it. I feel frightened.”

“What is there to frighten you? You're a lucky girl, my dear. You'll have the best and kindest husband in the world. Nugent is a man in a thousand. Of course the only drawback is his age compared with yours; but he won't be

really old for many, many years to come, not until you are a middle-aged matron—perhaps a Granny yourself!”

“Oh! it isn’t his age. I’m sure I should hate to marry a boy. It’s only that the whole thing seems so—so queer. I wasn’t prepared for it, and I feel—oh! I feel anyhow!” she broke down and wept aloud like a child.

“Now, now, you mustn’t cry,” urged Mrs. Denham in kindly reproach. “Pull yourself together, dear. You don’t want Nugent to come back and find you with a red nose and swollen eyelids, do you? Come and sit down on the sofa.”

She drew Aline to the couch. Then rang the bell, and met the parlourmaid at the door to order iced lemonade. By the time this pick-me-up arrived Aline’s tears were dried. She was composed, though still rather nervous; and it amused Mrs. Denham to observe how the fresh lemonade was appreciated, the sugary biscuits too that accompanied the drink; they vanished rapidly.

“Nice?” she inquired. Aline nodded and took the last biscuit on the plate. “Now you feel better?”

“Yes,” with a contented sigh. “Now I’m all right. I suppose I was very silly, but you do understand, don’t you? I don’t mean to be ungrateful, you know I’m not; but I’m so stupid, and you and Colonel Kaye—I’m simply not worth it——”

“Well, my dear, if Nugent and I think you are—isn’t that sufficient?”

“Yes, yes, of course—if only I don’t prove a disappointment.”

“Why should you? You’ve been brought up as a lady. I know you and Granny are poor, but that has nothing to do with it. Nugent has plenty of money, and it will make him so happy to spend it on you.”

“Do you think——” began Aline, and hesitated.

“Think what?—out with it!”

“Do you think he would let me give Granny some money—after we were married?”

A little qualm ruffled the surface of Mrs. Denham’s satisfaction. Aline must not marry Nugent simply with the object of providing for old Mrs. Maynard! Then she brushed aside the thought. Aline would marry Nugent because she admired and was attracted by him, because he loved her; and very soon she would love him as a good wife should love a good husband.



And if she thought of her grandmother, shrank from the notion of deserting the old lady in her poverty, was it not perfectly natural and a very worthy instinct?

“I am sure,” she said in a tone of conviction, “that Nugent will allow you to do anything you may wish for Granny. It will be so nice for you to feel you can give her presents and make her more comfortable.”

“Such a very little would mean all the difference,” Aline exclaimed eagerly. “Poor Granny, she is so plucky. I should love her to have a cure for her rheumatism.”

“Yes, and a servant,” encouraged Mrs. Denham; “anything in reason.”

“I would never be unreasonable,” declared Aline, “and I would always do what he told me.”

“‘Love, honour, and obey,’ ” quoted Mrs. Denham lightly.

“Yes, ‘love, honour, and obey,’ ” echoed Aline in a faint though solemn voice.

She felt weary, longed to lay her head on one of the big downy cushions and go to sleep; the room was so restful, so fragrant with flowers, and outside the sun was so hot. She thought of the dust and the glare on that deserted bit of road, the tall weeds on the waste patch of ground, and the rubbish, rusty tins and empty bottles—all the surroundings of the spot where Colonel Kaye had exploded his bombshell. What a contrast to the cool peace and comfort here! . . . Her eyelids drooped; she became dimly conscious that a silk cushion was being placed behind her aching head. . . .

Mrs. Denham stole from the room. The child needed a rest; Nugent must not disturb her just yet. She waited for her brother’s return and waylaid him. He was mopping his forehead.

“By Jove!” he ejaculated. “It’s infernally hot. Where’s Aline?”

“Aline’s asleep. Come into my boudoir.”

“Asleep! Is anything wrong?”

“Nothing; only the child arrived in a state of nervous excitement, and you must leave her alone for a bit. Perhaps you rushed things rather more than you should have done, but there’s nothing to worry about. She’s all right. Well now,” as they seated themselves in the luxurious little sanctum, “how did you get on with Granny?”

“The old girl was amiable enough, but not what you might call affectionate! Anyway she wasn’t obstructive.”

“She knows better than that!” observed Mrs. Denham a trifle tartly; she had not expected Mrs. Maynard to gush over Aline’s good luck. “So now it’s all settled? Aline shall have a nice wedding. I’ve always wanted to have a wedding from this house.”

“Oh! you don’t mean a big show?” asked Kaye in alarm. “I’m sure Aline wouldn’t want it, or her grandmother either. I thought we’d be married quite quietly in the morning and go off somewhere, some village on the Cornish coast, perhaps; then come back and pay you a visit before going to the south of France for the winter——”

He regarded his sister with anxious eyes.

“Well, we’ll think about it,” she temporized. “Now I’ll go and see if Aline is awake.”

“Don’t disturb her if she isn’t.” He followed his sister to the drawing-room door, which she opened cautiously. As he looked over her head he drew a long breath at sight of the slip of a figure stretched on the sofa; the lovely sleeping face with the bloom of a wild rose, long dark lashes resting on the tender cheeks, bright hair curling over the black satin cushion. One arm was thrown up above her head; the loose sleeve of the simple cotton gown had fallen back, displaying the delicate white flesh. What a picture!—the angel, the darling, his jewel! What had he done to deserve such a prize? How he would cherish and guard her! . . . For one moment he doubted if he ought to take her to India; supposing the climate did not suit her; supposing she fell a victim to any of the horrible ailments rife in the country; she was so fragile, so exquisite, he could not bear to think of her even being bitten by a mosquito! Yet, after all, he had not much more than a year and a half to put in from now to claim his full pension, and it wasn’t as if she would be down in the plains for the hot weather and rainy season. Mercifully his billet meant Simla for the summer months. They would be going straight up there when they got out next spring; and she had said she longed to see India—the experience would interest her. He tiptoed away as Mrs. Denham closed the door gently.

“I’ll go and have a bath,” he said. “I’m so beastly hot.”

When, half an hour later, he came down spruce and cool in white flannels, his sister surveyed him with approval; he was an excellent example of an English gentleman, with his crisp grey hair, healthy tanned skin and

clear blue eyes; he and Aline would make a picturesque pair. She watched him as he strode towards the drawing-room door, opened it, glanced within, turned and nodded to her; then entered the room, shutting the door behind him.

Mrs. Denham looked at the clock; there was a good hour before tea-time. She ordered the car and drove to Mrs. Maynard's flat with the intention of bringing the old lady back for tea.

4

Alas for poor Mrs. Denham's plans! Granny proved obdurate in the matter of a grand wedding. She came back for tea at Beach Lodge; she was as agreeable as could be expected, exceptionally so for her; but she refused definitely and finally to allow Mrs. Denham to spend money on her granddaughter's nuptials. If Mrs. Denham were kind enough to give the child a modest outfit, well and good; it could be regarded legitimately as a wedding present; but nothing else.

In the flat, and all the way back to Beach Lodge, and while the two sat in the boudoir awaiting tea and the appearance of the engaged couple, Mrs. Denham argued, entreated; but all to no purpose. At the same time Mrs. Maynard laid stress on the necessity for suitable settlements.

