RECOMPENCE

A · SEQUEL · TO · SIMON · CALLED · PETER

BY · ROBERT · KEABLE

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NOVELS BY ROBERT KEABLE

SIMON CALLED PETER

THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

PERADVENTURE

CONSTABLE LONDON

RECOMPENCE

A SEQUEL TO

"SIMON CALLED PETER"

BY

ROBERT KEABLE

". . . Love fled,
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crown of stars."

W. B. YEATS.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In April, 1921, there was published *Simon called Peter*, a novel written eighteen months earlier in Africa as sincerely and as simply as ever pen was set to paper. It was too sincere, however, for the Religious Press, which told me the real meaning of what I had written, and too simple also, for the *Church Times* in particular, which insisted upon composing a sequel. Personally I neither agreed with the one nor acquiesced in the other; but experience has shown me that an author is practically defenceless and that it is both useless and inadvisable to attempt to explain anything in a Preface. I therefore content myself with offering this second volume, asking only that the many friends whom I made with my first venture will understand that herein I write, not necessarily what I or they would wish, but what appears to me, in some form or another, given the natures of Peter and Julie, inevitably and substantially would be.

And lest the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce should feel aggrieved by the characters of Stenhouse and Jeffries, I hasten to add that they are in no way typical of that Society, and, above all, wholly unlike friends of mine at Mokhotlong to whom, in a circumstance upon which that of Peter Graham is based, I owed so much and remain for ever grateful.

R. K.

PUNAAUIA,
TAHITI,
March 6, 1923.

Recompence—A Sequel to “Simon Called Peter”

CHAPTER ONE

1

The old barn clung tenaciously to life. Seeing that its further end would have admitted a pony and trap through what had been a wall, that the greater part of what had been its roof was open to the sky, and that its doors, windows, and a not inconsiderable number of its laths had gone to provide material for forgotten camp fires, it was a miracle that it still lived. But its timber was blackened oak that the centuries had hardened, and its main supports were sunk deeply in the soil. It had been built in an age that thought of the morrow, and in a land that knew war. It had a stubborn air. With its roof—such as was left of it—somewhat askew, it suggested a grim old peasant with his head on one side, who looked at you doggedly and muttered: All right. Knock me about. But here I am and here I shall stick as long as I can.

In point of fact, it had come in its old age, through its many vicissitudes, to great honour. The men who used it called it Brigade Headquarters; and although of that Brigade there was not left enough to form a couple of full-strength companies in the field, while officially the very title had been whirled away in the maelstrom of the months that followed March 25, 1918, still the survivors had dubbed it so with a kind of heroic irony. Within, beneath the most serviceable portion of its roof, there stood, to justify the title, a trestle table and a couple of chairs. In a corner was another, littered with boxes of papers. The barn boasted a field-telephone, too, and to a wall that would have carried little more substantial, was pinned a map which could no longer expose secrets that had ceased to be.

An officer sat alone at the table that he called his desk, and a couple of orderlies at the other. He was a man of light hair, blue alert eyes, with a lean face and a humorous mouth, which had hardened, however, in six months, as life had not been able to harden it in a dozen years. He looked up from the papers he had been studying intently and glanced across the trampled earth

floor to the aperture that was still called the door. Just within it, a sergeant stood at attention. “Bring them in, Sergeant,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” replied the man, and turned smartly about. The order rang out sharply. “Shun! Right—turn. Quick—march.” Colonel Donovan moved suddenly and restlessly in his seat. There was no one of them who was not utterly tired of the routine of it all. But the men were filing in, and he was the last who might shew what he felt.

So when the two privates and the lance-corporal stood rigidly before him, the grizzled sergeant a little to the left and rear, he reverted again to his papers and delivered his little speech in the correct manner. “I have sent for you three,” he said, “before posting Orders which have just come in from G.H.Q., because I wanted to say how personally gratified I am to be able to tell you that you have each been selected to receive the D.C.M., for conspicuous gallantry in recent actions. The Brigade”—he hesitated—“well, what was the Brigade will be proud of you, and South Africa. Lance-Corporal de Villiers is awarded his honour for bringing up ammunition for hours, though wounded, under the heaviest fire, thus enabling the survivors to hold the position; Private Beyers for ably directing machine-gun fire when every officer and non-commissioned officer within reach had been shot; and Private Graham for leading the final counter-attack which permitted the ultimate withdrawal of what was left of the battalion. That is the official language.”

He stopped, and laid down the papers. There was dead silence in the place. Through the shell-holes in the roof of the crazy old barn small white clouds chased each other across a field of blue, and sparrows twittered in a fragment of scorched thatch. But within, these few who had themselves come out of the inferno, saw again, conjured up by the terse phrases, that stricken field, that hell of gas and bullet and shell, that agony of thirst, despairing resolution, maddening horror, through which they had somehow passed alive. They lived again its unending hours in a few seconds. They forgot for a moment the honouring of these particular three who had been singled out, in their remembrance of the Brigade to which they had belonged, and of the fighting in which it had ceased to be.

“That is the official language,” said the colonel again at last, and perhaps did not know that he said it in his even official voice. But he raised his head now, and his eyes swept the three before him. “That,” he went on in another tone, “is all they know at G.H.Q. But we know more than that. As nations go, South Africa is a small one, and we know each other. Beyers, I think I am right in saying that you and I were on different sides at Colenso. De

Villiers, you and I were troopers in the same commando at Ludrecktspruit. I congratulate you personally. And because I suppose I represent South Africa at this minute, I thank you, in the name of the Union, not merely because you have fought with supreme valour; not merely because, where all were brave, you three have been singled out for bravery; but because in what you have done lies the earnest of the greatness of our country. I speak as your officer to-day, but with this news has come more which will give us all satisfaction. When the Armistice was signed, it was said that the Colonial troops were to be repatriated as soon as possible. I learn to-day that the Battalion is under orders to move, and that we are to be in the first draft. And when we have been demobilized shortly in South Africa, I shall hope to be able to congratulate you again as citizen to citizens of the Union that in a sense the war, and conduct such as yours, has gone far to make. Carry on, Sergeant."

He leaned back with an inward sigh of relief. Jack Donovan wore his new honours gingerly, and he was no hand at speech-making. He was already quaking inwardly at what would be expected of him when the first draft did reach Cape Town. But the little file of men were outside before he remembered another matter. Then he called sharply. "Orderly! Slip out and tell Private Graham that when he is dismissed, I want to speak to him in my tent."

He signed a few papers, gave a necessary direction or two, and rose to go. Outside, he strode across the field, made a detour about a bomb-hole, and reached his tent under a still-standing elm in the far corner. As he entered, Private Peter Graham came smartly to attention.

Donovan took a couple of quick paces forward and held out his hand. "Drop that, old thing," he exclaimed, "for a few minutes anyway. Thank God, it will all be over in a few weeks. Damn it all, Graham, shake. By Jove, I've never been more pleased about anything in my life. Sit down for a bit and let's talk. No one's likely to bother us." And he flung himself on the camp-bed, loosened his belt, and tossed his cap on to a suit-case at its foot.

Graham smiled momentarily and sat down, but his face changed again instantly. "Look here," he said, "I can't take it. I don't deserve it."

"Rot. I know it's true that there was hardly a perisher there who didn't deserve it, but they can't sling 'em out wholesale. And I'll see the ribbon on your tunic with more satisfaction than I'll see it on anyone's. By the way, did I talk utter piffle? I didn't dare look at you. Does an 'earnest' 'lie,' anyway?"

Graham was not to be diverted. “But look here, Jack,” he said again, earnestly, “I was simply mad. I hardly knew what I was doing. I don’t believe I even led them over the top. All I wanted was to get killed. God knows why I wasn’t. I—I tried to be, anyway. And now——” He stopped abruptly and set his lips. Then: “It’s a ghastly mistake,” he blurted out.

Donovan regarded him quizzically and felt for his pipe. “You’re a deuced rum cove, Graham,” he said.

“I’m not. You ought to understand. What in the world have I to live for?”

“Julie,” said Donovan coolly, packing his pipe.

Graham made a helpless gesture and flung himself back in his chair. He stared out of the open flap of the tent at the green peaceful field which was still a brand-new kind of miracle to them all. “Then you *don’t* understand,” he said at last.

“Why not? She turned down the padre. Who knows what she’ll say to the man?”

“Does one cease to be the padre because one becomes the—the man?” Peter asked bitterly.

“Sure thing,” retorted Donovan cheerfully.

But he did not succeed in rousing the other. A note of hopelessness crept into Peter’s tone. “I told you you didn’t understand,” he said.

The man on the bed did not at once reply. He smoked thoughtfully, his eyes on his friend. When he opened his lips again, he blew out a long stream of smoke before he spoke.

“But confound it all, Graham, talk some sense. I don’t profess to understand your religious views, and anyway I don’t know much about padres, but I do know a man when I see him. I thought I saw one in you the first day we met. I’ve had no occasion to change my mind. You were perfectly honest in feeling that your religion cut no ice. You were perfectly honestly in love with Julie. After that London stunt, you were perfectly honest in chucking up your job, and it was a lucky chance that I was able to get you into this push when they let me go back to the Brigade. If ever a man made good in the ranks, you have. That D.C.M. is the proof of it. What the devil you want to talk of dying for, I can’t see. Nor can Providence apparently. Well, go back to Julie. She’s still at the hospital with my girl. I bet she’ll marry you now. What’s to stop it?”

“The love of God,” shot out Peter on the instant.

Donovan stared at him. Then he shrugged his shoulders. “If I didn’t know you well, Graham——” he began.

Peter interrupted him. “Remember that letter you wrote me in town?” he demanded.

The other nodded.

“Remember what you said?”

“Yes, more or less.”

“You said Julie would know best. Well, you were right. She did. She knew better than I did. She saw, right away, for good and all, that though I turned from God, He wouldn’t turn from me. He had called me to be His priest, and I had become His man. I betrayed Him, I struck Him in the face, I crucified Him; but He would not give me up. Right there in London, in the very moment, as I was sending Him to His Passion, He turned and looked at me. Even then, I saw a little what it meant. I saw what God’s love was, and it has dogged me, grown on me, haunted me, ever since.”

He ceased a minute and glanced swiftly at his friend. Donovan’s bewilderment might have struck a third person as comic. His eyebrows were raised in a kind of humorous astonishment, and there was a trace of a smile about his mouth. The sight of him fired Peter afresh.

“Oh, you may not understand,” he burst out, “but surely you can see. If you had betrayed to death your best friend who trusted you, would you feel that a D.C.M. or a V.C. or all the honours that the world can give, wiped it out? You know you wouldn’t. And nor can I. In rest-billets, in the trenches, even when I was sticking my bayonet into Germans, I have seen the eyes of Christ on me. Betrayed. Broken-hearted. Oh, my God!”

Donovan swung his legs up on to his bed and sprawled over on his back. The other seemed to him more than a little hysterical. If he had not come to like and admire him, he would have ended the interview. But then Graham had always been a queer fellow.

“Well, go back to the Church, then,” he said coolly.

His tone and manner recalled Peter to his senses. He laughed a trifle harshly. “No,” he said, “I can’t do that.”

“Why not? Surely to goodness it must be one or the other.”

Graham got up slowly and took two or three turns across the tent. At last he stopped at the foot of the bed. “Look here,” he said more quietly, “put it

this way. I may be a damned fool, but grant that, and just admit this much. There's blood on my hands; it's between me and Julie, it's between me and"—he hesitated at the word—"and the Church. It's got to be expiated. Then maybe I'll see what I must do."

Donovan put his pipe down and clasped his hands behind his head. His shrewd face relaxed into a smile. "You're a weird chap, Pete, my son," he said, "but we'll let it stand at that. It's all Hindustani to me, but I see the bee you've got in your bonnet. However, if the ranks and killing Huns and a D.C.M. haven't expiated the crime, what in the wide wide world will? You can't give yourself up and be hanged, for there's nothing to hang you for. How do you suppose it can be expiated? I'm dashed if I see."

"I don't see, either," said Peter miserably.

"Deuced awkward posish', what?" laughed the other, sitting up, "but at least I see one thing. Come back with this push to the Cape. Get demobbed. They'll probably give us leave on full pay first. I shall spend mine shooting in Zululand, and you can come too."

"Probably your wife will be back."

"Then we'll all four go, and Tommy shall chaperone Julie!"

Peter smiled, but shook his head. "Still," he said, "if I sit tight I shall get sent to the Cape right enough, and that isn't a bad move. I've nothing to go home for, in fact I'd rather not go back to London. And something may turn up in Africa."

"Sure to," agreed Donovan cheerfully.

"It must," said Peter. "I've got precious little cash."

"So you'll want a job," said Donovan slowly.

"Sure thing," returned Peter, and then, as the other continued apparently to size him up, "why? Know of anything?"

"I'm not so sure that I don't."

"What?"

The other rolled off his bed and went to his suit-case, pushing his cap carelessly to one side and heaving the case up on to the bed. As he opened it, he talked.

"Damn it all, Graham, but I seem destined to dry-nurse you. I suggested the Brigade when you came back like—like God knows what, from London,

and I endangered my immortal soul to take you into it with me. Now it appears that it is I who take you out to Africa, but whether I ought to shove this under your nose or not, I don't know. Here, read that."

He had taken out a packet of letters, from which he selected one, which he opened, turning the sheets. One of these sheets he held out to Peter, who took it and read curiously:

". . . much as usual, though the rains were good this year and the country looks green. Wool's still sky-high—we're giving 3s. 6d., and a bag of mealies costs us £3 landed here. Trade's good though, and we're lucky, as we've a big stock of rugs, ordered and paid for early on in the war, which have just arrived. Trade price for a 15s. pre-war rug is £2 10s. 0d. and the niggers give it. But what we want is another fellow up here. Jeffries has to be down below half the time, and it's too much for me alone. But we can't hear of a soul, or, if we do, the perisher funks this place. Can't you dig me out a chap with some guts, who has learned to rough it, and who doesn't want to go back to an office stool? There ought to be scores. He'd soon learn the business, and it's a good life all round. Some young . . ." The sheet ended there, and Donovan had not given him the next. Peter re-read it. Then he handed it back. "Who's the author?" he demanded quietly.

"A fellow called Stenhouse, a trader in Basutoland. Not my district, but right up in the Berg. I go up there shooting and fishing occasionally; that's how I know him."

"Decent chap?"

Donovan shrugged his shoulders. "He's what they call 'a gentleman by birth and education.' Old public school boy, I believe."

"Why didn't he join up?"

Donovan chucked his letters into the suit-case and shut it with a snap. "Ask another," he said. "Trade too busy—couldn't get away—no one to take his place."

"Humph," said Peter.

"Well," retorted the other, "that's neither here nor there now. Besides, it's true in a way. Why don't you go up? You'd do."

"And become a trader?"

"God knows what you'll become. But there's money in it, which you appear to want, and you'd see a bit of fine country. You'd be about a week's trek from Julie when she's at home, and about as far from a church. That's

about what you want, isn't it? You've grown damned particular all at once, Graham."

Peter flushed. "By Jove!" he said, "I believe I had for the moment—— I'll go, Donovan. Selling rugs to natives is just about my mark."

His sudden acquiescence made his friend pause. "Oh, I say," he said slowly, "I don't know that I really meant it. After all, it's no place for you. Bar Stenhouse and Jeffries, you'd see a white man about once in six months. You'd get papers once a week, and I don't suppose there are a dozen books in a hundred miles. And Stenhouse's a rough diamond. No, Graham, cut it out. I was a fool to mention it."

"I'll go," said Peter again, shortly. "How do you get there?"

"You'll have to buy stinkin' wool and hides from sweatin' niggers, and sell 'em half-pounds of sugar over a counter."

"It doesn't sound over-difficult," said Peter smiling.

"That's all very well, but it's no joke. You do that day in and day out. You'll have to live on mutton and potatoes, and after that potatoes and mutton, unless you can't get either, and then you'll live on bully beef and mealie meal."

"Right," said Peter. "What's mealie meal for a start?"

"The store's about 7,000 feet up. It's under snow in winter, and 90 degrees in the shade in summer. There isn't what you would call a road in a day's journey—in three, for that matter, and there's not half a mile of level surface either. The paths run down precipices and ford rivers. Can you ride?"

"Not much," said Peter, "but I suppose I can learn. Where can I get a horse?"

"Look here, chuck it. It's not the place for you."

Peter jumped to his feet. "Will you write to that chap—what's his name? —Stenhouse, or shall I?" he demanded.

The two men stood face to face in silence for a little. Then Donovan shrugged his shoulders again and gave it up.

"Well, don't blame me when you get there."

"I certainly shall," said Peter gaily. "And when shall I get there?"

"Never, probably. You'll break your neck on the road."

Peter Graham's face hardened suddenly. "That would be excellent," he said.

2

An early morning mist was lifting slowly from an oily sea. The troop-ship moved steadily and quietly forward, her bow cutting through the water with a faint swishing sound that was music in the ears of the little group of men who clustered there and peered eagerly ahead. Cape chickens passed restlessly up and down, now sailing serenely on motionless wings, now planing to the surface and screaming with quick beatings of the water in some little group ere, that business settled, they rose again to fling themselves back, high in air, over the relentlessly progressing steamer. Soft greys and greens and blues tinted sky and cloud and sea, and hardened dimly ahead into the form of peaks. With every minute the distant outline resolved itself more clearly, and the men eagerly welcomed each remembered shape. Devil's Peak, Lion's Head, and at last the white town asleep at their feet, were each acclaimed. Then someone made out the Town Hall, its tower rising prominently above the surrounding roofs, and at that, wharfs, docks, houses and even streets rapidly appeared. Then voices died down. What had had something of the unreality of a mirage became suddenly personal and clear. Veterans of Delville Wood and Meteren found themselves unable to speak. Those visionary streets were peopled, suddenly, with familiar faces. In the blur of houses, imagination descried homes. These men had thought many times that they would see neither the one nor the other again.

Peter Graham, a little apart, was the only stranger, yet he too stood in a tumult of memories. Eagerly listening to his friends, he had been trying to understand this new land, but behind the beauty of it that his eyes welcomed eagerly, flitted inner visions that would not be denied. The very act of greeting the strange and new recalled the far away and dear. Leaning on the rail, he surrendered to his memories. Thus, while he saw the sun lighting, as it grew momentarily stronger, on green slopes, white city and rocky Table Mountain, he saw as clearly fragments of past scenes; heard, as it were behind the gulls, the ship's siren and now that new magical overwhelming sound which brought tears to eyes not easily given to sentiment—the ringing of the city's bells in a tempestuous riot of triumphant welcome—echoes never to be silenced, the laugh of the waves at Dieppe, the strain of a song in London. Upon him a new life slowly opened, but he could hardly welcome it as it deserved. The shadow of the old lay over all.

Thus, when the bugles rang sharply out and the men fell in, he with them, he began to play his part in a pageant that grew hourly more unreal. His part in it seemed unnatural, and he a ghost at a feast. Yet the wine so freely offered to the guests rose also to his head. He would have been ungenerous had it not done so. That wharf, packed with a black mass of humanity that cheered till its mingled sorrow and joy gripped it by the throat, and then cheered despite everything in a wild and desperate abandonment beneath which emotion ran like a great river in full spate; the poignant human drama of the first formal salute and then the fervent handshake between the little group of high officials at the gangway's head and the principal officers of the draft as they stepped ashore, while the cheers died down and men caught the brief electric words—"Thank God, thank God; well done; welcome home!" then the crashing of the band, the swift landing, and the march that slowed of necessity as barriers broke down and the massed thousands went mad in a frenzy of pride and joy; over all the warm clear sunshine, the blue vault, the grey-green mountains, and the sweet-scented breath of Africa—these were Peter Graham's as much as any man's. There were no strangers in the streets or in the ranks. A hundred old friends never seen before clapped him on the back, wrung his hand, fired eager questions at him that did not expect an answer; a woman seized his cap, decorated it with roses from her breast, and replaced it on his head; girls hung on his arm; sun-burned men from veld and farm fell into step beside him, thrust cigars into his pockets and offered him meals, the use of motor-cars, and all that they possessed when he should be dismissed; and coloured folk peered for a passing sight of him that they might tell their black babies in the days to come.

Adderley Street was hung, of course, with flags and flowers, but beneath them the friendly incongruity of Africa offered him the freedom that is bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. The jostling of modern palace and iron-roofed shanty; the goods, language and civilization of home in the setting of a new and youthful nation; the familiarity of the mere street to a town-bred man, with its added insistent reminders in advertisements and shop-windows of vast spaces and wide undeveloped lands; all these struck Peter as they strike every new arrival. But there was added the electric atmosphere of the day. He was baptized South African in an hour. He was taken to the heart of a people whose story is yet to be written. There were offered him the rich potentialities of this new citizenship. The warm promise of it swept him off his feet.

The programme of the day was fully arranged: welcome, general luncheon, concert, and officers' dinner. He was thanked publicly and a

thousand times privately, all the more warmly if he ventured to insist that he had done nothing for which he ought to be thanked. Vaguely he heard Colonel Donovan talking, and knew vaguely that he and a few others who had been decorated were formally presented to officials who greeted him with a homely simplicity of manner by which it was impossible not to be moved. He knew that they fell in at last, somehow, before the Town Hall, and commenced another roaring progress to their camp. He knew that he and Beyers and a few others got allotted to the same tent, and that it was a relief to fling off one's tunic and stretch oneself on the grass. Not till then, perhaps, did the shouting really die out of his ears and the sense of a new and unexpected kinship from his heart.

They were in the suburbs somewhere, in a grassy tree-set place, and the evening shadows lengthened swiftly on the piled woods of what Peter was told was Devil's Peak. Staring up at them, as they sprawled on the grass, he and Beyers, he could see the white spot of the Rhodes Memorial and note the red flash of sunset deepening on the iron crags above. He liked the Dutchman, and since that day in the old barn, de Villiers, son of an old Natal family that had nearly forgotten that it did not originate in England, had been added to their company. The lance-corporal joined them now.

"Phew!" he said. "Some welcome, what?"

"Ja," grunted Beyers.

"I've got more smokes than I can get through in a month, I think, only they'd be more use if they hadn't been thrust in my mouth and crammed down my neck."

Peter laughed. "Well, for the next ten days we can get them in boxes by strolling through the town."

"That's so. Unless another draft comes in. We'd luck to be in the first."

"So," said Beyers. "But we shan't be here in ten days. The commandant told me that he thought we'd get our papers in two or three."

"Where you for then?" queried de Villiers.

The Boer removed his big pipe from his mouth and spat accurately. "Hermannesberg," he said.

De Villiers nodded, but Peter sought information. "Where's that?" he demanded.

Beyers regarded him stonily. "Near Krugersdorp," he volunteered at last.

Peter laughed again. “Look here,” he said, “I suppose I ought to know Krugersdorp. I expect it’s a big place of great importance, but I confess I’m none the wiser.”

Beyers took him quite seriously. “Free State,” he said. “It’s a good place, Graham. There’s three hotels, and the new church cost £10,000. But it’s not paid yet,” he added.

De Villiers winked surreptitiously at Peter, but followed it with a half-sigh. “Gum, but I’ll be pleased to see Ladysmith again! I reckon the wife and kiddies’ll be there all right. They’ve made a new dam on the farm since I’ve been away, and there’s a new baby I haven’t seen.”

“Sweetest water in the Free State on my place,” remarked Beyers, “and the house well never dries. Why, man, way back in ’13, when they were selling water in the dorp at a tikki a can, we had more’n we wanted!”

De Villiers capped the wonder with one from his own farm—a land of Kaffir corn that annually performed a miracle, and the two talked away of their houses and beasts and crops while Peter lay and smoked. And as he listened he knew himself, after all, a stranger, and a stranger on a strange quest. In France, in those later days, he had spoken the same language and had had most things in common with these two, but here in South Africa the very memory of France was already slipping from his friends, and the simple incidents of their homes and life fast returning. In all those he had no place.

“Gott!” exclaimed Beyers, and jumped up as suddenly.

“What is it, man?” enquired de Villiers lazily.

But the Dutchman was already moving off towards the pavilion of the show-ground in which they were encamped, an erection which did duty for Officers’ Mess and Orderly Room. “Letters,” he called over his shoulder.

“Letters!” ejaculated de Villiers. “Come on, old son,” and he too, was away, running.

Peter got slowly to his feet. From all sides, from under the shade of the trees, from tents, from stables, from the canteen, men were converging on the Orderly Room. The camp hummed with noise. The rosy glow from the Peak reflected itself even on the white shirts of some of the moving figures, Peter noted incuriously. Well, there would be no letter for him. He stood irresolutely a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and turned back to the mountain. There would be time to climb to the Memorial, and he was itching to see what might be seen of this new country from that height.

The little path led him under trees, past the camp, past a pleasant shady house with big stoeps in the Dutch manner, out on a bare hill-side, where, however, the grasses and heather and shrubs were often shoulder high. From this point he made direct for his objective. He scrambled up and up. Once, in a drive, a herd of deer took sudden alarm and went by him like the wind. Once he hit upon a copse of silver trees whose leaves shimmered in the sun and breeze. And then, breaking through a thicket, he was out on to a path again, and the great flight of massive granite steps lay before him, their approach guarded by that magnificent straining male figure on horseback who stares ever out and out across the slopes and the flat to the mountains which shut the great desert beyond. He climbed slowly to the shallow portico which protects the carving of Rhodes and bears the proud inscription of his name and worth.

Peter turned and looked away. It was very still. Sheltered from the wind, away from the rustling even of the leaves, no sound broke on his ears. Far off the mountains were already deep purple in the fast dying light, and yellow points of flame below and a few silver stars above winked and signalled each to each. At that hour the plain below him seemed even more vast than it would otherwise have done, and he was, as it were, poised above it, lifted away from the affairs of earth, a lone figure in a silent space. It seemed to him that he waited on the threshold for some titanic curtain to lift, some immense drama to be staged. This great new continent beckoned invisibly, called silently, to him. He held his breath instinctively, and listened.

From far below, from very far, a noise came to him, a long-drawn sound, punctuated once by the faint cry of a steam whistle. Then he saw the transcontinental train, a line of moving light, threading its slow way by field and farm to the river and then pass out of his sight on the horizon. Somehow there was nothing incongruous in it. At the moment even the commonplace spectacle, transfigured from that height and at that time, had a message which he could not fail to read. Along that road would he, too, be whirling in a day or two, out to the unknown, irresistibly borne out and on. And somewhere there, behind the curtain of the night that had fallen, lay the answer to his riddle. He did not doubt.

The lights were lit everywhere when he reached camp. He made for his tent and stepped from the darkness into the glow of light within. Half a dozen men sprawled in all attitudes reading, and a lamp hung from the tent-pole. Peter surveyed them in silence, and then laughed.

“And where the blazes am I to sit?” he demanded.

De Villiers looked up. “Oh, it’s you, is it? Where the hell have you been? Commandant’s been asking for you an hour ago.”

“Asking for me?”

“Sure thing.” And de Villiers’ eyes turned to his letter.

“Where is he?”

No answer.

Peter picked up a folded blanket and hurled it at him, his friend ducking a moment too late. “Look here,” he spluttered, “blast you, Graham—how should I know? Sit down or clear out. Haven’t you got any letters?”

“Orderly Room,” said Beyers, suddenly, in Dutch.

Peter laughed. “Oh, we’re home again, aren’t we?” he said cheerily. “Thanks. Suppose I’d better go seek.” And he departed whistling.

Donovan was still in the Orderly Room, and alone. A file of unclaimed letters lay before him, and he was reading his own. He looked up as Peter entered.

“Hullo, there you are. Come in, old dear. I’ve news for you. What do you think?”

Peter could see that suppressed excitement was in his friend’s eyes and manner. “I’ve no idea,” he said, advancing to the table; “what is it?”

“Well,” said Donovan, his eyes on the other’s face, “I’ve been on the ’phone to the Castle. There’s a radio in. The *Balmoral* sailed a fortnight after we did, and pretty near caught our old tub at that. Anyway, she’s due day after to-morrow. There’s a second draft on board, mostly wounded, and nurses.”

Peter nodded, but did not speak.

“Tommy’s on board,” said Donovan, “and Julie.”

Peter stood very still. It was curious with what a sense of shock he heard the news. He had last seen Julie, her face turned from him to the pillows in a London hotel. He had left her then in an agony of doubt and desire, for she had given herself and yet refused to marry him, and he had not seen her since. His return to France had been followed by weeks of strange new life, turmoil, danger, death. He had had no leave. Each day had been full, so full, so overwhelming, that he had had a hard fight to keep his head above water, until he and the rest had been launched into the last fight, into the retreat, the

stand, the rally, the great advance, and had had no time to think the while. And here the strangeness and excitement of a new country had got him already in its grip. For the moment that week-end in London had seemed far away, out of life. And now Julie was all but here.

"I can't see her, I can't, I can't," he blurted out. "Not yet, anyway. Can't I go, Jack? Can't I get my papers?" Then he pulled himself together, and a realization of what it meant to the other came over him. "By Jove, old chap!" he exclaimed, "I'm damned glad for your sake. It's topping."

Donovan shrugged his shoulders with a familiar gesture. "Gad, yes," he said, rising; "come and have a drink." Then he remembered the difference in their rank. "Oh, blast it," he said, "I suppose we can't go to the mess. Come to my tent."

"Well," said Peter a little later, "here's cheerio."

"Here's fun," said the other, and they drank.

Peter set down his glass. "You must give my love to Tommy," he said, "and—and to Julie. Tell Tommy I'm coming to see her in Natal first chance I get."

"Rot," retorted Donovan. "Look here, Peter, I'm damned if you're going to be such a blasted fool. You're going to stop and meet 'em both with me, and we're going to have a dinner at the Opera House to celebrate old times. No need to hide from A.P.M.s in taxis here, thank God. But we'll have a private room all the same, and I'll see to the drinks same as before. Remember?"

Peter could not help it. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I'll ever forget it? Cinder City, too. And the evening we arranged that dinner. I saw 'em both home, and Tommy had the impertinence to tell me on the way to the Hospital that I must not cross the Rubicon that night!"

Donovan's eyes twinkled. "And you arranged to buy menu cards with Julie," he said.

Peter flushed. "Confound it," he said, laughing, "Tommy's been talking."

"After the event," said Donovan, smiling and reaching for a cigarette. "She can keep quiet, can Tommy. Have one?"

But as he caught the packet of Flags the other threw to him, as the match spluttered and flamed, even as he drew in the first breath of smoke, his mind raced. He did not dare see Julie again. He knew that. It was the one thing

clear to him. He knew that he knew himself more and yet less than ever before. He knew his own weakness, his own indecision, his own passionate temper. He knew that if he saw her, it would all be with him as before, but that she would see, quickly enough, that the old questions were still unanswered, the rival claims still unresolved. Could he meet her to torture her strength with his weakness once again? Not yet, at any rate, not until he had crossed those beckoning mountains and learned what waited there.

So it was a resolute Peter that spoke again. “Look here, Jack,” he said, “that’s all very well and all very jolly, but I know my own business this time. I will not meet Julie here. Sorry, but that’s flat.”

His friend was momentarily angered. “You’re a damned fool then,” he retorted hotly.

Peter smiled, a trifle sadly. “Yes, old thing,” he said, “so I am. After all, I did learn that in France. It was always cropping up. But I reckon Julie will understand. Give her a message from me, will you?”

“Sure.” Donovan had recollected himself and leaned forward carelessly to tap the ash from his cigarette.

“Say,” said Peter—then he hesitated. At last: “Tell her,” he said, “that I’ve gone up to her wonderland at the top of the great range in order to see the world spread out at my feet. And I’ll see her again after that. She’ll understand.”

A little silence fell between them. Donovan still played with his cigarette. Peter was staring out into the warm night through the open flap of the tent. He saw it all again so clearly—the little Soho restaurant; the flask of Chianti between them; Julie before him in her flame-coloured frock, with the rosebuds and the mother-of-pearl and silver at her neck, toying with her wine-glass; and he heard her voice a little hushed, a little solemn, describing the great climb, the kranzes, the trees, the rocks, the grass. “You look down the way you’ve come,” she was saying, “and there’s all Natal spread out at your feet like a tiny picture, lands and woods and rivers, till it’s lost in the mist of the distance.”

“What do you do there?” he had said at last.

And she had laughed then, laughed at his solemnity and her own, and had broken the spell. “What would one do?” she had demanded. “Eat and drink and sleep and make love, Peter, if there’s anybody to make love to.” Gaily she had said it, and yet he had known that beneath the gaiety, all the time, lay hid something, some knowledge of hers, that puzzled him. Now he

too would make the climb, he too would throw himself down at the top, he too would see—what she had seen. And then, then, not till then, would he meet Julie again.

"By the way," said Donovan, fumbling among papers, "there's a letter for you."

"For me? From whom?"

"Stenhouse. I wrote from France, and it came before us on the mail." He drew out an envelope and tossed it over to Peter.

Peter picked it up, looked for a moment at the unfamiliar stamp and postmark, and then ran his finger up the flap. "Excuse me," he said.

It was dated from Maritzburg a fortnight previously. It appeared that the writer had got Donovan's letter there, while on a holiday, which was good luck, or Peter would not have had an answer for another month or more. It was a little stilted in phraseology, but definite and friendly enough. Stenhouse was very glad to hear that he was coming. He was to wire his arrival and then take train to Maritzburg, change to a branch to Rangeville, and find a horse at the Viewberg Hotel waiting for him. "You'd best sleep in the dug-out half-way up the Telli," the letter went on, "and come on in the morning. Make an early start. The road runs by the river—you can't miss it—and you might hit the store before sunset. We're short-handed and you'll be very welcome." That was all.

Peter smiled grimly. "I suppose it's all right," he said, "but it sounds pretty vague. What's the Telli, any road? A river? A pass? And do you have dug-outs in Africa? However—Donovan, when can I get off?"

"You mean it?"

Peter nodded.

"Well, if you do—mind you I'm bloody sorry—I can get you your papers in the morning at a pinch, and you can catch the evening train to-morrow."

"Right!" exclaimed Peter, jumping up. Then he stiffened and said solemnly: "Will you give me leave, sir, to step out of camp and send a wire?"

Donovan reached for a writing-block and scribbled a few words, tearing off the sheet and handing it to him. "Go to hell," he said with a twinkle. "Good-night."

“Good-night, sir,” said Peter.

3

“There’s Jack!” exclaimed Tommy. “See him? Talking to that fat officer on the quay. Oh, Julie, isn’t it topping!” And she leaned over the rail, waving furiously to her husband.

“Nice to see the filthy old place again, isn’t it?” said Julie calmly. “And I shall kiss Jack, old dear, whatever you say. I think I shall kiss that staff-officer, too. He’s a fool—I know him—he wouldn’t know what to do. Heavens, come to think of it, I feel like kissing the Kaffirs for that matter. And I’m going to have strawberries and cream at Cartwright’s this very morning.”

“My child,” drawled Tommy, “we shall have to report somewhere or another, and probably we shall have to see these poor dears safe into hospital. You won’t get off.”

Julie turned and looked reflectively at the crowd of boys in blue, some on crutches, some with empty sleeves, some with disfiguring bandages about their heads, who, however, all of them, were waving frantically to the crowd on the quay. Her eyes grew a little misty as she looked. But you would scarcely have thought it. “Tommy,” she said, “these boys are going to have the time of their lives. I never remember much of the Bible, but I can think of an appropriate verse at this minute. ‘To every man a virgin or two.’ And I’m damned if I’m going to stop them.”

“Julie,” gasped Tommy, “for heaven’s sake speak softly. Someone will hear you.”

“I don’t care if they do.” Then, raising her voice, “Here, you boys. Half a moment. Listen to me. . . .’Are we downhearted?’ ”

They hushed a little as she addressed them, and her voice in the challenging question rang out clearly across a fast-closing lane of blue water, even to the ears of the watchers who waited for the maimed men on shore. And the very peak of Lion’s Head must surely have heard that answering denial from sons of the veld and berg who, nevertheless, would never ride again, never shoot again, some of them never even see those glories again.

Five minutes more. The little crowd of officers were pouring up the gangway. Tommy pressed forward. “Oh, Jack,” she cried.

“Here, Tommy, let me in. I want a kiss too, please, Jack.”

“God, you haven’t changed, Julie,” laughed Donovan excitedly. “How’s everything? Gosh, you two look well!”

“When did you arrive?” asked Tommy, smiling and laughing and clutching his arm.

“Day before yesterday. Damned good passage. And my God, the welcome we got! But your chaps will have it all ten times heated. God knows when we’ll get away.”

“Jack,” and Tommy lowered her voice, “where’s Peter then?”

But Julie heard. She raised her clear eyes to the man’s and repeated the question evenly. “Yes, Jack,” she said, “where’s Peter? Or don’t they allow a Tommy leave?”

Donovan looked uncomfortable. “Well,” he said, “he’s gone. He’s got a job in Basutoland, and the fellow wanted him to go at once. He sent his love to you both, and a message to you, Julie.”

Tommy glanced from one to the other. It was Julie who said, resting her hands on the rail and leaning back a little, “Heavens, he was in a mighty hurry. And what was the message, Jack?”

Jack Donovan blushed. He knew he did. He said afterwards to Tommy that it was damned uncomfortable and all that, and he couldn’t think what the blazes a fellow meant by leaving any such tom-fool message as Peter had done. But he got it out bravely. “He told me,” he said, “to say that he’d gone to your wonderland at the top of the Berg in order to see the world spread out at his feet. And he said he’d see you again after that. Oh, and he said that he thought you’d understand.”

Julie looked away and past him. Her eyes travelled over the old town, over the roofs and tree-tops, up the slopes, up the scarred rocky furrows, up to Table Mountain glittering in the sun. “Silly old blighter,” she said lightly.

CHAPTER TWO

1

Peter rose restlessly for the twentieth time, crossed his empty compartment, and peered out into the deepening dusk on the other side of the train. For the twentieth time he looked out on a bare grassy hill-side that sloped into grey emptiness. And the train jolted over the uneven country side-tracks so slowly that had there been anyone to whom to speak or anything to see, Peter might have done all the speaking and all the seeing that he desired.