"But of course!" acquiesced the distracted Mrs. Denham. "It goes without saying that my brother will do the right thing. But," with a final attack, "I do beg you once more to let me give Aline a proper wedding. It's very little to ask, after all!"

"It's not *my* notion of a very little," replied Mrs. Maynard, shutting her mouth with a snap; and Mrs. Denham sighed. She feared that her brother would back up the obstinate old dame; and the tiresome Aline would, of course, agree with whatever he and her grandmother wished. It was rather hard, after all the trouble she had taken!

"Well, mayn't I ask just a few people?" she pleaded plaintively. "And if you are determined that they are to be married quite quietly in the morning, can't I have a luncheon, a sort of wedding breakfast, before they start off?"

Reluctantly Mrs. Maynard conceded that much.

It all ended in the marriage date being fixed for a month hence; and Mrs. Denham contrived to fill the house with relations, and smuggled in Miss Foster, though friends had been strictly barred. The servants went to the church with the rest of the party from Beach Lodge, but the subsequent cold

spread was perfect. Aline went off on her honeymoon, a ravishing vision in powder-blue crêpe de Chine, with hat and wrap to match. What that turn-out alone had cost Mrs. Denham only Mrs. Denham (and the dressmaker) could have divulged. She told Mrs. Maynard one falsehood after another in connexion with the elaborate trousseau provided; in fact she went so far as to have a trunk packed in secret and placed among Nugent's luggage, taking care that the trunk looked like a man's, that it might escape Mrs. Maynard's eagle eye.

Yet, despite Mrs. Maynard's aggravating behaviour, Amy Denham felt desperately sorry for the old lady as the car drove off—Aline waving, Nugent holding his hat aloft. The bride's cheeks were flushed with excitement, she looked the happiest of brides; while Mrs. Maynard stood rigid on the doorstep, like a stone image in her Paisley shawl and antiquated bonnet. . . . Mrs. Denham laid a sympathetic hand on the bony arm.

"Don't grieve too much, dear friend," she urged softly. "Remember that Aline will be happy, and safe."

"Ah!" muttered the old woman, as if talking to herself. "*Will* she be safe?"

Mrs. Denham could have shaken her. "What do you mean?" she exclaimed incensed.

But Mrs. Maynard only looked round vacantly, and said nothing more.

## CHAPTER IV

### 1

The months passed swiftly, joyously, for Aline; too swiftly perhaps for Colonel Kaye, to whom every moment was precious. Yet, when the time came to prepare for India, Aline felt as if years had gone by since her marriage; she could hardly believe she had ever been Aline Maynard in shabby clothes, scrubbing and cooking, screwing and scraping! She was happy about Granny; there had been business interviews in London, and she had signed her new name to incomprehensible documents that at any rate she understood meant comfort for Granny. It added immensely to her happiness; she could enjoy her wonderful life so much more completely, take full pleasure in all the lovely presents Nugent gave her, and revel in the luxury of her surroundings.

They travelled abroad all the winter, moving as they felt inclined from one delightful spot to another, until it was time to return and say good-bye to

Amy and Granny, and accomplish necessary shopping previous to the start across the Continent. The voyage, too, was enchanting; Aline loved it. She proved a good sailor, everybody was so nice. Nugent liked her to join in the games, encouraged her to dance—she had taken a few dancing lessons—and he seemed quite pleased when all the young men in the ship crowded round her. She favoured no one of them more than another; it was the dancing and amusement she liked, not the young men.

“They are such idiots,” she confided to her husband, “but as long as they can dance, and all that, it doesn’t matter. I wish you danced too, Nugent, then I shouldn’t have to dance with anybody else.”

He kissed her and laughed. “It’s good for you to mix with young people,” he said fondly, “and to get away from me sometimes.”

“Oh! Nugent—I never want to get away from you!”

“Sooner or later you’ll have to do without me occasionally; when I go on my tours of inspection in the winter, for example.”

“Couldn’t I come, too?”

“No, my child. I’m not going to rush you from pillar to post in trains. You will remain in a comfortable bungalow and be ready to welcome me when I come back. But we needn’t think about that yet. We shall go straight up to Simla, and you’ll be invited to balls and all kinds of entertainments, and have no end of a time. You’ll have to make friends with all the big-wigs, and learn to entertain too.”

“Oh dear, I shall be so frightened. I’m sure I shall hate that part of it. Supposing I do the wrong things?”

“I refuse to suppose anything of the kind. Make your mind easy. There’ll be no difficulties.”

There were not. Aline took to the life, fortified by Granny’s training in manners; and as for domestic duties, she found Gunga, Nugent’s old servant, an excellent stand-by. At first she was afraid of the old man, he was so ugly, so sphinx-like, and he seemed to criticize her with every look. She felt sure he was jealous, and she said so to Nugent.

“Not a bit of it,” he assured her. “It’s only his way. He’s as staunch and faithful as they make ’em. Just let him take charge and he’ll do it well—follow his advice and don’t interfere with him.”

Young Mrs. Kaye was a social success in the great hill station. Her fresh beauty, her simplicity, her natural charm, caused a sensation that lasted throughout the season. She was fêted, run after, made much of. Kaye felt intensely proud of his beautiful wife; she came through it all unspoiled, ever anxious for his company at all the gay gatherings which for her sake he never shirked. She gave him not the smallest excuse for jealousy. He was an indulgent witness of her triumphs, glad that she should enjoy herself, though secretly disappointed that as yet there was no prospect of a child. The only other flaw in his happiness, a very trifling flaw, was Aline's failure to overcome her aversion to Gunga. It seemed to Kaye that on the whole Gunga had taken the marriage in much better part than might have been expected; perhaps the old man was a bit sulky at times—only natural, as he explained to Aline, after so many years in a bachelor's service. Aline agreed that such a change must be trying for any old servant; she granted that Gunga saved her no end of bother over the housekeeping, but she adhered to her conviction that he hated her. It was the sole matter in which she was unable to see eye to eye with her husband.

"I can't help it, Nugent," she said at last, in plaintive self-reproach. "I know he's invaluable, I appreciate all he does, but I feel all the time that it's entirely for your sake. I'm an interloper, he can't bear me; and I'm certain he would rejoice if I were to die!"

"Darling, don't be so silly. It's all your fancy. If Gunga felt like that he wouldn't help you as he does. He'd give you as much bother, indirectly, as lies in his power—in a thousand little ways, as only native servants can when they choose. But if you really wish it, we'll get rid of him."

Kaye repented having made the suggestion, as he caught a gleam of relief in Aline's eyes. For one moment she was tempted to take advantage of the offer. She hated the daily interviews with Gunga over household arrangements; she was forced to give her orders through him because he understood a little English, and she distrusted the old man's cold politeness. He never looked her in the face, never smiled; it was like dealing with something venomous and vindictive that only awaited the hour to strike. She could not explain fully to Nugent, he would never understand; and she hadn't the heart to proclaim boldly that she would be thankful to see the last of Gunga. No, she could not bring herself to seize upon the chance; it would be unfair to Nugent who was so unaccountably fond of the disagreeable old creature; she thrust the inclination from her with a strong effort, once and for all. Surely she could put up with such a small trial in return for all Nugent's goodness to her; she was an ungrateful wretch even to have considered the

question of Gunga's dismissal; it was only that she didn't understand natives, and there was no particular reason why she should endeavour to do so, since they were going home for good next year.

She left it at that; and when the time came for their departure from Simla for the distant plains station that was Nugent's headquarters during the winter she felt rewarded for her self-sacrifice. Gunga took all trouble off her shoulders; other wives wailed to her over the difficulties of packing and transport—she had none. The whole irksome business was carried through without a hitch, and it was entirely due to Gunga's skilful management. Aline felt bound to acknowledge that much to Nugent.

"I don't know what we should have done without the old horror," she said magnanimously as they watched her grand piano being borne away on the heads of a pack of coolies. "Mrs. Watson hasn't been able to get half their things started even yet, and we have had no bother at all."

"You'll never have any bother over anything with Gunga in charge," said Kaye, well pleased with his wife's admission. "Aren't you glad you decided to keep him?"

"Yes," she replied readily, though in her heart she was not quite so sure. "It was wrong of me even to think of parting with him. He is so devoted to you, and I know you are attached to him. It was only at times that I felt—well, just a silly prejudice, and I've got over that now."

Her conscience pricked her; a white lie? She had not got over the "prejudice"; she felt she never would get over it.

### 3

Gunga went ahead to Pragpur. Colonel and Mrs. Kaye arrived at the broad bungalow set in a garden ablaze with plants and flowering shrubs, to find all as well prepared as if they had been inhabiting it for months. The servants took up their duties under the old bearer's admirable and untiring supervision. Everything went smoothly until preparations had to be made for the sahib's first tour of inspection. Then there was a scene. Kaye wished to leave Gunga at Pragpur in charge of the establishment; Gunga resented the plan. Had he not always accompanied the sahib on his travels?—that he should be expected to remain behind while some substitute went with the sahib rankled sorely.

It took Kaye the best part of a morning to reconcile the old man; finally he only did so by dint of explaining how greatly it would ease his mind to

feel that Gunga was on the spot during his absence to look after the memsahib. Whom else possibly could be entrusted with such a duty?

“The memsahib needs your help and care,” he said in conclusion. “I ask you to give it to her, in order to please me.”

Gunga salaamed grudgingly. “So be it,” he agreed at last.

It tried him severely to see his beloved master depart without him. But enraged though he felt what else could he do? It was a matter of mingled love and duty. Oh! how he hated the memsahib’s pink and white face; the very thought of her beauty raised a storm of fury in the old servant’s breast. With her accursed beauty had she ensnared his sahib. Had she been ugly would he have married her? Never! and now he, Gunga, was fated to remain and guard a being who was but a child, quite unworthy of the sahib’s love, while the sahib went away unattended by his faithful slave. It was hard to bear, and but for the sahib’s special request he could not have agreed—rather would he have journeyed to his village, there to end his days in peace, but a peace poisoned by angry recollection.

#### 4

Aline felt utterly lost without her husband in the straggling unfamiliar plains station which was so different from Simla, and where as yet she had no particular friends. To go out alone among strangers was distasteful to her, consequently she refused many invitations; her tennis was so indifferent that nobody wanted to play with her; and as for appearing at the club or attending polo and cricket matches without Nugent, she simply could not do it.

Nugent’s first absence, though short, was quite bad enough; but when he was forced to go off, this time for a much longer tour, she became desperate, and welcomed the advances of a Mrs. Long, a hard-working barrister’s wife, who seemingly was the only person to divine young Mrs. Kaye’s loneliness. This lady made determined attempts to relieve it, whether out of kindness of heart or for social reasons was best known to herself; and gradually Aline was lured into a heedless, irresponsible set of people. She felt in her bones that they were not “good form”; she feared Nugent would not approve of them; she knew they were regarded with disfavour by the more sober section of the English community. Therefore, at first, she put up a feeble resistance against “Noah’s Ark” picnics, moonlight excursions, impromptu dances, and such-like hilarious gatherings. Then she succumbed; it was all harmless enough, she told herself, if perhaps rather undignified, and anyway much



more amusing than solemn receptions at the houses of senior officials. These new acquaintances were so light-hearted, so gay, though sometimes their conversation jarred on her sense of propriety; and Mrs. Long was awfully kind; it was nice to have some one running in during the long mornings for a talk. Also Captain Davenant, one of Mrs. Long's friends, was particularly nice. He was in the British cavalry regiment quartered at Praggpur, and had heaps of money; he was always getting up the most delightful little entertainments.

Aline told Nugent in her daily letters that she was having a pleasant time, but that it didn't make up for his absence. Privately she wondered with a spice of rather guilty apprehension what he would say when he came back and realized the sort of "pleasant time" she was enjoying.

But when he did come back all her new friends suddenly ceased to include her in their revelries, and she saw little or nothing of Mrs. Long. In a measure, though it puzzled her, this was a relief; it saved possible misunderstanding between herself and Nugent; not that she thought Nugent would really have been tiresome—yet there it was, the covert little feeling of relief.

And next time he went away she was conscious, to her dismay, of a sense of liberation. Gradually Mrs. Long and her set gathered round her again. Now sometimes Aline went for a drive in the evenings with Captain Davenant, who preferred horses to motor-cars. He had such nice horses and such a smart English dog-cart. She even ventured on little after-dinner parties of her own, and it was when one of these informal reunions was at its height that Nugent happened to return unexpectedly.

They were playing a round game in the veranda, shrieking with laughter. Mrs. Long had brought a couple of girls noted for their free-and-easy ways; three subalterns had accepted Mrs. Kaye's verbal invitation, and of course Captain Davenant was there. As usual, Gunga lurked about; Aline felt sure he disapproved of these gatherings. Sulkily he carried out her orders, glowered and watched. Insufferable cheek!—surely she was at liberty to invite whom she pleased to the house; Nugent himself would be the first to admit that, and she had always mentioned in her letters when "a few people dropped in after dinner."

Yet, when a cab of the country drove up to the foot of the veranda steps, and she beheld Nugent's tall figure descending from it, panic assailed her, a panic that she failed to conceal from her guests.

“Oh! here is my husband!” she exclaimed in a voice that betrayed consternation; and they all stood up.

“What a nuisance!” breathed Mrs. Long in her ear. “Never mind, my dear; just pretend we had all come without being asked. Say anything you like, and I’ll back you up.”

Aline stiffened. “There’s no need for that. My friends are his, of course.”

But were they? Aline feared that Nugent would not be best pleased to surprise her in such company. However, now there was no help for it.

Kaye came up the veranda steps, regarded the scene with momentary astonishment, but greeted his wife’s guests politely, receiving a somewhat awkward response from all but Mrs. Long, who said blithely: “We invaded your wife to-night, Colonel Kaye. Luckily for us, though perhaps unluckily for her, she had not gone to bed.”

Kaye chatted with Mrs. Long, then asked if they were not ready for refreshment, said he was, and bade the unwilling Gunga produce drinks; with the result that a little later the party broke up in good spirits, feeling that after all they needn’t have behaved like a pack of school children caught in some act of mischief. . . . Even Aline felt reassured; Nugent hadn’t minded at all!