Since midday, and his lunch with quite a respectable number of passengers—sixteen at least—at the Junction, it had been so. Up to that point his journey had been so intriguing that he had selected an empty compartment thereafter in which to turn it all over in his mind. There had been the days and nights in the transcontinental train via Bloemfontein and Ladysmith to Maritzburg, days and nights during which he had made one of a riotous gay crowd of returning troops who were welcomed at every considerable station and gradually shed friends to the accompaniment of cheers and good wishes. Not only had that been pleasant, but it had been pleasant also to see in such company the Karoo, the veld, the familiarly-named towns so much smaller than he had anticipated, and at last that grey range on the horizon which he was to ascend from the other side. They were comparatively near to it at dusk, and after Ficksburg, bowered in its trees, the rail had seemed, indeed, to run out to meet the sweep of the foot-hills. During the night, awakened by the train's strange shuntings and stoppings, he had gone out on to the cab to see Van Renan's Pass under the stars. Peter thought that he had seen nothing in his life more wonderful than that—the curving railroad winning its slow way up and up through barren steeps into the silences of those immemorial crags. Then, after breakfast, there had been Colenso, the wayside graves of the Boer War, the woody hills of Natal, Maritzburg at last nestling at their feet.

Thence he had had to go on alone, but the beauty of the ascent through rich lands to the Berg had companioned him, to say nothing of the farmers and chance travellers who had interested him with their unfamiliar talk of vleis and kopjes, boys and beasts. Now, however, he had long been alone, alone with his thoughts and alone with the growing dark on a high plateau of grass and stone and outcrop whereon few sheep pastured and no house

apparently stood. True, at stations which were no more than a siding, a shed, and a board with a name in staring letters, there were always two or three buggies and waggons to tell of a hidden population; but as it seemed necessary for the engine to remove itself at each such halt and stroll off to pay a call or two or get a drink, and for the driver to take five times as long over the process as was necessary, one naturally got bored in the end. Peter was bored now. Also he was hungry. Also he was tired. And also he was very conscious that he was alone in a country but little removed from its state of primitive loneliness.

But even as he peered out for the twentieth time or so, the engine-whistle screeched, the train lurched more than usual, took a curve and swung into view of at least a dozen lights. Peter leaped at the rack and lifted down a portmanteau and his kit-bag. He stuffed a few odds and ends and a book or two into a haversack and donned it. As he did so, his compartment commenced to slide by the central railway-station of those parts.

There was a porter. He was crying "Rangeville," "Rangeville," at regular intervals and trudging along the slowing train with a lantern after the manner of porters the world over. But his eyes were not fixed on the train. Long years had taught him not to expect passengers with considerable tips on this branch, indeed they had all but taught him not to expect passengers at all. At Peter's resolute hail, he halted in apparent stupefaction and raised his lantern to look at the prodigy.

"Porter," said Peter again cheerfully.

The man advanced a little and surveyed him. Finally he managed to speak. "You for Rangeville?" he queried.

Peter laughed. His arrival was obviously almost too good to be true. "Sure thing," he said, "and I want the Viewberg Hotel."

At this the man moved still nearer and surveyed him yet more closely. He was thus good enough to allow Peter the use of the light from his lantern while that hero removed his own luggage, but when it was in a pile on the platform, he turned and plodded off without further words. Peter watched him go, correct velveteen jacket and all, and then removed his cap, wiped his forehead and laughed. Two other passengers had emerged from other compartments, but they were already driving away in buggies. The creaking of their wheels rattled into the black of the night. Beyond the station lamps and those, fast disappearing, of the vehicles, there were no lights visible anywhere. Only by the guard's van, whither the porter had gone, was there a small group and a pool of radiance, and thither it appeared to Peter that he

had better make his way. He glanced irresolutely at his luggage. Then he swung his suit-case on his shoulder, picked up his portmanteau, and staggered down the train.

"Four cases, 'Jeffries,' " the guard was saying as he came up.

"How big?" queried a dimly-seen fourth figure. The porter swung his lantern. "Have to wait for a waggon," he added. "What's this chap got?"

"Nothing in the van except this 'ere," and the guard indicated a small wooden box which contained books that Peter, acting on advice, had brought with him from Cape Town.

The words showed that he was not wholly forgotten, but he deemed it time to say something. "Yes, that's mine," he said. "But where is the hotel, and how am I to get my stuff out to it?"

All four turned to look at him, framed against the cavernous door of the guard's van in the yellow glow of the lanterns. Then the station-master glanced back at the guard. "Buck up, Jack, get her away," he said. Jack signalled up the train. "So long," he cried; "there's a waggon-load of stuff for Fergusson forrard." The station-master nodded. The train whistled and moved. The guard and the porter stepped on, the latter leaning from the door of the van. She rumbled off to a siding.

Peter was impatient, and a little irritated. But he had no need to be. The fourth man had apparently been but waiting for the train to leave, for he now took a step forward and said friendlily, touching the box of books with his foot: "You step right along. I'll bring this." And then, to the station-master, "Give us a hand with the mail, Olesohn, will you?"

Peter suddenly warmed. He sensed, as it were, a welcome and a kindliness which had merely been hidden by the taciturnity of the strangers. He smiled in the dark. "I reckon you'd best lead with the lantern," he said, "for I'm blest if I can see anything."

"Gate's there," said the other, nodding over his shoulder. Then he swung up Peter's box, glanced round to see if the station-master were bringing the mail-bag, and tramped off. His boots scrunched in the dark on the gravel. Peter followed. A fence loomed up. Olesohn caught them up and his lantern shone on a battered and muddy Ford motor-car beyond. They reached it, and an ill-made uneven road. Standing by the door, Peter perceived the thicker dark of trees, and then, like a star, a window stabbed out in the distance. Next moment his conductor had cranked up the car, and the clatter of the engine and the leaping radiance of head-lights shattered the night. Someone

opened the door, and he climbed in. Olesohn threw the mail in after him and banged the door. The car dropped into gear and slid down the shafts of its own lights. " 'Night, Olesohn," shouted his driver. " 'Night," echoed Peter. "So long," cried the other. Peter had miraculously arrived and finished with railways for longer than he knew.

Peering about him, he was aware that they soon passed two lighted dwellings and a third at some distance, all hidden among trees, but thereafter they topped a rise and every sign of the terminus of Rangeville disappeared. More accustomed to the dark by now, Peter realized that they were swiftly traversing a long straight track which ran apparently across open veld. In the starlight he could see vague distances, clumps of coarse grass close at hand, and little more. Curious at last lest there should be any mistake, he leaned forward. "I say," he said, "I wanted Viewberg Hotel, Rangeville."

"Aye," nodded the other. "Viewberg Hotel. I'm the boss. We've bin expectin' you. Stenhouse passed through last week and reckoned you'd along likely. We've seven mile to run. Guess you'll be glad to be in."

"Oh," said Peter, "I thought Viewberg Hotel was at Rangeville."

"Good Lord, no. Viewberg's a township, bigger 'n Rangeville. But they've only got the rail to Rangeville so far. There's an hotel there, but I usually meets the train for mail and takes along any passengers."

"Do you get many?"

"A few, sometimes. There's a good few school-folk come up for the holidays. We're near the Berg, you see, and there's good fishin' in the Selatla. I'm enlarging my place, only stuff's so expensive since the war. I've known times when I could do with a dozen bedrooms, what with the chaps passing through and so on. You'll see to-morrow. There we are."

They had apparently topped another rise. In any case there loomed up again more trees, shadowy dark buildings, fences, and small groups of lights. They came to a standstill by a rough hut with a door and a wicket, and on the wicket, white gleaming in the night, the words Post Office. There were half a dozen persons lounging round. Getting out, Peter found himself by a wire fence and a gate, and could see beyond the gate a path and an open door bright-lit. It allowed him the glimpse of a spread table, an easy chair or two, a red curtain. Then the car lights died as the engine stopped, after the manner of Fords, and someone switched on an electric torch.

"That you, sergeant?" queried Peter's driver to a man who crossed the shaft of light in a slouch hat and khaki riding-breeches.

“Aye, John. Give us t’ mail. I’ll sort her, you’re that late.”

“Right-o. ’Taint much to-night. Doctor bin?”

“Yep.”

“How’s the missus?”

“So-so. She’ll do, he says.”

“Bully. That’s fine. Now, mister, just you step up with me. I guess you’ll be wanting supper.”

In the doorway for the first time Peter saw him clearly, a tall bearded man, kindly of face. “Mother,” he shouted, “here’s Mr. Graham. Dish up the stuff.” He turned to Peter. “Leave your traps—the boys’ll see to them. You’ll want a wash; come along o’ me. By the way, my name’s Halloway, John Halloway. I’m glad to see you, Mr. Graham.”

Peter knew himself welcomed.

2

The early sun awoke him, but he lay for a while piecing together the incidents of the night before. He had a vague recollection of a room built of rough wood and iron and very plainly furnished, in which there had chiefly struck him two excellent enlarged, coloured and framed photographs of Bushman drawings in what he was told were local caves, with an inscription that they had been presented to John Halloway, Esq., in return for services rendered to a party of scientists; and of a dish of superlatively excellent chops and chips. Turning it over, he realized that he had yet to see his surroundings by daylight. Whereupon he jumped up, crossed his rough-and-ready little room to the open door, and stepped out to the little covered stoep before him. Then he drew in his breath with a little gasp of wonder, gripped the rail of the verandah before him with both hands, and was still.

Perhaps five miles away, in a great semicircle which bounded his horizon, ran the chain of the Berg. It was like a piled rampart, a mighty wall, a titanic barrier to ring the world. Grey and misty blue in that early sunlight, it lay there soft and yielding as an unsubstantial thing. Here and there great buttresses thrust themselves up as if they were mediæval castles in a fairy story, impregnable, inviolate; but for the most part the range was a solid wall that from this distance seemed regular and smooth. In the middle distance he could see lands and a river; the trees of Viewberg; even the dusty empty village street; but these were nothing to that spectacle of wonder beyond. Into the serene sky the mountains lifted themselves, a sky that thus early was

but washed with blue, liquid with light. Slight mist-wreaths wound about the crags of the higher peaks, but for the most part the range lay there, silent, far, and still, truly a world unconquered since the dawn of all.

"Well, and what do you think of them?" enquired a cheery voice behind him.

Peter started and turned. He found himself looking into the good-humoured freckled face of a young woman who stood with her arms akimbo regarding him. She was sunburnt, with honest grey eyes, and she was smiling at him. Instinctively Peter smiled back. He also forgot his English manners. "Hullo," he said brusquely, "who are you?"

The girl laughed. "Tit for tat, I suppose," she said. "Well, I'm Gwen Eldred."

"Good-morning, Miss Eldred," said Peter with gravity, and attempted a bow, only to discover himself in pyjamas and fresh from his bed. "I say ——" he said, involuntarily.

"Yes?"

"Oh, I mean I must apologize for being in pyjamas."

"No need for that here. But you ought to apologize to the morning for being up so late."

"It isn't late."

"Eight o'clock. I've been up about two hours. Where have you come from?"

"Rangeville. That is, I wasn't living there, you know. I came from Maritzburg, no, the Cape. Oh, well, London, I suppose."

Gwen chuckled. "I guess so," she said, nodding shrewdly. "I was at school in London."

"Yes?" queried Peter instantly. "What happened?"

"What happened?" She was puzzled. "I don't understand."

"Well," said Peter, getting his own back, "something must have done, you know. Either you or the school must have obviously—er—well, given way."

The girl stared at him for a moment, and then she threw her head back and burst into peals of laughter. "I did," she said at last. "You see, I was born in Africa. I couldn't stand it. So I came away."

"And when was all this, may I ask?"

"Oh, ages ago now. Yet somehow it doesn't seem so, does it? You see, I got back only a year before the war. Heaps of things happened in that year, and then, just when we thought everything was settling down, the war came. I went to East Africa, to nurse, with our troops, you know. Now I'm teaching in Maritzburg, and it's holidays, and I thought I must come up here again."

"You know the mountains then?"

The girl nodded. There was something in her silence that made the man press his point. "You know them well?" he queried.

Gwen Eldred turned and stared out at the Range. She did not answer at once, but he knew instinctively that she was framing her answer. It came at last, deliberately.

"No," she said, "not well. But I went there for a trek once with a party, with my sister and some friends of ours. It seems like yesterday, though it is six—nearly seven—years ago. I was such a little fool. We had a wonderful, terrible time, and the others understood the Berg better than I did. But I think I'd understand now. The war's made such a difference, hasn't it?" She faced him. "Haven't you noticed that?"

Peter took a grip of the rail of the stoep and perched himself up on it. "Do go on," he said.

She shot a glance at him, then turned away again. "Well," she said hesitatingly, "everything is different. Things we thought awful seem little, and the little things—only they were not little really ever—seem big. Up there I was happy and miserable and frightened and—and horrified, one after the other, but—but—oh I don't know how to put it!—it was inside me. Little absurd *I* was all that. Now, somehow, I wouldn't be any of those things. I see that the things that used to make me all that don't matter in the least. They're so small. There's something bigger than them that matters, something the Range stands for somehow. That's why I wanted to see it again." She broke off suddenly. "Oh, but you must think me a fool!"

Peter did not take his eyes off her. His lips were pursed together and he did not speak. She misinterpreted his silence and swung round on him suddenly, marking her mood. "Great Scott," she cried, "I am really becoming a school-marm! Go and dress, or you'll get no breakfast."

"Damn breakfast," said Peter. "Do you know, this beats everything. I'm trying to size it up——But then, I suppose we're mostly all fools enough to

think that we're the only pebbles on the beach."

Gwen raised her eyebrows. Then she smiled. "There's bacon and eggs," she said, "can't you smell 'em?"

Peter jumped off the rail. "You see," he said, "you've said just what I've been feeling. Personally I've come through hell, and also incidentally travelled thousands of miles to get out of myself and have a look at things. And yesterday I thought I'd reached the positive end of the earth. I think I even thought I'd got beyond the end. And now, this morning, first thing, I meet a girl I've never seen before who puts my own thoughts into words in two twos. Don't you think it's rather wonderful?"

Gwen slowly shook her head. "No," she said, "I don't. I'm past thinking things wonderful. And I'm past thinking there's an end to anything. There must be *some* reason in it all——But it's too big to matter, I think."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Peter.

"Oh well, I don't know that I can explain in a moment. But you see I was up here with two men—at least two and my father. There was Hugh, my brother-in-law. He was so topping, a solid rattling honest good chap. He went through *his* hell up there, and had just got out when the war came. Of course he went at once, and of course he was killed. Blown to bits on the Somme almost at once. And then there was Chris, and Chris was—oh well, Chris was Chris. He went, of course, but after a bit, and he's alive. He would be. Mind you, I know Chris better now. I like him. But it's a puzzle. It's the wrong way round, somehow."

"I know," said Peter. "It's the same with me. I ought to have been killed."

Gwen regarded him gravely. "Oh!" she said.

"Yes. I've mucked up my life, and not mine only. And I'm just going on in the dark. I'm going to a store up there because it seems to be about the last thing on earth."

"Humph," said Gwen. "Well, look here, I'll tell you something. I bet you've come to the right place; I'll bet there's more hope for you than you know; I bet the Berg won't let you off lightly either."

"Why not? How do you know?" queried Peter curiously.

Gwen's solemn face grew merry. Then she laughed. "There's no mystery in it," she said. "Only I guess you're the sort to find out things up there. Cheerio, anyway. I'm off fishing. See you later."

"I don't know about that," said Peter. "I'm starting this morning."

"Oh well, good-bye, then. Hope you have a good ride." And she held out her hand.

Peter shook it. "Good-bye," he said, and turned in to shave as she went off humming.

Thereafter he sat down to his bacon and eggs, and was finishing them when his host came in. They greeted each other. "Well," said Halloway, "if you've about done, you'd best come and see your horse and your boy."

"My boy?" queried Peter.

"Yes. Stenhouse has sent Yacob down for you to ride, and Mosheshoe to guide you. But they only came in yesterday. Better rest 'em to-day, I should think."

"But Mr. Stenhouse wanted me to get up as quickly as possible."

Halloway chuckled. "Guess in six months you won't be in any hurry to leave Viewberg when you get here. Not going this way, at any rate. Specially when there's as jolly a girl staying here as you would find in a day's march. I reckon if Stenhouse were here he'd stay a month."

They went out together to the stables, a ramshackle building of rough wood and brown thatch, before the open door of which a native was squatting, mending a bridle. Halloway hailed him, and he got up as they approached.

"Here," said Halloway, "this is the boss."

Peter stood awkwardly. The man was looking at him with fearless quiet brown eyes. He was dressed in an old pair of trousers and a singlet, and Peter noticed his bare feet, hard and splayed at the toes. He did not know quite what to do. Did one shake hands? So he nodded, and said good-day.

"Lumela, Morena," said the other.

Peter turned to Halloway. "I say," he said, "doesn't he talk English?"

"Oh, yes. He was only greeting you. *Lumela* means How do you do? or Good-bye, which you like. Boss wants to go to-day, Jim."

"Right, baas," replied the other. "Only can't go yet. Horses gone out to the veld. They bit tired. Thought baas 'd rest 'em to-day."

"Do they really need it?" asked Peter of Halloway, irresolutely.

The man shrugged his shoulders. “As you please,” he said. “It’s a good long ride down, but it won’t kill them to do the return at once, if you like.”

Peter glanced round at the hot bright sunshine, the shady blue-gums, the open parched brown veld—and the distant shimmering Range. He felt suddenly that he would like to watch the mountains for a day before he essayed them. He could hardly have put his thought into words, but it made his mind up for him.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll wait.” And then, at a sudden remembrance: “Oh, I say, what about my luggage?”

Halloway grinned. “Boss got trunk, packing-case, kit-bag, and God knows what else, Jim,” he laughed.

The native shewed his teeth in a smile, but said nothing.

“But can’t I take it up?” queried Peter.

“You can take up exactly what’ll go into two saddle-bags, after you’ve got a night’s skoff into them, and what the boy can carry. That’s all. I’ll send the rest on when a waggon leaves. I forward stuff for Stenhouse and there’s some waiting now at Rangeville. It won’t be long. Week or two, p’rhaps.”

Peter stared at him in dismay. Then he laughed. “Oh well,” he said, “we had to go short pretty often over there. I dare say I can do it again. But where are the saddle-bags?”

“Here, Jim,” put in Halloway, “you take saddle-bags and go to boss’s room, see? You pack for him, eh? Then you leave early to-morrow. That’ll be the best plan,” he added to Peter.

The boy nodded and turned to the stable. “Right,” said Peter, “but I say, I thought you said his name was Mo—Moshesh—something or another. Why do you call him Jim?”

“All niggers are Jim,” replied the other carelessly, turning away. “Mosheshoe is his Sesuto name. I must be getting on.”

Peter stood awhile in the hot sun, watching a lizard play on a stone, and whistling to himself. Then his boy emerged with the saddle-bags. “Ready, Mosheshoe?” queried Peter, smiling.

3

Peter Graham and Gwen Eldred met again under circumstances peculiarly trying to them both, however amusing to a couple of locust-birds

who watched from afar. Peter's acquaintance with horses having been limited to rides on heavy Shire animals bringing back loads in the evening while he was on holiday as a boy at farms in English country villages, he thought it not unwise to cause Yacob to return earlier than usual from the veld, to have him saddled, and to go out upon him for a trial spin. Yacob thought it otherwise. He gave every indication of his disapproval known to a nicely-tempered animal until Peter had caused him to travel a mile or two of veld in a direction which, at the back of the pony's, if not of Peter's brain, had a distinct objective, and then, smelling the river and considering that late afternoon is a good time for a drink, he forgot his manners, tossed his mane, took the bit in his teeth, and made for the water. Peter called him a good chap, a sportsman, and an old fellow, but it made no difference. He lost first one stirrup and then the other, but still it made no difference. He lost all that remained to him by way of pretence at control, gripped the flying mane, called the little pony a something devil and set his teeth. Still it made no difference. A figure in a shirt and riding-breeches, holding a rod strained taut and intent on playing a big fish, made no difference either. The lady was standing where he, Yacob, wanted to water, and he came gallantly to the goal, stopped nearly dead in his tracks with his two forefeet together, got rid of his rider and commenced to drink. Peter went over his head with extreme neatness of action, apparently to pay a call on Gwen's fish.

"Good Lord! Damn your eyes!" Thus Gwen, enraged and forgetful.

"I say—I'm awfully sorry—couldn't stop the beast." Thus Peter, spluttering, emerging, rueful, wet—very wet.

Gwen stared at him, felt her fish again, exclaimed vehemently, lugged at her rod and dragged him into the shallows. Peter, seeing that he could not get more wet, and suddenly alive to the hunt, sprang forward, floundered, and collapsed half in and half out of the stream with the fish on the bank. Yacob lifted his head, mouthing water contentedly after the manner of a happy satisfied pony. And the two humans, surveying each other across the fish, laughed incontinently.

Peter finished first, being very wet. "Oh I say," he repeated, lugubriously.

Gwen took fresh stock of his appearance, and then went off again into peals of laughter, which did not, however, prevent her giving him a hand up and landing him alongside the gasping fish on dry land. "Never mind," she spluttered, "you landed my fish."

"But of all the infernal brutes——"

"Not at all. He's rather a dear. I expect he just wanted a drink."

And she walked over and caressed the little pony's nose, who signified his approval in his own way.

Peter surveyed him mournfully. "Perhaps he did," he said, "but I didn't. At least, not water. I'm soaking."

"Well, it won't matter," said Gwen cheerfully. "You'll learn to get wet in the mountains. I don't think I knew what rain was till I went there. By the way, are you on your trek now?"

Peter had climbed out of the river and was engaged in wringing out his jacket. "No," he said, taking her question seriously, and Gwen stifled a laugh.

"Never mind the jacket," she said. "It'll dry in the sun, though the day is getting on. I've had a glorious time. That's my first fish, but it's been topping fun. You should have come. Why didn't you start this morning?"

Peter explained. "I've reduced my luggage to about one shirt and a change of socks," he said, "but Mosheshoe will carry a bit more for me. I say, do you know Mr. Stenhouse?"

The girl shook her head. Then she reconsidered it. "Wait a moment," she added. "Is it Stenhouse and Jeffries?"

"Yes."

"At Qathlamba?"

"Yes. I never knew how you pronounced it till now."

"Well, then, I know a bit about it. There was a fellow in hospital at Dar-es-Salaam in the Basutoland Mounted Police, and he knew it. It's in his district. I've heard him speak of the store."

Peter was interested. "Good," he said, "do tell me. Shall I meet the man? What's his name?"

Gwen regarded the river philosophically and began to wind in her line. "Probably you will. Cathcart he's called. He usually passes the store when he's out on patrol-duty."

"Oh," said Peter, watching her face. "Nice chap?"

"He's not so bad, as men go—which is not saying much, you know."

"I suppose you nursed him."

“Clever fellow! Come on, let’s get back. I walked, and you can walk back with me. Here, lead your pony. He’s got to get to know you.”

“I wish I hadn’t got to get to know him,” retorted Peter.

Gwen shot a glance at the speaker. “You didn’t mean that,” she said. “You’re glad to be here, and you’re fond of animals, and I expect before you’ve done you’ll love the little beast. You’ve only got to fall off him twice more to be able to ride him, and I expect you’ll do that to-morrow. Take some Zam-Buk; it’s grand stuff, and they sell it at the store!”

Peter could not help smiling. “Go on,” he said. “Kid me some more. I like it.”

She laughed. “I reckon it’s time you told me something about yourself,” she said. “Your name, for example. You should have told me yours when I told you mine.”

“Graham—Peter Graham.”

“And why, Mr. Graham, did you select this part of the world for your attentions after you’d done your little bit to whack the wicked Hun?”

Peter flicked at long grasses with his whip, and paused perceptibly before he replied. Then he realized that the question was simple and honest enough, and that he could, after all, give a simple answer. “I was a private in the South African push in France,” he said, “and the O.C. of my crowd heard of this job and offered it to me.”

“South African!” exclaimed Gwen instantly. “Why didn’t you say so before? But”—her mind beginning to consider it—“but I say you aren’t a South African?”

“No. I joined up with them because of this friend of mine.”

“O-o-oh.” Her shrewd eyes considered him. “Early on?”

“No, not very,” he said indefinitely.

She scented a bit of a mystery, but concluded it was not her job to probe it. Peter, after all, looked a decent sort. So she waived the enquiry and merely said: “I expect I knew some of your fellows. South Africa’s not very densely populated, you know. Any from Natal or Griqualand?”

Peter mentioned de Villiers, but it appeared that there were many de Villiers and they couldn’t agree on common knowledge. Beyers was O.F.S.; his own immediate officers had been Transvaal. He suggested Donovan, and she thought she had heard of him. It appeared that her father’s farm, and her

own district, lay just south of Basutoland. Then, savouring the pleasure of it, he mentioned another name. “I met some African nurses,” he said, “and there were a couple from Natal. Miss Raynard for one, Miss Gamelyn for another.”

“Julie Gamelyn?”

“Yes; do you know her?”

“I know of her. I was trained at Maritzburg, where she’d been. And everybody in Natal knows the Gamelyns. How jolly! Did you like her?”

Peter nodded.

“Is she demobbed yet?”

“I believe so. Miss Raynard’s married to Colonel Donovan, and I believe both of them came out on the *Balmoral*.”

“Oh, you know all about it, do you, you dark horse? You’ll easily be able to see her in Natal.”

Peter did his best to laugh unconcernedly, but he was aware that he had not succeeded. And, with one of those sudden inspirations, he resolved to make something of a confidante of this girl. He raised his eyes to hers openly. “Miss Eldred,” he said, “I don’t know why, but I don’t want to beat about the bush with you. I was a padre first in the war. I stuck it as long as I could, but my faith broke down. At least, it was not quite that; it was rather that it seemed to me that the religion that I taught did not really meet men’s needs. It wasn’t real as the war was real. You were talking of values this morning; well, its valuations were all wrong. And Julie did a great deal to help me realize that. In the end I’d—I’d have married her if she’d have had me. Mind you, I’m telling you all this in confidence, and I don’t quite know why.” He stopped abruptly.

Gwen impulsively laid her hand on his arm. “I know why,” she said, with a little smile.

“Why?”

“It’s the Berg. It’s the beginning. It does things like that. It makes you see at once how silly it is to pretend and be polite, and just to talk for the sake of talking. And it’s made us friends in half a day.”

Peter halted dead on the track and their eyes met. His were solemn, puzzled, and not a little sad, she thought; hers were half-merry, half-serious, and wholly tender, he thought.

“I believe you’re right again,” he said.

“And so you’re coming up here?” she questioned.

“Yes. At least that’s not quite all——”

“Well, Mr. Peter Graham, don’t tell me more now. Wait a bit. You’ve told me enough. It’s good to tell your troubles, sometimes, but more often it’s good not to tell too much. And perhaps she’ll have you yet.”

“Oh, it’s not that,” said Peter, “not what you think, at any rate. She thinks I’m—I’m—oh I can’t say it! But I believe she’s right, and anyway it’s my job to find out. And that”—with a nod of his head—“seems as good a place as any to try in.”

Instinctively they both looked out and away. The great Range was already purpling for the setting sun to dash what colour he would upon her. Many a sunset was Peter to see up there, but never was he to forget this first. In a luminous gold haze they stood and looked away there where the tones were deepening in the valley and lightening to crimson and gold upon the summits. So they stood a minute, and then turned to go on.

“And I’ve actually made a friend to watch for my return?” said Peter, hiding his seriousness with the lightness of his tone.

Gwen understood. “Rather,” she said, “you and Julie.”

4

“Mosheshoe,” said Peter, late on the following day, “another five minutes and I’m done to the wide.”

The Mosuto grinned. At least he understood the drift of the language. “Morena rest a minute,” he said. “Not far now. Morena walk the rest.”

“Thundering good idea,” said Peter. “Hold Yacob’s head. I don’t seem to have got the telegraph system right yet. He stops when I signal to go on, and goes on when I signal to stop.”

“Right, morena. Now, morena. Morena see this path? Well, he follow it up when he is ready and he’ll see the dug-out. I go on and make fire and see to the horses.”

“Mosheshoe,” said Peter, wearily and sitting down where he stood, “you’re a damned good fellow. I’ll follow in half an hour. Meanwhile, I’ll have a drink, since the flask’s in my pocket and the water at my feet. Cheerio.”

Again the black man smiled. Peter watched him depart, riding his own pony about until he had shepherded Yacob on before, and then following, seemingly tireless. Then he swung round where he sat, took out his flask and unscrewed the cup which formed its head, poured in some whisky, added water, and took his drink. “Lor!” he exclaimed, “recommend me to Africa for a healthy thirst!”

He had reason to be tired. Horse-riding is a wearisome business when you are not used to it at any time, but it can hardly be worse than when you must sit a walking horse for the greater part of the day over a tiny trail that is all boulders and bushes and hidden snags, and which crosses and recrosses, a score and more of times, a swirling stream whose brown waters hide the stones. Peter was so sore that he could hardly sit with comfort; his every leg-muscle ached and ached again; his back felt like breaking. In addition he was stickily hot, and had been since he left Viewberg at dawn except for the brief luncheon off-saddle.

From his seat now he could survey the way he had come, and surveying it his spirits rose within him. He had climbed two-thirds of a great rift in the Range, down the centre of which foamed a swift stream, joined every few hundred yards by some trickle from the mountain on either side. He could see mile on mile. Already Viewberg was no more than a clump of trees on the horizon. The rich bush—tree-fern, willow by the water, sugar-bush and brushwood—lay stretched out below him in the sun, glistening and lovely in that clear air. Left and right, and sometimes overhanging the path, the towering buttresses, that if anything seemed bigger as they grew nearer, rose to the sky, and now and again across the gulf that divided them some great bird sailed on wide-extended wings. Save for the song of the water it was very still. And the Berg seemed to smile at him friendly-wise, and take him to its heart.

“I must be getting on,” he said to himself, and rose with a sigh. Behind, the aspect of things was distinctly more forbidding. He could see his trail for possibly thirty yards; then it was lost in the bush. From thence, and upwards and onwards for a good distance, it looked as if scrub impassably filled the gorge, except where the river that was now no more than a mountain stream tore its way through. Beyond that the scrub indeed ceased, but only because the neck narrowed in precipitously and became just a grassy slope and then a grim shoot of stones and rock. He had to throw his head well back to see the top, clear cut as with a knife against the sky. As for the trail there, to his unaccustomed eye it was not. How he was to get up, let alone the ponies, he could not guess. Well, it was not to be to-night. Somewhere ahead was the

“dug-out” and tea and supper. Supper at the Ritz never sounded more inviting. He picked up his sjambok (a kindly gift from Halloway) and set out.

A quarter of an hour later he scrambled over some boulders and through some rank grass and gave a little shout of surprise. A stream, one of those many tributaries to the main river, fell just here from the side of the pass and made a bit of a pool. Beyond it lay a stretch of comparatively level greensward backed by rock and a face of vegetation. In the rock, half hewn out of it, half built out from it, was a dug-out indeed, with a comical bit of iron chimney stuck into its roof to complete it. It was like a tinker’s camp straight from Lavengro. And the afternoon sun lay over all.

Mosheshoe was not immediately visible, but he hailed Peter from the hill-side. Somehow or another he had got up behind and was slowly driving the ponies into a kloof for the night. However, his handiwork was plain enough, for a wood fire spluttered gaily between three stones near the centre of the clearing, and a kettle was balanced upon them.

Peter crossed the little plateau and peered into the dug-out. It had a window in the far end, and contained otherwise two beds with a fireplace in the rock between them, a chest, a table, and a medley of pots and pans and ropes and riding gear hung on nails or stuck into the roof. In odd corners were firewood, their saddles, some folded blankets, and an iron pot with three legs. Peter returned to the fire outside.

A couple of hours or so later he knew the joys of trekking in the wilderness. He and his boy lay either side of the fire which glowed dully between them, save when Mosheshoe leaned over for a log and threw it on. The pots and kettle had been emptied and washed. Overhead the stars made a canopy of friendly pattern that twinkled and laughed solemnly at them, and clear in the night rose the song of the streams, the chirp of crickets, and once or twice, far off, the cry of a baboon. Peter was tired, indeed, but he rested on a pile of brushwood that the boy had cut for him and spread below his blanket, and his pipe drew well after the most delicious stew that he thought he had ever tasted. And the strangest thing of all about it was the contrast of this situation with many in some respects not so dissimilar in France. Dug-outs and camp fires and tea out of a kettle or a billy—yes. But here he lay folded on the breast of some great kindly soft-bosomed mother, and was well content.

“Mosheshoe, tell me about Qathlamba.”

“Qathlamba a store, morena.”

“Yes, I know. But I’ve never seen a ‘store,’ remember. What shall I have to do all day?”

The boy shewed his teeth in the firelight. Then he essayed information. “Men will bring in wool and mealies and wheat and all such things on ponies, and morena will weigh them. Then the boys get tickets and go and buy blankets and saddles and oil and soap and matches——”

“Yes, I see. They buy from the man they sell to?”

Mosheshoe’s face looked puzzled. “No other store at Qathlamba,” he said.

Peter laughed and changed the subject. “What sort of a house does Mr. Stenhouse live in?” he asked.

“Fine house, morena. Baas Stenhouse very clever man. He haul iron up here, and wood, and build fine house.”

“Hauled iron up here?” Peter was incredulous and stared up the pass, dimly seen in the starlight.

“Ja, morena. Girls carry it up, one piece one girl. Then baas Stenhouse have a waggon on top, and he make a road and take it to the store. He make a garden, too, morena. ’Tatoes, cabbages—all things. He plant willows even. One day he have trees there.”

“What, aren’t there trees?”

“No, morena. Too cold for ordinary trees. No trees in Qathlamba.”

“What is there then?” asked Peter, puzzling it out.

“Grass and rocks, and a big river, morena. Baas Stenhouse he catch plenty fish in river. Sometimes he go shooting on Sundays.”

The word suggested a further question. “No church there, Mosheshoe?”

“Natives have church, perhaps two hours away. No white *moruti* though. Native *moruti* there, and white man come sometimes.”

“You go to church?”

“I Ma-roma, morena.”

“Ma-roma?”

“Ja, morena. ‘Charch,’ he English; Ma-fora, he French; Maroma, he—he Katoliki, morena.”

“Oh, I see,” cried Peter, light breaking in. “You’re a Catholic, Mosheshoe, then. But where’s your church?”

“Priest come sometimes, morena. He come from Roma, seven, eight days away.”

Silence. Then at last Peter asked in a lazy curiosity, “What’s Mr. Stenhouse’s religion, Mosheshoe?”

“Eh, morena?”

“What’s Mr. Stenhouse’s religion? Ma-roma, Charch, Ma—Ma—what’s the other?”

“Ma-fora, morena.”

“Oh, he’s Ma-fora, then?”

“No, morena.”

“But”—sleepily—“you said he was.”

“No, morena.”

“What then?”

“I don’t know, morena.”

A little later. “Good-night, Mosheshoe.”

“Good-night, morena.”

“And thanks awfully, Mosheshoe, for—for——”

“Eh, morena. *Lala hantle, morena.*”[1]

The moon got up about midnight and flooded the Telli Pass with silver light. And then a little wind crept restlessly about the stones and bushes. But Peter slept.

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[1] “Sleep well, chief” (Sesuto).

CHAPTER THREE

1

At the top, as Julie had indeed foretold, Peter threw himself down on the wet grass, panting. He was very nearly too tired to watch Yacob arrive next, or the way in which that gallant little beast got his forefeet on the last bit of rock and sprang up almost as if he were a goat, but he was recovered enough by the time Mosheshoe appeared—last, for it had been his job to drive the animals on ahead—to notice that even the native was pretty well breathed. The morning had hardly yet fully begun. The pass out of which they had emerged was still full of dark shadows, and only on the higher buttresses to the left had the sun's rays lit. But that all added to the wonder of the scene. Peter lay in the shadow, and as he looked down the pass he could see nothing for mist which swirled about in it, and spread out on either side, and hid the Selatla and the lands about Viewberg. He was above the clouds. He remembered how, as a boy, he had seen the sky as it were resting on the heads of great peaks in Scotland and how he had longed to be able to climb up and get above and see what was to be seen. Now, at a height of 10,000 feet, the world below was drowned in a sea of mist. But he had hardly a glance for it. The world above held all his attention.

He lay upon the edge of a great upland which stretched away before him and fell imperceptibly towards a watershed. It was bordered by fantastic hills and mountain tops, among which ran wide open valleys, and it lay in the full light of the cloudless morning. There were flowers about—clumps of great yellow thistles, swaying reeds crowned with pink fairy-bells, a patch of red-hot-pokers, and myriads of everlastings here and there. There were little pools, brown and peaty, which caught and deepened the blue above. There were ancient rocks everywhere, lichened in greys and yellows, warm and friendly, and on the top of one close to him a fierce-looking red and black lizard peered down. And there was a breath in the air of wide open places swept clean by rains.

Peter raised himself on his arm to survey it all more easily, and he caught Mosheshoe looking at him, a smile on his ugly rough brown face. "So this is your country, Mosheshoe," said Peter.

"Eh, morena."

“Well,” said Peter reflectively, “it strikes me that up here, above the clouds, seeing it is as lovely as this, you have perhaps made a mistake. I reckon it’s heaven.”

The boy replaced his old deer-stalker on his head and laughed happily. But he made no direct reply. “We’ve got long trek before us, morena,” he said. “Best be starting.”

“Starting?” queried Peter. “What do you think we’ve been doing for the last two hours?”

“Climbing the Telli, morena. Now we start. We’ll off-saddle way down there on the Qathlamba, where the river is little. Then we get in by dark.”

“All right, Mosheshoe. Carry on. Here, I’ll catch Yacob; I’ve got to get used to it.”

But Yacob was easily caught. The little pony seemed to know what lay ahead of him, and perhaps smelt fodder in imagination at the end of it. But that livelong day was all new to Peter. Stiff as he was, it was a joy at first to jog along there behind Mosheshoe, along the narrow stony path that at times he could not distinguish from the surrounding plain, across the face of the grassy slope that led to the river, and at last, at long last, with the sun high above him, to reach it. A small stream it was here, but they found a boulder that gave some shade, and Peter stripped by a deep still brown pool, and emerged fresh and cool for the cold meat and hard-boiled eggs and bread that still remained to them. Stretched out full length thereafter he went to sleep, and woke to find the horses caught and saddled and Mosheshoe waiting for him. And then they needs must ride faster, pushing the ponies, in and out, and up and down, and in and out again, hour after hour, while the stream became a river and the valley opened out, and the sun burnt fiercely and the wind disappeared, and Peter longed to stop and yet knew that if he stopped he would never go on again. Terrible were the places in which some shoulders of rock pushed out to the stream. There they must scramble tortuously up a zigzag path which Peter could have declared was unrideable, and lead the horses down the farther side. It seemed an endless journey, and the obstacles endless, until they struck the first patch of cultivated land and saw the first group of huts.

The country changed thereafter. Up till now it was possible to feel that they were on the summit of a mountain range with the land comparatively flat about them. Now, however, it was broken by hills that were mountains in themselves, by rivers and barriers and passes between them that seemed scarcely less terrible than the original Telli by which they had come. There

were distant prospects, too, and vast tumbled masses of mountains and gorge and valley. True, they fortunately kept to their own river bed, but Peter lost all sense of direction, and merely followed his guide as they moved steadily into the unknown. A sense of the barren rough wildness of the country grew on him. Although there were patches of loveliness, as when "lands" of wheat or mealies, picked out with the scarlet of gladioli, smiled at the traveller, for the most part it was a wilderness of rock and stone, sunburnt and desolate, hard and grim. And had he been alone he could not have retraced his way five miles.

They had hardly spoken for an hour, not, indeed, since the sun had dipped out of sight behind a lowering crest ahead and Peter had asked if they would really be in before dark. Mosheshoe had replied confidently enough that they would, but that they must hurry. Here and there, in little irritating pushes almost intolerable to a raw hand, he had made up on time. Peter must be for ever shaking his reins, changing from the walk that had by contrast become bearable, to the jog-trot or the canter, reining in again for a difficult piece. To say that he ached is not to convey the truth. He was all one ache. And if he was utterly weary of body, even more was he weary in his mind. The monotony of their way grew upon his nerves: those unending curves and river-stretches, those unvarying rocks and cliffs, that interminable vague wilderness ahead that held no promise of life or rest, and grew no nearer with the hours. He had settled down to the one overmastering job of keeping a grip upon himself, of preventing himself slipping from the saddle and crying out to Mosheshoe that he must halt. Two hours ago he had got along by planning imaginary dinners and by savouring in his mind the comfort of an easy chair and a long drink. But that was, indeed, two hours ago. For an hour now he had been learning the first lesson that the Berg has to teach. She is iron-handed, unrelenting, inexorable, till one has learned her way. So must God needs be.

Conceive, then, the relief. They rode up a little crest in the fast gathering gloom, and perceived that they were on the rim of an almost complete basin in the hills. Mosheshoe reined up to one side of the way. Peter came alongside. "There, morena! *Levenkele* there!" exclaimed the boy.

The tiny settlement nestled at the foot of a slope, and two roads led to it, the one by the ridge above the river which they had just surmounted, the other two-thirds of the circle away, over another crest which shut off all view beyond. But from the settlement a little path ran away, by a pig-pen and a potato patch, under the lee of a stony kopje, down out of sight. As one walked down that path, one's view was not shut off. Twenty miles of

mountain and plateau and valley lay tumbled before, and the east lightened over those far peaks ahead so that a man might walk into the sunrising. Well Peter was to learn that path in days to come.

Just at present his gaze focussed on the buildings in the hollow. They looked small enough in the vastness of the empty lands around, but one could make out the unlovely gaunt square iron-roofed structures of store (or shop) and storehouse. As if thrown down anyhow there were also a few rondhavels of grass and stone, some sheds, and some formless outlines that were in fact stacks of wool and wheat. A couple of waggons stood empty on the open ground. And a few hundred yards away from all these, there loomed up a good-sized building which even at this distance was recognizable as a bungalow. There were lights in the hollow, too. By the rondhavels a large fire blazed in the open, and men grouped near. But the place looked curiously silent and remote. It was welcome as any house in that wilderness would have been, but to Peter it ever remained as it appeared then, impersonal, a place, a centre of business and living, but never a home. Even in the moment of arrival he was aware of the strange contrast between it and the country about. Qathlamba store was man's handiwork, a thing of his passion and greed and intrigue; the Range might be wild, desolate, grim, but if you knew its ways it was possible to learn to lean upon its breast.

"There, morena! *levenkele* there!"

"Cheers, Mosheshoe. I began to wonder if it existed. Even now I wish it were *here*. I feel as if I couldn't ride another yard."

"Close now, morena."

"So it is, my boy. I know. Up, Yacob, old son. Gosh, Mosheshoe, I've come pretty far to see this!"

They rode side by side as the width of the way now allowed. "You live here, Mosheshoe?" queried Peter.

"Yes, morena, I live here. I bin Baas Stenhouse's boy for long time. But my home not here. My home at Nkau's, long way away."

"You must take me there one day then, Mosheshoe."

"Surely, morena. I very pleased. My father chief there, and he very glad to see morena. He give sheep, chicken, eggs, everything, and make a feast."

The warmth of the boy's words cheered up Peter. He was in the mood for a welcome. He was quick to recognize that they two had been good

companions for the last twenty-four hours, and that the native felt it too. He had yet to realize why.

But he was cheered. He even managed a canter on his own initiative as they drew near the place. Then he pulled rein in front of the store and sat still. It was shut, and no one appeared. Mosheshoe dismounted unconcernedly and took his bridle. Peter looked about him. A native came round the store and greeted Mosheshoe, who replied shortly in Sesuto. Peter in his turn dismounted. The newly arrived native lifted Yacob's saddle-flaps and commenced to undo the girths. Peter took his weary hand off the saddle and stared round again.

The earth was bare and trampled. Scraps of dirty wool, bits of wood, odds and ends of refuse, a few empty tins lay about. By the galvanized iron sheets that made the door stood a rusty weighing-machine and an upturned box that plainly did duty as a seat. A ragged army of weeds began beyond the trampled earth, save where small paths kept them clear. There was a fusty smell about.

Hot from his ride, the air of late dusk struck chill at that height. Peter shivered. He turned wearily to Mosheshoe. "Where is Mr. Stenhouse?" he asked.

The other boy replied. "Boss at the house," he said.

"What had I better do, Mosheshoe?" Utter fatigue spoke in the words.

The black face eyed him kindly. "I shew morena the way. He come with me."

In silence Peter followed up the bit of a rise in the uneven ground that led to the house. They came presently to a fence and a gate. Within, the ground was plainly cultivated with vegetables, and twigs, with a few leaves on them, planted here and there, gave promise of willows to be. The stoep, raised a step above the ground, was but a few yards from the gate, but Peter was too tired to perceive the man sitting in a chair upon it until he had covered half that distance. Even as he did so, the other got up leisurely.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Graham," said Peter. "Are you Mr. Stenhouse?"

"Graham—good God! I didn't expect you for a week. And did you break down? It's damned late." Then, for Peter stood where he had been hailed, "Come in, man."

The two men shook hands. Peter was too weary to make any explanation after that brusque welcome, and the other did not seem anxious to ask more. He pulled up a chair, indeed, and Peter collapsed into it, but some seconds passed before he spoke. Then: "Well, haven't you anything to say for yourself? Tired?"

"Yes," said Peter.

"But you were in France, weren't you? I thought all you brave men who 'followed the flag' had learned to stick a bit of hardship." The sneer was unmistakable.

"Oh, I dare say," retorted Peter, stung, tired as he was, "but if you can't ride, it's a bit tiring at first."

The other considered this in silence. Then he unbent a bit. "Well, have a drink?" he asked.

"Thanks," said Peter.

Stenhouse shouted for a boy, who appeared from the back in a greasy apron. He smoked in silence while the whisky was brought, but after the conventional good wishes he resumed the conversation.

"How's Halloway?"

"All right. There's some stuff for you down there."

"Always is. Halloway's damned slow. One day we'll have a man down there ourselves. You didn't see Jeffries?"

"No."

"Thought you might have. He went south on business, and I reckon he'll go down before he's back. Halloway begun building yet?"

"No, I don't think so."

"And not likely to with wool at 5s. and mealies sky-high."

"Yes. I suppose the war has hit you all."

"Damn the war. I'm sick of hearing of it. Anybody'd think it mattered. We're doing all right up here. But then we weren't such bloody fools as to run out of stock."

"I should think not," said Peter quietly.

"Eh?"

“I said I thought you wouldn’t be such a bloody fool as to run out of stock because of the war.”

Stenhouse leaned forward a little and peered at the speaker. Peter lay stretched out in a camp chair, smoking. He was beginning to feel a bit more cheerful, thanks to the whisky. The other man apparently concluded that the remark was innocent. “Umph,” he said.

Peter continued to smoke.

Stenhouse knocked out the ashes of his pipe, “Hungry?” he queried.

“Yes, I am now.”

“Well, I finished half an hour ago, but I dare say Daniel’s got something for you. Daniel!”

“Ja, baas.” The voice came from the back of the house.

“Got some skoff for the boss?”

“I put him on table, baas.”

“Let’s go and see then,” said Stenhouse.

Peter followed him into a room. On the table stood a lamp. It shewed a loaf, a pot of jam, an opened tin of butter, some bully-beef on a plate, a bottle of tomato sauce, and some tin crockery. “There you are,” said Stenhouse, “fall to.”

He pushed the lamp aside a little and sat down himself with the obvious intention of studying his companion while he ate. The light also enabled Peter to return the compliment. He attacked the bully, without much enthusiasm—he was too tired—but as he munched he took in the man opposite. Stenhouse was clean-shaven, and it was characteristic of him that he shaved every day. But he was very dark, and the black bristle shewed in the evening on his heavy jowl. He was of medium height, but heavily made and very strong. His eyes were small and set under heavy black eyebrows. A bullet had clipped his right ear and the jagged edge of it looked livid. He wore a collar and a tie, and his hands and nails were clean. Peter remembered the description he had been given.

“Mind eating while I smoke?” queried Stenhouse with heavy affability.

“Like it,” said Peter at once, smiling.

The other filled his pipe and lit and puffed it carefully. “Well,” he said at last, “how’s Donovan?”

“Fine. I left him at the Cape. He was expecting his wife in a day or so.”

“His wife? You don’t say the blighter’s married?”

“Yes. A girl he met in France. She’s from Natal, and was nursing in a hospital.”

“Good sort?”

“Awfully.”

“Strong?”

“Yes.”

Stenhouse laughed unpleasantly, eyeing the other. “She’d need be where old Jack Donovan’s concerned. He could wear out a pretty bit as quickly as anyone, could Jack.”

Peter continued to eat bully. “Guess Mrs. D. had better not know that,” said Stenhouse.

“It would doubtless be better,” said Peter, and the conversation again flagged.

“He told you the sort of chap we want here?” Stenhouse asked at last.

“Yes,” said Peter, pushing back his plate. “And I reckon it’ll suit me. I fear I don’t know anything about the job, as I wrote you, but I’m willing to learn, and the country’s grand, isn’t it?”

The native boy, Daniel, entered with a big cup of tea that had slopped over into the saucer. Stenhouse told him to fetch the whisky and said he’d keep Peter company. Then: “The country? Wait till you’ve seen it under snow. First time I saw this place, I thought I’d made the Arctic Circle by mistake. Wait till you’ve sat in the heat for a day weighing stinking wool for stinking niggers. Wait till you’ve ridden for ten days in succession the kind of ride you’ve had to-day. And wait till you haven’t seen another fellow for six months. God! Oh, it’s a grand country.”

“Yes,” said Peter, “I reckon there’s another side to the picture.”

“Reckon there is, and as you’ve got to begin to see it to-morrow, what about bed?”

Peter pushed his chair back and got up. “Thanks,” he said, “I’m afraid I was hoping you’d suggest it. By the way, I had to leave practically all my kit down at Halloway’s.”

“I suppose you managed to bring a tooth-brush though?”

“Yes,” said Peter, “I managed that.”

“Well, you can sleep in your shirt. It won’t hurt you.”

“I managed to bring a pair of pyjamas, too,” said Peter.

“What more do you want then? Take the lamp, will you. This way.”

He led Peter into the passage that ran down the centre of the house. Peter noticed that it, and the rooms too, were clean enough. He opened a door beyond that of the dining-room, and Peter followed him in. “This’ll be your bedroom,” he said.

It was quite a pleasant room, sparsely and plainly furnished, but clean and sufficient. Peter put the lamp on the dressing-table and sat down on the wooden chair. “Thanks,” he said. “Reckon I’ll turn in at once. Good-night.”

The other stood a second regarding him quizzically. Then: “Good-night,” he said enigmatically. “Pleasant dreams.”

He shut the door and went out. Peter sat on awhile, staring at the closed door, the day’s experience passing through his mind. Five or ten minutes he sat so. Then he shrugged his shoulders and got up, slipped off his clothes, and put out his lamp.

As he did so, he heard Daniel’s voice somewhere outside, speaking Sesuto. “Rosa! Rosa!” he was calling in his harsh voice, and added something Peter could not understand.

From the stoep, apparently, Stenhouse cursed the boy.

“Less noise, you bloody fool.”

Peter glanced through the window. It was uncurtained and gave on the side of the house. He saw Daniel come round the corner and move out a little into the shadows with a hand-lantern, and heard him call again softly. In a moment or two, in reply, a native girl passed into the circle of light, coming from the dim outline of a rondhavel in the garden. Peter could see her only indistinctly, but the light gleamed on bare shoulders and breasts, and revealed a not unpleasant youthful face. Daniel said something to her, and the two passed out of his sight, round an angle of the house, to the stoep.

Peter remained where he was a minute. The yellow lamplight gone, the stars shone clearly over the black of the veld. In the silence he heard beasts of some sort somewhere, feeding. His window was open, and the cool night breeze blew in. Then he turned and got into bed.

"Well," said Stenhouse, "you'd better follow me round to-day and watch out."

The two men went out together into the sunshine. Peter's eyes swept the near amphitheatre of hill and turned at once to the blue distances in front of the store; Stenhouse, who had after all seen it often before, kept his on the store. The iron gates were open and a few natives lounging already on the steps. Stenhouse led the way thither.

As they went, Peter looked curiously about him. There was a big stack of sacks of wheat. A couple of boys, in shirt and trousers, were arranging it by the aid of iron hooks which they stuck into the bags to swing them into place. One of the waggons was loading up. Sixteen head of oxen were being pushed, driven and exhorted into their respective places on the long yoke-chain by a small imp of a boy in a loin-cloth that had an end dangling over his little dirty behind like a tail. A group of women and girls, in dirty petticoats and blankets draped over their shoulders, were approaching from the other path to that which he had ridden the night before. Down his path, at full gallop, came a man on horseback, picturesquely attired, from the distance at any rate, in a tall grass hat, a pair of trousers, and a flying blanket. Fowls were stalking about the yard, and a dog or two of nondescript appearance. Stenhouse had no friendly dogs. There were half a dozen attached to the store to guard against thieves and keep down the rats, but the boss allowed none near the house. In the dust by the step two naked brats played at shop with bits of stone and tufts of wool. They were a dirty light chocolate.

The two white men entered the big square barrack of a place, with its counter running round the three sides and its shelves filled with goods behind. From the roof depended all manner of gear—hats, umbrellas, saddles and fancy show blankets, walking-sticks with metal tops in the shape of dogs' heads, leather bags and purses, reins, boots and shoes and the like. A good two-thirds of the shelves were filled with blankets, and Stenhouse pointed out those at £1, at 30s., at £2, and so on up to the expensive ones at £4 10s. and £5. The remaining shelves held tinned goods, calicoes, fancy goods—mirrors, beads—and under the counter were stored open bags of sugar and flour, drums of oil, bales of sweets. Stenhouse conducted him about not unkindly. He explained the system of pricing and Peter got his first lesson in profits. A sham leather purse that you would buy in England for 6½d. cost 3s. 6d., a 1s. pocket-knife 5s., and so on. However, Peter reflected that it was a long way from England and that everything had

to be manhandled up the Telli. Nevertheless, it was two or three hundred per cent. profit, cash down. Only it was not cash down.

As they inspected, one of the two store boys put his head in at the door and announced wool-sellers in sight. The two white men went over to the door. Sure enough a regular cavalcade were coming in, two or three parties in amalgamation apparently. One or two men rode on horses whose saddles were half-empty sacks of wool, and perhaps led another horse fully loaded. But one party had a string of some six ponies, tied head to tail, heavily burdened. Peter watched these unload. Presently he gave an exclamation.

A full and heavy sack was lashed on each animal's back by means of raw hide reins pulled tight to prevent slipping. As one such set of reins was undone and the bale slipped off, Peter saw that the pony's back was red with an open sore at least a foot long and some six inches wide. Flies settled instantly on the festering sore.

"Good God!" cried Peter, "look at that devil with his pony's back raw!"

Stenhouse glanced that way. "They've come from Ntauti" he said. "It's the deuce of a way."

"But he ought to be run in for that," retorted Peter fiercely.

Stenhouse glanced at him and laughed. "That's the Government's business, not mine," he said, "and it's little they do. Come on. If you start worrying over ponies, it's ruddy little use you'll be here."

Peter turned away. At the moment it was plain he could do nothing. He watched his boss go up to the scales and seat himself on the box. One of the poorer natives came up alone and swung his wool sack on the scales.

Stenhouse read the weight. "Forty-three," he said, wrote something on a slip of paper and handed the paper to the native. A store boy swung the sack off and emptied it. The seller took his paper, glanced at it curiously and entered the store. "A raw hand," said Stenhouse smiling.

Three men came up together. Stenhouse looked them over. "Oh, it's you, Mokabethlani, is it?" he said. "None of your lip to-day."

The boy grinned. From a hip pocket in his dirty corduroys he took out a tattered book and a pencil and stood expectant by the scales. A second native took up his station by Stenhouse, peering over his shoulder. One by one the third swung packets of wool on the scales, Stenhouse calling the weights and writing on his slip, Mokabethlani turning his pages, consulting

his book, writing on *his* slip, the second boy watching the white man. The last packet was counted and weighed. “Make it 560?” queried Stenhouse.

Mokabethlani pushed his battered cap back on his head and wrestled with figures, adding, subtracting, dividing. His companions gathered about him, peering excitedly over his shoulders, watching the miracle of arithmetic.

Stenhouse proceeded to fill his pipe. “That’s it, take care,” he said sarcastically. “There’s plenty of time. Your sheep will have grown another lot of wool before you’ve finished, Mokabethlani.”

One of the two others turned and grinned at the white man, but the calculator continued unmoved. “£63,” he announced at last in triumph. “Money please, baas.”

“What!” cried Stenhouse. “Aren’t you buying anything?”

“No, baas. Got all we want.”

Peter, watching Stenhouse, saw that he controlled himself with difficulty. But whatever he felt, he kept calm at the moment. He was even genial. “Right, Mokabethlani,” he said. “Go up to the house and Daniel’ll p’rhaps have a drink for you. Say I sent you. I’ll be along in a minute.”

The boys departed, and when out of earshot the white man’s wrath blazed out. “The bloody brute!” he exclaimed fiercely. “I’d like to skin his bloody back for him. God damn these blasted missionaries and their infernal schools! Thinks himself a white man, he does. Christ, I’ll learn him! I’ll be even with him yet.”

Peter was puzzled. “What’s the matter?” he demanded. “He seemed a decent enough chap?”

“Hell!” ejaculated the other. “Couldn’t you see his bloody ready-reckoner? And that fellow watching me? And now he won’t spend a penny here! No. I can run a store for *his* benefit, I suppose. He’ll trek down to Witzie’s Hoek or Viewberg and buy from someone else. Thinks I’d swindle him. *He* doesn’t think what it costs to get stuff here, *and* cart it away. God Almighty, I’d turn all bloody missionaries out of the country if I could!” Then, to a store boy, “Right, Bully.”

Bully beckoned to a native who had been watching the proceedings with an air of blank interest. He was naked to the waist and wore a loin-cloth. His store of wool was tied up in a bundle, and the clippings had to be emptied out on the scale. All the conversation was in Sesuto. While the wool was

being weighed, the boy stood back from the machine and watched respectfully. Peter stepped nearer.

Stenhouse pushed the sliding-scale and said something. Then he wrote down fifty-two. The scale said fifty-eight. Then he said something else, and on his slip he wrote down £4 17s. 0d. He tore it off and handed it to the native with a smile. The boy took it, turned it over curiously and looked at the back. Then he asked a question of Bully, and Bully replied. Then, dubiously, with a sidelong glance at his wool, he entered the store. "Give him a handful of sweets," said Stenhouse to Peter.

Peter turned to go. "How much are you giving for the wool?" he asked carelessly as he went.

"2s. 3d."

Peter nodded and entered the store thoughtfully. So Stenhouse had made already six pounds of wool and £1. He gave the boy his sweets and the native was overwhelmed with gratitude. Then he watched while Kaba, the other store boy, sold him a blanket, a bottle of paraffin, some matches, two yards of red cloth, a purse and a hat for £5 7s. 6d. He watched while the native fumbled in his loin-cloth for the 10s. 6d. worth of difference. He walked over and stood at the door while the man saddled up and rode away. Stenhouse was buying mealies.

Bully held the mouth of a bag open while the native filled it not only brimful but piled up. "Why does he pile it up?" asked Peter.

"Oh, it's the custom," said Stenhouse carelessly. "*Thaba morena*, they call it, from a hill near Maseru."

"And when they buy, do you pile it up?" asked Peter.

Stenhouse glanced at him sharply. But Peter's face was expressionless. "Well," said Stenhouse, "there's always a difference between buying and selling, you know." His face relapsed into a smile. "Prices fluctuate terribly, too," he added.

"I see," said Peter.

3

Peter bought wool at Qathlamba store for about a week. There was no open remark, but then he was put on to serving in the store. He served in the store for about another week, and then he was put on to the quarterly stock-taking and book-keeping that happened to be due. In this his accuracy was

satisfactory beyond the common, but in the evening of the last day the two men had their first open quarrel. Or rather, during the evening of that last day, having had a few more drinks than usual, Stenhouse gave vent to what he meant to be a friendly remonstrance and allowed Graham's answers to arouse his temper.

They had counted the last bale and locked the store.

In a long chair, on the stoep, Peter was more than usually glad of his evening's drink, of the rest, and of the reflected light of the sunset on the mountains before them.

Said Stenhouse: "I reckon I'll have another. What say?"

"Right," said Peter. " 'Another little drink won't do us any harm.' "

Stenhouse filled his own and Peter's glass generously. "Look here, Graham, you aren't half a bad sort of chap in a way, you know. You might be damned useful to us up here. We want three men with a share in the show, one here, one out on the buying business and trekking as Jeffries is now, and one down in Viewberg to run the transport. It's got to be a third man with a head on his shoulders. You're all right. You've got a head for figures, and you work. You're an educated man, which Jeffries isn't, and I was once. Only you're going to be no good to anyone if you're so damned scrupulous. Christ, I could hardly keep my temper when you were buying wool. And you're not much better in the shop. Gad, man, these aren't white men—they're ruddy niggers. They do you down if they can."

Peter shook his head. "It's no use, Stenhouse," he said; "I can't see it that way."

"But, damn it all, man, you haven't been twenty years in this blasted country like I have. They put stones in the middle of mealie sacks, half their wool is filthy and not worth buying, and what with prices varying, as often as not one loses by the time the stuff's got to the coast. Besides, what do they want with money? What's the good of educating them up to things? That's what I want to know."

"But you make your profit because they are being educated up to things."

"Maybe; that's not my look-out. The point is, are you going to cut it a bit fine with the damned niggers, or let them cheat you?"

Peter said nothing.

“Look here,” said Stenhouse. “Let’s talk things out. Which is it to be? Come on, give us an answer.”

“Well,” said Peter, “if you force me, I should say neither. Certainly I object to being cheated, but still more do I object to being a cheat.”

“Who said it was cheating?”

“Mr. Stenhouse, frankly, that’s what it is. In a sense if you do it, it’s not my business, but personally if I have to weigh wool I weigh it, and if I have to reckon the price I reckon it fairly.”

Stenhouse dashed his fist into his open palm. “Jesus Christ,” he swore, “I won’t be talked to so in my own place. Who the hell do you think you are? You might as well be a bloody parson yourself.”

Peter paled to the lips. “Mr. Stenhouse,” he said, “this is your house and I hope you will remember it. I’m your employé too, and I haven’t refused to do any work you set me to do. But I’ll trouble you not to swear at me, and I tell you plainly I resent your use of the name of Christ.”

Stenhouse stared at him for a moment in amaze. Then he burst into a loud laugh. “By God,” he cried, “you’re that sort, are you? Sure you weren’t Y.M.C.A. in the war?”

Peter’s temper got the better of him, and though he could have bitten his tongue out the next minute, he forgot himself and retorted bitterly: “As a matter of fact I was more than that. I began as a padre, and I’m not ashamed of it. And I went on to the ranks, and I got my D.C.M., while business kept you here.”

The implied criticism passed the other by. The fact that his assistant had been a parson, with all that that meant, with all the opportunity for insult that it offered, was the thing that gripped his evil imagination. He slapped his thigh in riotous humour. “Oh my God, why didn’t you say so before? Why, you might have preached to the boys all last Sunday if I’d only known. A parson! But why did they kick you out, man? What, you’re a sly dog, eh? Too fond of a little bit of fluff, I dare bet. Or was it the whisky? By all accounts, one or the other accounted for most of the padres in France.”

Peter leaped to his feet. “Stenhouse,” he said, “you’ll take that back right now, or I’ll make you. I’ve seen and I’ve heard since I’ve been here. You’re strong enough to knock me down, but on my honour, if you do I’ll summon you for it, and I’ll give evidence that’ll have your licence looked into.”

Stenhouse upset the small table between them and doubled his fists. “You bloody swine,” he hissed. “I’ll——”

“Stenhouse!” sung out a cheery voice from the distance. “What the deuce is up? Haven’t you a boy on the place? Send someone to lend a hand, will you?”

The interruption recalled them both. Both turned instinctively at the first words in the direction of the store whence it came. Peter was chiefly immediately conscious that the house and store boys had gathered silently to witness the row between their masters and that the fence in the dusk was lined with half a dozen interested spectators. A sense of the shame of it dyed his face scarlet in the dark. As for Stenhouse, he more quickly took in what it meant. “It’s Cathcart,” he whispered. “Probably he didn’t hear us. Say, Graham, I said more’n I meant.” Then, raising his voice, “Hullo, Cathcart, that you? Cheerio. Kaba, you lazy brute, where the devil are you? Take a lantern to the boss, quick, d’you hear?”

He himself set out at once for the gate. Peter righted the table, threw the pieces of a broken glass into the garden and called to Daniel for another. He poured out drinks half-way in each for appearance sake, and was smoking quietly enough when the two returned.

“Let me introduce,” said Stenhouse. “Mr. Graham—Mr. Cathcart. Cathcart’s the Government in these parts, Graham, and he drifts in when he’s on trek.”

Peter took the other in at a glance. “I know,” he said smiling. “I’ve heard all about him.”

They shook hands. “What do you mean?” asked Cathcart, smiling in his turn.

“I met a friend of yours in Natal,” said Peter, “and just heard of you, that’s all. I’m jolly glad to meet you.”

“So? And I’ve heard of you from Donovan. He wrote me. Fact, I came out of my way this journey because he told me you’d be here. I reckon you know he’s one of the best without my telling you.”

Stenhouse sized the two up readily enough. He was courtesy itself as he offered the newcomer a drink. That sub-inspector in His Majesty’s Forces, if he had heard or if he guessed anything, kept it to himself. He stretched out his gaitered legs with a sigh of content and loosened his tunic. “Well, Stenhouse,” he said, “I must say I’m not sorry the bar’s open, and if you two can manage another——”

It was only next morning, as Peter walked with Cathcart down that little path that ran eastward—the officer's outfit on ahead, and he himself bound for the border up to Mont aux Sources—and still more as he walked back, that he realized what the other's visit had meant and what the life was that he was leading.

"Topping day—wish you were coming too," said Cathcart, his legs brushing the sparkling dew on the long grass as they walked side by side.

"By Jove, so do I," said Peter, "though I'm not much good on a horse."

There was that in his tone which caused the other to scrutinize him closely. Cathcart was no astute judge of humanity, but he was a clean, decent fellow and he had taken to Peter. "P'rhaps you will, one day," he said. "Guess you could get a fortnight off. Old Stenhouse isn't a bad sort, but I don't reckon you two have much in common, eh?"

Peter kept his eyes ahead. "That's so, perhaps," he admitted, "but we shall manage."

"Rum start, store-keeping, I should reckon. But it pays. Damned sight more in it than this, anyway."

"Oh yes, they make it pay," said Peter.

"I should think they do. The Government won't sell licences, you know. The idea is that it's a grant in the interests of the natives. They only allow as many stores as are wanted. But if you want to get a licence privately, you've got to pay for it. I've known the bare licence change hands at £5,000. You staying long?"

"I don't know," said Peter. "Perhaps. I've no other job."

Cathcart whistled to his boy. "I must mount here," he said. "By the way, you never told me who it was knew me in Natal."

"A Miss Gwen Eldred," said Peter, smiling.

"You don't say so. Where'd you meet her?"

"Viewberg."

"Great Scott, I wish I'd known. I'd have inspected the Telli. Do you think she's there now?"

"No. She was only staying a fortnight."

"Just my luck. She's all right. What did you think of her?"

"Top-hole," said Peter. "She spoke rather decently of you, by the way."

"Did she though? Damned fine sport, that girl. Gad, I'm glad you met her, Graham. I don't mind saying I'm rather sweet on her. Didn't say when she'd be up again? We don't write, you know."

"Why not? She's teaching at St. Margaret's, Maritzburg."

"By Jove, I think I will. Thanks for suggesting it. I might say I'd met you, what?"

"Good idea," said Peter, secretly amused.

"Well, I must get on. Got a long way ahead of me. We must get to the border to-night. So long, old chap. See you again one day."

"So long," said Peter, "Cheerio."

He watched him mount and ride away, his two packs in front driven by one boy, his orderly, in his neat uniform following. They went down the path in the bright sun, crossed the sparkling river, and went gallantly at the hill the other side, whose corkscrew track took them speedily out of sight. At the bend Cathcart turned and waved. Peter waved back.

But he did not himself go at once. He was desperately conscious that he had to face Stenhouse alone, that he hated the store and all at it, that the mere thought of selling paraffin in bottles or endlessly handling rugs for never satisfied natives made him almost physically sick. Cathcart had brought an atmosphere with him which recalled all the cheer and good-fellowship of the years past, all the change and excitement of the Army, however dull it had been at times, and still more, something, somehow, of Julie. He was so transparently boyish and decent, so much the sort of man that Peter could picture Julie once more nursing, chaffing, loving, with all her honest heart. And against that atmosphere he had to set Stenhouse, Stenhouse with his sickening meanness, his useless blasphemy, his pretended gentlemanliness, his native women.

He turned to walk back. Almost his mind was made up to go at once. But the very sight of the store arrested him. A cavalcade was coming over the hill. He could see Stenhouse looking for him as he stood in the door—he would want him in the store while he weighed and bought. Peter set his teeth. He was damned if he would run away from Stenhouse. He was damned if he wouldn't stick it. And—another glance at the sweep of the mountains—he was damned if he would leave *them* like a coward and nincompoop who couldn't learn his lesson.

All the same, he told himself, Stenhouse had got to square that row. He set his teeth as he walked back. Suppose Stenhouse struck him? In a rough and tumble he hadn't the ghost of a chance, and besides, even if Stenhouse didn't care, he didn't want to scrap with the only other white man while a crowd of natives formed a delighted ring. And he was well aware what he had threatened in the height of his temper, and that he could hardly do as he had said. He couldn't exactly give Stenhouse away, not in personal revenge anyway. But for all that, Stenhouse had got to square things, or——

He need not have feared. The other, truth to tell, had not quite liked the immediate friendship between his assistant and the officer. Subconsciously he was aware that it meant they were of one world and he of another. He was so much of another, too, that he was not any too sure of what Peter might or might not do. So it was he who walked to meet Peter on his return.

"See him off?" he enquired genially, as the other came up, scanning his face closely.

"Yes," said Peter shortly.

"Decent chap, isn't he?"

"Very," said Peter. "He wants me to go on trek with him sometime."

"Good. I dare say we might manage it if you like. Turn about. I'd like to get off sometime."

"I'm sure he'd be pleased to have you," said Peter, politely.

Stenhouse drew a breath of relief. Then it was all right. He proceeded to make what both men knew was an apology. "There's a crowd coming," he said. "Will you weigh their wool?"

"Right-o," said Peter.

CHAPTER FOUR

1

"Well," said Julie, in her most definite voice; "I reckon this settles it."

"Why?" queried Tommy. She was tired and very bored. It was a hot day, and Maritzburg in the heat is very hot and dusty and tiring. The streets are beautiful, straight and parallel and at right angles and all the rest of it that makes for neat methodical efficiency—and weariness. Possibly, if you can afford to keep your car and go house-hunting in it, you would not find the job so wearisome; but Colonel Donovan, despite the fact that he had been given a staff job on the Defence Force and would have an official car when he was in residence, was at present in Pretoria on business and unable to provide his wife with that luxury. The first day they had indeed taken a taxi, but house-hunting in a taxi is a desperate business, naturally. The clock ticks away shillings while you are debating if a good colour scheme would make the drawing-room habitable or a little enlargement keep a cook in the kitchen. Even Julie had turned the taxi down thereafter. And this was now the fourth day that she and Tommy had inspected possible habitations. They had been out to the suburbs and back to the centre, and now they were in one of those new long streets running down from Grey's Hospital that are nevertheless pleasantly planted with trees and comparatively near the open country. In the upstairs room of a corner house Julie had pronounced her decision.

"Well, surely," she replied, a twinkle in her eyes. "Look at that great dormer-window. Wouldn't you have adored that when you were a kiddy? See, it looks bang across the garden to that mysterious shrubbery and that old dead blue-gum over there. I bet there are owls in that blue-gum. Aren't there, Mr. Despard?"

Mr. Despard smiled deprecatingly. A land agent's clerk sees a good few people in the course of his life and is moderately acquainted with the eccentricities of human nature. But Julie had him beat. Still, it appeared that she wanted owls. . . . "Probably, madame," he said.

"There you are," cried Julie triumphantly. "I told you so. Only think of it! Hooting in the evening! Think of the stories there are about owls. I should have some on the wall-paper. And look at the size! Three other windows!

Jack can play soldiers over there—Mr. Wells's floor games, you know—and no one would ever disturb his forts!"

"Julie," cried Tommy, "for heaven's sake talk sense. As if Jack wanted to play soldiers!"

"Well, perhaps it'll be a Mary then, and then she can run a doll's house over there instead."

"Julie," cried Tommy again, blushing hotly, "how can you!"

Mr. Despard coughed desperately, and when he recovered found Julie's eyes reprovingly upon him. He murmured something about hay-fever and the dust, and faded away. Julie turned back to her companion, and he repeated afterwards that she was a oner, his oath she was.

"Well, honestly, Tommy, it'll make a topping nursery. And the last thing Jack said to me was to be sure there was a good nursery."

"He didn't. Or, if he did, I'll teach him."

"That's it," said Julie philosophically. "Just like you young wives. After all, Jack knows his business and he's not the sort to make a mistake. And what's more, he'll make a damned good father, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you——But you really think this house will do?"

"My dear, some house has *got* to do. And this isn't any too bad. There's a top-hole garden and a decent dining-room. There's a big stoep and a kitchen that will at least house a stove. There's a bathroom in which one need not always, of necessity, bark one's shins and fetch out a bruise on the back of one's head. Besides, it's fairly near the Town Hall for Jack, and it's close enough to Grey's for me not to have to spend all my off-times in the streets coming and going to see you. And lastly, as I say, this will make a priceless nursery."

"What was the rent?" queried Tommy, in her last trench.

"Damn the rent," said Julie.

The house settled upon, it had now to be furnished, and furnishing involved visits to Durban, where the shops exceed in magnificence those of Maritzburg. Tommy had married Donovan in one of the blackest moments of the war, at a time when one said nothing about it, but reckoned personal survival at about one chance in ten. It had been also, of necessity, a hurried affair, of which South African friends and relations had chiefly heard after the event. Wedding presents had not been possible—indeed, they would

only have burdened either Tommy or Jack, both on service. But now people remembered and not a few gifts came in. The two girls had a hectic fortnight. Mr. Somebody would send a delightful dinner-service round to the hotel an hour after they had turned out half the shops in West Street selecting one, and Julie would jump up and set off immediately to blarney the tradesman into taking it back. Or Jack's Aunt Jemima would write enclosing a cheque as "likely to be useful to you two poor dears trying to settle in with prices sky-high owing to the wicked Kaiser," and it would be decided that a delightful nest of occasional tables, which had been dragged out and arranged and rearranged all over a shop, and finally recollected and carted away by a perspiring assistant, were after all, possible. Besides, Julie had the most amazing gift for unconsidered trifles. She would spot a flower vase when they were buying kitchen utensils, or a decanter just made for Jack's whisky when they were furnishing a bedroom, and Julie would buy and presently offer it to a cousin, or tick it off against an uncle's note with the most delicious sang-froid in the world.

But the house was furnished more or less at last, and the cases despatched to Pietermaritzburg. There remained to Julie five days before she must report herself for duty at Grey's Hospital, and the girls decided on three days' rest at Durban before two of strenuous fitting in at Maritzburg. They did up the last parcel and sent it away—a pair of silver candlesticks from the Rev. Stuart Arnold, who wrote from a native mission in Pondoland, and of whom neither of the girls could remember having heard, and then Julie, who had been tying it up and talking nonsense about the tender hint implied in a parson's sending instruments of light to the pair of them, suddenly threw herself down on her bed with an exclamation.

"Oh, Tommy," she cried, "I could wish we were back in our room at the Quai de France!"

Tommy regarded her wisely. "But why, old thing?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, because after all it was such fun. It was topping dodging Matron and chivvying men about and kidding the doctors. Nothing ever mattered there. One couldn't sit on a bed here, at midnight, and drink Benedictine—one doesn't even want to. We dined at the Royal the other night; was it the same as the good old Grand? There's that sportsman downstairs, with a face like a rotten tomato, that you want to push me off with. Well, I dare say, in Le Havre, I'd have slipped out after hours and had a Martini with him at Travalini's, and tickled the old boy with 'Here's to we two in Blighty,' or something equally mad, but he wants to take me to the

Model Dairy for a fruit sundae, and even if there was a Travalini's, do you think I'd go? I'd see him in hell first."

"Major Ryecroft is an old friend of Jack's and a very decent sort," protested Tommy.

"Oh, I dare say he is. I take it all back. His face is like a nicely shrivelled apple, not a rotten tomato."

Tommy laughed gently. "My dear child," she said, "you haven't changed much anyway."