Only Mrs. Long scented trouble.

“I pity that girl,” she said to Roy Davenant as he drove her back to her bungalow.

He moved impatiently in his seat. “She doesn’t need your pity—yet!”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s got everything she wants, according to her lights, a devoted, trusting husband, enough to live upon, she hasn’t learnt how to spend money, nothing to complain of. If you’ve any pity to spare, you’d better bestow it upon me.”

“Good heavens, my dear Roy—you don’t mean to say you’ve fallen in love with Mrs. Kaye? Oh! for mercy’s sake don’t hit the pony like that!”

“Yes,” he admitted, pulling up the pony that had broken into a gallop owing to an unnecessary cut of the whip. “I’m absolutely bowled over, and it’s all your fault. Why couldn’t you have let the girl alone instead of enticing her into our set? Now the mischief’s done, and it may interest you

to know that I don't intend to rest until she's as much in love with me as I am with her. She's wasted on that stuffed old image Kaye!"

Mrs. Long felt alarmed. She had known Roy Davenant since his boyhood, before her own marriage. Then he turned up at Pragpur with his regiment, and their old friendship was renewed. She had no illusions about him; he was very rich, and very self-indulgent. At present, she felt certain, he was not quite sober—that was one of his weaknesses. Probably he had been drinking before he arrived at the Kaye's bungalow, else he would not have betrayed his designs. Well, at any rate he would have no opportunity of furthering them, if they were serious, as long as Colonel Kaye was in the station; but what about the next time Colonel Kaye went away? She must keep clear of the couple; she had no desire to find herself mixed up in a scandal.

She was wrong about the opportunities. Davenant contrived opportunities even while Colonel Kaye remained in the station, and he made the most of them without causing Colonel Kaye to find fault with his behaviour. He did not dance too often with the lovely Mrs. Kaye; he was but ordinarily attentive when they met as they did most days in public. He gave a choice little dinner party at the Club, but he did not place Mrs. Kaye next to him and only talked to her for a short time afterwards. Nobody could possibly have said anything spiteful; yet Mrs. Long perceived plainly what was going on, how he gazed into Aline's eyes, how his voice softened when he spoke to her, how subtly beguiling was his manner. She knew well enough what it all meant, and that it was only a matter of time for his victim to know it also. Then what would happen!

Only once, while Colonel Kaye was in the station, did Roy overstep the mark, and Mrs. Long guessed rightly that champagne was to blame for that. It was at a big official ball. The whole station was collected. Mrs. Kaye was looking her best; her partners, and would be partners, were legion; but the night was half over before she danced with Roy Davenant. Then the pair disappeared. Two or three dances went by and they had not returned to the ballroom. Mrs. Long noted that Colonel Kaye was growing restless; she heard a young man ask him if his wife had gone home. He replied composedly that she had not.

At the same time Kaye made up his mind to give Aline a gentle hint; not that he distrusted her for a moment, but the idea of her perhaps being talked about troubled him. Never before had she done such a thing as absent herself from a ballroom for the space of several dances with one particular partner; . . . of course it was only a thoughtless disregard of appearances, no doubt

she was tired, had danced enough, and was just resting somewhere out of sight with an agreeable companion. He had seen her leave the room with Captain Davenant, who seemed to him a harmless enough youth, though he had more money than was good for any young fellow, and was perhaps inclined to drink rather too much. Still, if Davenant had not been conducting himself properly Aline would have left him at once; he recalled an occasion at Simla when she had hurried to his side flushed and tearful and indignant because some partner had annoyed her, and she had never spoken to the man again. Only the smallest hint was needed. He would speak to her to-night; to-morrow, very early, he had to start off again on his travels, otherwise he would have let the matter wait. But when Aline returned to the ballroom, Captain Davenant at her side, she looked so white, so weary, that he felt he must delay his little homily till the morning; it would be cruel to risk upsetting the child to-night.

“Tired, darling?” he asked as Captain Davenant bowed decorously and withdrew. “Where have you been all this time?”

“Oh, only sitting in the veranda,” she answered fretfully. “Yes, I’m tired, Nugent. Let us go home.”

“Certainly. I shall be glad to go, too. I have to catch my train in a few hours!”

He little guessed at Aline’s true state of mind. Her whole being was aquiver with shame. Roy Davenant had said things he ought not to have said, and she—she had sat there beside him in the darkness and let him say them! His voice, the touch of his hand on hers, the perfume of flowers, the seductive strains of the dance music—she had felt drugged with a sense of rapture she could not control. And somehow Captain Davenant knew, perhaps she had told him, that Nugent was going away again to-morrow morning; he had planned to call for her in the evening to take her for a drive. Of course she ought to have refused, she ought to have snubbed him; instead of which she had stayed there, after the things he had said, after he had laid his hand on hers; and she had not refused to go for the drive! What could have possessed her!—well, she would have to tell him that their friendship must end unless he promised to behave himself in future.

Kaye hurried into his wife’s bedroom to bid her good-bye; it was later than he had realized, he must not miss his train.

She was still asleep; he hesitated, gazing at her adoringly. What an entrancing picture!—the bright hair curling over the pillow like burnished copper shavings, the long dark lashes resting on rose-pink cheeks, the sweet lips, with their perfect outline, half open. . . . Let her sleep on; she needed the rest. He had intended to utter a few loving words of caution with his farewell embrace, to remind her gently that spiteful tongues wagged with the smallest provocation; but now he hadn't the heart to disturb her, neither had he time to deliver the little speech prepared in his mind. He bent and kissed one of the bright curls, then stole softly from the room.

Gunga stood rigid and resentful in the veranda. He had satisfied himself that nothing conducive to his master's comfort had been overlooked. Jealous rage and contempt for the woman smouldered within his heart, but he salaamed submissively as the sahib bade him take care of the memsahib.

## CHAPTER V

### 1

Captain Davenant "behaved himself" that evening with such complete circumspection that Aline found no occasion to exact any promise. He drove her down to the river bank and they halted close to a whitewashed flat-roofed building overlooking the broad bosom of the Ganges.

"That bungalow isn't occupied," he said. "It belongs to a rich native who seldom uses it except, I believe, in the rains—shall we climb to the top and look at the view? The air would be nice."

They climbed to the top by a steep narrow stairway. Captain Davenant spied a couple of clumsy chairs in a lower room, and he carried them up to place them facing the parapet on which he and Mrs. Kaye could rest their arms. Below rolled the river, indolent, mighty, stained pink and opal and amethyst in the sunset glow. Further along the shore rose a plume of grey smoke from a funeral pyre; the monotonous chant of the mourners, busy about the burning heap, floated on the warm evening air.

Aline sat silent, uneasy, but consumed with an unpardonable sense of bliss. Her companion made no reference to what had happened last night at the ball. Perhaps he, too, felt it was best ignored, and if possible, forgotten; yet when she met his eyes she knew he was not likely to forget, any more than she was.

"Well," he said at last with an expressive sigh, "this has been ripping! We'll come here again to eat the air, as the natives say, and enjoy the view,

won't we?"