"Oh yes I have, Tommy. I'm about five hundred years older. I'm tired out. And what the blazes I'm going to do at that infernal old hospital, God knows."

Tommy got up, went over to her and took her by the arm. "Come on out, Julie," she said. "Let's go and bathe. It's only twelve o'clock now and there's heaps of time."

They were staying at a big hotel on the Ocean Beach, and in five minutes were undressing in the Baths. In their box Tommy reflected that she was indeed right. Julie had discarded the few clothes she consented to wear, and was trying to admire her new bathing-costume in the small mirror offered for that and similar purposes in such establishments. "Good Lord, Tommy," she said, "it's a bit tight, isn't it? Crimson suits me, but it may set the baths on fire. I swear my figure steadily improves with the years. If Jack had ever seen me with nothing on you'd never have stood a chance."

"Julie! They'll hear you in the next box!"

"Let 'em. That's the beauty of the baths. No one can ever recognize you outside. All the powder gets washed off, for one thing, and what strikes the eye is the figure and not the face. If we walked about in bathing-dresses our very creditors would not recognize us. I think I shall try one day." And she opened the door, singing blithely:

"The rich get richer and the poor get—babies,
Ain't we got fun?"

Tommy, whose arrangements took longer, dodged behind the door as a young man of the town passed with a fringe and a fragmentary bathing-costume. "Lor'," whispered Julie, "buck up," and darted out.

She had emerged from her first dive when Tommy came out, and was standing, an unconcerned figure of grace, in the sun, while the young man did a racing stroke or two and blew water prodigiously as moderately near

as he dared. “Julie!” she exclaimed *sotto voce*, “for heaven’s sake, my dear, do take care. He’s utterly impossible. Anyone might see you.”

“So they might,” cried Julie. “What a spree!” And she threw her hands up and dived cleanly, taking the water sufficiently near the young man in question as to cause him to turn on his back and float magnificently, confident that she would emerge near him.

Yet this same Julie talked in monosyllables all the way back to the hotel and helped herself to lobster mayonnaise as if it were hashed mutton. It was Tommy who ordered coffee outside in the lounge; and seated there, the splendour of that beach, with its great rollers and far horizon, but a few yards away across the grass, it was she who reopened the conversation of the morning.

“I can tell you what’s the matter with you, my dear,” she said.

“Oh?” queried Julie indifferently.

“Yes. In France your life was full with endless work of definite importance. You *had* to laugh. If any of us had taken it all seriously we’d have broken down. You remember Grace Modred?—she did. I can see her now receiving the boys off a train from the front. They brought up a kiddy with half his face blown away, and she said, as white as a sheet of paper, ‘Oh my God, damn the bloody Huns.’ And do you know what you said? ‘Hullo, Tommy, somebody’s been pushing you! Never mind, old sport. There’s a clean bed over there, and when we’ve tidied you up you’ll be ready for Blighty, and your best girl.’ ” And something suspiciously like tears stood in Tommy’s eyes.

“Chuck it,” said Julie.

“The *Church Times* and the *Guardian* wouldn’t have understood you, Julie. Nobody would have done who wasn’t there, or who was there with both his eyes tight shut in his turnip head. That’s where Peter was such a sport. *He* knew right enough, bless him. But you see now——”

“Nothing matters,” put in Julie, throwing herself back in her chair and clasping her hands behind her head.

Tommy regarded her steadily. The tone of the girl’s words was a blasphemy on the poise of her figure and the joy of the sun outside. “Rubbish, my dear,” she said.

“Tommy,” said Julie, but not looking at her, “it isn’t rubbish. You’ve got your life before you. You’re full up with Jack, and you’ll have your home

and your babies, and you're not the sort that worries over ultimate things. But what have I got? I can't go home, to sit about and twirl my thumbs all day. Sometimes I almost wish Father was poor or I had to mother the kids. No, the hospital's better than that. But it's flat, it's empty. Some silly ass gets himself run over by a motor—I've got to take his temperature and dish him up his beef-tea and tell him to be a good boy and he'll be better again soon! Oh God!"

Her friend laughed immoderately. "Come, my dear," she said, "it will be better after a bit."

Julie sat up suddenly and jarred the wicker table so that the coffee cups rattled. "You're right," she said savagely, "it will. I shall 'settle down.' That's the phrase, isn't it? A year or so and I shall be thirty; another twenty and perhaps I shall be matron of the old place! Who knows? 'Miss Gamelyn? Yes, a bit—ah well, perhaps unsettled, in France, but so steady and trustworthy now. Quite an *obvious* vocation!' Can't you hear them?"

"Well, why not?"

"Why not? Oh my Lord. . . . Tommy, do you know what Peter did for me? He woke me up; he made me think. What's the good of it all? Where does it get you to? Oh, no doubt it's all very pleasant and nice, but do you think I want that? Is that living? I wish to God I'd been born a Kaffir. They don't think."

Tommy ground her cigarette-end into her saucer before replying. She wanted to say something that in all these months she had never dared to say. There are things it is not easy to say even woman to woman, best friend to best friend. But she was brave, was Tommy. So she asked her apparently simple question that implied so much. "What about Peter, Julie?"

"Peter?" The girl's tone changed completely. All the bitterness dropped away. "Peter?" she questioned. "Yes, I'm glad you've asked about him, Tommy. You're right. Maybe I've had all of life that I'm going to be allowed. Three days. . . . Well, it was worth it. I know that. I ought to be content. I am, most times. But three days, Tommy. . . . It's a very little to remember for so long."

The other did not move. She was looking into her own heart and questioning it. If Jack were taken from her, could she say the same? Would she feel it? Was *her* heart big enough for that?

And then she could not contain herself. "Oh, it's monstrous, maddening, Julie!" she cried. "You've not lost Peter! You've not finished with him! You

two were made for each other, and you must come together!"

Julie's eyes grew bright. The light of her irresistible defying laughter gathered there. It was characteristic of her. When the other person was up against it, stricken, Julie knew what to do. She threw back her head and laughed.

"Oh Tommy, you old scream, you'll be the death of me! Bless her little heart! Don't you worry over Peter and me, old thing. We're all right. Peter'll be saving souls in Hoxton or Whitechapel yet. And"—with a sudden change of tone—"nobody will ever know that an immoral woman taught him tenderness and love."

Her friend could not bear it. "Julie, Julie, darling, don't, don't!" she cried.

Julie leaned forward. Upright and trim in her smart tailor-made costume, young, strong, unafraid, she was very good to look upon. Indifferent to what any observer might think, she stretched a hand across the table. "But *I* shall know, Tommy," she said, "I shall know."

"But *that* can't make your life!"

"That," said Julie, getting up, "is what we've got to learn."

2

The Transvaal train is due in Maritzburg in the afternoon, and by luncheon the house in St. John's Street was ready. It was ready from the pleasant verandah with its abundance of easy chairs, to the large empty room at the top which had a big frieze breast high all round the walls, on which fairies danced under the moon in the sight of prodigiously wise owls or who came to the ball shouting gaily on their wide-opened wings. Tommy met the train, but not Julie. She had refused to be there when Jack was shewn the nursery. She said they might have a good deal to say to each other which would require no third person. And Tommy, who was changing a good deal from the old Tommy, quite seriously implored Julie that she would not repeat her reasons to Jack.

So Julie had announced her descent upon the hospital for that hour. She was received in the Matron's room and Matron was most pleasant to her.

"Why, Sister, this *is* delightful! We are delighted to have you among us again. And I am sure you must be very glad to be back after your terrible experiences in the war."

Julie held her hand with a twinkle in her eyes, although those eyes took in, at the same time, the antimacassars, the mantelshelf of china ornaments, the framed text, the painted ostrich eggs, and the slender gimcrack chairs in which she had always been afraid to sit on Matron's pleasant Sunday afternoons.

"How do you do, Matron. But I must say I always thought you were delighted to see the last of me, and sincerely hoped I wouldn't come back to disturb the peace of the hospital, as I remember you once said that I did."

A faint colour gathered in the elderly woman's cheeks. Julie Gamelyn always said the most impossible things! Yet no one else ever said them, and it was good to hear the same unawed chaff again. "Ah, my dear," she cried, and the conventional tone was not in her voice this time, "you gave me more trouble than all the rest together, but I'd sooner see you here again than anyone. Sit down. Tell me all about everything. Whatever *were* the hospitals like in France?"

And Julie told her. She told her of that slip of a Nurses' Common Room in the Quai de France, boarded off from a ward that had been a customs storehouse, convenient to the kitchen, with its walls decorated with magazine pictures mounted on brown paper and its windows overlooking the leaden sea. She told her of the loaded trains that ran in below the wards at all hours of the day and night and in almost unending procession, what time the newspapers announced further Allied victories on the Somme or the triumphant taking of Vimy Ridge "with no serious loss to our forces." She told her of the daily Red Cross ship alongside, and of how it had doffed its red crosses for zigzag streaks of orange and white and black, and once had not come in. And she even told her of the little restaurant across the harbour, of T.B.D.'s that moored but a hundred yards away and had friendly wardrooms for nurses, and of the camps that lined the Quai and were strictly "out of bounds."

Matron shook her head. "You were a terrible handful, Sister, I fear," she said. "But of all those young officers, didn't you perhaps find one——? But don't tell me if you don't want to, dear."

Julie rose impulsively. She took two steps across the little room and threw her arms round the other's neck. The glass drops of the chandelier may have been supposed to have trembled with indignation. Certainly Matron was duly surprised. "You darling," cried Julie, "I don't know what it is, but there's no one quite like you!"

“Well, well, Julie,” said Matron, “well, well. If an old woman can ever help, my dear . . . And now, Sister, I won’t keep you any longer from the Common Room. I am sure they want to see you as quickly as possible.”

Julie went down the remembered corridor and across the grass plot before the native wards to the Sisters’ Home, taking in the afternoon sun on the tennis courts and the drooping graceful willows of the little river that ran through the grounds. And as she went she wondered. Matron was beyond understanding. Prim, old-fashioned, a fussy disciplinarian, she had never succeeded in effacing her true self. Under the mask lay a mother. But how did one know? What was the secret? And how sympathetic, how far gentle and wise would the mother be if she knew all that there was to know?

She opened the door of the nurses’ room. A tall ginger-haired girl put down her teacup with a bang. “Lord love us, here she is at last! Julie, old dear, how goes it?”

“Cheerio all,” said Julie. “That you, young Talbot? What, have they made you a Sister? And what on earth have you been at not to be married by now? Hullo, Ruth. Still going strong? How’s ‘Old Jig-saw’? ‘Sister, don’t handle him as if he were a jig-saw puzzle!’ ” She imitated Dr. Rawley’s voice to perfection.

Sister Ruth Hearnshaw heaved her four feet eight out of an armchair and ran at the speaker. “Julie! Fancy your remembering all that! How are you? It is topping to see you again.”

“You too, Ruth. . . . Let me see, my child, I declare on my honour that that’s Grace over there. Grace, when last I saw you you were always dirty, you invariably upset the slop-pail when you scrubbed the floor, and you broke a thermometer once a week. In short, you were the probationer whom of all others I wanted to turn up and spank. And there you are, as solemn as a judge! Come here and kiss me this instant.”

Grace, fair as Ruth was dark, flushed to the ears. “Sister, I am glad you’re back,” she said. Grace never could think of anything to say at the right time, and was well aware of it. But now she had an inspiration. “Sister,” she added, “I don’t think you know Miss Gwen Eldred, who came after you left. She was *my* probationer once. Gwen, this is Sister Julie Gamelyn.”

Gwen rose from the corner where she had been sitting.

“How do you do?” she said, and the two shook hands.

Julie smiled at her. “You poor soul,” she said, “was Grace really your Sister? What happened to you? How did you survive it?”

“I didn’t,” laughed Gwen. “I went up to East Africa as quickly as possible, and now I’m Sports Mistress at St. Margaret’s. It’s less strenuous than being Grace’s half-section.”

At the moment there were no others present, and Julie was not sorry. She sat down, and Ruth poured her out a cup of tea.

“Seen Matron?” queried Ethel Talbot. “I bet she’s saying her prayers now!”

“Oh, Julie will have sobered down in France.” Thus Ruth, swinging a leg over the arm of a chair.

“Will she?” retorted the other. “Not on your life. We know our Julie. More likely she was responsible for several casualties among the staff, reported as overwork.”

“Or among the probationers, reported as brain-fever.”

Julie stared at the last speaker. Then: “Miss Eldred, whatever did you do to Grace? She’s almost as cheeky as—as young Talbot. Grace, pass the cake. At any rate, you’ve got the food near you, as always.”

“Well, anyway, Julie,” said Ruth Hearnshaw, “tell us all the news. We’re dying to hear.”

“And I must go before you begin, Sister, or I’ll never get back in time. I’ve gym, this afternoon. Do you think we might meet again? I’d love to swap experiences.”

There was just that little more than the merely polite in Gwen Eldred’s voice, if not in her words, which told Julie she had reason for wanting to see more of her. And Julie was ready enough, always, for friendships. “Right,” she said. “Call again some time, will you? Sorry you can’t stop now. Good-bye.”

The door shut after her. “A jolly good sort,” said Ruth.

“But I’m glad she’s gone, Julie,” put in Ethel, pulling her chair closer. “Now you can talk. Tell us all about it. I bet you and Tommy had a rattling time. You were damned lucky, you two. Nobody else got away to France from here. Wasn’t it topping, really?”

“In streaks,” said Julie. “A mixture of heaven and hell, with as hard work thrown in as anyone ever dreamed of in her life.”

“Well, that’s better than this. I’d put up with hell for a bit of heaven. You’ve probably forgotten that this is damned dull.”

“No, Ruth, I haven’t,” said Julie, “not by more’n a little. But we had good times once; can’t we have them again?”

“I don’t know,” said Ruth Hearnshaw thoughtfully. “You folk who come back are never the same, and it doesn’t go as it used to go.”

“Good Lord, Ruth,” cried Julie, “are you among the philosophers?”

“Among the prophets, Julie,” corrected Grace with her childish air.

“Grace,” said Julie, only half mockingly, “you’re wonderful. Maybe you’re a prophet yourself.”

3

Julie was often reminded of that saying in jest during the long months that followed. She had her time fairly full, what with the hospital and her friends, but there weighed upon her the sense of an intolerable uselessness. Before the war, before her week-end with Peter especially, she would not have thought of it so; she would have just gone her light-hearted way, ragging and joking, working and playing, to fill the moment with the quickest, most fascinating activity that she could at that moment devise. But now, as Ruth had put it, it didn’t go as it used to go, and the reason was obvious: she herself was not the same.

The passing of the months developed her friendship with Gwen Eldred, and while time did nothing whatever to loosen her friendship with Tommy, still it tended to lift her, as it were, out of Julie’s path. Thus in her two friends she focussed her discontent with life, perceiving that each of them found in it something lost to her. Both in a sense understood, yet both were powerless to help. Tommy knew, or thought she knew, but held her peace, partly because she had something else overmastering to think about, and partly because she was convinced Peter would reappear on the scene and all would be well. Gwen guessed a little but not all, but shrank from forcing a confidence that the other did not volunteer.

It was very natural that Julie and Gwen should become friends. Both, alone except for Tommy among their intimate friends, had seen war service on foreign fronts, and the very fact that they had been in different parts did something to draw them together. They compared experiences, and it arrested Julie to see how much the same, though in such different zones of the war, those experiences had been. With an added force she realized how

alike at heart is human nature the wide world over. Imperceptibly, even in this way, Gwen prepared the road for what was to follow.

But most of all did Julie see in Gwen something of what she herself had been. Thus one afternoon, arrived at St. Margaret's for a walk with her friend, she was told that the Sports Mistress was in the gym, and perhaps Sister would go down there. Julie made her way down the pomegranate hedge that led to the building, and stood arrested at the door listening to the merriment within. Then, with a smile on her face, she turned the handle quickly and looked in.

A crowd of girls in various stages of changing from their gymnastic costume to ordinary dress stood in a riotous semicircle about three figures. Gwen was one. Dressed in a leather body-jacket and black knickers, she was taking on two girls at once at her favourite sport of fencing. Julie, who knew nothing of the art, watched in amazement while her friend's foil turned aside all efforts of her two pupils simultaneously to reach her. Now retreating, now attacking, now dividing them and pinking one after the other, she held them breathlessly from her, until at last the pair, uniting more by good luck than skill in a common attack during a moment of their mistress's retreat, succeeded in touching her in what would have been a vital part.

Gwen let the point of her foil fall. "Yes," she said laughing, "I give in. That's done it. But don't forget that you were both dead first."

The crowd rushed her. "Take me on now, Miss Gwen!" "No, it's my turn —you promised me!" "Miss Gwen, please, please, me!"

Gwen caught sight of Julie. "No, I won't. Look, there's Sister come to take me for a walk. Another time. Violet, what do you suppose Miss Davies would say if she caught you running about with practically nothing on like that? Go and dress at once or I'll spank you!" And then, as they cleared away reluctantly from her: "Coming, Julie. So sorry to keep you waiting. Come and help me change."

Julie crossed the gym floor and Gwen took her by the arm. "Pamela, put away my foils for me, will you?" she called over her shoulder to one of her late opponents. "This way, Julie, my dear."

She led her friend into the little dressing-room strewn with her clothes. "Such fun," she exclaimed, as the door shut. "Julie, they *are* rattling girls."

"With a rattling mistress," said Julie, smiling at her.

"Oh, I don't know. But I like them all, you see. Where the blazes are my garters? Oh there—thanks. I only wish I'd had such a jolly time at The

Lindens. How's Grey's?"

"All right, thanks. We've had three serious accidents lately, and two amputations."

"Julie! Anybody would think you enjoyed them. Oh I say, what do you think? The girls have rigged up a ghost in Miss Davies' garden. She's gone to town and she's stopping for dinner. When she does that, she always comes back by the little side path, the short cut from the tram. Come on—I'm ready now. I'll shew you."

"Do the girls know you know?"

"Not officially, of course. They aren't allowed in the garden, either. But ——" She laughed merrily. "This way. We'll go round the tennis courts and they won't see us."

Presently the two were contemplating a hollowed turnip on a pole draped in white. "Ten minutes before the last tram Pamela will creep out, light the candle and smear the stuff with phosphorescent paint. They think I don't know, but I do. Violet begged the phosphorus and the olive oil off me. Isn't it a spree?"

Julie slid her arm into her friend's, and they turned away. "You're about fifteen yourself, my dear," she said.

"I think I am sometimes. But why not? Life's jolly."

"Is it?" queried Julie.

"Of course it is. There are all sorts of jolly things at the moment, and anything may be ahead. It reminds me of trekking up on the Berg. You've been; you know. The path goes winding round the mountain, and it's fascinating as you go. And there may be anything in the world round the next corner. The only thing is not to take yourself too seriously."

"You perfect kid!" exclaimed Julie, smiling at her. "Can't you see that, for all your wisdom, it is yourself you are really thinking about? Come on, isn't your Mr. Cathcart on the Berg? Isn't he perhaps round the jolly old corner, eh?"

In her enthusiasm Gwen forgot to mind one little bit. "Julie," she cried, her eyes dancing, "do you know I got a letter from him yesterday!"

"Did you?" queried Julie.

"Yes. He'd heard about me from—somebody. Such a spree! Men *are* such funny creatures. Bobbie goes and invents half a dozen reasons for

writing to me, each thinner than the last! But that's rather nice about them," she added reflectively.

But even then she was not reflecting so much upon Bobbie Cathcart as upon Peter Graham. Almost his name had slipped out, and too definitely. She had never mentioned him. Julie had never spoken of him, and Peter's talk, she felt instinctively, had been confidential. Besides, she was sure in her own mind that something lay between these two which imposed that silence on Julie and had been the other half of Peter's story.

Meanwhile Julie nodded. "They are utter babes," she said. "And yet, Gwen, there is a terrible strength or a terrible weakness in them. You ought to know; you've nursed them too. They don't see things as we see them. Look how lightly most men treat their own bodies, and look how damned important they mostly think their own job. A woman, on the whole, is the other way round. It's a grim joke, my dear."

"Oh don't, Julie. I can't bear you to be bitter."

"Bitter? I'm not bitter, Gwen. But—well, you see, I've been round the corner. My God, twice I've been round such corners. And now——"

Characteristically, she broke off.

"Oh, my dear, don't look so serious.

"Sweet Hortense (she hummed),
"She ain't no money, but she's got 'orse sense. . . ."

The tears gathered in Gwen's eyes. Julie instantly saw them.

"Gwen," she cried, "I'm a beast. I don't mean it. Let's go down town and have cream buns for tea. There are always cream buns left when all else fails. Lord, there's the tram! We'll have to race. Come on!"

But there it was. She knew it. Gwen had a great hope before her. No doubt she was hardly aware of it, no doubt she never fully worked it out, but Julie, standing where she stood, knew exactly what it was. The school was good fun, life was jolly, the days were like a sunlit path on the Berg, because there was a corner in sight, and round it, half guessed, waited Bobbie Cathcart. And Bobbie Cathcart stood for so much that Gwen's soul never got beyond him. Physical fulfilment and ecstasy lay with him, and after?

Well, Tommy supplied the answer. There was a corner ahead for Tommy that she lay on the stoep and dreamed about, and when Julie, coming from the hospital, saw that dream in her friend's eyes, she knew well enough why

Tommy, too, found life jolly. And in these months she watched her friend turn that corner.

There was an evening when Jack rang up the hospital, and although Julie was not a maternity nurse, she obtained leave to go down with her to St. John's Road. She dined with Jack, at his request, and listened to his absurd talk. "Damn it all, Julie, a man feels such a brute at a time like this. Why the hell can't we bear some of the pain?"

"Because you're such a set of blithering cowards," retorted Julie, laughing.

"Oh I say, steady on, old girl. Gad, I could stand a damned sight more than my poor little girl upstairs!"

"Could you, Jack? Don't you believe it. Not that sort of pain. If you stopped a chunk of 9.2 and survived, you'd grin and bear it, perhaps. Like a kiddy knocked out. But Tommy sees what's coming and waits for it. Besides"—the other point was perhaps not wisely to be developed at the moment—"Tommy's no 'poor little girl.' She's a fine strapping woman, and she can hang on where you'd go to pieces."

"There's something in that," said Donovan, relieved. "Jove, she's one in a thousand, is Tommy."

"Look here," laughed Julie, "this is all very nice and pleasant for me, isn't it? You're wonderfully polite and all that, aren't you? Pass the port, please. If this wasn't such topping wine, Colonel Donovan, I'd leave your bally house on the spot, so I would!"

And so on, chaff, chaff, chaff all the time, to keep one's rich friends contented with their riches, Julie used to think as she lay in her bed and stared out at the moonlight on the slim pepper trees before the hospital. For Gwen had Cathcart to fill her life—or the hope of him, anyway, and Jack had Tommy, and Tommy had her baby, while she had—a memory, bitter she called it sometimes, wonderful at others. It was only Tommy, now, who never needed chaff. Tommy was so wholly satisfied. Julie's life began to centre on Tommy. She found herself dropping in at odd hours just to see what Tommy and the baby might be at. She would find her in an easy chair in her bedroom, her baby at her breast, or stretched out on a rug on the lawn, the baby asleep on a pile of cushions. Julie had never wanted a baby: she did not even know that she did so particularly now. But she wanted a reason for existence fiercely, overwhelmingly. Her life was full—yes, with things that didn't matter, things for which she did not really care a tinker's curse.

She did not very often go to church, but it was about this time that she ceased to go altogether. Peter had brought religion before her in such a way that she could no longer play with it as one of the minor amusements of life. She used to sit in the cathedral and look at the altar, and remember her own light-hearted words to Peter. "I used to do the flowers in church regularly at home. I believe in God, though you think I don't." And Peter had sighed in his own absurd way and changed the subject. She saw why now. People could not believe in Peter's God in that way. He mattered everything, or He mattered nothing. The arranging of altar flowers was one of the most important things in life since it was His service, or it was a silly affectation. And when the vicar came to the hospital to arrange a private communion, and said, in his cheerful smiling way, "You'll let us have some nice flowers on the little table, won't you, Sister? It brightens things up so," she could have damned his flowers to his face.

It was the vicar, too, who finally shut the church door for her. He announced that he would preach a course of sermons on well-known hymns, and one Sunday evening, when Gwen was on duty and it was more than she could do to visit Tommy, the music and the quiet took her in. The Vicar was preaching upon a morning hymn, and drew his lesson from:

"The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we need to ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

In his cultured, easy manner he expounded his doctrine. "The small duties of everyday life, my friends, faithfully performed, develop our characters, perfect our souls, and prepare us for heaven and for God. We must never allow ourselves to think that they are unimportant. The control of our not unnatural irritation from time to time, the curbing of our tempers, the doing of the little things we have to do as well as we possibly can—that is what God asks from most of us."

So God was a kind of hospital Matron who would come one day into the ward and look round on its neat regular orderliness, and smile and say: "Very nice indeed, Sister. I'm sure you've been working very hard. Let me see—we're not too busy. I dare say Sister Ruth could do your work to-morrow. Wouldn't you like a day off?" God! The Creator of that passionate heart of hers, that had swept her into a heaven of bliss worth years of hell for a brief few days in restless, driven, tortured London; aye, and the Creator of the breath of this throbbing body of hers, with its clean strength and purpose, with its blindly-seeking spirit! God, who had created beings whom

He must have known had it in them to plan and strive and grasp, to grapple with each other in war, to lust and drink themselves divine or bestial, He knew which! This God wanted the trivial round, the common task. There was no explanation of its triviality—it was trivial. Well then, it was a trivial God who wanted trivialities, and for Julie's part she did not want such a God.

Only she did not for a moment believe in Him. He was a figment, well, not of the vicar's imagination, for he had not enough, but of sentiment, and of more than sentiment, of restless craving on the part of men and women for some answer to the emptiness of life. Like Peter. To Peter there must be some great Power at work, some (she remembered his words) infinitely loving understanding Heart. "The heart of man is restless"—why, the vicar was saying it—"till it rests in Thee. And now to God the Father. . . ."

Julie got up mechanically. Exactly. There was the false conclusion. The heart of man was restless enough, so restless that it conceived there must be somewhere where it could rest. Hence it created an imaginary rest. Well, Peter at least saw that agony and love and service and bitterness and joy, worth striving for, worth living for, worth dying for, must make up that rest, but for the trivial round and the common task, and flowers because they brightened things up, and all the empty platitudes——

The vicar announced the final hymn. "The day Thou gavest," he said reverently and kindly, "Lord, is ended." The organ broke into the sweet sentiment of the tune. Julie walked out of church.

Her friends, naturally, talked of Julie, or rather Tommy and Jack did so. Both were worried about her, and both, as the months went on, were bored stiff with Peter. That was Jack's expression.

They were sitting in the garden after dinner, the three of them. Julie had drained her coffee-cup and stood up. She looked round the garden. The air was slumberous and warm with the scent of Natal's semi-tropical flowers. The house stretched itself in its happy-go-lucky, sprawling colonial fashion across the trim lawns. Tommy rocked lazily in a hammock, in a soft evening dress, looking very well and very content. Jack was smoking his pipe in mufti in a big Bombay chair. And as she glanced round she noticed the glow of light behind a thin curtain in the dormer window, and she saw as plainly as if she looked in, the little cot there and the native girl who sat by it, crooning to herself as much as to the baby.

"Good Lord," she said slowly, "you two are lucky."

Neither of the others spoke at once. The implication was more than they could answer. And before either could think of anything she was gone. "Good-night," they heard her call from the gate merrily again. "And go slow, Jack, old darling."

Tommy smiled involuntarily. "Really," she said, "she is utterly impossible."

Jack swore roundly. "By God, Tommy," he said, "I'd like to wring Graham's neck. I'm bored stiff with him."

Tommy rocked her hammock restlessly. "I don't know that I'd put it like that," she said, "but the sentiment is the same."

"Why doesn't he write, at least? Good Lord, what the hell is he going to do with his life? I beg your pardon, Tommy, but it makes a man swear."

"Why not write to him?"

"I have. I didn't tell you, but I wrote weeks ago. I told him Julie was eating her heart out and that we could all see it. He hasn't even answered."

"Perhaps he never got it," suggested his wife.

"Oh yes, he did. But he's as obstinate as a mule. I like old Peter immensely, but he's a stubborn beast. Packed full of high falutin' notions, too. Damn his notions! He's a parson through and through—and can't get down to life."

Tommy shook her head. "You're wrong, Jack," she said; "you know it. Peter may be trying, he may even be a mad idealist, but he doesn't funk life."

A little silence fell on them. At last Jack knocked out his pipe. "Well, maybe. But look here, I don't think I ever told you what he said to me just before he left France. It was a bit—well, you know; he was rather—well, that is, I mean to say——"

Tommy from the hammock smiled at him. "You funny old thing," she said. "I suppose you mean he talked religion and got you into deep water."

Donovan exploded. "Religion! Damned sentimental tommy-rot, if you ask me. He said the love of God stood between them, and that he'd got blood—the blood of Christ, so far as I could gather—on his hands. Of all the maddening piffle . . . Still, I thought it'd blow over. Poor old Peter—we'd all of us been through the hell of a time just then. But I bet you it hasn't. I bet you he's worrying his crazy head about the love of God, while all the time

what both of them want is—is——" He caught a warning look on Tommy's face. "All right, old girl, something a damned sight more practical, anyway. But what the blazes are we to do, my dear?" he demanded.

Tommy did not answer at once. Then she sighed. "Nothing, I suppose. Those two people have got to manage their own lives. I think, perhaps, what worries me most of all is the thought of the thousands there are of women like Julie. I mean women without a man. Say what you like, women want a man, Jack."

Jack Donovan got up and came over to her. "Oh my darling, my darling," he said, "not half as much as we men want a woman."

Tommy stroked his hair. "Some of you, yes," she said. "I don't know about all."

"Me, at any rate?" queried Jack ungrammatically.

"You, at any rate," replied Tommy, smiling up at him.

4

Then, in a moment, the trivial round and the common task were thrown to the four winds. It was an evening in early October, and Julie, coming off duty after a hard day, was passing along the corridor to the Nurses' Home. In the passage she met the hall-porter.

"Do you know where Dr. Anson is, Sister?" the man asked.

"I don't," she said. "Yes—wait a minute—I believe he's in Matron's room. Is he wanted?"

"There's a wire for him, Sister, just come." He held out the flimsy envelope.

"Oh well, I pass her door. I'll take it in."

"Thanks, Sister."

Julie went on with the telegram in her hand and knocked at the Matron's door. A voice called: "Come in." She entered. Dr. Anson was there, in a wicker chair, and Matron was at her desk. "What is it, Sister?" she asked.

"A telegram for Dr. Anson, Matron," she said. "I met the hall-porter looking for him, and I thought he was with you."

"Thanks, Sister," said the doctor, and he got up and took the wire.

Julie turned to go. “Wait a moment, please, Sister,” said Anson, tearing the envelope. “There may be an answer, and as I’m rather busy with Matron —good God!”

“What is it, Doctor?” Matron’s voice was slightly reproachful. Such expressions were far too common nowadays. . . .

“It’s a wire from Basutoland, from Qacha’s Nek, forwarded to me, apparently, as Stevenson, the M.O. there, is out of reach on trek. There’s been a murder on the Berg, or something like it. They want to know if I can go at once.” He made for the door.

“Doctor! Who is it? A white man?” Matron could not control her agitation.

Anson turned at the door. “Apparently. Fellow called Graham. I shall go in half an hour, Matron. Will you have Dr. Rawley told that I must see him at my house at once?” And without waiting for a reply he was out of the room.

Julie gripped the back of a chair with a hand on which the blood drained from the knuckles. Otherwise she was very calm. “Matron,” she said quietly and directly, so as to make argument impossible, “Matron, I lived with Peter Graham in France. I love him. I am going with Dr. Anson.” And then, the thing said, the necessity urged, her voice broke. “Oh, I must, I must!” she cried, and choked back her sobs.

CHAPTER FIVE

1

Cathcart's visit was the last outside incident to break the monotony of Qathlamba store for many months. He had come in May, and in June the first snows fell, blocking the paths. The snow did not lay all the while, for even at that altitude the African sun has power, but from thence onwards till September the wind on the open mountain-tops cut like a knife, snow lay piled in all the sheltered places, the nights were bitter, and sometimes for a week and more nothing could be seen for driving sleet and hail. No one travelled who could avoid it—no white man certainly. Between the spells of wet and wind, parties of natives came and went, but in great discomfort and with not a little risk. Following each storm, there would come some tale of a herd-boy found frozen in his hut, or of cattle and sheep running crazily over a precipice. Once, in the late evening, after three days of almost perpetual blizzard, the store closed, the white men shut indoors before roaring fires, Daniel had come in to report travellers the other side of the river. With hurricane lights and waterproofs they had gone down to the mad swirling unfordable torrent into which their pleasant singing river had been transformed and had seen the forlorn group on the farther side. Some party had come down the mountain road, had perhaps missed the remote and only village between the store and the forsaken Border by that way, and stood there now in desperate need of warmth and food and who could say what else. But bawl as they would, it was only possible to hear a dull shout above the turmoil of the spate, and beyond frantic signals warning against a crossing and attempting to point out the way to the next village, they were helpless to assist. They had gone back in the long run as there was nothing to be done, and in the morning, through the driving rain and grey mists, the bank beyond had shewn itself deserted. There was never any news of those travellers. Stenhouse said they were bloody fools to be out, anyway; Mosheshoe gave Peter his private opinion that they were no men at all, but devils tempting them to essay the crossing to their aid; Peter himself felt that the incident, natural as it may have been, had a mystical signification for him. He did not speak of it even to Mosheshoe, but the black night and the driving rain and the hungry furious river, with the lights of hope and welcome out of reach, what were these but a parable of far deeper significance than the things themselves?

No, he did not speak of it even to Mosheshoe, and Mosheshoe, native as he was, was the one person to whom he might have spoken. Between himself and Stenhouse hostility was not less great than before Cathcart's visit because it was less openly expressed by the older man. Stenhouse was, indeed, far too keen on his own interests not to see that Peter Graham was in many ways exactly the man that was wanted for the Qathlamba job. He had had too many loafers, too many roving restless spirits who either drank his whisky or cleared off to the natives or made their own little bit in various ways, not to realize that in Peter he had an assistant it would not be easy to replace. True, he was not particularly cut out for a business man, but even that had its advantages. He had no axe of his own to grind. For the rest, he never slacked, he was utterly trustworthy, he had a good head for figures, and the natives liked and respected him. He would bring custom to the store—Stenhouse saw that. That asset, Stenhouse had, indeed, certain plans of his own for using.

But otherwise the two men were for ever discovering fresh antipathies, and Peter was no cotton-wool saint for ever mortifying his own disgust. A mail came in and the two sat over their pipes with the few letters and the newspapers. "God," growled Stenhouse, "wool's dropped a tikki and we bought all that last lot at a loss. Damn it all, who'd be a trader in this blasted country?"

"You would," said Peter, "or you wouldn't be here. . . ."

A little later: "Oh, my holy aunt, this is too much. Here's mealies up 6d. and we refused fifty bags the day before yesterday! Damn the stuff. Even so, 23s. 6d.! *Twenty-three and six-pence!* Why, when I came up here, you could buy a sack of mealies for——"

"Five shillings," put in Peter. "I know. You've told me a hundred times. I say, Stenhouse, *can't* you talk about anything else than mealies? . . ."

Stenhouse received regularly a sporting paper and *Tit-Bits* from England. He would sit chuckling to himself and occasionally reading fragments to his companion. There were moods in which Peter found the first journal passable in places, but his gorge rose ever at the other. At times he would possess himself of it and read items to Stenhouse—garbled. "I say, Stenhouse, do listen to this. Do you know that if you took all the sacks of wheat in last year's crop and stood 'em in a line, they'd reach from here to the moon?"

"By Jove, no, you don't say so," Stenhouse would remark interestedly.

"No, I don't," said Peter. "It says Cheshire cheeses, to be exact, but it's all the same, come to think of it, isn't it?"

"Damn you, Graham," retorted the other.

"Thanks. Cheerio. I think I'll go for a bit of a walk. . . ."

The other did not drink heavily—it cost too much, but now and again a case would be sent up from Natal and it was quickly emptied. It was then, of course, that the man's dislike of Peter was more freely expressed, and as a rule that expression took the form, first of sly jeers at the fact that he had been a parson, then of broader witticisms as to why he was not one now, and finally of salacious stories told deliberately to move him to disgust. Added to this would be a more open parade of Rosa and other native girls. One such night he busied himself with stories of the Army which had come his way, questioning and seeking confirmation. After supper he sent for Rosa and a younger sister of hers, Marua, to come to the dining-room, and as it was pouring with rain there was no escape except to bed. This Peter did not particularly want, since there was no fireplace in the bedroom, and, besides, Rosa was herself not a bad sort and Peter did not want to be uncivil to her. But Stenhouse plied the girls with liquor. They were induced to dance, with clumsy halting motions, for they were shy and dressed and the white man's dining-room lacked the stimulus of a native village under the moon with the applauding villagers around. And at this point Peter made a mistake. "I don't think much of that as an exhibition," he said.

"Oh, you don't," retorted Stenhouse evilly. "I suppose as a padre you saw finer women in France. Here you, Marua, come here."

The girl, who was perhaps twelve or thirteen years of age, rose from the floor on which she had subsided and crossed the yellow lamplight in her old red cotton dress to the sprawling white man in his basket-chair by the fire. Despite her heavy negro features, she smiled as she came. "Turn round," ordered Stenhouse.

The girl obeyed, and the man, lifting his hands suddenly, caught her dress at the neck and ripped it with one furious gesture from top to bottom. She was foolish with drink, and, besides, it meant the gift of a new dress, so she only giggled tipsily. Stenhouse twisted her about, pulled the rags from her, and pushed her into the circle of firelight. "Now dance, you —— little ——!" he bawled. "Shew his reverence what you can do."

The child stood there naked, laughing foolishly, looking from one to the other. As for Peter, that curious frozen dispassionate temper in the face of

just such temptation which had stood his stead more than once in France and had brought him physically a virgin to the clean heart of Julie, took possession of him now. The blood drained a little from his face—that was all. He was determined Stenhouse, brute beast as he was, should not drive him from the room.

"You don't shine at this sort of thing, Stenhouse," he said coolly, his eyes resolute on the other, ignoring the girl.

Red rage gleamed in the man's eyes, but he still could remember Cathcart and keep his temper superficially with Peter. He glanced round and saw Rosa. A little flame of devilish humour flickered up in him as he saw her. "No?" he queried. "Well, let's try. Rosa, you're older. You've got more of a figure. Strip, my girl—pull your clothes off and come over here. His holiness shall see if that's better."

Rosa looked from one to the other. "No, baas," she said, "that no good. Me big girl. No can do."

And then the suppressed anger found expression. "By God, you ——," he roared, lurching to his feet. "Do as I tell you, will you, or I'll cut the clothes off you." And he reached for a heavy sjambok that hung on the wall by his side.

Peter, too, was on his feet in a moment. "Steady on, Stenhouse," he said. "You're going too far."

The man swung round on him. "Oh, I am, am I? And who the hell are you to tell me so? And what d'you mean, eh? The girl's mine; I bought her. Can't a man whip his wife if she won't do what he tells her?"

And then Peter had what was almost an inner vision. He saw, as he glanced from the towering bully to the frightened woman, not the heavily-shuttered room heavy with smoke and the fumes of whisky, not the three before him, but the black silent mountains and storm-lashed valleys that stretched mile on mile about them all. He knew that in a sense Stenhouse spoke correctly. The sycophant coarse native chiefs would uphold the white man's right to do, to that extent at least, what he would with his own. They stood there under the shadow of native law and centuries of savagery. And who was he to protest when that great Berg held its peace? It had brooded and endured; not by a drunken brawl could such wrongs be righted. That stern Range of iron patience seemed to him sentient, and more than sentient, a Personality. And before that Personality, Peter felt again as if about him

flowed a moving, living, infinite ocean that enclosed of every kind, and even him.

The other strode across the floor with a savage laugh that aroused him. “That’s got you, eh? . . . And now you, strip, will you? Strip to your skin and be quick about it!”

And then cool control took renewed hold on Peter. He crossed the room and paused with his hand on the door-knob. “You had better do as your husband”—and the sarcasm of it stung even Stenhouse—“says, Rosa. And as for you, Stenhouse, I prefer the company of the boys in the kitchen until you recollect yourself.”

But of the boys, it was the company of Mosheshoe that Peter came to prefer. He began to find in him the very focus, in a strange remote way, of what he found in the Berg itself. The black untutored native was also flesh of its flesh. Mosheshoe was not, indeed, a typical native; emphatically he was not. The Basuto have their virtues, as Peter was to find if he had not done so already, but few of them had the fine sensibility that Mosheshoe had. Mosheshoe was far more silent than the rest. Peter would see him making one in a circle about the fire when some caravan had come in late and stayed the night, sitting nativewise, eating nativewise, as meanly and inartistically clothed in ancient well-worn shoddy of the trade as any of them, but distinguished, so it seemed to Peter. Distinguished by his quiet silent manner, distinguished by the very carriage of his head and the look in his eyes. And he would be silent, too, when out with Peter, as he often was. He would plod along behind with fishing-tackle, or tether and tend the ponies, or make the fire while Peter fished, sometimes for hours with scarcely a word. Yet his silence spoke. He was not morose, not indifferent—very far, indeed, from either. He seemed always alert, always aware of what the other did. Mosheshoe’s quiet manner of fetching what was needed without being asked was exactly as if he had come up saying: “Here it is, morena. You’ll want the landing-net for that big fish—wait a moment—play him, play him! Now, the shallows. Got him!” The other boys either went to sleep and were not at hand, or shouted unintelligibly in Sesuto and got in the way.

But just thus the Berg itself spoke. He would come out to its companionship from the emptiness or the beastliness or the sickening materialism of Stenhouse. He came to feel that it was always there; always unmoved, patient; always understanding and teaching something, silently.

Then there was another curious characteristic of the Mosuto which Peter externalized for himself in one definite conversation. The week at the store had been unusually busy and, complementarily, sordid. Stenhouse had bought heavily from ignorant natives, and there had been a run for some reason on a particularly expensive and shoddy line of rugs with an unusual pattern. The boss had gloated over big profits all round, and, as always, he had been correspondingly stingy. He gave drinks and trifling presents to men of the Mokabethlani type, but he would curse the store boys if they distributed the customary largess of sweets or a box of matches to the others. Thus, taking it all in all, the week had been a purgatory, and on the fine Sunday that followed Peter had called Mosheshoe and gone off, like an adjectived loony, Stenhouse said, to collect some uncommon gladioli bulbs that he had noted before in flower at some distance.

They had got their bulbs in befitting zeal and solemnity and were sitting by a little stream eating a cold lunch. Peter swallowed his last mouthful of tinned salmon and bread and leaned over the water to wash his hands. Dabbling them there in the sun-shot liquid fragrance of the cool pool, he fell to wondering at the contrast between the store and such a spot, and from that to a problem that had worried him for long in connection with his companion. And at last he spoke with his tongue upon it.

“Mosheshoe,” he said, “you and I are good friends. We see the same things. So you don’t like Baas Stenhouse. Why, then, have you stayed all these years?”

The Mosuto looked at him with a vague bewilderment. “He my boss,” he said.

“Maybe,” persisted Peter, “but he’s not bought *you*. You aren’t a slave. Other boys come and go. As a matter of fact, he hasn’t another boy who has stayed a year. There’s nothing to stop you getting a good job elsewhere. Why do you stay?”

Mosheshoe reached for the tin plates and began to clean them.

For a second Peter was irritated with him. Knowing it to be so, he stated the truth. “Oh, come on, man. You aren’t a fool.”

“Eh, morena?”

Peter was checked. He considered aloud. “Well, I suppose you are, so to speak, near your home. Nearer than you’d be in the Lesuto, anyway. You’re not married?”

“No, morena.”

"Oh! Then you're saving up to get married?"

The boy smiled. "My father rich. He headman," he said conclusively.

Peter studied him. That meant that he could find wife, huts, lands and cattle for the asking. "You don't care about money, then," he said reflectively.

Mosheshoe finished his cleaning. He rose politely enough to fetch the saddle-bags. But as he went he rather unusually proffered a question of his own. "Why do morena himself stay?" he queried, and departed.

Peter started, stung by the obviousness of it. The incredible thing was that the obvious had for months now never been obvious. Cathcart had questioned him, and he had said he had no other job—true enough, but as easily rectified in his case as Mosheshoe's. On Cathcart's leaving, he had himself been tempted indeed to go, but that was because of a particular issue, and he had stayed because at the moment he couldn't shew funk. But since, since, all these months. At any time he might have gone on the morrow, and he had not gone. . . .

His thought whirled about: there was that that he had said to Donovan. In France he had, indeed, been acutely conscious that he had betrayed a trust. He had gone there to serve God among the troops, and, put it as one might, he had turned his back, and that with what all theology labelled a sin. A sin? He reflected that it was not as such that he viewed it. It had been clean physical love. But he knew more than that. He knew that beneath his kisses, as Julie had seen, lurked the passion of a revolt from God, a passion somehow that should have been God's. That was it. It was amazing, incredible, but somehow, mysteriously, mystically, he knew that for him, at any rate, that passion for Julie ought to have been for God.

But—and here was the strange thing—he knew that honestly he had in a sense ceased to feel that betrayal. He did not deny that he had felt it; he did not deny that he ought to feel it; but he knew, beyond question, that he did not. The horror of it—for it had been a horror—was not put on one side, ended, gone, but sunk, sunk into the oblivion of his subconscious self, he told himself with ridiculous wisdom, as it naturally would come to be. But, then, why remain at Qathlamba? Why not go back to Julie? Why not go to Julie and say honestly: "Something has dropped out of sight, Julie, Julie my darling, my love, and I can make you the centre of my life now?" He conceived himself saying it, and the hot blood raced in him as he guessed her answer.

Mosheshoe came over, walking clumsily in his hob-nailed boots, and sat down by the stream. Peter glanced behind. The horses were saddled and waiting, but the bits hung loose, and they were feeding. The trivial thing was not trivial. Again the Mosuto had read his thought. He would want to go soon, but not at once. He would not want to be delayed, however. Absurd: there was nothing in the incident.

He turned his head and studied Mosheshoe. The boy had his old deer-stalker pushed well back on his woolly head. His wool was a little long and it looked dirty. As for the deer-stalker, he might have been cleaning a waggon with it. For the rest he wore an old khaki shirt, patched khaki trousers, and those infernal boots. Peter studied the trousers, as he might well have done since they had been his. The blue patch askew on the seat hid a rent which had finally negatived his own ownership. He recollected the day he had done it at Qathlamba on a nail. The nail had projected from the box of the weighing-machine, and he had always suspected that nail. He would have sworn that it hadn't been there before. Stenhouse had been by and had roared with coarse laughter. "Hurt your bottom, eh?"

Peter considered Qathlamba personified in the garments of Mosheshoe. He found himself contemplating it with a curious detachment. Why did neither of them go—together, to-morrow? Why?

And then slowly, slowly, like the beginning of storm upon the mountains, there arose in Peter's mind two realizations. He watched that tempest of realization gather and beat upon him and bow him utterly, so that he crouched before it. Nausea took him, and fear, almost physical. He knew that he loathed and hated and dreaded Qathlamba, and all that was in it, with every nerve and fibre of body, soul and spirit. He knew that there was not one redeeming feature in it and that he found it a hell of hells. It was a thing of utter abhorrence to him, of which it was the smallest feature that it was materially uncomfortable and painful. And he knew, too, staring there at Mosheshoe, that he could not go. He could not. The Berg held him. The Berg, the Range. Incredible, absurd, a fantasy, but the Range held him.

Peter stood up and looked about him. The long valley, rock-hung and strewn, glittered hardly in the harsh sun. Nothing stirred. He might die there and no one would know or care but it, and how would it care? It would bleach his bones and whiten them, and they would mingle with its dust. He—he *hated* it. No, he did not. He—he *loved* it, passionately.

"You're right as always, Mosheshoe," said Peter fiercely. "We can't go, damn it."

It was next day that Donovan's letter came, came to emphasize the hideous nightmare of an impasse in which he found himself. "Come down," wrote Donovan. "I'll get you a job on my staff, easy as winking. Come down to Julie, who, we all swear, is eating her heart out for you. Tommy wants to show you the baby. Come down. . . ."

And what was he to answer, if you please, what write to practical, reasonable, topping old Jack Donovan? "My dear chap, I'd love to come. Stenhouse is the dirtiest piece of work that God ever made. Qathlamba is a material, money-grubbing, dirty shambles of everything that's decent. The Berg is a silent nightmare, grim and desolate and mostly snow these days. I'd love to come. But I can't. Awfully sorry and all that, but the Berg holds me. Love to Julie and Tommy, oh and the baby. Cheerio."

Utter preposterous rubbish; blinding stark truth. That letter doubled Peter's purgatory. Heavy as a couple of unplaned planks bound crosswise to his shoulders, Peter carried it every step of that way. For he did not burn it and he could not answer it.

2

Knee-deep in the swirling brown stream swollen by rain, Peter waited while Mosheshoe on the bank disengaged his last yellow-fish and rebaited the hook. "Big one that," he said gaily, nodding towards the five-pounder that still flapped among the wet grasses.

The boy could hardly hear his words for the roar of the torrent, but he read the action and grinned back with all his teeth. Then he stood up and released the hook pointing with one hand towards the deep pool among the rocks where the water swirled and eddied, indeed, but had not the fury of the main stream. "Again, morena," he said, "try him again."

Peter tried, but unaccountably the fish had ceased to bite. Also it grew late. Half a dozen times he allowed his worm to rush down the race into that miniature maelstrom, as enticing a piece of flotsam as the flood had sent the waiting fish that day, but not a yellow-fish stirred. So at last he reeled in his line and waded back to shore.

The Mosuto sat on a big boulder, and he shewed his friendship for Peter with the dignity of his people. Had his chief approached, for whom he would have fought and died without a question, he would not have risen of necessity, and Peter, who had been learning a great deal these past months, understood. So he approached Mosheshoe. "No luck," he said. "The beggars have ceased to bite. Let's go back."

Mosheshoe turned his head. “Look, morena,” he said, and nodded up the river.

Heavy sullen clouds still hid the mountains in which the river took its rise. In the gathering dusk the great grey masses of vapour grew darker and yet more dark. The river poured, swollen and menacing, out of that black gorge, which, with its lowering crags on either side, might have been the background of a Doré picture of some Old Testament massacre. Yet, stabbed across the gloom, rending a cloud, falling sharp as a thrust spear upon the mountain side, lay a beam of blood-red light. Instinctively Peter turned to look for the setting sun, but it was hidden down the valley, out of sight among the hills, and only a faint glow told of its presence. But by some secret gorge, through some unseen rift, it still had strength to shoot this crimson arrow of its death.

Peter stood awestruck by the native’s side. He was used to Mosheshoe’s sense of natural beauty and wonder, rare though it is in a native, because he and the Mosuto were now as inseparable as Stenhouse’s hatred made possible without the brunt of it falling on the boy, but he had never ceased to wonder at the contrast between the brown man and the white. Their mutual boss had “no time” for sunsets, as he put it; in fact, as Peter knew well, he really did not see them. But as Peter stood there he wondered whether even Stenhouse could have failed to worship before this.

Then Mosheshoe spoke. Peter was amazed that he half echoed his own thought. “Good that Baas Stenhouse not see this.”

“Good?” queried Peter. “What do you mean?”

The Mosuto studied the other’s face for a moment in silence. It is not the native way to explain, or to be sentimental, but Peter was aware that he was being judged. It was as if Mosheshoe had said: “Can I tell you? Will you understand? Will you at least not curse me for a God-damned fool of a superstitious nigger?” And Peter answered the unspoken question. He sat down and took out his pipe, filling and lighting it in silence, thereafter sitting still and smoking. Already the appearance of a spear-thrust of light had faded. There was but a painted splash of dying crimson in the robe of cloud that veiled the mountain’s face.

“Morena,” said the other, twisting his toes, for he was barefoot near to home, in and out among the mosses of the rock, “five nights ago, very late, I woke in my hut, and behold I could see the house of Baas Stenhouse plain in the moon. And I feared as I lay, for I knew that I was to see what it is not good to see.”

He stopped, almost as if to give his listener the opportunity of a good-humoured laugh.

"And then?" queried Peter quietly.

"And then, morena, Baas Stenhouse and another white man stepped out from the stoep on to the gravel that we spread yesterday before it, as morena knows. They talked some time and then Baas Stenhouse turn so that I see his face. It was not good, morena. And he call, though I could not hear what he say, and you come out, morena. Baas Stenhouse talk to you, and then he point towards the mountains, pointing you a road. And as he point, morena, there come crash! thunder, and a great lightning stab out into the mountains, morena. I shut my eyes because I was much afraid, and when I look you gone, morena. They two left. You gone." He ceased abruptly.

Peter smoked on awhile. He understood that he had been told the story of a dream, occasioned, probably, by the storm of some nights—five as like as not—ago. Odd, the native mentality. But still gravely he asked again at last, "And then, Mosheshoe?"

"That is all, morena. Only to-night the heavens send the sign. It is to-night, morena."

"What is?" queried Peter. "I do not understand."

The Mosuto rose in silence and gathered up the landing-net, the fish, the box of bait. "Come, morena," he said. "It is late."

Peter jumped up in his turn and permitted himself now to laugh. "You do not make me afraid with your dreams, Mosheshoe," he said.

The boy smiled back at him. He understood the other, and that there was no ridicule in the words. But he shook his head. "In the Bible," he said, "God speak in dreams. Why not now? White men too clever, perhaps. But, morena, if Baas Stenhouse ask you one thing, do not do it."

"What thing?" queried Peter, puzzled.

"One thing," repeated the boy, "one big thing."

Peter understood then that he meant some new thing, some obviously new design, but, understanding, he laughed again. "Baas Stenhouse my baas, too, Mosheshoe," he said. "But never mind. Come on, you old dreamer. And thanks, Mosheshoe."

"Eh, morena," replied the native, and fell to the rear.

Peter walked up to the store in a brown study. He was wondering all the way if the Bible were not possibly correct enough, and incidentally Mosheshoe; if white men were not too "clever" to be reached by any power, psychic and within, supernatural and without, through the obvious channel of their own deeper susceptibilities made possible in sleep. Too "clever," indeed, for having invented a machine-made world they had possibly become mere machines themselves. And he was wondering so for it is curiously possible so to wonder on the Range.

When he reached the store he found that Jeffries had come in from Natal and that the two partners were deep in talk. He had not met Jeffries yet, for the winter had kept him below the Berg.

As Peter's boots crunched on the gravel, the partners ceased talking. Stenhouse, with something humorously reminiscent of the air of a shopwalker about to display the latest "line" to a prospective customer, took his pipe out of his mouth and effected the introduction. "Mr. Jeffries—Mr. Graham. Jeffries has brought up a case, Graham. Get yourself a drink and join us here."

They had been dry for some weeks and the news was welcome. Besides, Peter almost instantly caught the different note in the other's voice and manner, and responded unconsciously. He would never like Stenhouse, but he did not wish to be perpetually at war with him. He rejoined the two men with the reaction from solitude with Stenhouse to the society of Stenhouse with a third and strange person written on his face.

That Jeffries was a person of infinitely more importance than Stenhouse he perceived at once. An air sat upon him, and at that obviously unaffected and sincere. He was not exactly cordial, but plainly he was glad to find Peter there. It soon transpired, from his manner though not from his words, that he was glad to hear of Peter's abilities. Jeffries was never emotional; as a rule he appeared to be able to maintain without effort a curious remoteness. Stenhouse himself, Peter perceived, recognized and to some extent feared this aspect of his partner. It was not easy to tell what Jeffries really thought. He was an active man, and he went about his business without explanation. He had a trick of getting up from a meal or of leaving a conversation, removing his coat if he wore it (which, indeed, was rare), and he would be seen thereafter active upon some job, calling and directing boys in some employment, which he had not thought it worth while to mention.

After dinner on one occasion, Peter, having observed this characteristic for some days in silence, was moved to laugh and remark upon it to

Stenhouse. “There’s Jeffries off again,” he said. “It is curious that he never says, like anybody else, what he is going to do. Yesterday he went fishing. Neither of us knew where he had gone till he came back with the fish. Is he always like that?”

“Yes.” Stenhouse regarded Peter uneasily. “It’s a trick of his. Damned unsociable. I’ve known him prepare for two months’ trek with never a word about it, and then go off after lunch, collect his boys and stuff, and merely rein up at the gate on his way, and say ‘cheerio.’ ”

“Odd,” said Peter reflectively. “Why?”

“Because he’s damned selfish. He’s full up with himself and he doesn’t care a cent about anybody or anything else. I’ve known him for years, and he’s always like that.”

“What about the business?”

“Oh, he’s all right *there*. That’s his own look-out, that touches *him*. Don’t you worry, he’s all right there.”

That very first evening Peter began to gather that Jeffries was indeed “all right” in business. He was plainly the predominant partner. Stenhouse had the nominal leadership in appearance, since it was he who conducted the business of the store and wrote the letters that had to be written, but it was Jeffries who, moving in his own orbit ahead of the other, forced him to follow. Jeffries was beyond Stenhouse, and it was exactly here that Stenhouse was not sure about any alliance between the three of them. For Graham was equally beyond him, and what if the two should, as he put it, pal up and cut him out? To his little mind, that appeared to be a likely result. He could not perceive that if, in himself, there were qualities which repelled Peter, in Jeffries there were others that did so no less.

Here, then, is that first night’s conversation from which so much is deducible. Stenhouse opened it, with that hint of renewed cordiality, as Peter returned to the stoep. “Well, Graham, get any fish?”

“Three or four, biggish fellows. Then they unaccountably ceased biting.”

“What’s it like up the valley—more rain?”

“I should say so. Marvellous sunset though. There was a spear of blood shot right across the valley.” And Peter looked at Jeffries as he spoke. It was a relief to be able to remark on beauty to anyone.

Stenhouse laughed, a trifle suspiciously. “Graham’s for ever looking at sunsets. Not much in our line, eh, Jeff?”

The third man smiled meditatively, but passed the question by. “Fond of fishing?” he asked.

Peter shrugged his shoulders. “Up here,” he said.

“You’re a new hand,” answered Stenhouse. “I got fed up with it ten years ago.”

“Done any shooting?” queried Jeffries.

“No. I haven’t a gun for one thing. For another I haven’t seen much to shoot.”

“Too near the store and the villages. Plenty of birds farther out.”

Stenhouse took the opening. “If you trekked about a bit you’d get a chance,” he said.

“I’m not really keen,” said Peter. “To be honest, I’ve rather hated killing things since the war. I’ve seen too much blood and filth to want to make more.”

Stenhouse moved in his chair. “He’s full of the war, Jeffries. Began as a parson, you know, and ended as a Tommy. Cathcart was here the other day and they talked of nothing else. Damned interesting, I must say. Get him to tell you.”

Peter was used to this sort of thing and he said nothing. Nor did Jeffries. He continued to smoke meditatively.

Then: “How do you find the work?” He spoke as if his partner had said nothing.

“Oh, well,” said Peter, “it’s monotonous on the whole, of course.”

“Christ!” retorted Stenhouse, “monotonous! Good God, man, wait till you’ve been here two years, five, ten. The first time I came I didn’t see a tree for two years—not till I went to Natal for a holiday. And I saw two people, Father O’Brien and Morshead. Morshead was at the camp then and looked in once or twice. What do you make of that? Enough to make a man take to drink or women, eh?”

“Wasn’t Mr. Jeffries here?” asked Peter politely.

“Jeff? Were you here, Jeff? Well, he was when he wasn’t, so to speak. And he wasn’t most of the time. You don’t know him. He was making a road to the Pass and working up the villages. It was damned hard going for us both, but he had the best of it. He likes trekking around, don’t you, Jeff?”

Again the other ignored his partner. “What’s wool now?” he asked Peter.

Peter told him, and Stenhouse was instantly loquacious.

“Yes, think of that. And I’ve missed several chances. Good God, how could anyone tell it’d go to that? I sent the blighters on rather than pay it. Just my luck,” and so on.

When he had finished, Jeffries once more fired a question at Peter. “What rugs have we in stock?” he asked, and again Peter told him.

Stenhouse caught the drift of the questioning. “Oh, Graham’s got a head for figures,” he said. “I told you so. He could probably tell you how many cases of bully-beef we have too.”

“Well,” said Peter, “I’m more or less storekeeper. It’s my job.”

“Humph,” grunted Jeffries, “but we’ve had storekeepers before.”

The two partners exchanged glances, and then, abruptly, Jeffries got up and walked out. Stenhouse leaned across to Graham. “Look here,” he said, “we were talking when you came in. I suggested you’d do well on trek a bit. We want to develop that. Before, you see, we couldn’t: one of us had to be here, and one more or less in Natal. But cattle pays, pays damned well. We’ve good grazing. Horses too. It’d be worth getting up a thoroughbred stallion. With a few good mares we could turn out first-class stuff and the niggers ’ll give anything for a decent horse. It wants a man to trek through the villages, buying cattle, later selling horses, all the time letting ’em know we’re here—sort of making friends. You could do it? What do you say?”

“I know nothing of cattle, or of horses, either, come to that.”

“You’d learn. My idea is that you should go round with Jeffries a bit. He’s due to make a round soon, when the weather clears, end of September or early October. And if you cottoned on—well, we could talk of your coming in with us. I suppose you could put up a bit of capital?”

Peter did not know exactly what to reply. All his instincts were to say no. But why? If he had to stay at Qathlamba, why not stay as a partner? In point of fact, why refuse? He had no intention whatever of going home, and he had a few hundred of capital, too small for any reasonable income, enough, perhaps, for this. If Stenhouse was a rotter, Jeffries might be straight. Between them they might even play the whole show better for the natives. That might be a solution of his own problem. He couldn’t be a priest, but he might be an honest trader. . . . And, anyway, he would see less of Stenhouse. . . . “I must think it over,” he said.

"Right." The other got up. "Of course, I'm not talking business now, only suggesting an idea. Wonder where old Jeff has got to." He went out.

Peter sat on. Jeffries interested him. An odd man, acute plainly, silent, contemptuous of his partner's inanities, but what in himself? He conceived it might be interesting to go on trek with Jeffries.

And then he heard Stenhouse call from the stoep. "Graham! Step out here a minute, will you?"

He went out. The two men were standing on the gravel just below the stoep and a full moon flooded the country. Far off, a dream, scarcely a reality, the great world of mountains and valley lay transfigured in it. Peter stood before it, as ever amazed, incredible, at such beauty.

"There," said Stenhouse, pointing, "that's the country. Jeffries goes up there, up the Lalela, parallel to the border, out towards Motebe's and Nkau's. I've told him you might care to go up with him and learn the ropes. What say?"

Peter did not look at the speaker. That remote immovable softened wilderness, silver and grey and not of earth to-night, held his eyes. And he knew as he looked that it held more than his eyes: it had his heart and his fate. Stenhouse might ask, Jeffries might consent, but it was neither the one nor the other who arranged, who bade. He did not hesitate. "Yes, I'll go," he said.

Stenhouse smothered an exclamation of relief, a sigh of satisfaction. "Right," he said. "I suppose we can take that as settled, eh, Jeff?"

"If Mr. Graham is agreeable," replied the other, "I am."

"Thanks," said Peter, playing the human convention to the card that fate or destiny or providence or God, all of them, at least, inexorable, had laid upon the table.

3

Two weeks or so later, after breakfast, Jeffries rose in his place and stood awhile lighting his pipe. Then he tossed the match away and glanced at Peter. "Start to-morrow?" he said, half definitely, half enquiringly.

It was characteristically abrupt, and Peter looked up at him half smiling. The man was short and thick-set. He wore an old shirt with the sleeves rolled above his elbows and ancient dungaree trousers held in position by means of a black strap. He was a fair man, and a reddish stubble shewed on

his chin, for Jeffries could not see the sense of shaving at Qathlamba more than was convenient. “Right,” said Peter.

“You can have a pack for your stuff. You won’t need it all, and I’ll give you a few tins of bully and so on to load in too. I always take a reserve; never quite know where you’ll get to. We’ll take Mosheshoe, Stenhouse. Going to Nkau’s it’d be good to have him. What’s Graham riding?”

“I’ve stuck to Yacob,” said Peter. “He suits me.”

“Right. He’ll do.”

He waited a moment, and then turned on his heel and went out. Stenhouse laughed as he disappeared. “Quite a long speech for Jeff,” he said.

In the morning, then, they started. Peter was frankly excited and pleased with the prospect. The sun shone, the winter was past, the grass was green and hung with dewdrops, and in the clear rain-washed air the very store-buildings looked pleasant. Jeffries went methodically about, testing straps, indicating parcels, directing, packing. Then he mounted and took the lead. “So long, Stenhouse.”

“So long, Jeff. How long’ll you be?”

The other jerked his shoulders for only answer. “Ready, Graham?”

Peter nodded. Then he held his hand out to Stenhouse. “Good-bye,” he said.

“Cheerio,” said the other. “Good luck.”

Peter swung into the track behind Jeffries. Mosheshoe, cracking his whip, headed the pack-ponies into the trail behind the white men and brought up the rear. They took the eastward road, and at the rise Peter swung in his saddle to wave back to the group of boys and to Stenhouse who were watching them. Jeffries rode over the ridge without a backward glance.

It was Peter’s first trek of any length since his arrival. He was not by now easily tired, and he was used to his mount and his mount to him. He was more familiar with the country, too, though he had never yet slept out on the veld. Thus he was aware to some extent of what he was to experience, and yet not sufficiently aware to be wholly ready for it. They were away three weeks and in that time the iron had entered into his soul.

They rose most days just before the sun’s rays had lit upon them, unless they had had the good luck to hit upon a very favourable camp. Blankets

would be wet, or, perhaps, early in the African year as it was, hoar with frost. It would be too cold for more than a superficial wash—possibly, if the spring were below them in the valley, in a billy or even a tin plate. Peter would survey the barren hill-sides, and the sloping valleys grey in the dawn—stone, rock, grass, sparse reeds, bleak and bare. Mosheshoe would arise without a word, take a look round and tramp off in his heavy boots to round up the horses, perhaps dimly seen at some distance, perhaps out of sight. Jeffries would light his inevitable pipe, and then the dung fire. Peter would fill the kettle, roll up blankets, pack the bags of meat and meal and sugar. Then would follow coffee, black, probably, and very sweet, and a bun of native bread, good when fresh, that must be soaked to be eaten when stale. Jeffries was of those who believed in an early start on a cup of coffee and breakfast at the off-saddle three hours later.

Then the day, on, on, on, in single file. It was always the same, lovely at first, whether the sun shone or not, cold at first too, hot later, and monotonous. The mountain streamlets set with flowers, clattering over the stones, became innumerable, endless. The valleys were all different at first; later, all alike. The distant prospects changed entertainingly until, for ever changing, they appeared never to change. Jeffries said very little but smoked interminably. Mosheshoe rode behind and talked to the pack-horses. Sometimes Peter rode with him, but more often alone. One got too tired to talk. Always towards the end, the last climb seemed endless, the signal for camp, the possible camping-ground, never to be.

When it came Mosheshoe saw to the horses, Jeffries to the fire and the cooking, and Peter humped a blanket and wandered a mile or so seeking the dried dung that was the only fuel. Then one ate and smoked, while the stars came out. And slept.

Sometimes, of course, there were villages, and then the white men had no camp tasks to perform and Peter had to watch the operations of Jeffries. There would be a day's rest during which one stood around and smoked and watched cattle unkraaled for the day, and stood around and smoked and watched sheep driven up, and stood around and smoked and watched sheep driven off, and stood around and smoked and watched cattle kraaled, and ate, and slept. The white men set up a patrol tent which just slept the two of them, and ate before it. Sometimes they would have a hut, sometimes Jeffries knew the chief and sat and talked with him. But mainly they lived wholly remote from the native life. The children played at a distance; the men smoked at a distance; the women passed to the well, or in and out of their houses, at a distance. And when the barrier was broken down, it was

because the chief or headman talked some English and in some degree had ceased to be wholly native.

Jeffries dominated the scene—that chiefly. He was so different from Stenhouse that Peter at first found amusement in a comparison of the two, but later he all but forgot Stenhouse. Jeffries was so much the bigger in reality. Stenhouse was contemptible, and living with him was unpleasant; Jeffries, forceful, strong, brutal in his strength, was totally another matter. The two never quarrelled: that was not Jeffries' way. He was even friendly after his fashion, or he was willing to be. Yet in the end he became a kind of nightmare to Peter.

Jeffries dominated this endless trekking in which there was allowed no place at all to sentiment, to beauty, to life. It was hard and practical and material, so many hours, so many miles; visiting villages because one wanted to drive a bargain in cattle and not because one had any pleasure in cattle or natives or villages; camping because it was time to camp and there was water and fuel at that place, never camping because this situation or that was, utterly lovely or because one wanted to think or read or dream. Occasionally Jeffries took rifle and rod, because the pot was empty. Occasionally he chatted with a native, because the native had something to sell that he wanted to buy cheaply. And Peter could hardly make his own pleasures, for it was on and on endlessly, and he, as a rule, too tired.

Yet the Berg became more and more to him. He loved its moods; its laughter in the sun, its humped dogged back in the rainstorm, its solid purpose far-stretched in the night. He loved the monotony of green and grey and blue; and he loved equally the vivid sudden rare splashes of colour—a bed of purple and blue forget-me-nots by a stream, a sheet of scarlet gladioli on a hill-side. He loved the brown thatched huts that clustered on some spur where the early sun would strike them, and the simple living of these brown folk, children of a day whose every sign of existence could be swept away by the wind and frost and rain and sun of a year. And through it all he had to move on and on and on, as though he did not care, as though that were life and another heifer its last word.

A vignette may symbolize it. There was a day when they were overtaken towards late afternoon by heavy rain, cold and stinging. They were toiling up a long ascent, zigzagging out of a grassy valley, over loose earth, over hummocky grass, slippery and difficult, finally over loose stones and slanting faces of glistening wet rock. Peter was ahead. He was ahead because he was too tired to help drive the pack-ponies, too sodden and cold and cheerless to dare to drop behind. Yacob climbed a little in front; he with

him, hand on saddle, trudging on. The wind grew more bitter as they climbed.

With a last effort they emerged, and as they did so—Peter and Yacob—the sheet of rain rolled up, the sun flooded out, a million raindrops on delicate rush and grass caught and reflected the golden light that had in it the rich mellow glow of approaching sunset, and the crags on either side, whipped about with fairy scarves of mist, rose clear into an azure sky. To Peter, cold, tired, despairing, it was the opening window of Paradise. He gripped his sodden saddle shaken with emotion.

Clumping over the stones came Jeffries. His pipe, long since out, he took from his mouth, and spat, mounting instantly. “We can make Motebe’s now,” he said gruffly; “they’ve fine cattle there.”

They did, and the moon was bright enough for a deal of fifty pounds.

CHAPTER SIX

1

Yet at Motebe's Peter Graham found relief. Jeffries rested the outfit for forty-eight hours, and on the second day Peter not only got away alone for an afternoon, but returned to find his boss gone—frankly and absolutely gone. Mosheshoe was seated on a big boulder at the entrance to the village, and he gave Peter the news nonchalantly. "Baas gone, morena."

"Gone?" Peter was bewildered. "What do you mean, Mosheshoe?"

"Baas Jeffries gone. He take his horse and ride away just after morena go to the river."

"Oh! He's gone for a ride. When's he coming back?" Peter seated himself by the native and got out a pipe.

"He not coming back. He go off to Ntauti's by himself. He say you and I go on to Nkau's, see my place, do business there, and return to Qathlamba when we ready. Then he get his horse and go. Right away, morena."

Peter forgot to light his pipe, and stared at the speaker instead. "But why, Mosheshoe? Was he angry? What's he gone to Ntauti's for? And what about the packs? Did he take them?"

Mosheshoe shewed his teeth. "You not know Baas Jeffries, morena. He like that. He never tell anyone his plan. He just say he go, and he go. He not want anything 'cept his blanket and his saddle-bags. He know the road, sleep at a village, reach Ntauti's to-morrow. He know Ntauti and Ntauti know him. That all, morena. No, he leave letter for you in tent."

Peter jumped up. "You old windbag," he cried, "why didn't you tell me that before?" And with long strides he set out for the tent. Inside, a scrap of paper folded on his blankets, lay the laconic note. "I've gone to Ntauti's. You get on to Nkau's and do what you can on your own. We'll meet at Qathlamba. J."

Peter read it, kneeling there, perforce, on his blankets in the little tent. He read it twice, refolded it, slipped it into his pocket. Then he slowly emerged backward of necessity, and sat down on the grass outside. His eyes travelled over the open space below him and the ring of brown huts; over the rough grey stone walls of the rectangular cattle-kraal, plastered with slabs of

dung drying for fuel in the sun; over the steep hill-side; over the deep valley beneath, with its stream flowing through mealie-lands; and away to the far peaks that shut the world in below, above, around. A mountain rat peeped cheekily at him from a big rock in the comical inquisitive way of his tribe. Peter saw him, and burst into laughter, the first honest laughter for many a day. "You funny little devil," he called at him. And then: "Mosheshoe! Mosheshoe!"

"Coming, morena," the Mosuto shouted from below.

"Never mind," Peter shouted back. "It's true. He's gone. How many days to Nkau's?"

"Three, morena."

"And from Nkau's to Qathlamba?"

"Five, six, morena."

"Thank God," said Peter to himself, and stretched out in the sun.

They left next morning, and the village turned out to see them go. Peter shook hands all round, and he and everyone else laughed nativewise at everything and nothing. They set off down the path, the packs in front, Peter and Mosheshoe riding together behind, talking nineteen to the dozen, over their shoulders when they could not ride abreast. Mosheshoe explained the meaning of innumerable things: two great sticks planted at the corner of a field to keep off the storm-fiends; a twist of grazing-grass by the wayside to serve as notice that here was winter grazing, not to be touched in summer; scattered stones on the hill-side telling of a village a year or two ago which had been abandoned because therein a woman had been possessed of a devil. That story was a long one, and it was not ended when Peter drew rein by a stream. Willows overhung a deep pool. Looking back, one could see up the valley into the heart of the mountains; looking down, rich lands spread out to the skirts of a village.

"Let's off-saddle here, Mosheshoe."

The boy looked surprised and dubious. "It's early yet, morena," he said.

Peter leaped to the ground. "Good. We'll rest half an hour longer and ride half an hour later. This place is far too good to pass by. I shan't, anyway."

Mosheshoe, from the saddle, watched his master's pony. "Yacob want his bread, morena," he said, smiling.

Peter stroked the soft muzzle that his little horse was poking at his pocket and laughed. “You greedy scoundrel,” he called him. “Don’t you know it’s too early? Shall we send old Mosheshoe on then, and wait, you and I? Shall we, Yacob? No, little pony, I don’t think we will. Come over here, Mosheshoe, and tell me all about that village down there.”

Mosheshoe dismounted and off-saddled, talking as he did so. “That good village, morena. I think we buy cattle there.”

“Oh, damn cattle! No, I don’t mean that. We must do our job. But tell me about the people first, and rest yourself. Look at the sun on those willow-leaves! We can talk cattle later.”

Mosheshoe contemplated the willows gravely. “Morena,” he said, “if God made willow-trees to throw shade on rivers, why did He make caterpillars to eat up all the trees? See there, that big caterpillar. He eat and eat and there be many many more—there, there, there. In one week, perhaps, two weeks, not a leaf left here. I see miles and miles on the Semena river, bare dead trees. And what good the caterpillar, morena? Nobody to eat him!”

Peter stretched himself and looked lazily away. “But willow-trees go on, and so do caterpillars, and in one year, in one hundred years, in one thousand years, this old Berg will still be the same, Mosheshoe.”

“Eh, morena.”

And there fell a silence that was only broken by the purling of the stream, the faint occasional swish of a dragon-fly, and the murmur of flies in the trees above.

Two hours later they rode into the village. Peter asked for the chief by name and shook hands gravely with a strong bearded fellow to whom Mosheshoe spoke at length in Sesuto. Thereafter Peter was introduced to his wife and taken to his house, and regaled with *mafi*—the rich thick milk of the Basuto—and invited to stop the night. He glanced at Mosheshoe, who nodded. Thereupon he was given a sheep, and for supper there were fowl and eggs and cutlets and *mafi* and bread and native beer. Mosheshoe, the chief and himself sat far into the night over the debris discussing King George, the Prince of Wales, the Great War and submarines. In the morning the chief pressed him to stop another day, or at least to return that way. Failing both, to come again and stay a week. He would come to Qathlamba with wool and cattle, he said, and fetch Peter. And it was not until the village was some hours behind that Peter wondered whether in his heart of hearts he was glad that he had brought trade to the firm.