They did, more than once during the next few days. And on each occasion Gunga watched them drive off with increasing anger and suspicion. He could have slain the pair of them. Where did they go? He would make it his business to find out, though if he succeeded what purpose would the discovery serve? To risk dismissal from the sahib's service by telling tales of the memsahib was unthinkable; the sahib would never believe ill of the woman. . . . The old man's irate curiosity grew till it maddened his brain; the tiny black pills in the brass box were his only solace.

On one of the evenings when the smart dog-cart drew up before the bungalow, and Gunga had duly ushered the visitor into his master's wife's presence, he hovered about the veranda flicking dust from the tables and chairs; gradually he edged down the veranda steps, then paused, purposely, to make polite conversation with the well-dressed groom who stood at the pony's head. The two discussed crop prospects, the deplorably high price of flour, and various items of bazaar gossip.

"And hast heard," inquired the groom, "how Chandra Lal the money lender hath died but this morning of the smallpox sickness?"

"Wah! Is that truth?" exclaimed Gunga.

"Verily. And according to report the sickness was conveyed to the rich man by some one deeply in his debt who obtained the services of a sorcerer to accomplish *chilawa*." (The passing on of a disease.)

"As we all know," continued the man, lowering his voice, "the spell can be purchased. It is but a small packet of dust mixed with God knows what, and rendered potent by the Cunning Man's curse. Some say it contains the scabs from one suffering from the sickness, there be always those sick of it in the bazaars who are glad to be thus rid of the complaint, and to earn a few coppers thereby as well. At any rate, it is said that a *chilawa* was seen on the doorstep of Chandra Lal's dwelling, tipped with a marigold, and now is he not dead!"

Gunga made no comment. Presently he inquired if the sahib and the memsahib would be setting forth soon for a drive?—otherwise would the syce not take the tum-tum to the stables and enjoy a smoke?

The syce hesitated, then declined the invitation.

"Doubtless," he said, "my sahib will be driving the memsahib down to the river bank, and they will eat the air on the roof of Bhagwat Dial's bungalow, as is their usual custom. I shall have ample time to smoke while

they do so. Is it truth," he inquired with a knowing grin, "that your Colonel-sahib be still absent?"

"Yes, it is truth," Gunga replied carelessly, ignoring the grin; and having obtained with such ease the information he wanted he proceeded to lie glibly. "That be a favourite drive of the memsahib's, down to the river bank, in order to sit on the roof of Bhagwat Dial's bungalow and eat the air. Frequently doth my sahib take her there in his car, but since of course during his absence she cannot well go alone he is pleased that a friend should accord her the pleasure."

"Without doubt," agreed the syce, affably sceptical.

Then he stood to attention as Mrs. Kaye appeared in the veranda followed by Captain Davenant. She was clad all in white, her violet eyes shone, her complexion was like pink-and-white icing straight from the hands of some master confectioner; and the sight of her beauty still further inflamed the old bearer's hatred. Was it not to blame for this cursed intrigue that was like to blacken the honour of his master's house? Had she been less fair would this officer-fellow be taking her to eat the air—to *eat the air*, forsooth! on the roof of an empty, isolated bungalow on the river bank? Certainly not! As he watched the pair drive off he formed a desperate resolve. This evil woman merited punishment. She should have it, the Captain sahib's syce had unwittingly suggested a means.

Gunga went straight to his little chamber in the servants' quarters, and from a hole in the ground beneath his string bedstead he unearthed a few rupees, tied them up in his waist cloth, and set forth, tramping through the dust, obsessed with one purpose. On and on he tramped, passing through the teeming city into open country until he arrived on the outskirts of a tract of bare, uncultivated land. In the foreground stood a solitary tree, a magnificent specimen of the pipal with its great girth and spade-shaped leaves that trembled so mysteriously in the windless air. Probably it was the sole survivor of some ancient grove sacrificed at a time of drought and distress in the past, spared purposely as a sacred refuge for branch-dwelling spirits deprived of their wider sanctuary. Surrounding the massive trunk was a little masonry platform through which the snakey roots had forced their way, and on this ruined platform lay an irregular heap of stones rudely carved, relics of a shrine long ago demolished and forgotten.

Close to the giant tree, in squalid contrast, stood a rough shelter composed of thatch and bamboo protecting a dilapidated bedstead, a dirty quilt, and a few brass vessels; a fresh patch of ashes lay in front of this

dwelling, if so it could be called, and a long bamboo staff tipped with a ragged ochre-coloured flag was planted like a sentinel in the ground beside it.

As Gunga approached, a figure emerged from behind the tree, the hyena-like figure of a very old native garbed fantastically in various hued rags patched together. A necklace of carved bones hung low on his chest, his eyes were bloodshot and restless, white hair straggled in matted wisps about his shoulders. In one claw-like hand he clutched a little drum the shape of an hour-glass.

Here was the *Shaman*, the Cunning Man, who dealt in spells and charms and curses.

For a space the pair squatted together in whispered conclave. Then business was concluded. Gunga received a tiny packet; the Cunning Man was the richer by five rupees.

“Place the spell,” he directed, “where the enemy must come in contact with it, none other. Can this be accomplished with ease?”

“The gods will decide,” said Gunga piously; and he thought of Bhagwat Dial’s bungalow on the edge of the river where his master’s false wife enjoyed privacy with her lover.

## 2

And while Gunga was making his sinister purchase Aline Kaye and Roy Davenant had settled themselves on the flat roof of the house overlooking the river. As usual Davenant had lugged up the couple of clumsy chairs from the room below; he always made a point of replacing them, it was wiser to leave no trace of their trespass.

“Good to be by ourselves,” he said contentedly; Aline nodded. “I hate the feeling of someone sitting behind us in the trap, and when I come to see you in the house that villainous looking old bearer of yours is always hanging about. Is he an old beast, or isn’t he?”

“I don’t like him, and I know he hates *me*. He has never forgiven me for marrying Nugent, whom he adores. Sometimes I’m inclined to think the old thing is mad.”

“Why does Kaye keep him on, then?”

“Oh! Gunga’s been with him for such years—ever since Nugent came out to India, I believe.”



“That must have been in the dark ages!” remarked Davenant spitefully.

Aline permitted the thrust to pass. “The poor old creature will break his heart,” she continued, “when Nugent retires. You know we are going this spring. This is my husband’s last tour of inspection.”

“When is he coming back?”

“I don’t know. He wants to get everything cleared up this time so that we needn’t be rushed over the packing and preparations. He may be away for another two or three weeks.”

Something in his silence made her glance nervously at him; he was staring out over the expanse of water, his face set, his eyes sombre. Suddenly he pushed away his chair and seated himself on the parapet facing her—an attractive specimen of young manhood, excellently proportioned, with warm colouring, crinkled dark hair and moustache, red-brown eyes that stirred the girl’s heart, appealed to all the romance in her nature. . . . She shut her eyes that the sight of him might not allure her senses.

“What shall I do when you are gone!” he burst out wretchedly. “You must know perfectly well how I love you. . . .”

“Oh! don’t!” she implored him, trembling. “You will make it impossible for me to drive with you—to come here. I know I oughtn’t to do it. I feel it’s all wrong.”

“Why should you feel it’s all wrong?—unless—unless—Aline, darling!”