But there was no time to wonder. A hailstorm came roaring over a crest and caught them as they tortuously wound round a series of heights. A pack-horse bolted. He was stopped with difficulty after he had broken a strap and scattered his pack-bags. They mended that strap in the hail, fingers blue with cold, and they put the sodden blankets over their heads the while, since the frozen particles stung their ears pitilessly. And when it was over, Peter looked round on the transformed landscape—pockets of driven sleet here and there, everything sodden, the path a morass—and burst into a roar of laughter.

Mosheshoe regarded him enquiringly. "Why morena laugh?" he said.

"Oh, because it's so good to be alive, you old scoundrel!" exclaimed Peter.

Mosheshoe's eyes twinkled. "You think so at Qathlamba?" he queried.

Peter shook the water from his hat and made no reply.

On and on and on. That afternoon, following the path under a brae, they saw two motionless figures atop of it, some twenty paces apart. Peter drew rein. They were girls, silhouetted against the sky, fantastic figures with short skirts of sheep-skin, girdles of plaited wheat-straw, breasts and shoulders bare, and the flesh whitened with clay. They stood rigid, motionless, each with the right hand held straight out grasping a peeled rod some eight feet long.

"What in the world . . .?" queried Peter, gazing.

"*Bali* girls, morena."

"What?"

"*Bali* girls. They sort of circumcision school, go out and live on the veld for weeks with one old woman, all dressed like that. That part of their lesson, morena. Then, that finished, they go back to village, make one big feast, and then they get married."

"But why do they dress like that?"

Mosheshoe was fairly puzzled to explain, but he made a gallant attempt. "Well, sheep, wheat, that food, morena. They wear that because they want to have babies some day."

"O-o-oh, I see," said Peter. "Emblems of fertility. Go on. Why make their bodies white?"

"They not clean, morena."

“But why white, then? Oh, I see. We’re white, so black’s not clean, and if you’re black, why, white’s not clean. Topping. Relativity in Africa! But why do they stand like that?”

“I don’t know, morena.”

“You don’t know? What do you mean?”

Mosheshoe shifted his cap and shook his head. He was fairly stumped now. “No one know, morena. It very old custom. They stand for hours and hours, holding sticks to the east. That all, morena.”

Peter shook up Yacob. “Humph,” he said. “Well, Mosheshoe, you won’t understand, but I’ve seen pictures of Greek girls like that hundreds and hundreds of years old. And the sun gets up in the East. It’s an old, old world, Mosheshoe. Get up, Yacob.”

On and on and on. One morning, shortly after starting, as they descended a valley they saw a village below. The hum of shouting and talk floated up to them, and the circle of huts was alive with people. Mosheshoe looked down curiously. Then he turned to Peter. “They try a new witch down there, morena,” he said.

“What, try her? Judge her?”

“Yes, morena. See if she any good. She been learning from the old witch one year, two years, perhaps, and now they see if she can smell out. Shall we go and see?”

“Rather!” cried Peter.

It was a sight not easily to be forgotten. When they arrived (and they drew rein on the outskirts of the crowd and did not go nearer at Mosheshoe’s instructions) the entire population—a medley of red blankets, dried grass hats, sprawling babies, waiting horses, inquisitive dogs—were gathered in a rude semicircle. Within that semicircle two women kept up a fantastic song and an irregular whirling dance. One was old, wizened, and if not the Gagool of fiction, since she wore an old skirt and had no waistband of skulls, was at least repulsive enough in her rags bound about with dried herbs, sticks, and fragments of bone. The other was not ill-looking, and, save for a hanging amulet between her breasts, was not tricked out at all. Perhaps she had not as yet any right to the insignia. She was the more active. Here and there she danced, she contorted herself, she screamed, she pointed with the dried tail of an ox. At each gesture the shouts of the watchers rose in crescendo or dropped away in groans of disappointment. Mosheshoe explained.

“They have hidden things, morena. Some on them, some in the ground, some in the huts. She call to the spirits to help her, and she point. If she right, the people glad; if she wrong, they angry. She call out names: if she right, they glad; if she wrong, they angry. The old woman, she not find; she all the time pray. Very bad, morena. Let us go.”

They rode slowly away. The shouting grew less and less behind them. Once Peter, looking back, saw the dust of the frenzied dancers and the gesticulating excited watchers shot through with sunshine. He was silent as he rode. It was all so childish—the game of hot and cold over again, with the seekers trained to interpret; at least, perhaps, that was all. But though childish, it was more. It was old, old, very old, old perhaps as the everlasting hills, nearly as old as the Powers themselves to whom men cry, now in this way, now in that—cry, because they themselves are lost—cry, straining ears for the whisper of an answer. Faint and far now came the shouting. Peter turned again and looked. But the hills had risen between and he could see the place no more.

Mosheshoe had said three days, but he had considered Jeffries’ manner of travelling, not Peter’s, and it was on the evening of the fourth day that they made Nkau’s. The ponies were tired and travelled slowly all the afternoon. But as the shadows fell Mosheshoe grew excited and pressed his friend. “On, morena. It sad if we come too late for my father to make a feast.”

The final approach lay down a long valley to the junction of two rivers. They had been crossing the watershed all day, and tiring it was under a blazing relentless sun. Now, at last, the valley opening up, villages appeared, and in each Mosheshoe was recognized, at each Peter expected to have reached Nkau’s, and from each in turn, the shadows lengthening, they must drive the unwilling pack-animals which would bolt in among the huts in protest against a further march. From one such village a man set out as they left to climb the rocks above the huts, and Peter shortly heard him cry with a long-drawn shout down the valley, heard the echo among the hills, but did not understand. So that in the end his welcome had the appearance of a magic thing.

It was growing very hard even to see the trail as they rounded a final shoulder, but dimly the beauty of the place lay imagined in the cool evening before them. The two rivers converged; one could see the dying light reflected in the long still reaches below; and the waters, meeting, flowed together down a wider valley to the west. There a thousand peaks appeared to lift themselves into the sky, and each was picked out in purple and scarlet

and gold. The stony path on which they rode ran down to the water, crossed, and trailed up to the broad bosom of the left slope of that valley, hidden now in shadow. But the shadow was starred already with points of light, and a lantern was moving down to the ford. "On, morena, on!" cried Mosheshoe excitedly, reading the signs of welcome, and kicked his mount to a final canter. The mountain ponies knew the tone, and one lifted his head and whinnied. A horse answered over there, and dogs took up the chorus. "On, morena, on!" cried Mosheshoe again.

Thus they clattered down the path. Now they were in the water, swishing through, stumbling, just keeping their feet, emerging. The ponies breasted the incline as though they had never been weary, and in a moment or two they reached the swinging lantern and the group that came to meet them. Peter was aware of the beating of hoofs; tall figures loomed up; Mosheshoe cried again excitedly and urged his own horse forward; and Peter found himself leaning from the saddle and grasping an old wizened hand. He peered down, and could see in the yellow gleam a shrewd old face looking up at him, two filmy eyes straining under heavy white straggling eyebrows, lips that mumbled, ancient broken teeth. The hand that held his did not leave its grip. "My father, Nkau, morena," cried Mosheshoe in his ear.

"Lumela, morena," replied the old man, "welcome, welcome. You are the friend of my son, so this is your home, morena."

On yet, but only a little further. Peter could no longer see the path, but surrendered his fear. In a little whirl of hoofs and laughing figures; amid cries and chatter of Sesuto that he could not understand; some hand holding his bridle, someone holding his stirrup as he dismounted; hands thrust at him to shake; brown faces flashing teeth in the fitful lantern-light; now women, all eager, all smiles, holding babies that learned of their mothers not to be afraid, pressing about him, laughing, babbling; reed-fences; flames of fires beyond glinting through the reeds; someone holding back the little door for him to bend his head and enter the courtyard; and now a hut, clean-swept, lamp-lit; a bed with new blankets turned back invitingly; a chair and a table, spread already, with rude dishes of heaped potatoes, smoking beans, ill-cut chunks of meat, a dozen or more eggs, a bowl of *mafi*, a china mug of beer, lettered—he caught that on the instant—"A present from Durban"; great grain-bags stacked down one side; Mosheshoe, all smiles, bringing in the saddle-bags; and Nkau once more shaking his hand, peering under heavy eyebrows with filmy old eyes, lips mumbling, skinny hands tremulous. . . . "Lo, morena, we did but know an hour ago. To-morrow we will feast. Forgive us to-night, morena, this poor food, this hut. To-morrow the women

shall clean one for morena, the best we have. For you are the friend of my son, and lo, this is your home, morena."

Peter took the old man's hands in both of his. He looked into that ancient wrinkled face. A second only he looked before he spoke, but in that second, lest perhaps the rest of the road before him should prove too hard, he was given a moment's illumination. He saw the meaning of simplicity, the unquestion of love, here, on the edge of the world, in the heart of the age-long unbending unchangeable Berg. "My father," he said—and it mattered nothing that he spoke English which the old man did not know—"you honour me. I could not have believed it. It is true. I am at home."

2

It was at Nkau's that Peter wrote to Julie, a letter that was never posted because he himself had to carry it to Qathlamba to the post-bag. But Julie read it later and it belongs here. It belongs to the Peter of this moment and not to the Peter of the moment in which Julie was destined to read it. The very fact that he wrote at all is significant, but perhaps he best explains himself.

"My dear Julie,

"A first letter to you after—how long? And which of us would ever have thought that I should write as I am writing now? My dear, picture me. I'm in the most dilapidated shirt and riding-breeches that you ever saw, though I've brand-new puttees that Nkau has given me. (How he got hold of them, I can't tell: I suspect, actually, the Boer war.) I'm sitting in a hut specially prepared for me, a round hut, you know, with all manner of things stretched out round the walls—saddle-bags, a dead sheep, from which portions are cut twice a day for my food, a big pot of beer, a tin trunk of my hostess's best clothes, a pile of grass rope and so on. The wall has a dado of coloured clays with a frieze of the most incredible designs—oxen, horses, a human hand, a clock face, an axe, and what I take to be a fowl. It's the afternoon, and two of Nkau's kiddies—or are they grandchildren?—are playing in the doorway. One is a girl and she wears a string of grass, and the other is a boy and he wears nothing. They're not a bit scared of me now, and come occasionally with outspread paws to remark: 'Sucari' (I can't spell it, but that's what it sounds like, and, of course, it means sugar, or jam either for the matter of that). And outside, Mosheshoe—he's a boy from the store, and rather a

wonderful person in his own way—is cleaning harness and saddles, because we go to-morrow, worse luck.

"My dear, it is odd that I should be writing to you at all. I haven't before. Will you understand—I haven't wanted to! I've been the whole of autumn and winter and most of spring now up here on the Berg, and nearly all of it, all but the last few days, at the store. It hasn't been possible to write. Jack D. wrote to me, but I couldn't reply. I couldn't have made him understand, but surely I might have made you. . . .

"Yes, perhaps I could have done, but for all that, Julie, darling, I couldn't write. And I see why now. I've had six days' respite, and I see. And I write now in case I am going back endlessly to the other thing, and cannot write again.

"You won't think me an appalling fool, will you? I can see you tilting back in a chair and laughing at me. No, not laughing. I can see myself trying to say this best in some little restaurant—ours in Soho, perhaps—and you watching me over the top of a wine-glass, very gravely, and yet making suddenly an irreverent and probably blasphemous comment. Of course, it's utterly incongruous that I should want to say there what I am going to say to you now; it's beyond me that I should; but then, it's queer that I should want to say it to you at all. What is it between us, Julie? Why do I love you so intensely—and remain away from you? Why do you love me so intensely—and refuse me? Why do I write as I am now writing to you, who, by all standards, ought to be the last to whom I should write so? Why, oh why? Are we never to have our 'whys' answered in life, my dear? It's so long to wait for death. And, honestly, death would have been so easy, so welcome, any time these last months. . . .

"Because, my dear, I've been through a real *hell*. Truly. I used to think March and April, 1918, was a hell, but it isn't in the same street. (Mixed metaphors, but you'll understand!) France was like the old stories of hell—fire, and pain and horror; but this has been more like Dante's. I've been utterly, awfully alone, alone on this great vast terrible Berg, that has no pity and no care and is utterly indifferent. That first, but not that only. It was my soul that was alone, but in the body I've been with a man—no, two men—who have gradually become to me as terrible and as monstrous as figures in a nightmare. In France I learned that many a man who

broke the Ten Commandments remained a good fellow, an unselfish, tender-hearted, damned plucky pal, but here I've seen that a man can be wholly a beast, a devil, not a good roaring devil with a pitchfork, but a leering bestial filthy devil such as you see in the old pictures sometimes. One man is like that, and the other —oh, well, he is the personification of Business. See? Business. Profit. Money. Oh, I can't explain. But I've been a kind of shuttlecock, thrown from Stenhouse to the Berg for help, and back from the Berg to Jeffries, and now I suppose back from Jeffries to Stenhouse, and it's knocked me dumb. . . . That's it, Julie.

"But I'm talking now. Why? Because I've been alone with Mosheshoe three days, because I've seen simple kindly human things, as well as rather pitiful soul-hungry human things. You should see old Nkau! He's seventy or eighty, old and wrinkled, but he's such a dear. Utterly unsophisticated. Last night, at sunset, he sat with me outside this hut and we watched the women go down to the river for water, and he told me how, in his young days, it was dangerous to go because of lions in the reeds. I don't know: that's nothing, of course: but it's a kind of symbol to me. Kindly, friendly, simple talk. Or we sit still and don't talk. Neither of my white men has either speech.

"Well, what's it done for me? Julie, I know now that I HATE that world that Stenhouse and Jeffries stand for. Contact with these natives has given me a vision of true values. Old Nkau said to me when I arrived: 'This is your home.' He was right. In this poverty and simplicity I am at home.

"Is that all? Julie darling, will you understand? It's not quite all: I know it isn't. These great mountains are saying something to me, silent, hard, incomprehensible as they are. Something deep down in me is listening. I've got to go back to Qathlamba. I've got to stick it out. They want me to join the firm—I think I shall. I shall hate and loathe it; it's like deliberately going back to hell; but I'm going. Maybe that is being asked of me. You understand? I don't even say maybe *God* is asking that of me, because I can't see really why He should—what would be the good of it? But there it is. . . .

"Listen. Do you remember London, that last morning? Remember! Am I not a fool, of course you do! Well, you know what you said? That you'd watched me struggling, that I was built

for great things, that I couldn't give up God. Well, I still don't know. I see nothing; no, I see something, if not much. I'm different from what I was in London, Julie. I'm more quiet. I've ceased to struggle, to plan. I'm just being knocked about by something—Someone, perhaps—knocked hard and hurt terribly. Words that meant a lot have fallen away from me—even words like sin and God that I used to use so much. I don't *know* about them. I only know that I'm being knocked about and that I've got to go on being knocked about—up here, on this grim old Berg.

"And all the time, Julie, I love you as I've never loved you before. *That* I can't even attempt to explain. But, at least, I shall not for a moment even think that I ought not to tell you.

"PETER."

3

They left Nkau's and they made for Qathlamba, and they took the wilder of the two roads, one that even Mosheshoe knew but little. That was Peter's choice, plainly enough, but he had not learned to reckon fully even yet with that wilderness. They struck two days of the foulest weather that the Berg can provide, and that when they had climbed high and were out of reach of cattle. The first night there was no *liso*, or dry dung, to be obtained at all, for all there was was wet; but they set up their tent in a drizzle only, and the blankets were dry, and they had abundance of cooked meat and fresh bread from Nkau's. In the morning, Mosheshoe looked long at the clouds. It was not actually raining, but he knew that they must follow the road up to the heights that make the Border, and that if it rained it would rain without hope of shelter. Still they had a tent and Peter was imperative. He wanted to get up high; he wanted to be away. So they up-saddled and started.

First it began to drizzle, and very cold it was at that. They donned mackintoshes and even a blanket each, but still it drizzled. The going became foul—loose and wet. They took an hour to make a couple of miles. Towards midday they must walk, and boots stuck in the mud and grass-tufts squelched at every step. On the top the drizzle became heavy rain. They made an hour through it, tried a short cut across a plain, passed an hour or two more realizing that they had missed the road, and then, exhausted, under the lee of a big boulder, set up their tent. Mosheshoe, cheerful and uncomplaining, went off to pull up a kind of thick green bush that grows on the Berg and which burns, though green, roots and all. He found plenty of it, but he wasted a box of matches and mainly produced smoke. They dined off

dirty water, bread and sardines, and the bread was wet. Thereafter they slept, warm enough together. But the awakening was bitter.

Over the Border had come a thick mist. The hot air of Natal, rising, meets the cold air of the Berg and makes that mist, and terrible it is. You cannot see a yard. To trek is lunacy, for the precipices of the Border are unexpected and profound. There are places sharp as if cut with a knife, and if you step over, you or your pack-horses, you tread on air for a full 8,000 feet. Mosheshoe pulled the flap and looked out.

"Illick!" he exclaimed, or something that sounded like it.

"What is it?" queried Peter.

"Mist, morena. We can't go on. Must stop till it goes. And I not sure where we are."

Peter looked out into that grey pall and at the few feet of sodden turf that he could see, and drew his blanket closer. He spoke without much enthusiasm, but he was not sorry to stay. "All right, Mosheshoe," he said cheerfully, "let's eat."

"What, morena?"

Peter whistled. "Yes," he said, "I suppose that's the question. Let's see."

They had bread and the pickings of a leg of mutton that Mosheshoe had kept to stew for soup. They had one tin of bully, tea, coffee, sugar, and dry mealie-meal. That was all. Tinned foods had been a delicacy, and hence distributed freely at Nkau's, and they should have been along and down from the Border by this. "Let's open the bully," said Peter.

Mosheshoe shook his head. "Maybe mutton won't keep," he said.

Peter laughed. "Right," he joked. "Let's make certain." So they breakfasted off bread, dirty water, and a suspicion of mutton and marrow.

The mist hung all day. About twelve o'clock Mosheshoe got up and stepped out. "I go to find the horses, morena," he said.

Peter protested. "But you can't see an inch!" "No, morena, but I know the slopes a little. I whistle and they hear, perhaps. They must not stray, if we can help it."

"Take care, then," said Peter: "shall I come too?"

"No, morena." Mosheshoe was brutal. "You no good, only lose yourself. You sit here, wait for me." And he disappeared in the mist.

He was away two hours, while Peter sat and stared into the grey misty blanket that enshrouded them. Once he caught a sight of a pinnacle of rock a hundred yards away, and thought it was lifting. Once he rummaged in the bags and got out a pocket Matthew Arnold, but he read only a few pages. For the most part he sat and smoked and waited and thought. Not that one does really think on the Berg. One sits quiescent, and thought drifts subconsciously through one's mind. Thought drifted through Peter's, and once a memory—the utter patience of life-in-death carven on the face of the Christ in the parish church at Abbeville. It drifted in, and the Magi bringing gifts in a fourteenth-century reredos. And then the mists re-formed. That was so far away. . . .

At last Mosheshoe returned. "Found the horses?" queried Peter, the instant he loomed up out of the mist.

For once the native was despondent. He shook his head. "Not possible to see anything, morena," he said. "We wait, that's all. Perhaps mist go soon."

They talked desultorily of weather experiences, as men do in such conditions, but soon gave it up. For supper Peter opened the bully-beef without the other's objection, but they only ate half. And then they slept.

Next morning the mist had gone from their immediate surroundings, but it still lay obviously spread over Natal and could be seen about the hidden crags and buttresses. Mosheshoe was first up. He took one look and then crawled back to the tent. "Morena," he said, "I go to find the horses. I may be gone one hour—two; can't say. You not go far from tent, case mist come on again. You pack. We start when I come back."

"Right," said Peter, "but what about breakfast?"

"I take some bread. Morena make fire with stuff in tent, if he can. Good-bye."

Peter tried, and succeeded more or less. The green shrub that had been pulled on the night of their arrival was less wet than it had been, since they had slept upon it more or less, and with much smoke Peter did coax sufficient flame at last to boil a kettle. As he did so, he collected more fuel and set it to dry. He had never enjoyed tea quite so much in his life. He ate bread with it and a little meat, packed up, sat around, and finally walked the half-mile or so to the actual border. There he saw the mist in all its splendour. Impenetrable below him, it swirled into gullies and kloofs of the Berg like a frozen sea, fringes of it thrown up to his very feet, spreading before him to the horizon, motionless. It was possible to climb down into it,

to stand literally waist-high in the white impalpable stuff. Its effect was one of utter solitude and isolation. The world was blotted out; in all that he could see nothing moved, nothing lived. His own boots on the stones and rocks as he walked back alone broke the silence, and if he stood to listen that silence was terrifying.

At long last, as a faint and watery sun broke out about midday among the mists overhead, Mosheshoe reappeared. He was moving, a tiny figure in that wildness, with the slow calculated deliberation of a native driving horses, whistling occasionally, now and again throwing a stone, not at, but behind, or to one side of some straggler, heading the four beasts to the tiny white spot in that wilderness which was their tent. As Peter watched him, his admiration grew. The boy must have walked miles. With infinite patience he had collected one after another of the far-strayed animals, with knowledge that was almost that of a sixth sense, finding them without losing himself. And all that he had done on a hunch of bread as part of the day's work. Peter turned himself to his fire and to his kettle.

Mosheshoe came up. "Bully!" cried Peter gaily. "Come on and have some coffee. And some beef. You must."

Mosheshoe looked doubtful. "We must go on at once, morena," he said. "If wind comes from the west, up comes mist and we left here again. That very bad when we have no food for you. No, we go at once. I think I guess where we are. We best make straight for Makhoa's place. *Levenkele* there. It's much best, morena."

Peter nodded. "Sure," he said, "but there's time for you to drink this coffee. I'll saddle up while you eat. Come on, Mosheshoe. Don't waste time arguing."

The Mosuto gave in. He was indeed ravenous, but he ate standing and half helping the while. In a few minutes they were away, moving quickly out of that desolation.

"What's this store at Makhoa's?" asked Peter. "Who keeps it?"

"I don't know the baas' name," replied the other. "He Dutch, not English. It very small place, not very nice. And Makhoa's people, they not good. Still, morena, it a store, and it nearest to us now."

Peter's spirits were rising. True the sun had given up attempting to shine, and it was damp and depressing, but they were moving at long last, at any rate, and he had visions of a good dinner and a bed of blankets on the counter, if no more. So he replied cheerfully: "Oh, that's all right, old son.

Anything'll do. And if we can't get a sheep, we can get bully. But is it on the road to Qathlamba?"

"No, morena. Long way from Qathlamba. We cut up from Nkau's and now we cut down to Makhoa's. Makhoa's nearly as far from Qathlamba as Nkau's. On road to Qacha's Nek, that's all. Bigger road."

"Oh, well," said Peter, "if we are still as far from Qathlamba as when we started, I don't mind. It's not your fault. Eh?"

Mosheshoe smiled his answer.

They rode another hour. It was bad going downhill now, and both began to realize that they were stiff and wet and hungry. "How much farther?" queried Peter.

"A little yet," answered the Mosuto enigmatically in his own idiom. Peter knew enough to realize that a little bit might mean many hours.

It was in point of fact dark when they reached Makhoa's, too dark to see much, too dark to give them time to pass on. It was just discernible that the store was as poor a holding as a white man ever built, a mere shack of half stone, half mud and thatch. The dwelling-house, some yards away, was worse, the walls all mud, the thatch ancient and filthy. Both buildings stood isolated and dilapidated in the midst of a trampled waste, which nevertheless was fairly covered with a rank evil-smelling weed that no respectable person tolerates for a moment about his place, and the waste was littered more than is usual before a store. Mosheshoe peered at once through the gloom at the wool-stack. His eye perceived unusual disorder in what is always disorderly. He grunted something beneath his breath, but continued to ride forward. Not a soul stirred. Not a light shewed.

"Is the fellow in bed?" queried Peter.

"I do not know, morena. Perhaps he drunk. Perhaps he away. Best go and see."

Peter dismounted and walked across the flat impatiently to the dwelling-house. The ramshackle door, of flimsy wood, cracked and of little use, hung on one hinge, unfastened. He knocked upon it gingerly. There was no answer. He called; there was no reply. For a moment he hesitated, tapping his boot with his sjambok, and then glanced back at Mosheshoe. The boy was watching him, holding their two horses, while the pack-ponies stood dejectedly by. Something in his attitude put Peter on his mettle. Here, in the "home" of a white man, however squalid, the lead must remain with him. He shrugged his shoulders. Something had to be done. He called again; no

answer. Then he looked over to the Mosuto and spoke. “No one here, apparently. I’m going in.” He pushed the feeble barrier to one side and entered.

A mud wall which did not reach the roof divided the interior ineffectually into two, and did not itself reach the door. In the gloom he could see no more than that each half of the building, each room thus made, was lighted by a window in the side wall. He tucked his sjambok under his arm and felt for matches in his pocket. The tiny flame spurted up, and by its light he entered the room on his right.

There was a table in the centre, and the first glance shewed a candle-end stuck to it in its own grease. Peter stepped quickly over to that and essayed to light it. The wick was broken, however, and it took three matches. Then, as it flared, he looked around.

The squalor, the disorder of that room was incredible. The table was filthy beyond words. There were dirty plates, a sardine-tin with oil yet in it, a tin for butter, upon which successive paper parcels had been stuck down without the removal of the various papers, a pair of socks, half a loaf of bread, with the marks of a dirty knife on the cut face—Peter felt almost sick and did not look more. About the little room were clothes, firewood, old boxes, paraffin-oil, and two chairs, one overturned. And empty whisky bottles—these were everywhere. Upon all rested filth, dust and dirt and stench almost palpable.

He released the candle-end and crossed to the second room. That was practically empty. There was a trestle-bed in it opposite the door, of rusty iron, without bedding, an empty box or two, a pair of trousers and more empty bottles; that was all. Peter did not wait to examine. He turned away and tramped over to Mosheshoe. Rain had begun to drizzle again and he had difficulty in keeping the candle alight.

“There’s no one there,” he said. “He seems to have left in a hurry, too. And I never saw such utter filth.”

Mosheshoe nodded towards the store. “Morena,” he said, “I no like this. The store’s open.”

“What!” cried Peter, and strode to the door.

“Take care, morena!” cried the boy.

But Peter’s blood was up. The store door, too, was half-open, half-broken. Peter pushed it to one side and entered.

He could see in a moment that the store was in considerable disorder, but after the house that was not surprising. Moreover, nearly half the shelves were empty, but that might easily be if stores had been delayed on the road or there had been a run on the goods. What he did see at once was beef, many tins of it, and salmon and other tinned foods for which his soul and body just then lusted. He walked round the counter—and stood still. The locked till had been left open.

He regarded it a moment and then called to the Mosuto. "Mosheshoe, tie up the horses and come here a moment, will you?"

He heard the other's familiar answer: "Eh, morena," and the sound of horses' hoofs, together with sundry cries of "Who-o!" "Up a little!" "Yacob!" and the like. And then Mosheshoe entered.

Peter waved his candle at the till. "Here, Mosheshoe," he said, "what do you make of this?"

The boy moved forward and bent to examine it. Then he straightened himself and glanced about. Then he turned to Peter and spoke without hesitation. "Store been broken into, morena."

Peter whistled. "Then where's the boss?"

Mosheshoe shook his head and the eyes of the two met. A little silence fell. Peter broke it uneasily with a laugh. "Come with me and see the other place," he suggested.

In silence the two subjected the living-house to a more detailed inspection. The ancient trousers, indeed, all the scattered clothing, the Mosuto examined with a care which Peter had not used and did not want, in truth to use. The Mosuto handled and even smelt them. In the long end he looked bewildered and scratched his head. "Don't know, morena. Man here leave in a hurry, I think. He been very drunk, too. (He pointed to significant stains). But I think no fight. I think he perhaps go and leave store, and store be broken open afterwards."

"Well," said Peter, and suddenly knew himself very cold and hungry, "what are we to do?"

"Better go to village, morena."

Peter's heart sank. "How far?" he queried.

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "Not sure," he said, "perhaps one mile, perhaps two."

Peter stood irresolute. Then the thought of the black night and the sound of the rain on the roof and the memory of those tins of food decided him. "No, Mosheshoe," he said, "we can't go to-night. We stay here. There's food in the store and candles and blankets; we'll take what we want. Then we'll nail up the door and camp down here in this second room. It's the cleaner. You sweep it while I get the candles. If it wasn't for the rain, I'd use the tent," he added, walking off.

They did not fare so badly. They even found some bales of fodder by the wool-stack, and the remains of a building that had once been a stable. Together they made the ponies comfortable. Then they looted the store, and Peter made a duplicate list of all they took at once, pocketing one, leaving another in the till. With boards and nails and the old sheets of iron they secured the door against any but a very noisy assault, and in the swept room of the dwelling-house, a packing-case covered with a blanket for a table, they fed royally. Mosheshoe made a fire on the mud floor of the other room, where fires were plainly wont to be made. And while the kettle boiled, Peter made up his bed on the iron trestle with his own blankets on top of a couple from the store, and actually found, as he moved the trestle, a novel on the floor. It contained stories by Jack London of the South Seas.

After supper Mosheshoe washed up and was ready for bed. Peter, smoking and reading desultorily, stretched out on his blankets, watched him contentedly with half an eye.

"This is none too bad, Mosheshoe," he said.

"No, morena, but what we do in the morning?"

"I'll stay here, while you ride to the nearest chief and fetch him. It looks to me as if he ought to have known already, though. Still, he can't shirk responsibility. That'd be a Government job."

"Eh, morena. Shall I shut the door now, moren'?"

Peter glanced out. The night had cleared a bit and he could see stars framed in the door-space. It was very still and he did not fancy being boxed up in that filthy hole. "No, Mosheshoe," he said. "Leave it open. There's more air, and I like to see the stars."

"Eh, morena."

The boy came over, removed his coat, arranged his blankets in the corner, fumbled in his pockets and got out a rosary. He invariably used it, Peter noticed, when alone with him, and as invariably Peter took no notice. But to-night he watched contentedly.

“What are you going to say?” he asked lazily.

“Sorrowful Mysteries, morena.”

“Oh,” said Peter. “Good-night.”

“Good-night, morena. Sleep well.”

“Sleep well,” said Peter.

He lay still staring into the night. The Sorrowful Mysteries. His thoughts began to move. They came easily to the harbour crucifix at Dieppe and he got out his letter to Julie to re-read. Before he was finished he was half asleep, and he dropped the folded sheets on his coat by his bed and blew out the light.

He was almost instantly asleep. They both were utterly weary. Odd dreams began to race in Peter’s mind, dreams that were compounded of the Berg, Julie, and Jack London’s stories of the dynamiting of fish in the South Seas. He was in a canoe with Julie, and Jack London, who looked exactly like Jeffries, was lighting the fuse of a stick of dynamite to throw overboard. Suddenly Peter knew that it would hurt Julie if it was fired. He leaned frantically over to seize Jack London’s arm and—crash!

He was instantly awake, deafened, shattered by the concussion, dazed. He knew he was awake; then what had happened? The dynamite had exploded; no, that was a dream. What then? A rifle? But—and then he saw a figure framed in the door.

“Who is it?” he demanded, and in the instant of speaking saw more. The man held a firearm at the old trail position and was peering into the room. Far quicker than it can be written, Peter thought of matches, reached for, but could not find them; thought of his sjambok and knew it left in the other room; thought of his heavy riding-boots and knew them at the foot of his bed, just within the door. A plan formulated itself. He leapt from his bed, his eyes on the rifle, took the two or three paces that would bring him to his boots, stooped for one. He would grasp it, fling it, and close with the assailant thus confused, unless the rifle went to the shoulder, in which case he must dodge——

And then the man fired from his hip at that stooping figure no more than a yard away.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1

The shooting of Peter, from the first shot which, in point of fact, missed by a few inches and had been fired at him as he lay in bed, until the second, which crumpled him up in the doorway, had only occupied a few moments of time. Mosheshoe, aroused with his master by the first explosion, had not, as his master, been so quick to act, for a Mosuto in an emergency is invariably, as it were, paralyzed at first; but when he saw Peter fall he did not hesitate. He sprang from his pile of blankets across the floor, threw himself over the huddled body, and with a single effort, dragging Peter with one hand slightly out of the way, he pushed the door to with the other. He had acted instinctively, but better than he knew, for, as it appeared, their assailant did not know that there had been anyone with the white man in the house. Taken himself by surprise, the door was shut upon him before he had had time to face the fresh contingency.

Within it was now completely dark. Mosheshoe, crouched on the floor, was trying hard to think what he must do, cautiously feeling his master's body the while. It lay on one side, the right leg doubled completely beneath it, the thigh twisted horribly. Blood dyed the boy's fingers as he felt. "Jesu, Maria; Jesu, Maria!" he breathed rapidly in his childish agony of anticipation.

And then Peter spoke, low and faint, but spoke. Mosheshoe's heart seemed to stand still with gladness. The assailant, without the flimsy door, was forgotten. In the dark the breath caught in his throat.

"Help me," whispered Peter, "to—sit up."

The boy put his arms about the man and felt the body in them nerve itself for movement. Peter turned over, bent himself forward a little, fumbled at his leg, straightening it, in fact, and then leaned back on the other's chest for a moment, choking back little sobs of pain. But only for a second. "Prop me—with—saddle," he whispered.

Mosheshoe reached behind and felt for his master's saddle, there, by the side of the door. He drew it carefully forward, the little chink of metal as he did so sounding so loud in the night, and got it behind the wounded man's back. Peter leaned back into it.

"That—will do—nicely," the faint voice went on. "Now—take off—stirrup." The Mosuto perceived the plan on the instant. The steel stirrup, detached from the saddle and swung in the hand by its leather strap, would make a formidable weapon, at least the best to hand. He was quick and deft enough the moment he understood. He groped for and found his own saddle in preference to attempting to move the other's again; he detached a stirrup and wound the leather strap about his arm; he rose silently to his bare feet and stood there, tense, with the steel hanging, his teeth set, himself again. And so they remained, listening, interminably, waiting for they knew not what—probably an attempt to force the door, and then the uneven fight. . . .

Peter himself lay very still, waiting for death. He had not any doubt that this was the end. He was perfectly conscious, almost miraculously so, his mind seeing clearly, working quickly. By whom they had been attacked he did not know; why, he could scarcely guess; but he barely thought of that. Surely the man without would either force an entrance or fire through the door from where he stood outside—outside there in the moonlight that Peter could almost see, such was the clarity of his mind, shining so serenely on mountain and vale. Sooner or later he would attempt one or the other, and either way the end was surely inevitable. If the former, what could Mosheshoe do with a stirrup iron against a rifle, hampered as he was by the confined space and his master's form at his feet? and if the latter, why then, he, Peter, who knew that that one effort of straightening his limb had been the last that he could make, now that the immediate spur for action was over, must surely stop the bullets with his body. No. This, then, was the climax. It was as if (he saw now) parting from Julie, he had gone out to the leaping mind-horror of battle in France, to the dull soul-agony of Qathlamba, and now finally to this torture of his throbbing maimed body, which must usher in the end. He was so stricken that he did not really care. He closed his eyes and leaned back, partly on the saddle, partly on one hand. He could not even pray. Perhaps Jenks had been like this, all one pain. . . . Poor old Jenks—Peter understood that incident in the train better now. Jenks had been jolly brave, really. He wasn't brave: the leaping agony of pain stabbed so, through and through, through and through. . . . If only the man would make haste. . . .

And then through the dark came the clatter of horse hoofs riding furiously. Mind and body leaped at the sound, involuntarily. It grew fainter; it died out on the night. Silence again.

"Morena"—the Mosuto was whispering—"you not dead? Morena?"

"No," whispered back Peter, "not yet. Why—doesn't—he—fire?"

"I think he gone, morena. I go to see."

"It—may have been—his friend," replied Peter feebly. He would like the door opened himself, if only to make an end, but there was Mosheshoe: he must warn the boy against the attempt. "Better—wait—a bit," he said.

Silence again.

It was so hot, Peter thought, in the hut—hot and stuffy. His body was on fire. There were little flashes of light before his eyes. He moved his fingers blindly, dumbly, and touched blood, hot and sticky. His mind burned too. . . . After all this, to die up here, alone. . . . But it did not matter really. He deserved it. God had a perfect right to take this—this—what was the word he had used to Jack? yes, expiation. Not for Julie, exactly: it was all right, somehow or other, about her. She was so good—God would see to that. No, *he* was wrong: he hadn't loved God. That was it: he hadn't *loved* God. Not at all, really. (He moved his head wearily.) Well, now, all this pain, he offered it, anyway. If only the man would make haste. . . .

"Morena." Mosheshoe was speaking again. "He's gone; I'm sure he's gone. I expect he came to finish steal, saw you, thought he'd kill you. Now he frightened; he gone; I open door, morena."

"All—right," whispered Peter. It was extraordinary how clearly he could think and speak. "Step—over me—carefully—Mo-Moshesh"—he must finish it—"Mosheshoe."

The boy moved a little forward and Peter felt his hand. It passed over his leg and reached the door. The wood grated on the mud floor. With a louder creak the bright moonlight shewed in a white panel all down the side. He was in the way; he moved a little, and caught his breath with the agony of it. Another pull and the door was wide. Mosheshoe sprang across him, steel uplifted. Peter looked out under him. The peaceful radiance of the moon flooded the scene—store and yard and valley. And there was not a thing that moved.

"He gone, morena." Mosheshoe was triumphant.

Peter managed to smile at him, his eyes bright: the boy would be all right. But he himself was not to die quickly then. He would have to be moved; there would be native aid—rough, unskilled—oh, he saw it all. It would be a sort of slow passion; yes, a passion, like Christ's passion,—slow, slow, but of course, certain. He flinched physically and involuntarily at the thought, and pain surged through him on the moment like a flood of fire. He

caught his breath, gasping pitifully a little, and the moonlight, Mosheshoe, the Berg, faded away.

2

Peter came to his senses a little later with the tang of spirits in his mouth; that passion had begun. It was still night, but candles were lit in the room, and Mosheshoe was bending over him with the pocket-flask of spirit, carried in reserve in anticipation of extremities less than this, in his hand. The boy's eyes were bright with solicitude and affection. But Peter, looking into them, knew that he, the white man, wounded as he was, must take charge, must direct, must plan. Ah yes, the passion had begun.

He gathered all his strength: he was to need every ounce of it for seven intolerable days.

"Nobody about?" he asked Mosheshoe.