Tears rushed to her eyes. Hurriedly she took out her handkerchief. “Please, please!” she forced back her sobs, and stood up. “Let us go, I can’t come here any more.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, quick contrition in his voice, fierce triumph in his heart. “I didn’t mean to let it out. I beseech you don’t punish me too severely. If you would rather go back now of course we will—but just come with me here to-morrow evening; for a last time if you wish it. Give me that comfort, in mercy just once more—just once!”

Against her conscience, and because the temptation was too strong for her, she yielded. Very well, she would come, but for the last time, and she held to it desperately that they must leave the bungalow, now, at once. It all sounded very virtuous, very right; but in her heart she was aware that she wanted to go because she could trust neither herself nor Roy Davenant if they stayed. By to-morrow evening she would have gained control of her will, be able to grant the favour he asked of her fortified by time to think

things over. He had taken her by surprise. A still, small voice whispered that he had not taken her altogether by surprise; she silenced it relentlessly.

Mutually reluctant they left the bungalow, and drove back in silence, a silence fraught for Aline with distress, for Davenant with jubilant anticipation.

Later, he recollected that he had not replaced the chairs in the lower room; later, Aline missed her handkerchief, she must have dropped it somewhere, in Roy's trap, or on the roof of the bungalow. Trifles of no great consequence to the lovers, but of supreme importance to old Gunga when by moonlight that same night he climbed to the top of Bhagwat Dial's bungalow in pursuit of proof that the syce's information had been correct.

He found what he sought. Here were two chairs; here the pair had sat, and here again, no doubt, they would sit, making love, many times, until his sahib should return. And what was this, on the seat of one of the chairs? Something white; a handkerchief; by all the favour of the gods the memsahib's handkerchief!

For a space he regarded the wisp of cambric thoughtfully. Then, exercising the utmost caution, he introduced into its folds the contents of the magic packet he had purchased from the Cunning Man; and, smiling secretively, he crept down the steep stairway.

### 3

Aline passed a restless, miserable night. She dragged wearily through a day of agonizing doubt and indecision. At one moment she decided against driving again to the river bungalow with Roy Davenant; at another she argued that if their friendship must be ended once and for all it had better be wiped out at a private interview, when she could explain. Explain what? That she was afraid? Such explanation would only betray her real feelings! What were her feelings? She dared not admit to herself that she loved Roy; and surely she had given him no reason to believe that she returned his declared love? Had she, or hadn't she? If she shirked this expedition to the river-bank bungalow it might lead him to think, it might look as if . . .

Thus she comforted her conscience with one false excuse after another; and when he called for her that evening she was ready to go with him.

Arrived on the roof of the bungalow she espied her lost handkerchief. It lay on the seat of one of the chairs, and absently she picked it up; picked it up absently because, alas! for good resolutions, alas! for specious argument, she found herself listening as in a dream, making no protest, to wild,

passionate words; and then she found herself, silent, unresisting, in Roy Davenant's arms.

Trembling, horrified, she broke from his embrace. Oh! why had she been foolish and weak enough to come. She might have known—she *had* known! Now what was she to do? Bursting into tears she pressed the derelict handkerchief to her face. Then all at once she flung the wisp of cambric from her with a little shiver of disgust. It floated into space over the edge of the parapet. Davenant took Aline's action as symbolical of her feelings towards him.

"All right," he raged, "I understand! You fling me away from you, just like that! I'm no more to you than a bit of rag. What do you care? I wish I'd never set eyes on you!"

Unconscious of bathos she whimpered: "There was some nasty dust on my handkerchief!" and sank sobbing into the nearest chair.

He knelt beside her, and laid his cheek to hers. "Oh! beloved, don't cry, I can't bear it!"

#### 4

During the next fortnight, stifle her conscience as she would, Aline suffered hours of mental torture, almost beyond her endurance. Then would come meetings with Roy, meetings in public and in private that held such enchantment as to blot out all fear and remorse.

Mechanically she wrote as usual to her husband; and she took a certain amount of pains not to arouse gossip in the station, holding aloof from Mrs. Long (who, oddly enough, no longer seemed anxious for her company), walking warily, prompted perhaps by a vague, distorted sense of loyalty to the man she had betrayed, not in fact but in spirit. A gnawing dread of his return kept her sleepless, her appetite failed, she felt completely run down. The relief was immense when she heard from him that he could not get back for another ten days. When she told Roy he began to urge definite action.

"Listen to me, Aline. The only honest way out is for us to bolt and have done with it. Money doesn't stand in the light; I've got more than I know what to do with. I've paved the way for long leave, I can get it at any moment, and passages can always be wangled, given sufficient cash. It isn't as if you had children to consider, or as if you weren't married to a man old enough to be your grandfather!"

“Oh! I couldn’t, I can’t,” she cried, steeped in despair. “There is another honest way out. We ought to have taken it at the beginning.”

“You mean we must part, forget? How can we! Of course I understand your feelings—love versus duty and all that. But just think, is it fair to yourself, and the man you married in all ignorance, to go on pretending? Would he wish to keep you bound to him if he knew? Aline, be brave; come away with me. I swear you shall never regret it for one instant if you trust yourself to me.”

She wrung her hands. “Oh! Roy, give me time,” she besought him, “give me time to make up my mind.”

“How long do you want,” he asked scathingly, “to make up your mind?”

“Only a few days.”

“And, meantime, what about the cruel suspense for me?”

“It’s no worse for you than for me,” she flared desperately; “in fact it’s far worse for me; you have no one to think of but yourself!”

“Is it possible,” he asked in a fury, “that you haven’t been serious all this time? If you haven’t, if it’s been merely a flirtation on your part, then of course the sooner we say good-bye, the better!”

“Roy, how can—how dare you!”

He realized that they were on the verge of a quarrel, on the verge of an end to everything, and he changed his tone.

“No, no, I didn’t mean it,” he said in restive resignation. “I was beside myself. Forget it. Look here, I’ll go away for a week.” (He thought: “She will miss me so frightfully that there’ll be no hesitation when she sees me again.”) “I’ll come for your answer three days before your husband returns. Will that do?”

She wavered. “Oh! I don’t know—perhaps. I feel so awful!”

At the back of her mind she had pictured a final and painful farewell, righteous sacrifice on both sides, her life in the future dedicated to Nugent, saddened with a hopeless love, yet sustained by duty accomplished. Now she perceived that she must play one man false or the other; which was it to be?

Finally they agreed on the brief separation, Aline glad of the respite, Roy Davenant certain that his ruse would succeed; and as they fixed the day and the hour of their next meeting he kissed her till, then and there, she could

have given him the answer he was counting upon. But something held her back, though she hardly doubted what her decision would be when the time came to make it. How could she live without Roy!

## CHAPTER VI

### 1

Aline stood in her bedroom at daybreak, harassed, confused, painfully perplexed. She had not slept, and her head ached, her throat felt parched, there was a dreadful drumming in her ears. . . . Roy would be coming next evening—or was it this evening? To her horror she found she could not remember!—and last night she had destroyed every letter received from him during his absence, burning the scraps of paper in her bathroom with furtive precaution, for lately Gunga had seemed to spy upon her with devilish persistence. Also he had taken to asking after her health, not with concern but with a queer kind of curiosity. She knew she looked ill, she felt ill; and what wonder, she thought, as in despair she glanced about the pretty room, recoiling from the idea of packing even the least of her belongings; had not Nugent and his sister given her practically everything she possessed! Her ayah sidled in, and irritably she waved the astonished woman from her presence.