"No, morena."

"Well, let's see where I got it," he said, smiling faintly.

Propped up by the Mosuto he tried to examine himself. The bullet had entered his right leg above the knee, obviously ricochetted from the thigh-bone, shattering it completely, and passed out high up on the left side, driving a splinter of bone before it. It had caught him as he bent to pick up his boot, and a trifle higher would have gone through the stomach. Sufficiently badly wounded as he was, it turned Peter sick to realize what a stomach wound would have meant under these conditions. As it was, despite the pain, the swelling, the completely shattered bone, hæmorrhage had all but ceased, and it was obvious that the danger lay chiefly in unskilled treatment. The effect of the shock upon him, the chances of mortification, of fever, of tetanus, he could not and did not try to estimate. The main problem, and first, was communication with white men; the rest must wait. "Mosheshoe," he said, leaning back faintly, "you must go for help. That's plain. I'm all right for the time being, but every hour probably matters. What do you suggest?"

"Suppose man come back? Can't leave you, morena," objected Mosheshoe.

"He won't," said Peter. "He's scared and gone."

The boy shook his head. "Can't leave morena alone by night," he said obstinately.

Peter was too ill to argue. “Well, at dawn then,” he said. “Question is, where?”

“Mokhotlong nearest police,” said Mosheshoe. “Morena Cathcart there.”

“How far?”

“Ride fast day and night, one day p’rhaps.”

Peter nodded feebly. After a while, he bade the boy give him a knife and he cut the leg of his pyjamas a little from the wound, putting strips of material from a clean shirt, soaked in water, over the thigh. There was nothing else to do. The night through they kept vigil. Nothing stirred. Peter, physically in good condition, regained a little personal strength in the long hours, though he scarcely realized it. He was only fully conscious fitfully—now stirred by cold, now by fresh pain. The boy moved softly about, lit a fire, made him comfortable with blankets, made tea. Towards dawn Peter demanded a writing-block and scribbled a brief note to Cathcart, while the Mosuto saddled a horse.

“Dear Cathcart,

“I’ve been shot, I think by a thief, at the store near Makhoa’s which we found empty last night. Can’t move or be moved easily. Will you try to get a doctor and come yourself? Hurry; I don’t know how long I can stick it.

“Yours,

“P. Graham.”

Then he summoned energy to give directions. “Here, Mosheshoe,” he said, “here’s a note for Morena Cathcart. You must ride like hell to Makhoa’s, and make the chief send a man to Mokhotlong. The Government will punish him if he doesn’t do all he can. The man must have orders from the chief to get fresh horses on the way and go as fast as he can. Then you come back to me. Tell the chief to send chickens and a sheep; we must have food. I shall be safe enough now. Oh, and the chief ought to send out men to see if he can catch the fellow who attacked us. See? Go now, there’s a good chap.” The speech exhausted him.

Mosheshoe wasted no words. He put the full kettle of tea near Peter and, pathetically, an opened tin of bully-beef and some stale bread lest he should be hungry. He fetched his master’s sjambok and laid it within reach in case a wandering dog might trouble him. He blocked the door breast high with the pack-saddles, for Peter could not bear being closed in wholly. The throbbing

was intolerable, and it seemed to the wounded man that there might be a hæmorrhage or some complication, and he did not want to die alone in the dark in that filthy hole. He asked for and was given a basin of clean water and a few more strips of shirt, and then once more he bade Mosheshoe go.

The boy seized his hand. "Oh, morena, morena, God help you!" he cried in Sesuto, turned, leapt into the saddle and disappeared in the faint light.

Lying there just within the half-blocked doorway, Peter could only see sky and a distant mountain top. He lay quite still, occasionally sipping tea, for sometimes he felt sick, and he watched the slow dawn without much thought. There was no use in thought just now. He could do no more; he was too weary to think. He scarcely weighed up his chances. This was the end for a while, anyway. He had told Julie that he had been knocked about. Well, now he was knocked right out.

Mosheshoe was not away more than a couple of hours, and Peter was enormously relieved by his return. The Chief Makhoa had ridden back with him, and the two burly natives tiptoed in in a clumsy childish way, so that Peter had even to smile his relief. He could not and did not talk much, but he pieced together in his mind the meaning of the attack. The Dutchman of the store had been apparently "no good." He was quarrelsome and a heavy drinker. Consequently he was lonely and trade was bad. That week, after a drunken fit, his boys had left him. The day before Peter's arrival, he had locked up, saddled his horse, abandoned the store and cleared for the Lesuto, Makhoa said. Apparently someone—possibly one of his own boys—with a grudge against him, had seen him go and had broken into the store. Makhoa imagined that this boy had returned at night to finish the job, carrying the white man's rifle. Finding the store shut and seeing a man asleep in the house, he had probably concluded that the storekeeper had returned, supposed him alone, knew that he could not reopen the store without awakening him, and had attempted an easy murder. The discovery of two men had frightened him and he had not risked a fight. In point of fact, that was the simple truth.

Well, now they must wait for Cathcart. Peter had himself shifted a little back into the house—a few feet—for it began to rain in upon him as he lay in the doorway, and despite the pain he got into a slightly more comfortable position with blankets beneath him. Thereafter, he was hardly conscious again for some hours. When he was again aware of things, Mosheshoe was sitting by him, and he found that a kind of invisible guard had been established outside the hut. Mosheshoe never left him. He would go to the door and ask in a low voice for water or tea or chicken when he wanted

Peter to eat, and someone would clump off and ultimately return with it. There were occasional arrivals, and once Makhoa looked in, only to be waved away by Mosheshoe. Towards night Peter was feverish and fell into a dread of the dark. A big fire was lit outside the house, so that through the doorway Peter could see the glow, while within they had a succession of candles. The native crouched on the floor and would not move to seek his own rest. Peter was a little delirious, though he did not know it, and talked of Stenhouse, of Jeffries, and of Julie to Mosheshoe. The heavy clumsy boy was as gentle as a woman. "Eh, morena," he would say soothingly, and take Peter's hand in his. That started Peter off on another tack.

"Mosheshoe, you won't leave me? I couldn't bear that store without you. I've got to stay, you see. The Berg keeps me. Oh, but it keeps you, too, in a way, doesn't it? No use mutinying against the Berg, is it, eh? No, we'll stay, Mosheshoe. But Julie mustn't come up. No, no, not Julie. Stenhouse might —might—Mosheshoe, promise me, promise, Julie shan't come up—she shan't, shall she?"

"Eh, morena. *Lala hantle, morena.* It all right, morena."

"And we'll stay together, eh, Mosheshoe? You and I, till—till—oh, what were we waiting for? Julie, what was I waiting for? Oh, I know, till we've learned the lesson. That's it, of course. The Berg's lesson. We'll wait, eh, Mosheshoe?"

"Eh, morena. I stay with you all the time, morena. Sleep now, morena."

In the morning, over and over again, not conscious of the repetition, Peter asked if Cathcart had come. In the afternoon the Mosuto had an idea and sent for the chief. Thereafter they despatched horses along the road the white officer would come, that he might have no difficulty in finding a succession of fresh mounts. But the day seemed endless. And if the day, how much more the night! Nevertheless Peter slept a little. He awoke to find Cathcart bending over him and the dawn stealing into the shack, lighting the mud walls and floor, still scarcely strong enough to fade the candles. For the first time Peter saw hope. He stretched out a hand. "Cathcart? You've come? Thank God, oh, thank God!" He could not help that. . . .

For all that, it was fifty hours since the shooting, and nothing had been done; moreover, now that he had come, Cathcart could do little. But his very presence was medicine to Peter. He was strong, capable, in authority, white; moreover, once relieved to find Peter alive, he was enormously cheerful.

“Of course I’ve come, you old rotter. Gad, and what I want is breakfast! Your messenger interrupted mine yesterday, and I haven’t waited long enough to boil a kettle since. But I’m going to have one now, and what’s more, you’re going to eat with me. No nonsense. You can manage an egg and some toast and tea, eh?”

“By Jove!” said Peter, smiling faintly, “so I could. Two eggs, perhaps. I slept a bit last night, and it’s all right now you’ve come.”

“Well, old thing, they’re cooking the toast, and meantime I want a glance at that leg. I brought my first-aid case along and I dare say we can do something.”

Bobbie Cathcart saw soon enough that he could do practically nothing, but he did not say so. With his little forceps he removed the fragment of bone sticking out from the leg without difficulty, and he bathed the whole limb in permanganate and warm water. He got it lightly wrapped in lint, and he washed Peter’s face and neck and put him into a clean shirt. He had him packed in a quantity of blankets from the store, till, as he said, he was as good as in a feather bed. But he did not attempt to move him and he had his own grim doubt about that possibility.

More comfortable than he had yet been, Peter ate his breakfast and smoked a cigarette. “When do you expect the doctor?” he demanded.

“Well, old bean, give us a chance. We’ve no telegraph at Mokhotlong, you know. Good old British Government! But I sent off a trooper with orders to commandeer horses and ride like Hades for Qacha’s Nek. Stevenson’s there, or, if not, they can ’phone Natal, get a car through to Himeville in no time, and send the blighter up the Sani. That’s the quickest thing. He could get from Himeville to Mokhotlong in a day, and in a day from Mokhotlong to here. So he won’t be long. And meantime you can take it easy.”

Peter did not try to work it out. He gave a sigh of relief. “Oh yes,” he said; “it’s all right now you’re here.”

“Sure thing,” laughed the other, his heart in his boots. There were possible weather delays, there, were such things as lamed horses, there were doctors who couldn’t ride, there were——But he would not think of such things.

As day succeeded day, Peter thought of them, however, and more especially as night succeeded night. The humour of the situation was too grim. They had three books: Jack London’s South Sea Tales, and his own

Matthew Arnold and copy of Keats. One doesn't take a library on trek. Cathcart offered to read to him, but Peter could not bear the first, and his friend went to sleep over the others. They played piquet till Peter could have screamed at the sight of a card. They talked of the war, of patrols and of hunts till the wounded man was sick of it. And they sat silent perforce at times, only to catch each other in surreptitious glances which gave outlet to their anxiety.

And all the time Peter was in pain. By night, especially, he would lie for hours striving not to allow the menacing shadows to threaten him, going over the past, unravelling a little. He was perplexed at his own attitude. It was obvious, for example, that Qathlamba was removed from the region of the possible, whether he would or no, for many a long day, even if the best came to the very best, and a week ago Peter would have hailed that consummation of his purgatory with delight. Yet now, lying there stricken in the dark, or by day, the country shut from his vision on the floor, mud walls about him, Cathcart for his companion, he knew that there was something he would miss. The months had done more for him than he knew. He felt that what he had seen from Devil's Peak the first night of his arrival in Africa had become strangely true. There was a veil hung before him up here; the Berg, the flowers, the rocks and grass, the natives and their villages, the occasional birds, the quality of the sunshine, the fall of the rain, all composed it. All this time, why, it was this he had been realizing! And—and this shot through his feverish hours and came to him delirious—that curtain had been about to lift. Was he not now to be given time to see?

Or he remembered Gwen and that talk with her at Viewberg. He babbled of it in his restless sleep, to Cathcart's surprise. "Oh, of course, you were right, Miss—Miss"—he could not remember her name—"Gwen. Sorry to call you Gwen, but I don't remember. . . . But it doesn't matter, does it? It's so little. We're all so little. The Berg's so big, as you say. It's big, big, big, big as—as—Gwen, what is the Berg as big as? What did you say? No, I remember you didn't say. You didn't know. . . . . Only it stands for, it stands for . . . Julie! Julie! What does the Range stand for? Gwen says . . ." And so on, endlessly.

For five days they waited, with no news. Then, on the fifth day, a mounted trooper clattered into the little camp. Cathcart was out in a moment to see him, and returned all excitement. "The doc.'s quite close," he cried, "half an hour away. How do you feel, old thing? I think it'd be best for me to go and meet him. Mosheshoe will sit with you. I shan't be off an hour, and then he'll be here to make you comfortable. What say?"

“Rather,” said Peter weakly. “Tell him I’m all right. He’s not to hurry too much.”

“Aye, aye,” laughed Cathcart, “that’s all right. Keep your pecker up. Cheerio.”

Mosheshoe came in and sat by him. Peter was restless. He sent him to the door again and again. And at long last: “They come, morena. They come over the hill.”

“Now for it, then,” whispered Peter. “What’ll he say, Mosheshoe? That—that—I’m finished? That I’ll never walk again? That—that—I must have . . .” But he could not go on.

“Doctor make morena quite well soon,” smiled the boy, with cheerful confidence.

Peter lay back on his blankets, listening. It was so still outside. He heard a dog bark. A man threw a stone at it. Ah, what was that? Clatter of horse hoofs. Voices. “Where is he?” asked someone—and the blood drained from Peter’s face.

“In that room,” said Cathcart, and added in a low tone—how could they know how supernaturally one hears, lying like that for days and nights on end?—“think we’d better break it to him that you’re here?”

With an effort Peter sat forward on his blankets. “Julie! Julie!” he cried, careless of them all.

The girl outside choked back her emotion. She swept a hand across her eyes. It mattered little that she could scarcely stand for fatigue, that she had ridden for forty-eight hours as many a man could not ride, that her breeches and riding-boots were soaked and muddy, and that her feet ached intolerably within. With long steps she strode to the door, riding-whip still in her hand. “Why, old Peter,” she cried, “you’re a fine old rotter, I must say! What do you mean by this, eh?”

The two men without exchanged glances. Cathcart took Anson by the arm. “Come to my tent, Doc.,” he said, “and have a whisky. Five minutes won’t make any difference.” And as they turned away: “By the way, who is the girl?”

“As fine a woman as God ever made, Cathcart, and I’ve seen a few.”

3

“Right,” said Dr. Anson; “he’s off now, Sister.”

Julie, Peter's head on her knees, held the chloroform to his mouth and nose, and Anson knelt beside him. Cathcart, pressed into the service, stood just behind holding a basin, lint, a sponge. Everything was extemporized, rough and ready; what else could it be? With swift fingers the doctor removed the lint and exposed the swollen discoloured torn thigh. "I kept it bathed with permanganate," said Cathcart apologetically; "that's all I could do."

Anson grunted. He felt and probed a little, occasionally reaching for a swab. But he had finished his examination almost as soon as he had begun, shrugging his shoulders with a gesture that Julie understood and which went to her heart. "Lint," he said nonchalantly to Cathcart, and rebandaged the limb. Then he raised himself, and stood there a minute looking down at the unconscious man, plainly at a loss. But only for a minute. "Cathcart," he said, "send that boy in to sit by him. He'll be all right for a bit. And you two come outside. Whatever we do, we three have got to do it. And, I suppose, the ultimate decision's mine. Still I want to know some practical details."

The afternoon sun shone brightly outside. The store lay cupped in the hills, remote and alone, and it struck Julie how small they three were as they walked a little distance to some rocks and she sat down upon them. The two men remained standing. Nothing was said as they went.

Anson took out a pocket-knife and began methodically to pare his nails. Cathcart watched him, hands in his pockets, with the ignorance of a layman. Julie, who partly guessed what Anson was about to say, turned her face to the distant hills.

"Well," began the doctor at last; but he stopped. Finally, however, he made up his mind and shut up his knife with a snap. "Look here," he said, "there's no use hiding it; we're in the devil of a hole. That fellow's smashed up pretty badly. What's wanted is the X-ray, an operating-table, expert massage, I expect, plaster of Paris, a decent bed, an extension, day and night nursing, to say nothing of medicine and food. And I've practically nothing here."

He stopped. Neither of the others spoke. Then, to Cathcart: "What's at Qacha's Nek?"

"Qacha's Nek!" exclaimed Cathcart, staring at him. The officer saw in a flash the trail there and the primitive little camp at the end of it. Then he laughed without merriment. "A couple of huts—no, of course, they could put him up in a house. But there's no hospital. Plaster of Paris, perhaps."

Anson looked at him grimly. “Well,” he said, “I scarcely know where we are. What’s the nearest hospital?”

Cathcart thought hard, and spoke his thoughts. “As the crow flies, something over on the Free State side, I suppose,” he said. “But it’s early yet. There are about five rivers in flood in between, and we could get practically nothing across them. I didn’t even send to them: we’re practically cut off. After that—well, after that, Grey’s, I suppose.”

Anson uttered an exclamation.

Cathcart shrugged his shoulders. “Well, Doctor, this is about as remote as anything in South Africa. You don’t understand. There isn’t even a road worth the name.”

“My God!” said Anson simply.

Julie turned her head sharply. “Doctor, you don’t mean——”

He threw out his hands. “Sister,” he said, “there are only two alternatives. I must amputate here, at once, or we must carry him to—to Grey’s apparently. If I amputate—and you know what we’ve got to do it with—it means weeks, at any rate, in that hut, at this altitude. What sort of comforts can we get him, what food? Who’s going to nurse him? I can’t stay ——”

“I can.”

“You? Alone with savages?”

Julie smiled grimly. “Doctor, you don’t know natives. I do. The Basuto aren’t savages. As if it would matter a damn if they were.”

Their eyes met. “Yes,” he said gruffly, “you could stay. He might pull through. He might not.”

Julie looked away again. She was a nurse. She understood.

It was Cathcart who broke the silence. “Stevenson would come up,” he said, “and, though we’ve never had women here, I dare say one of them might try, from the Nek.”

Anson ignored him. “The point is,” he said, half to himself, “given a chance, I believe we could save the limb. I should like to try, anyway. If we got him down the Sani, we could put him in an ambulance car at Himeville, right away.”

"If," said Cathcart. "Good God, Doctor, how can we get him to the Sani, let alone down the pass?"

Anson considered him. "Well," he said, "I suppose we can get native bearers. We could break up planks for a stretcher, and go slowly. I would go with him, of course."

"But the path," cried Cathcart. "You know what it's like. It's rough going on a pony; with a stretcher——" He broke off. "It would give him hell," he added.

"I could strap him tightly, and I've morphia. It's rough, of course, but a lot of it isn't so bad. The Sani's the rub. If we could get him over that."

"Ask the chief," interrupted Julie suddenly.

They glanced at her. "Good idea," said Cathcart, and, turning towards the camp, he shouted: "Makhoa!"

"Eh, morena."

In a few minutes the native joined them, and Cathcart questioned him in Sesuto. He was plainly surprised, even, native-like, amused. The others watched, not understanding. At last Cathcart turned to them.

"He says it could be done," he said. "He'll find the men—fifty, he says—and they will take it in turns, carry food, make the camps, and so on. Some'll go in front and prepare the way a bit. He thinks it would take about a week to get down, though."

"A week!" Julie could not suppress the exclamation.

"Yes," said Anson thoughtfully, understanding the meaning of her cry, "can he stand it?" And again silence fell on the three of them.

The native regarded them incuriously. It was impossible to know what he was thinking. A fine healthy animal, without imagination, he was doubtless regarding the occasion, in all probability, as a kind of joke. Anson was considering it already in a scientific light, weighing the chances, inclining, professionally, to take the risks. Cathcart, tapping his boot with his pipe, was mainly thankful that the decision did not rest with him, and was just (but profoundly) "sorry for the poor devil." Only Julie understood, and she, perhaps, since we are all for ever alone and out of each other's reach or real understanding, only in part. But she knew Peter as these others did not know him. She knew his power of imagination, his religious sense; and, knowing, she dreaded for him, and yet hoped.

"We'll risk it," said Anson suddenly.

Cathcart recoiled from the decision. "But, Doctor——" he cried.

Dr. Anson lifted his hand. "I must decide," he said. "I do not change my mind."

Julie stood up. "May I tell him?" she asked quietly.

Anson studied her face a moment. Then he nodded.

She walked slowly back to the shack, turning over in her mind what she should say. They had hung a blanket over the entrance for the examination of Peter's wound, and this she held back, passing into the shadow from the light outside. She was at once aware, first, of Peter's breathing, still heavy, the breathing of the unnaturally unconscious, and of the tang of chloroform in the air. That aroused her nurse's instinct. Then she saw Mosheshoe, squatting the other side of the pile of blankets, motionless. Something in the boy's attitude spoke to her. She was subconsciously aware that he was stricken in some sense as she herself was stricken, but that he was frightened too, in his own way, not understanding that heavy breathing, that sickly scent, that conference of the three white folk. Squatting there, the immemorial native, in his heavy ugly European clothes; watching there, in native fashion, but as others bade him, strong but helpless, tender but clumsy; Mosheshoe, for his part, saw her come in out of the sun, and, as subconsciously as she, understood her. He got up, his eyes questioning her.

"He still sleeps?" queried Julie, low-voiced.

"Eh, *mofumahali*."

"Well, that's good, Mosheshoe. Let's clear the room a little, get rid of this smell, see? You go and make a cup of good tea, boil water ready for when I call. I do this."

He smiled eagerly, for she was already busy with quick deft hands, looping back the blanket to let in the sun and air, folding, tidying; but he did not at once go out. Instead he fumbled in his pockets and produced some folded sheets of paper. He glanced at them for a moment to assure himself, and then took a pace or two towards her and held out the packet. "A letter for you, *mofumahali*," he said.

"For me? From whom?"

"Morena wrote it. After he shot, I found it on the floor. When you come, he call you Julie. And this for Julie."

Julie took the sheets, glanced at and thrust them into her own pocket. “Thanks, Mosheshoe,” she said gaily, “and now go and make that tea. He may wake any moment, and want it.”

Alone, she did not at once read: the prospect was too good. She would finish her work. She lifted his head and straightened the folded blankets that did duty for pillow. She felt his pulse and placed some water by his side ready for use. And then she sat down and read what he had written at Nkau’s. She finished before he awoke, and was sitting very still when he stirred.

He opened his eyes, in them the blissful ignorance for a moment still of the anæsthetic, and they rested on her. For a second he was puzzled. Then—she could see—he remembered dimly and returned instantly to pain.

“Julie, darling,” he whispered, “how topping of you to come.”

He was as yet indifferent to the questions of how or of why. She had come, and the troubled soul in the pain-racked body only knew that it was glad.

She put her hand on his head. “Of course I came, you old darling,” she said, “quite glad to get a decent job again! But it’s like you to be such a silly ass as to stop a bullet up here, when you had a dozen chances in France and never took one. I’d have had you in my power in next to no time there as like as not, but here——Why even now, we’ve got to carry you down to Grey’s before we can make you really comfortable.”

It was said so easily that he merely smiled faintly, as she wished him to do.

“I’ve got you, anyway,” he said. “That’s all that matters.”

“Does it? What about a cup of tea, eh? Wouldn’t that matter? And I’m going to sponge your face first, old thing.”

Peter moved his head a little. “That would be nice,” he said. Then he began to remember more distinctly. “What did the doctor say, Julie,” he asked.

“He’s going to fix you up as good as ever. Don’t you worry. Half a moment: let me open that shirt.”

“He won’t have to amputate? Truth, Julie.”

“Almost certainly not. Of course, he wants you X-rayed, but I’ve seen worse than you, my boy, patched up in France.”

"Good." While she bathed him, he lay still. Mosheshoe came in with the tea, and he even laughed a little at his serious face. "Hullo, Mosheshoe. I'm in good hands now. They'll make me as fit as a fiddle, old son. I say, Julie, you don't know Mosheshoe. He's—he's topping. He's my friend."

Julie nodded. "Ah, but I know him, Peter," she said. "We're friends already, eh, Mosheshoe?"

The Mosuto grinned. Then, all unconsciously, he precipitated the realization she had been avoiding. "I give her morena's letter," he said. And went out.

Peter set down his cup of tea and stared at Julie. Appreciable seconds passed. In his eyes there began to dawn complete remembrance of the past months and days, and the light of that imagination that she dreaded. Before it, she, Julie, was for once at a loss. She could do nothing; she could say nothing; she took his hand, and bowed her head a little and knew herself utterly tired. She took her lip between her teeth, unable to speak, instant only in resolution not to give way. But the tears flooded her eyes.

He spoke slowly at last. "You are going to carry me down to Grey's," he said.

She guessed all that lay hid in that sentence, guessed, since she had read his letter. She nodded and made a supreme effort. "You'll go easy, old thing, and Dr. Anson's a great hand at padding folk up. Don't worry about it."

He lay back, stroking her hand. "Ah, but don't you see," he said, speaking as if he thought aloud, "I hadn't realized. . . . It's finishing, up here—Qathlamba and all that. I'll never come back, I'm sure. Finishing with—with—with my being carried down, like this. Down to you, where I started. And—and—I'm not sure that I've learned the lesson yet, Julie."

Something rather like fear swept over her. It was all so fantastic, this story of her and Peter, and it was growing more fantastic still. But she knew suddenly that the fantasy was real. And she was out of it. It was he, Peter, who was in the grip of some great power, and he was being wrested from her. In London he had been so weak, such a child, such a silly dear old Peter, and she had been strong for him, understanding him. But she herself had hardly understood the things she had said. Here, in this remote shack, the declining sun glowing on the mud walls, she saw with something of true spiritual knowledge. There was a new note of finality in his voice. He was no longer drifting. He knew that he was being moved by more than Dr. Anson's decision, and he knew that there was reason in it. And he even

conceived of some grotesque ghastly plan in his going down to her. And now it was Julie, not Peter, who protested.

"Peter," she cried, "oh, Peter, don't, don't speak like that. You're imagining it all. There's nobody knocking you about. It's just bad luck your finding Qathlamba so terrible, and this shooting and so on. But it's practically over. And—and at Grey's—Peter, surely——" But she couldn't speak her heart. "We'll make you comfortable and well in no time, Peter."

He detached his hand from hers and folded hers in his, stroking it. "Poor little Julie. And you tired out, too. Rest a bit, Julie."

And because she was so tired, so they stayed, while the minutes passed, while the sickle reaped inexorably and the harvesting came on apace.

But before the others returned Peter began to speak again, slowly. "You mustn't worry about me, Julie. . . . Of course, it's bound to hurt a lot, this getting down to Grey's, but I can stand anything now . . . I can really. You don't know how strong I am now, my dear. . . . I understand why, too. I can bear being knocked about. . . . You see, Julie, the actual knocking about doesn't matter in the least. In the end you learn that it doesn't matter, except as a kind of experience. . . . Don't you see how the Berg teaches you that? . . . So big and silent and patient. . . . The knocking about is just part of the process of getting to understand, just as trekking up and down, in cold and wet and heat, hungry and tired and just occasionally very very happy, is all part of the process of getting to understand the Berg. It's only the Berg that worries me a bit still. . . . No, that is wrong. Why, Julie, I've gone ever so far since I wrote you that letter! It doesn't worry me any longer. I'm sure that I'm going to understand."

Julie forgot that she was nurse. She stared at him wild-eyed, and the words knew no check. "But, Peter, I don't, I don't! I can't see things like that. I haven't it in me, Peter. Peter, you're going from me, that's all that I can see. . . . Don't let me go, Peter!" And she buried her face in her hands.

And then Peter, though the movement jarred his thigh and brought on sickening pain, leaned forward slowly, very slowly, for he couldn't move fast—forward, bit by bit, till his lips rested on her hair.

She looked up slowly, wonder and a new joy in her eyes. But in the moment she saw his face, drawn and white, and all the nurse in her, all the Julie in her, leaped to the surface. The hands that gripped him were very firm and cool. The voice that spoke had no tremor. The lips even laughed a little. "How dare you," she said. "Peter, lie down. You're not to move, do

you hear? Good Lord, sir, do you forget that I'm your nurse? Here, drink this." And she laid him back on the blankets and gave him a dose of the medicine Anson had prepared. The colour came back to his face. Ten minutes later, when the doctor looked in, he slept again. She held up a warning finger.

4

Speed, as far as possible, was a necessity, and, at any rate, the preparations for the journey to the hospital could be quickly made. That afternoon Makhoa had gone off to issue instructions and consult with a brother chief. The next day cut willows were brought in and under Anson's instructions planed and bound into a stretcher of sorts. Food was provided and packed, and a first party sent on to prepare the road. Bearers from some distance arrived, bringing remounts and their own food. The wounded man was kept informed of the progress of things, chiefly by Julie, for, in truth, it was not possible to keep the sinister sound of them from him. Yet she would not allow him to think for a moment that it was sinister. And, indeed, now that the decision was made, now that they knew that here, at least, they were not to have to suffer more, the little party were more gay than any of them had been for a long time. They even discussed arrangements: that Peter was to be carried shoulder-high, that Dr. Anson should ride immediately behind, that Julie (Peter insisted) should ride in front. Cathcart was to be well in advance on the road. The stretcher was not to be screened, because Peter would not lie in the semi-dark with the country shut out. And concerning that, he and Julie had a little conversation.

"You see," he said, "what shall I do all day? Conversation won't be possible. How the bearers will keep abreast on the path, I don't know, but certainly nobody else will be able to. And I can't shout at you or Anson. Besides, perhaps I shan't want to talk."

Julie choked back the emotion that would come so easily these days. No, indeed, he wouldn't want to talk. . . . But she laughed. "And a jolly good thing for you, too! You talk too much, old dear."

He smiled. "And I'd like to watch the old Berg for the last time."

"Well, you shall. What next?"

"There is one thing, Julie. Don't think me a fool. Ask Mosheshoe to lend me his beads. I've seen him saying them over and over again, and I've a stupid notion that it might sort of give me something to do—sort of anodyne, you know, the repetition. . . ."

Julie turned away. “I’ll send him,” she said.

The boy came in. “Mosheshoe, will you lend me your beads while I’m in the stretcher? And—I think I know—but just shew me how you say them. The Sorrowful Mysteries. What are they?”

“Agony in the Garden, Scourging at the Pillar, Crowning with Thorns, Carrying the Cross, Death on the Cross, morena,” said Mosheshoe.

Peter repeated the lesson; Julie, in the doorway, clenched her hands that she might not scream. “And what do you say on the beads, old thing?” went on Peter’s weak voice.

The boy told him.

“I see: big bead, little bead, chain—funny idea, the chain. Yes, I should think it tires one a bit. Just what I want. And, Mosheshoe, mind you see you get them again if—if I forget at the end, you know.”

“Eh, morena.”

Very early in the morning at last, the stretcher was brought to the hut. Peter turned his head to look, but could not see it, as the ground sloped a little from the door. Dr. Anson entered to explain. “We shall have to carry you out to it, Graham,” he said, “the door’s so confoundedly narrow. But we’ll swing you in blankets and I don’t think we shall hurt you much.”

“Right,” said Peter, “whenever you’re ready.”

“Have a drink of this first,” said Anson, bending over him.

“Oh, I can stick it,” said Peter.

“Of course you can. But just take this, for all that.”

“I shan’t lose consciousness?”

“No, of course not.”

Peter drank. “I want to see the Berg as I’m carried out,” he said apologetically. “You see, I thought one time that I’d never see it properly again.”

Anson, Cathcart, Mosheshoe and a burly fellow from Makhoa lifted him. They did it gently enough, but Julie, watching, saw him grip his right fist convulsively about Mosheshoe’s rosary. Anson directed. “Gently, Cathcart. . . . Now lower, Mosheshoe. . . . Wait, wait, one moment. . . . Steady, steady—there!”

He lay on the stretcher, his eyes searching the mountains, his face white. The sun was just up; the whole world smiled. His gaze wandered over peak and valley, and Anson read there, since he was not unaccustomed to it, the look of a man who sees the world again after having gone down into the valley of the shadow of death. But Julie read more. She saw the colour creep back into his face and a new expression dawn in his eyes.

He withdrew them from the horizon and turned them on the doctor. "I say, Doc.," he said, "do you suppose it will be much worse than that?"

"No. You see you'll be firmer on the stretcher."

"Then I can stick this all right," said Peter.

Nurse and doctor got busy with the straps. Cathcart, unoccupied, turned aside to light a cigarette. He spoke of the little pause afterwards to Gwen. "You know," he said, "it was pretty ghastly. In the war, things were never so deliberate, so to speak. But there the old chap was—a rum feller, but such a good chap—stretched out flat on the stones, on those rough willows, while the two of them lashed him so that no bit of him moved except his hands. The natives hung about, staring. Nobody spoke, that was the worst of it. The sun, too, didn't seem decent. And the old chap had got hold of a rosary for some weird reason—he is a weird chap, you know—and he was twisting it in and out of his hands all the time. Tell you what I thought of. I've got an uncle who's a Catholic, and when I was a kid I went and stayed with him. He'd got a sort of Catholic Book of Martyrs, and, of course, I loved the beastly pictures. There was one of a fellow being strapped out on a hurdle before they drew him to Tyburn. Well, dash it all, there was the hurdle, and the stones of the road, and the crowd, and even the rosary in the fellow's hand. It made me feel sick all of a sudden, for, of course, he *was* going to a sort of execution. Damned long one too—sorry, old girl. So I just lit a cigarette."

Anson stood up. "Comfortable?" he queried.

"Sure thing," smiled Peter. Then he glanced at Julie. "You get on, Sister, while they lift me."

Anson nodded to her, and she mounted. Cathcart swung into the saddle. There was a stir of horses and of mounting all round. Julie could not help it: she had to glance back. "Right," she heard Peter say; "Now."

Sometimes the stretcher was level, but not often. More frequently Peter was on his head, or on his feet, his body straining to slip back or slip

forward. There were slopes in the mountain side to be negotiated foot by foot, when, literally, some men crawled beneath the stretcher, and as many as could held on with one hand like ants pulling a crushed fly. There were streams to be crossed, when the bearers slipped about on the slippery hidden stones, and Anson, though Peter did not know it, held his breath and whispered: "Good God, if they drop him now!" There were long uplands, over which they swung quickly, only the bearers were not trained ambulance men and the rough willows no smooth-swung stretcher. There were times when Peter could not bear the sound of the horses' hoofs about him and the careless loud talk of the natives, who could not be kept silent; there were times when he was not aware of either. There were times when the hill-sides opposite, or the skies above, were blindingly clear and vivid; and there were times when he seemed only to see a red mist. There were times when he was well aware of Julie's back on in front, and even of Anson, calling directions or looking down at him at some place in which his feet got tilted up and his head down; and there were times when he hung on to his beads and all but saw—The Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, the Death on the Cross. And yet he had no real idea of time at all. . . .

Sometimes they stopped, and people looked at him. It might be Cathcart: "How are you, old chap? Easy bit, that last?"

Peter would get a grip on himself. "Yes. Rather. Going strong, thanks." Or Anson; or Mosheshoe. He liked old Mosheshoe to look in. Usually he did so after a spell of bearing, before he fell out, his hot perspiring black face looking so humorously anxious, Peter thought. Usually Peter had to speak: "Well, Mosheshoe, getting me along?"

"Eh, morena. Soon be there, morena."

But once—as has been said, Peter had no real idea of time—it was Julie who bent over him. It was evening. He knew he had been set down and that fires were building, for he could smell them, but he did not remember their stopping. He had been in some remote place, high up, and he had seen the Berg, miles on miles of it, serene, silent, still, as ever. It faded, and there was Julie. She said something, but he could not hear what. No matter, he had something to say to her.

"Julie, darling," he whispered, "The veil has lifted at last."

"Yes, dear," she said (he could hear now). "That's all right. Try to sleep."

“Yes,” he said faintly, “I’ll sleep. Only I must tell you. About the Berg, you know I understand.”

“And what about the Berg, old thing?” She took his hand in hers.

“Why,” he cried, in his thin voice, smiling at her, “I was such a—such a fool—not to see. The Berg’s just—just—the love of God, Julie.”

When he was asleep—and it was late that night—Julie crept out of the tent that was erected each evening over the stretcher. She had changed into her pyjamas, and she made a curiously boyish figure. She wandered perhaps thirty yards across the grass and stood for a few minutes by the side of the stream. It was utterly calm and still there in the dark, and Julie lifted her face to the silent stars that glittered so imperturbably overhead. She watched them with that kind of wonder that all of us know at times, for the stars, like the Berg below them, are so infinitely lovely, and so strong, that one feels they must be kind. Only, feel what one will, they just glitter endlessly, changelessly, and how can one tell their meaning?

She stood and looked at them. Peter’s phrase was running in her head. Then she shrugged her shoulders. “Well,” she said to herself, “I bet this is the end of Book Two. But—dear old Peter—at least, he hasn’t got to run away. And I’m damned if I cry again.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

1

Gwen paused with her hand on the door of the private ward in which Peter had been lying for eight weeks in Grey's Hospital. She had come up the corridor to pay her call with a serious face, but standing there it relaxed. For within the voice of Julie could be heard, singing:

"To golf we started
(And her mother came too,)
Three bags I carted,
And her mother came too.
She fainted just off the tee;
My darling whispered to me:
'Thank God, at last we are free'—
But her mother came to."

Gwen's face took on a look her friends knew as significant and dangerous. She glanced right and left, up and down the empty corridor. Then she gave a hurried knock and instantly opened the door. "Julie, Julie, Matron!" she whispered, and entered superbly.

Julie gave one glance at her, dropped her duster, lifted her skirts, and commenced to fox-trot.

"We lunch at Maxim's (she sang on)
And her mother comes too;
How large a snack seems
When her mother comes too.
On Sunday, when I am free,
At dinner, luncheon, or tea,
She loves to sit on my knee—
And her mother does too."

During the first line Gwen had stood in astonishment surveying the room, or rather one portion of it. For Peter was sitting up in bed. At the second line she joined Julie, and they speeded up the music to a romp. Finally they collapsed into the armchair, laughing exhaustedly.

Gwen recovered first. "But where is Matron?" she demanded, sitting up. "I've never seen anything so disgraceful in a private ward—and at ten

o'clock in the morning, too!"

"Matron's out," replied Julie. "I saw her go. If she weren't I believe she'd fox-trot herself. She's in love with Peter."

"But I'm frightened to kiss her and find out for sure," retorted Peter from the bed.

Gwen drew a deep breath. "Oh, he *is* better," she cried excitedly. "Tell me all about it."

"Well," said Julie. "To-day's the end of the eighth week, and Dr. Anson came in here first thing. He said I might cut him out of the plaster after breakfast. My dear, I've never been so nervous in my life. You see, we couldn't tell properly if the bone was correctly set till we'd cut him out. I began at nine: I wouldn't have anyone to help. I cut him up from his feet, and when his thigh was really bare—do you know what I did?"

"Julie," put in Peter lazily, moving gratefully in his bed, "even a hospital nurse should not speak of these things like that, or in the presence of her patients."

"Shut up, Peter, or I'll wash you all over again. I will, I swear I will. There's to be no nonsense now. Gwen, first I kissed him and then I cried like a kid. I did really. God knows what's coming to me. Over old Peter, too."