What about her jewel-box?—of course it must be left. And her wedding-ring; should she leave it on the dressing-table? Ought she to write to Nugent—what did people do when they ran away? No, no, it was impossible, she couldn't do it, she couldn't go; she must tell Roy she couldn't go.

Oh! the pain in her head and throat, and all over her body! Perhaps she had a temperature, for the last two days she had felt feverish. Better lie down; the room seemed to darken as she groped her way to the bed and flung herself upon it. Aspirin—she would take some aspirin.

But now it was too much of an effort to rise and get the bottle; she could see the bottle quite plainly through the little glass door of her medicine cupboard. How strange—the bottle was floating towards her! It grew larger and larger, until it turned into something grotesque and horrible with lank hair and waving arms.

“Ayah!” she shrieked, “Ayah!”

Next evening when Captain Davenant drove up to the bungalow he was confronted by Gunga.

“The door is shut.” The old man uttered the Indian equivalent for “Not at home” with an oddly exaggerated obeisance.

“Nonsense! Take my salaams to the memsahib at once,” commanded Davenport. “Say I must see her without delay.”

“But the memsahib is sick, the doctor-sahib came, a telegram was sent to the Colonel-sahib,” whined Gunga in a singsong voice.

Davenant hesitated, puzzled, suspicious of some plot; the old brute looked like nothing human, probably he had invented the whole story.

“All the same, take my salaams to the memsahib,” he repeated.

Gunga withdrew, mockingly obedient. A few moments passed while Davenant fumed in the veranda. Presently a white-capped, blue-garbed English hospital nurse came forth; she had a serene, pleasant countenance. The old bearer was behind her, grinning like a monkey.

“I am sorry to say Mrs. Kaye is unable to receive visitors,” she announced; “she was taken ill yesterday morning.”

“But what—what is the matter?” he stammered.

“Well, we can hardly say yet,” replied the nurse with professional reticence. “Excuse me, I must go back to my patient.”

She disappeared into the bungalow, and Davenant perforce turned to descend the steps. Gunga pursued him.

“Listen, sahib, listen!”

The sahib halted reluctantly. A short sentence was whispered into his ear. For one second he stood rigid; otherwise he took no notice of the hoarse whisper. Then he went on down the veranda steps.

As the smart trap whirled out of the compound Gunga grimaced after it; he jiggled and chuckled, cracking his knuckles; still chuckling he shambled off, crabwise, towards the servants’ quarters.

Late that night Kaye returned, racked with anxiety. The capable hospital nurse did her utmost, and with sufficient foundation, to lessen his fears; in a measure she succeeded, but his distress was still so overwhelming that at first he was scarcely affected when one of the upper servants brought him the news, delivered with Oriental composure, that Gunga bearer was dead.

Gunga, the man reported, had become suddenly *behosh* (insane); for a few hours there had been much trouble; all that was possible had been done, as doubtless the sahib would believe. Then Gunga had slept, and died, on his bedstead; this little brass box was found clasped in his hand, empty.

3

During the first weak, misty period of her convalescence Aline found it difficult to marshal her thoughts. She tried to realize all that preceded the ghastly morning when she had lost hold of her senses; but the attempt was too painful, she simply could not bear it. Nugent was so loving, so tender, so immeasurably thankful for her recovery; he looked worn and aged with all the strain and stress of her serious illness, and there had been the additional shock for him of poor old Gunga's sudden loss of reason, and death. As she watched him she thought helplessly, hopelessly, of her treachery; and yet beneath all her remorse and self-condemnation there lurked the torturing, perpetual fret for news of Roy.

Visitors were still barred; people left flowers, books, illustrated papers, kindest inquiries, but so far no word, no message had reached her from Roy. At last in desperation she worked herself up to the pitch of asking Nugent, as if casually, whether he had heard or seen anything of Captain Davenant—hadn't Captain Davenant called to inquire, like other friends?

To her dumbfoundment, Nugent said: "Davenant? Oh! he's gone home. Someone at the club told me so. Such a lot of people have called, and sent, to ask after you that I'm afraid I've lost count. I can't recollect his coming here. I don't know when he left; anyway he's not in the station now."

Why had Roy gone away without contriving to leave her some message, some explanation? Of course he had come, on the evening appointed, only to be told that she was ill and could not see him; that much she had gleaned from the nurse directly she was in a condition to ask rational questions. He could have written to her, a letter with meaning between the lines that she alone would have understood: probably he had done so and in all the upset of her illness the letter had got mislaid. There must be some mistake. Supposing she had not been ill when he came for her answer, what would her answer have been? Oh! surely she would have done the right thing? But of what avail to think of it now; Roy had gone—gone out of her life, and she hardly knew whether she was the more broken-hearted or relieved.

Aline's first visitor was Mrs. Long, voluble, gushing; everyone had been so anxious, so concerned about dear Mrs. Kaye. "We were afraid you had

got diphtheria! What a mercy it wasn't, though a poisoned throat can be just as bad. I know, because I had a poisoned throat once myself and nearly died. It was awful, I was ill for weeks. You must have been run down and ready to pick up any microbe going about—these things germinate so quickly, knock you flat in a few days or even a few hours, once they get hold of you.”

Then, sympathy exhausted, the lady went on to station gossip, leading up to the mention of Captain Davenant. “You know he’s gone off on long leave?” she asked, eyeing Mrs. Kaye narrowly.

“Yes, I know,” said Aline, assuming indifference. “My husband told me. Rather sudden, wasn’t it?”

“Oh! no more sudden than might be expected of Roy. He’s an uncertain quantity. I’ve known him since he was a boy—very charming and good company and all that, but”—she shrugged her shoulders. “It’s a pity for his own sake that he has so much money, it has made him deplorably selfish.”

Mrs. Long, to her disappointment, gathered nothing from Mrs. Kaye’s silence. How far had the affair gone—who could say? But knowing Roy Davenant as she did . . .

“Perhaps you will come across our friend in England,” she suggested.

“It isn’t likely. We mean to settle at Haven-on-Sea to be near my husband’s sister and my grandmother. Meantime, until we can find a house to suit us we shall take rooms.”

“Haven isn’t so far from London,” remarked Mrs. Long pointedly. “If you do happen to see Roy you might tell him I think he’s a beast to have bolted off as he did without saying good-bye to me, and never even writing me a line! I can’t understand it, such old friends as we are.”

Mrs. Long was obliged to leave Mrs. Kaye’s side without knowing any more than she had known before the visit, and that amount of knowledge was negligible.

## CHAPTER VII

### 1

Mrs. Denham had taken a furnished house in London for the season while renovations were in progress at Beach Lodge. It was a house admirably adapted for entertaining, and to-night she was indulging her passion for hospitality, having bidden all her friends young and old, rich and poor, to a gathering after her own heart. Of course Miss Foster was one of



the throng, and others of the Miss Foster type. Dear things!—they did so enjoy a real evening party with a good supper and plenty of champagne.

There was bridge for the elders and dancing for the juniors; no lack of young men, for though Mrs. Denham numbered few of these among her acquaintances she had given the girls *carte blanche* to bring as many partners as they pleased, and they seemed to have taken full advantage of the permission!

Mrs. Denham looked about her with satisfaction. Then she wondered who had brought that good-looking fellow standing in the doorway. Why wasn't he dancing? He had not been introduced to her—manners were at a discount nowadays; but no matter so long as everyone was happy. No doubt he would look after himself and find partners when he felt like dancing.

She remembered some order she had omitted to give the chief of the waiters engaged for the evening, but people were still “coming on” from other entertainments, and she could not very well leave the room. Where was Aline? who had come up for the night expressly to help with the party, though that lazy Nugent had refused to do likewise. The tiresome child was nowhere to be seen! Mrs. Denham deputed the eager and excited Miss Foster to convey the message.

Aline had concealed herself in the dimly lit conservatory; she was seated in the shelter of a spreading palm, her heart beating wildly. She had seen Roy! She had seen him come into the room with a bevy of guests; and at once she had fled to the conservatory for refuge that she might have time to collect her wits and gain control of her feelings—impossible to face him until she had done so. But oh! how she yearned to hear his voice, to look into his eyes. The secret ache in her heart had never really ceased, dulled though it had been by his mysterious silence, by the voyage home, by the peaceful weeks afterwards at Haven-on-Sea. And now all the old madness revived! The future?—she could not think of the future, she craved for nothing at present but the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. Her memory turned to the roof of an empty bungalow overlooking the Ganges River, the warm scented glow of an Indian sunset; her spirit floated in a rapture of remembrance, she could almost feel Roy's lips on hers, his arms around her.

The sound of footsteps recalled her to reality. Two men sauntered into the conservatory, lighting cigarettes; as they paused for an instant in the broad shaft of light that pierced the dimness from the open doorway, she shrank back in her low seat. One of the men was Roy. Thank goodness the

rest of the conservatory was so dark. They moved on till she could see only the outlines of their figures. If she rose and left her hiding-place she must step into this wedge of strong light; he would recognize her, and she was not yet in a fit state of mind to meet him calmly.

Now he was speaking. She pressed her hand to her heart; it was racing so painfully that she felt as if the rapid beats must be audible.

“Our hostess seems to know how to do things,” he said. “Who is she?”

Evidently the two men were strangers to each other.

“A wealthy widow. Chance for you, perhaps, my boy!”

Roy laughed. “Luckily I don’t need such chances, and in any case I’m much too busy having a good time to think of matrimony. No place like London. I only left India this spring, did a loaf on the Continent, and got home last month.”

“I was in India all the winter, touring, sight-seeing. Where were you stationed?”

“Pragpur. Not a bad station—plenty of polo, and pretty ladies, and so on.”

“Oh! Pragpur—yes, I stayed there for a few days with some old friends on my way down to Bombay; the heat had begun to pipe up! Mrs. Denham, our hostess, had a brother at Pragpur, Colonel Kaye, but I didn’t come across him, his wife was down with some serious illness.”

There was a pause. Then the speaker continued: “I heard that Mrs. Kaye was exceedingly pretty, and not long married to a man old enough to be her father who had picked her up somewhere at home. Did you know her?”

Aline held her breath.

“Yes, I knew her. Certainly she was pretty, more than pretty; only the illness you speak of was I believe smallpox, and no amount of beauty can survive that!”

“By Jove—what rough luck!”

Davenant threw down his cigarette and stamped on it. “As you say, rough luck! But perhaps, all things considered, and for the old husband’s sake, it was a blessing in disguise.”

Aline rose, shaking; for a space she waited, gathering courage. Then slowly, deliberately, her little head held high, she stepped forward straight

into the shaft of light that the full blaze might fall on her face and figure. She felt, rather than saw, the start that Roy gave. As if impelled he moved towards her; she backed a few paces till they were standing together in the doorway.

“Is it—is it *you*?” His voice sounded harsh and unnatural.

She drew aside to let the other man pass them. Davenant’s eyes fell before her cool, unflinching gaze. “I heard what you said. But why,” she asked calmly, “did you think I had smallpox?”

He looked abject, craven. “That old servant, the bearer,” he muttered, “the evening I came—he told me——”

“Oh! the evening you came and I was too ill to see you? I understand. Of course you couldn’t know that the poor old man had gone out of his mind—he died that night. No, I hadn’t got smallpox; that must have been one of Gunga’s delusions. But as it happens it made no difference, because I had already decided not to see you again. Good night, Captain Davenant.”

“Aline!”

No use; already she had left him. A dance had just come to an end, and as she crossed the polished floor, an engaging vision, slender and fair in a rose-coloured gown, every eye turned towards her.

Davenant mopped his forehead.

“Hullo—anything wrong?” His late companion of the conservatory rejoined him. “Why, you look as if you’d seen a ghost.”

“I wish to God I had!” exclaimed Davenant savagely.

“Then come and let’s search for spirits in the supper-room—plenty to be found there!”

## 2

Next morning Aline accounted to her sister-in-law for her abrupt disappearance with the excuse that she had suddenly felt faint.

“But,” she added hastily, “I’m quite all right now, and I want to catch the early train back. We made an appointment for this afternoon to see a house that seems likely to suit us. Do forgive me, Amy, for not having been more of a help with the party last night. I’m so sorry.”

“Oh! never mind that, my dear. I was afraid you might not be feeling well. I looked into your room on my way up to bed, but you were sound

asleep so I didn't disturb you. I expect you haven't quite got over the effects of your illness even yet, and I oughtn't to have dragged you up for the party. I thought the little diversion would do you good; it's dull for you at Haven."

"No, no," protested Aline with fervour. "I don't find it dull. Nugent and I love it. We are perfectly happy, and our diggings are most comfortable, but we shall be glad to get a house of our own."

"That's all right! Well, good-bye, my dear." They kissed affectionately. "Give my love to Nugent and to Granny; I'm so glad the old lady is flourishing. I shall be running down soon to see how the papering and painting goes at Beach Lodge. I'll let you know in good time."

Considering the season the train was fairly punctual. Colonel Kaye stood on the platform looking out for his wife. . . . What an infernal crowd! All sorts and conditions of people pouring from the compartments till the platform was a seething mass of humanity. And the day was so hot! A dark-skinned individual brushed past him, wearing a turban, smelling of camphor, sandal-wood, spice, reminding him so vividly of India—Kaye thought of Indian railway stations, thought of old Gunga—poor old Gunga!

Ah! There she was—Aline, his darling, his treasure. But how tired she looked! This wretched tomasha of Amy's! He ought not to have urged her to go. Something else struck him about her appearance, something undefinable; it was as if—what a queer notion!—as if she had somehow matured, so to speak "grown up," in the last twenty-four hours. The vague impression puzzled him as he pressed through the crowd and reached her; then he saw nothing but the wistful love-light in her sweet eyes.

"Oh, Nugent," she breathed, "I'm so thankful, I'm so *glad* to come back!"

"What?—to come back to *me*?" he laughed happily, tucking her hand into his arm. "You don't say so!"

She nodded, speechless.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

[The end of *Rough Passages* by Alice Perrin]