"Peter," said Gwen slowly, "I can't tell you how glad I am."

"Thanks," he said. "It is topping, isn't it? It feels so queer, too. At first, you know, it was almost uncomfortable. If you lie on your back in plaster of Paris from your ankles to your neck, the first week is hell, the second is purgatory, the third unpleasant, but after that you enter your second childhood and get rather to like being completely looked after."

Gwen nodded. "And I expect it was easy for you," she said innocently.

"Julie," retorted Peter, "if you fetched her over here I believe I could manage to kiss her."

Julie leaped up and seized Gwen, who naturally struggled. Julie tried to drag her to the bed, and Peter urged her on. In the middle of a rag worthy of the occasion, the door opened again gently and a man looked in.

The two girls neither saw nor heard him. Peter, from the bed, signalled him not to interrupt, and it was not until Gwen tumbled against a chair and brought it and Julie to the ground that in falling she caught sight of the

newcomer. “Oh, Mr. Cathcart!” she cried, and regained her feet, flushed and panting.

Julie sat up too. “How dare you enter a patient’s room without knocking?” she demanded ridiculously from the floor.

“Julie,” cried Peter, “do stop. I can’t laugh any more, I really can’t. And I told him to come in.”

“And I did knock, Sister, but I gathered from the noise inside that you would not hear me, and also that no very delicate operation was being performed.”

“Oh, you did, did you? Well, you can come in and sit down for five minutes. So can you, Gwen. After that, Peter’ll have had about all he can stand for one day, and you’ll both take yourselves off. You can spend the morning on the river, if you like. The Sisters’ boat’s there.”

Cathcart’s face lit up. “You are a sport, Sister,” he said. “But, I say, I’m glad to see him so well. It was worth getting a week off to see this.”

“Yes,” said Julie critically, “we’ve made a good job of him, Anson and I. He ought to be photographed again for the *Lancet*.”

“Look here,” put in Peter, “I’m sick of being treated as a case. I’m sick of being talked at. Come over here, Cathcart, and light a pipe and tell me all about Basutoland.”

“You ungrateful beast!” cried Julie. “Come on, Gwen, let’s leave them. Here, Peter, here’s your pipe, and tobacco. And don’t move much yet, see?”

She took Gwen by the arm, and the door closed behind them. Cathcart moved over to the vacant chair by the bed. “No, but really, old thing, how do you feel?”

“I feel,” said Peter, “as I never expected to feel again, my boy. Of course, I’ve lost all power in the knee, but that’ll come back, they say. But in myself I feel well enough. Pretty lucky, isn’t it?”

“Lucky? Good heavens, I thought you were finished when I first saw you in that damned shack. And then I never thought you’d stand the move down. How much longer will you be here?”

“Don’t know. Two or three weeks, I suppose. I’ll have to get about on a crutch first, Anson says. Lord, you don’t know how badly I’m wanting to see the world again, anyhow. But how’s Stenhouse?”

“The same. No, he’s had rather a go at the whisky lately. Rosa’s left him. Don’t blame her. But he’s sent you this.” And he held out a letter.

Peter took it, and opened it with an apology. Then he laughed and fluttered some banknotes. “My salary,” he said. “Heavens, I’m a rich man! That was one good thing about Qathlamba: you couldn’t spend money.”

“Splendid. You’ll be able to take a thorough holiday.”

“So I shall,” returned Peter thoughtfully, leaning back on his pillow. “By the way, thanks for the letter, and it was jolly good of you to come down.”

Cathcart shifted nervously in his chair. “Well,” he said, scanning his pipe, “I’ve got a little business of my own, you know.”

Peter nodded understandingly.

Meanwhile, in the nurses’ room of the private wards, Gwen sat and watched Julie prepare the mid-morning Bovril for her patients. Being Saturday, Gwen had a holiday, and she had an idea that it was to be an unusually good holiday. Cathcart, besides writing to Peter, had written to her also. Julie knew. Boiling water and stirring the cups with her back to her friend, she approached the subject.

“How long has Mr. Cathcart got?” she queried.

“Only a week,” said Gwen. “He’s leaving Mokhotlong, you know. He’s been transferred to Maseru.”

“Yes. Up there he said he thought he might get promotion. . . . Do you think you’ll like Maseru?”

“Julie!”

“Well, my dear, why not? I’m jolly glad. He’s a rattling good sort, is Bobbie Cathcart. I saw enough of him to learn that. And he’s lucky, too, I don’t mind telling you.”

“He hasn’t said anything yet, Julie.”

Julie turned and looked at her, in her eyes that look that Peter had first noticed in France and Jack Donovan explained as “knowing a thing or two.” “Oh, you babe in arms,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

Julie sat down on a corner of the little table, swinging her foot. With her head a little on one side she studied Gwen reflectively. “My dear,” she replied, “it’s the queerest old world. No wonder nobody can make head or

tail of it, not even Peter, really. There you are, and Bobbie. Completely jolly simple folk. Bobbie has certainly believed himself in love a dozen times, and kissed girls at dances, sitting out, under the moon. You, probably, made love to the butcher's boy at that blessed school of yours, or adored the music master. Just like that. And now Bobbie's able to marry, and he's met you, and you've met him, and you'll just suit each other—and live quite nicely ever after. . . ."

"Julie!" protested Gwen. "Do you mean that we're not in love?"

Julie laughed. "Oh yes, you're in love. And very nice, too. How do you do it, Gwen?"

The younger girl looked at her with troubled eyes. "Dear," she said, "what do you mean? And you ought to know. You're in love, too."

"Am I? With Peter?"

"Yes. Oh, I'm so glad it's out! I've known for ages."

"That I'm in love with Peter?"

Gwen nodded. "And he's getting so much better. He'll be out soon. Then ——" She smiled serenely.

Julie jumped off the table and walked over to her Bovril. There was something in her attitude which perplexed Gwen. Her smile died away. "But surely, surely, he's in love with you?" she asked, bewildered. "Why, he even told me so!"

"When?" queried Julie calmly, her back to her friend and putting cups on the tray.

"At Viewberg. Or it came to that. It was a confidence, you know. We'd been talking about the Berg——"

"Yes?" queried Julie, interrupting. "And did he talk of marrying me and settling down?"

Something in her voice hurt Gwen. "Oh, don't, Julie," she cried.

Julie turned round slowly, her arms holding the tray. "Gwen," she said quietly, "I told you life's mysterious. My dear, you have no idea how mysterious it is. Look here, I'm not in love with Peter, and I never was. Not as you use the words. Nor has Peter ever been in love like that with me. *That* sort of love is not for either of us. Peter wanted me in France, passionately, because he was passionately in love with something else, and couldn't get it, and didn't know it. And I went to Peter because he had a right to me,

because I adored him, I worshipped him, I was his. My God, if you could understand! He was in a maelstrom, and he wanted something to get his feet on. I was his, for that. And he did get his feet on me, and it helped. That's enough for me. Do you think I mind, now, that it hurt? Do you think I'm sorry? Or ashamed, as I suppose people would think I ought to be? Well, I'm not. I've adored Peter—no, not that; there isn't a word strong enough for it. And Peter wanted me once, for a moment. That's all. Now he's gone on. That's all." She ceased abruptly.

Gwen stared at her, dumbfounded. She had never seen before such steely, incredible, restrained passion. She did not, indeed, understand, but she realized that there, in that commonplace little room, over the cups of steaming Bovril, with her own life and Bobbie's flowing on so calmly and happily, she looked for a moment into the great hidden tides of life, into the depths of the sea upon which she floated so serenely. Once before she had seen something like that, but not so profound, so incredible, yet so indefinable. And she was afraid, and from her fear came a cry—"Julie, Julie, is life like that?"

Julie straightened her back. Laughter swept across her face like a breath of wind over the sea. "You poor child!" she cried. "Heavens! What a fool I am to talk so! Gwen, my dear, come and find Bobbie, and go and let him kiss you in the boat. I dare say you're right. Kiss me first, anyhow. And don't worry; it's not a bad old world, after all."

Gwen rose impulsively. "If ever I can help you, Julie," she said, and they kissed across the Bovril. Julie saw the humour of it. "Good old Bovril!" she retorted; "it goes round the world, doesn't it? Come on." And she swept out of the room, humming:

"Carry on the good work do—do—do,
Carry on the good work, do!"

For all that, it was that night that she went to Matron's room about ten o'clock, when it was always possible to catch her unofficially after her final night round. She knocked, and in response to the invitation opened the door and entered. Matron sat comfortably in her armchair, reading the newspaper, her spectacles on her nose. She took them off hastily as Julie came in. No one ever really saw her in spectacles, just as nobody ever saw her in negligée. Knock up Matron in an emergency in the middle of the night, and she would emerge completely and strictly clothed in a minute. Julie herself had once won a bet by creating an emergency in order that her theory that

Matron never undressed might be put to the proof. Even now the phenomenon had never been explained.

"Oh, it's you, Sister," said Matron. "Am I required?"

"No, Matron, but I want to talk to you for a minute. Can I?"

"Certainly, dear. Sit down. What is it you want to say?"

Matron, Julie noticed with a secret mingling of affection and amusement, was undoubtedly a little flushed. Julie wondered why. The elder woman, since the night of Julie's outburst after the telegram, had never referred to her confession. Indeed, then, save for one startled cry of: "Oh, Sister!" she had made no comment. She had just instantly acquiesced. It was she, indeed, who had overridden Dr. Anson and insisted on a nurse's going, Julie being chosen because she was strong and could ride and knew the Berg. If Anson had guessed anything, it was not Matron's fault. It was Julie's face that had told its tale.

But Matron had doubtless anticipated a dénouement, or some further confidence; no doubt expected it now. She was always a little grim when her nurses announced their engagements or marriages, and this one—well! Julie knew how her infinite charity would be at war with her sense of propriety. She could almost wish that she had such news to give in order to see just what Matron would say.

But she speedily set her mind at rest. "Matron," she said, "I've had a letter from England, offering me a post which I want to accept."

"Sister!" exclaimed Matron, completely taken by surprise.

Julie drew her letter from her bag. "Yes," she said. "In France I got to know a Dr. Melville—a woman, fully qualified, and we became rather friendly. She's been demobbed—er—demobilized that is, of course, and she's setting up on her own in England. She wants me to join her. I should be second-in-command, a sort of Matron. There's very good pay, and I should like to go."

Matron folded her paper. She spoke primly, but Julie knew that beneath her words lay real affection. "Well, Sister, of course we must not stand in your way. You know your own business. We shall be very sorry to lose you, but I'm sure—er—you know, that is—of course as Matron you will have great responsibility."

Julie stifled her mirth. "Yes, Matron," she said.

"And what sort of work is your friend undertaking?"

“A maternity home,” said Julie primly.

Matron’s hands dropped in her lap. She was so surprised that for once she forgot herself. “Julie!” she cried. “You!”

Julie was able to laugh now, and she did so. “Yes, Matron. I dare say you’re surprised at my going to a maternity home. But it’s rather an unusual one.”

Matron had a flash of humour. “Doubtless,” she said.

Julie smiled. But she determined to get her own back. “Yes,” she continued, “it’s a new venture. Dr. Melville has private means and is being supported by others. She is founding a Twilight Sleep Hospital for poor girls who are not married.”

A slow crimson flooded Matron’s cheeks. Momentarily she was completely at a loss.

Julie guessed what she was thinking, but she did not help her, and at last the lady was forced to speak. “I do not approve of Twilight Sleep,” she said.

“No, Matron?”

“No, Sister. It is an interference with the direct laws of God. That sort of thing goes hand in hand with Eugenics and—and—Birth Control. I wonder if you have thought about those things?”

Julie had been more drawn to Dr. Melville than to her work, but now, very curiously, it was as if Matron had touched a secret spring in her. Suddenly, and rather incomprehensibly, she was intensely interested. “Why, Matron,” she said, “I never really have.” Then she checked herself. It was no good to add: “Except to think them reasonable.” After all, she reflected, she had never really *thought*. It was a new interest, the conception of a new movement when she was so weary of the old things, which took possession of her amazingly. So she merely added: “But I’m fearfully sorry for those girls, and I don’t see why their poverty should prevent them having what rich women can get.”

“No,” confessed the other, momentarily disarmed.

Julie pressed her advantage. “And my friend thinks I should do as a Matron of a place like that. It wants somebody fairly young and lively and sympathetic.” And then she realized that, in a sense, she had put her foot in it. It was her turn to stop suddenly.

But Matron smiled. The eyes of the two women met across the garish electric light. Neither of them spoke at once. Something welled up in Julie's heart as she looked—as she reflected that she knew nothing of Matron's history, of the reason for the humanity of that heart that lay hid under the exterior primness, the larding of austere religion, the absurd laces, the old-fashioned dress. And the other? She saw, too, saw beneath Julie's exterior gaiety, saw something beneath even the youth and liveliness and sympathy which would, indeed, qualify her admirably for the post, saw suddenly, too, that the girl before her had need of some new overmastering interest. And, knowing her own story, the tears gathered in her eyes.

"Ah, child," she said, "you are right. Don't waste all that, despite—er—despite—everything." She finished lamely enough, but she held out her hand to Julie with a gesture that only women use to women, and that but rarely.

Julie took it. "You've been just too good to me, Matron," she said impulsively.

Matron coughed, straightened herself, withdrew her hand. "We shall miss you, Sister," she said correctly. "That goes without saying. And now as to business: when do you wish to leave?"

2

A few days later Julie entered Peter's room in the afternoon with a card in her hand. "I say," she said, "there's a padre here—calls himself a Dr. Arnold—who would like to see you. Here's his card. Are you well enough?"

Peter smiled lazily. "Am I at home? you mean," he said. He was feeling increasingly fit every day, and knew it. "Arnold? *Arnold?* Good heavens, rather! I knew him in Havre. It must be he. Topping. Send him up at once, there's a dear." And in a few minutes the two were shaking hands.

"Arnold, by all that's wonderful!"

"Well, Graham, I'm verra glad to see you."

Arnold, Peter thought, was maybe a little more grey, the hair a little more sparse about the temples, but he was otherwise unchanged. Perhaps that air of strength and self-reliance which had so struck Peter in France was more developed also; at any rate, after the lapse of these years, it renewed forcefully his earlier impression. The older man smiled down on him, and he looked up delightedly.

"But how in the world do you come to be here?" queried Peter.

“Well, it’s nothing remarkable. You see, I’ve a Mission in Pondoland, and even in Pondoland we get the newspapers. So I saw that a certain Peter Graham, D.C.M., had been shot in Basutoland, and carried here; indeed, my paper gave all the details—or the better-known ones—of his adventurous career. And I thought, maybe, it was the same laddie that worried himself over breakwaters in Le Havre. Well, I couldn’t leave the Mission right then, but the Kirk has just had Sessions in Durban, and a run up to Maritzburg, especially when ye learned in France how to wangle a lift in a car, was not so difficult.”

“Arnold, you are a sport. I’m most awfully glad to see you. When did you get back?”

“Before the Armistice. They sent me back with a draft, and before I could take my return-ticket you fellows had walked over. Man, but it was grand at the finish! I wish I’d been there. And if I’d been a laddie like you, I’d ha’ been in with the Hielanders mesel’.”

“I wonder,” said Peter thoughtfully. “Well, so you went back to the Mission?”

“Aye.”

“How did you find things?”

“Not so bad. I hae some elders that’d take a lot of beating. They’d kept things going. That’s the advantage of the Presbyterian over the Episcopal form of Kirk government, ye see.”

There was a twinkle in the speaker’s eye, but Peter was not to be drawn. He shook his head. “I’ve finished with theologies, Arnold,” he said. “Take your pipe, man, and sit down over there, and talk sense.”

The thick-set short man sat down characteristically. He got out his old pipe and still older pouch, and packed and lit with precision, cupping his hands for the match with the habit of the open air, exactly as if the winds of the camp or the trek were blowing through the room. Peter watched him with real enjoyment. At the end he laughed.

“What’s the matter with you?” growled Arnold with mock severity.

“Nothing. If there were, you’d cure it. You remind me so absolutely of old times.”

The other eyed him shrewdly. He looked as if he might have questions to ask, but he refrained. Instead: “I do, do I?” he said. “Well, young man, you

don't. I doubt you could make the round of the docks in your present condition. What do you mean, getting yourself knocked about like that?"

"You said you read the story," said Peter.

"I did. But I never trust newspapers. Spin us the yarn from the beginning."

So Peter leaned back on his pillows and told him. He found himself speaking of his own thoughts about Qathlamba, the Berg, and the trekking, as much as telling the story, but that, too, was like old times with Arnold. His listener only nodded once or twice, or said "Aye." At last Peter reached Nkau's, leaning forward eagerly to describe the kindness of his reception there.

"Aye," said Arnold, "that's the simple native all over that they say we missionaries spoil. And there's no getting over it that some of the brethren are a wee bit trying at times. But not worse for the natives than your Stenhouse forbye. I met one of his sort once, and had a wee argument with him on the subject. In the end I forgot myself and used my fist, and he saw the point then."

"Aye," drawled Peter, trying to imitate and exaggerate the other's occasional accent, "I've nae doot but that some o' the brethren are a wee bit tryin' whiles."

Julie interrupted their laughter with tea. Peter introduced them. "Julie," he said, "I forget if you met Padre Arnold in France? Arnold, this is Sister Gamelyn."

Arnold rose in his stocky fashion, and his shrewd eyes rested on her face. "I don't think I ever met you, Sister," he said, "but I heard a lot about you from Jack Donovan and this laddie here. I'm verra glad to have the pleasure."

Julie shook hands. "I hope Peter didn't tell tales," she laughed lightly. "There were fearful doings more than once in Captain Donovan's camp."

"Ah, I was never padre there, Sister," retorted Arnold, "but the rumour reached me. If Padre Graham had not been in another Department I'd have called him over the coals. But it's well kent that the discipline of the Establishment is verra loose."

She went out, and as his friend closed the door Peter turned towards him. "Arnold," he said, "it was in that girl's company that I took your advice."

Arnold reseated himself. “I remember having to advise ye pretty freely, young man,” he said, “but I suppose, perhaps, ye refer to a morning when ye talked to me about the breakwater an’ such like.”

“Yes,” said Peter, “and you told me to get down among the multitude and make a few enquiries.”

Arnold studied him. “I warned you it was dangerous,” he said at last, quietly and much more seriously than he had yet spoken.

“So you did, so you did,” said Peter tranquilly, staring out of the window at the sky.

A puzzled expression grew in the other’s face. “Laddie,” he said at last, “there’s a deal you’ve not told me yet. Finish with the shooting, will you?”

“Ah, yes,” said Peter, “I was forgetting. I had got to Nkau’s. Well——” And he related his story to the end.

He told it better than he knew. Arnold’s pipe went out as he listened, and his face grew tender. “I wonder they ever got you down alive,” he said at last. “Man, but you must have suffered terribly.”

“Yes,” assented Peter. Then he added confidentially: “But after a bit, you know, it didn’t much matter.”

“Not matter?”

“No. You see, I understood what had been worrying me for so long. I saw why I had been sent to the Berg, to Qathlamba, to all that pain. I saw while they were carrying me down, and I’ve seen day and night ever since. I can go without anything now; I can bear anything now. I see that only God matters at all, and I see what He is like. I never understood before.”

Into Arnold’s mind came a remembrance of the Graham he had known in France—worried, introspective, curious, nervous, eager. It seemed incredible that this quiet, serene language should proceed from Peter Graham! It even slightly disturbed the Presbyterian, whose own faith was one long fight. “I thought you said you’d done with theologies,” he said, perhaps a trifle critically.

Peter laughed. “Why, so I have,” he said. “That’s not theology, is it?”

“If the Being and Nature of God is not theology, I don’t know what is!” retorted the son of the Covenant and the Confession.

For a moment Peter looked puzzled, but then his face cleared. “Oh, of course, I don’t know much about *that*,” he said. “I don’t see how anyone

can. Hardly by learning, anyway. I haven't worried about that since—oh, since I joined the Brigade, I suppose. At any rate, that's not my business."

"But you said you'd come to see that only Gods mattered."

"Yes. Just that. Nothing else can, can it? He is everything, you see. He's like the Berg, Arnold—or, at least, I suppose I should put it the other way on. He's always there, always silent, never changing, holding us up all the time, whether it rains or shines, and the only thing is to find out His ways, to fit in, so to speak. That's the business of life."

The elder man moved a trifle impatiently. "Aye, lad, but it's not so easy. Why, remember your own parable! What about the breakwater? What about the old terms of religion not meeting the Tommies' need? What about the need for rebuilding and restating, that worried you so? And what are you going to do when you get about again? Go back to the Church?"

"No," said Peter, smiling at him. "I'm going to Spain."

"What!" exclaimed the other, wholly amazed, "to Spain?"

"Yes, and you're privileged. You're the first person I've told. I only knew last night."

Arnold made a gesture of despair. "Lad," he said, "you're crazy."

Peter sat up in bed and leaned towards him. His eyes shone in his white face. "No," he said, "I'm not, Arnold. But perhaps it does sound a little like it. It might do, I suppose; though it's so simple to me. But I see now."

Once more Arnold's keen gaze searched him. Then he slipped his pipe into his pocket and put his hands on his knees. "Go on, laddie," he said kindly. "Explain a bit."

"Well, you see," said Peter, "when they were carrying me down from the Berg I said the Rosary all the time." Surprise once more mastered Arnold's face for a moment. "Yes, I know it sounds queer, for, of course, I'm not a Catholic, but you see, old Mosheshoe used to use it, and he was such a grown-up child. Well, I felt a child, Arnold, just a hurt child. And they're easy prayers, the Rosary prayers, and one just says them over and over again, like calling 'Father—Mother, Father—Mother,' on and on. That was about all I could do. I just clutched the beads and called the names and went over, as one does, the bare facts of the story of our Lord. And when the pain was hottest, like His, I suddenly understood. I can't explain: I just know. God is Love, and we've just to fit in—that's all."

"Well, I've used the Rosary ever since. I always say it going to sleep, and while I say it I understand things. Just as if one *saw* them. The other night, for instance, I *saw* how God was silent and yet always speaking. I've *seen*, too, how flowers and trees and light and darkness and pain and joy are all God. Arnold, it's impossible to explain. How would a man who'd seen explain light to a dozen men born blind? Well, and one sees little things, perhaps, because nothing's little. And so, last night, I saw I was to go to Spain. It's the very symbol of the lesson I've been learning. I shall go as soon as I'm fit: Union Castle to the Canaries, and on somehow. It'll arrange itself. Won't it be topping, too? I've always wanted to see the Alhambra and Seville Cathedral, the Mosque of Córdoba and all the rest." He leaned back, his eyes sparkling.

"And after that?" questioned Arnold.

"Oh, I don't know yet."

For a few seconds Arnold watched him; then he sighed. "But what about the breakwater?" he asked. All irritation had gone, and his tone now was gentle. It was almost that of one who asks to learn.

"The breakwater?" queried Peter dreamily. "I don't know, Arnold. It doesn't matter much, I think. Nor the sea, nor anything. It's not my job, nor yours. It's God's look-out. He knows all about it."

"But what would you preach if you were in France?" persisted Arnold.

"What would I preach?" said Peter. "Really, I don't know. I'm not there. If God sent me there I suppose I'd know what to preach."

"But didn't He send you there?"

"Yes, to learn," returned Peter quickly. "I sent myself to preach."

Arnold nodded slowly. "Aye," he said, "Aye. You're right there, laddie."

A little silence fell on them. Arnold broke in. "I must be going," he said reluctantly.

"Do come again," begged Peter eagerly.

Arnold shook his head. "I must get back to-night," he replied, "and it looks as if you won't be much longer in Africa."

"Ah, well," said Peter, "it's been ripping seeing you, and time and place aren't of much account in themselves, are they? Thanks awfully for coming. Pray for me, Arnold."

The elder took the younger's hand, and there was a suspicion of gruffness in his voice. "Graham," he said, "pray for me, too, will you? I rather think I'm one of the dozen men born blind."

"Rubbish," protested Peter, laughing up at him.

"Well, well. . . . Anyway, ye got marvellous sight on the Berg, my man."

Peter's eyes deepened. "But you have no need to be sent there, Arnold."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "It looks like Pondoland still, at present," he assented half jokingly, picking up his hat.

"Well, Pondoland, too," said Peter, "is the love of God."

The phrase arrested Arnold at the door. He turned and looked at Peter. "My man," he said, "I'll never forget that. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Peter.

Yet, for all that, in the corridor, Arnold met Julie. "How do you really think he is doing, Sister?" he asked.

"Capitally. Why?"

"No permanent disablement? Shock not too serious?"

Julie understood. Very gravely the eyes of the two met. Neither put it into words, but each knew what the other had wondered. "He will limp, Padre, all his days, but he was never more thoroughly Peter Graham," she said soberly.

3

Thus, for three weeks or so, that private ward became the meeting-place of old friends as well as of new ones. It became a place of curious isolation in their lives. For life plays us these tricks. We meet a set of friends and are merry together; then we are scattered to the four winds; then, usually briefly, we seem all to swing together again before passing out and on. A voyage may do it, or a holiday. Peter Graham's sick-room did it.

Tommy came there, and brought her baby; Donovan, for he chanced to be in Maritzburg, many times. Peter was shortly allowed a "sundowner," and Donovan used to drop in to have his with him—"like old times." The men became oddly intimate—much more so than before. Thus once, having poured out the whisky with the usual ritual and taken the first drink, Donovan put his glass down with a laugh that covered something else. "Peter," he said, "do you remember our first drink on the leave boat crossing

to Boulogne? Brandy and soda we had, on poor old Jenks' advice. Or was it the Major's? He was a bit of a rotter, that chap."

"He went West on the Ancre," said Peter. "Let it go at that."

"Yep. After all, we all did our little bit pretty rottenly. That sort of thing makes me feel what a brick old Tommy is, for of course she knows."

"It's odd," said Peter meditatively, "how little the past counts."

"Meanin'?"

"Oh, I don't know. We get renewed from day to day, I think. If somebody loves us. Tommy's renewed you, Jack."

Donovan digested this in silence. Then he lifted his glass, studying it. "Peter," he said suddenly, "that kid's got to be baptized. It's getting on. Of course, neither of us go to church much, and that sort of thing, but I wish you'd do it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Peter, in genuine astonishment.

"I do. It's damned queer. When I first met you I'd no use whatever for padres, and I palled up with you in spite of it, so to speak. I've still got little use for most of them, but I'm damned if I don't feel that you make a rattling one."

"But I'm not a padre at all!"

"No? So much the better. You're the man I want for my kid, and so does Tommy."

Peter was completely taken aback, partly by the compliment, partly by such an exhibition of sentiment on the part of the other. He did not know exactly what to say, but on one point he was adamant. "Sorry, Jack," he said, "but I can't do it."

"Why not?"

Peter reflected. "I'm not sure that I know. Theologically, I could. Ecclesiastically, I've never been deprived of my orders. But I can't. . . . I know: it's because you're looking at it wrongly. You are not wanting Baptism; you're wanting me. It's that blessed personal point of view that's all wrong. I can't lend myself to that."

"Look here," said Donovan, "I'm damned if I understand you. It's like you and Julie. Why the devil don't you two fix it up?"

“You’re right,” said Peter. “It’s much the same thing. I would, if I were just I. But I’m part of something bigger. I’m a cog in a machine; I’m a unit in a company; and that’s not my personal job.”

“Why the blazes not?”

“I don’t see, yet,” said Peter, “but I know it, all the same.”

“But can’t you explain?”

“Yes, if you like, old thing. God’s the something bigger, and He’s got a job for me. I’m booked.”

It was on the tip of Donovan’s tongue to retort, “You’re crazy,” as Arnold had done, but he did not. He looked at his friend with a perplexed, half-angry, half-affectionate frown on his lean face, which consorted ill with his humorous mouth. Peter burst into laughter as he watched him.

“Shut up,” growled the other. “Peter, I give you up. You’re certainly mad, but it’s that very madness which would make you a damned sight better priest than ever you were in France.”

“Which wouldn’t be difficult,” added Peter, a trifle sadly.

Tommy opened the door, coming to fetch her husband, and followed by Julie. She looked from Peter to her husband and back again. “You’re very serious, you two; what’s up?”

Donovan got up and took her arm affectionately, but with a little swagger that recalled to Peter other days in France. “I’ve been telling him what we think of him.” he said.

“What *we* think!” cried Tommy. “Peter, never mind him; he can’t think at all.”

“Well, he won’t christen the nipper.”

“Won’t he?” She looked at Peter.

He shook his head. “Can’t be done, Tommy,” he said. “Not my job.”

“There!” exclaimed Tommy, “I told you so, Jack.”

“Perhaps he will the second,” put in Julie.

Jack roared with laughter at his wife’s face. “Julie,” he said, “you’ll be the death of Tommy. She has now settled down, and grows more exceedingly matronly every day. You, on the other hand, grow more indecent. You’ll be having a baby yourself next.”

“Look here,” cried Tommy, “that’s the last limit! Out you get. Good-bye, Peter. Julie, drop in in the morning, will you? Come on, Jack.”

When they were gone neither Peter nor Julie spoke for a while. She arranged some flowers, glanced at her watch, took his temperature, marked it on the chart. Then she stood regarding him. “Want dinner now?”

Peter turned his eyes from the window to her face.

“It’s not time yet, is it?” he said. “Come and sit on my bed and talk to me.”

“Don’t you know nurses are not allowed to sit on their patients’ beds?”

“This nurse is, with this patient,” smiled Peter, holding out his hand.

She took it and sat down. But neither of them was in a hurry to speak. At length Peter did so. “So you’re going to England?” he queried.

“Yes.”

“Well, I’m going to Spain. Let’s go on the same ship to the Canaries.”

It was news to her. “To Spain, Peter! Whatever for?”

He hesitated. “Shall we say for a holiday,” he replied.

She studied his face. “We might say it, but it wouldn’t be true,” she retorted.

He smiled. “It wouldn’t, dear. But I can scarcely give you a better reason. I feel I’ve got to go, that’s all, and I believe that in Spain I shall find what I’ve got to do.”

“And what’s that, Peter?”

This time he was definite. “Honestly, I don’t know,” he said.

She accepted that, her eyes still on his face. “Peter.”

“Yes?”

“You remember telling me that your parish was to be the world?”

“Yes.”

“Anything still in that?”

Peter looked up at her and wonder grew in his eyes. “Why, Julie——” he began, and broke off suddenly.

“Go on, dear.”

"I can't—in a way I can't. But you know it is very strange with me these days. I've such interior peace all the time, like resting happily; but from time to time things happen, people speak, or I think, and I see a step farther. That is what happened then. I believe somehow you're right—that somehow the world is to be my parish. But I don't see in the least how."

"Oh, Peter, Peter," she cried, "I can't help it, but I must ask the same old question: 'Where do I come in, Solomon?' "

The old absurd name stirred them both, but so differently from the old days. He was impulsive now, with an impulse that she knew to be less personal than his former deliberation under that Calvary at Dieppe. He caught her hands and drew her to him, kissing her. "Why, old thing," he cried, "if my parish is the world, you, at least, will be a parishioner!"

"Always, Peter?"

"Always, Julie."

"And a dear one?"

"None on earth dearer, Julie."

"Then, beloved, I am not so ill content, after all." And she bent and kissed him. "Now, what about dinner?" she cried gaily.

But he still held her hands. "Not yet. What about you?"

"I?"

"Yes. What are you going to do, Julie?"

"You know. Become a Matron in a Maternity Home."

"Don't joke. What's going to fill your life? What's going to take control?"

She laughed at him. "Peter, with that tone, you'll be asking me if I'm saved next!"

He did not smile. "No," he said, "you are."

"*What?*"

"You are saved, to use that talk: I feel it about you; more, I *know* it about you. It's beyond me; I can't explain; but it's your dear honest heart, Julie, your bravery, your tenderness. I know God means nothing to you. Under that name, Julie. But He may come to mean everything to you under another."

"Go on," said Julie in a low voice.

“Well,” he said, “perhaps it’s like this. Take a parable, take music. Some people are musical, but can’t play; some can play quite well; one in a generation can write an oratorio.”

He stopped, as if that were all. She smiled at him: it was so like Peter. “Go on, you old stupid,” she said. “I don’t see anything in that.”

“Don’t you? Well, let’s go a step farther. Here’s a person with an intense love of beauty, a poet who can’t write a great line, a lover of music who can’t sing a true note, who has to admit, frankly, that Grand Opera bores him and an oratorio soars over his head. Is such a person musical?”

Julie nodded slowly. “I begin to see,” she said.

“Do you? One can’t explain it, can one? One can’t account for it either, but if heaven were all music, it would be hard to believe such a person permanently shut out.”

“But no religion,” said Julie, still in her low voice, “teaches that about God.”

“No?” queried Peter, playing with her hand. “John said He was the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Perhaps it is only that you don’t know His Name—yet.”

They remained for a moment, neither speaking. Then Julie straightened herself. “Peter,” she said, “you’re incredible. Are you a magician by any chance? Do you know something’s gone from me? I think I shall never be unhappy again. I shall find something to live for, and I shall try to live for it like—like you live for God. I’ll go for it with all my heart and soul, as you do. People will say you’re mad, and they shall say I’m mad, too. And being mad together we shall, we shall——” She faltered.

“Find that we’ve come by different roads to the same place,” finished Peter.

“Yes,” said Julie, “I believe that’s it.”

“And we’ll go together to Spain?”

“I thought it was to be the Canaries?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Who knows? The mystical Spain, anyway.”

“Oh, Solomon, you old duffer!” She jumped up.

But he still held her hand. “Julie,” he said.

“Yes?”

“Do you think we could kiss, really kiss, once more?”

She stood and looked at him, her eyes grave, but she said nothing.

“You see, I kissed you last—a real kiss—in London. That is the memory. And we’ve gone beyond it.”

Julie sank to her knees. As she did so, she saw that flat again and realized that the positions were exactly reversed. He had kissed her then, on his knees, and she had sent him, only half-seeing, away. Now she kissed him on her knees, and he was sending her, half-seeing, away. She wound her arms about him, and he lifted his to clasp her waist. Slowly and tenderly their lips met and clung together. And he withheld nothing from her. She pressed her body against his as he lay, and he tightened his grip: she felt his chest crushing her breasts. Passion was in that kiss, but as they exchanged it they knew that there was more than passion. He gave so willingly, all that he had to give, and she knew that it was another Peter that gave. She stood up at last, shaken, her hands at her hair in a feminine gesture, half-laughing words on her lips. “So that’s that. Good-bye, Solomon. Shall I bring in your dinner, Peter?”

“Yes, that’s that,” said Peter. “Now we’ll take our separate roads together. And first to Spain.”

4

Gwen burst in the next morning. “Peter,” she cried, “how are you? Where’s Julie? Look, I’ve got my ring! Did you ever see anything so sweet?”

She held out a hand, and on the third finger was a little circle of emeralds, all of a size, a complete circle. “It’s the latest fashion. Isn’t Bobbie a dream?”

“Congratulations,” said Peter. “Yes, it’s a topping ring, and a very charming hand!”

“Don’t be an old ass!”

“I won’t,” said Peter. “Ah, here’s Julie. Julie, she’s got her ring.”

“You darling,” cried Julie boisterously. “Peter, isn’t it sweet? You’re tied up now, Gwen—husband reading the newspaper, breakfasts, endless socks, a succession of babies! Give me a kiss.”

“I think,” said Peter, “that considering I’m an invalid, and that it would be the first and last time, I might come in too.”

“Kiss him nicely, Gwen,” laughed Julie. “He’s the absurdest old dear.”

CHAPTER NINE

1

The Southampton to London express slowed into Waterloo Station on the evening of a dull Saturday, early in a year black with the beginning of the Great Peace. Julie, wrapped in furs in the corner of a third-class carriage, stepped out of it and looked about her eagerly. She was quivering with excitement. There would be no one to meet her, she knew, for she had been carefully vague as to dates or hours. No; here she was, back in London, the London which she only knew as the result of two short leaves during the War, her own mistress, her own guide.

No wonder, then, that she hardly recognized this as London at all. An instantaneous porter took her luggage; three taxis stood empty for her reception; and in five minutes she was incredulous in a fairy Piccadilly. In the little vestibule of a hotel close to the tube station, she enquired eagerly if she could have a room overlooking the Circus, and actually got one. She went in, shut her door, switched off her light, ran up her blind, and stood there looking out.

War-time Paris had hitherto been Julie's most vivid conception of a city by night; otherwise Durban and Cape Town were all she knew. And Durban and Cape Town, although perhaps even more delightful by night (when the darkness hides the corrugated iron) than by day, cannot honestly be said to have entered into the spirit of modern illumination. Moreover, there is no night-traffic worth speaking of in either of them. Hence, then, that London which enthusiasts would brighten, seemed to her a city of faerie dreams.

For dream did Julie, indeed, as she stood there. First she merely watched the cascades, the fiery gestures, the leaping scrolls of light that make up the illuminated advertisements of modern night, watched but scarcely read, wherein she was wise. It is, perhaps, always a mistake to attempt to analyze our spontaneous pleasures. Then she centred on the swift traffic: the great roaring omnibuses thundering out to unknown suburbs freighted with the plots of scores of novels; the remote taxis, speeding this way and that, tantalizing, their occupants in reality far more commonplace and truer to type than those of the buses; the occasional private car, threading life, secure with the fatal security of wealth; a newspaper van, flaunting the name of one of those great modern travesties of truth and sanity. Then the pedestrian

stream, but this she could hardly see from her eyrie—no more than hats and veils; some swift, some slow; in groups; singly. . . . Oh, amazing!

As Julie watched, she saw against it all, as it were some strange half-real phantasy, her voyage with Peter; she became aware of what impression exactly it was which it had left upon her. In Las Palmas, for instance, a city asleep or, at any rate, out of the stream of life, she and Peter had wandered around, in theory, sight-seeing together, in fact, Peter seeing visions and she seeing Peter. She could see him now eagerly taking the Street of Their Most Catholic Majesties because of the name, since those remote and fantastic personages were to Peter more real, almost, than they themselves, picking their way among the garbage and over the pavé; or he would be peering into the dirty half-empty ugly cathedral like a child through some gate into Paradise which had been left ajar by mistake. Or Tangiers, whither the crazy Spanish cargo steamer had taken them, a place attractive enough, indeed, but not to her what it was to Peter, that she knew. She had enjoyed the sunlight, the colour of the white city, with its green and bronze minarets against the vivid blue of the sky and sea, the scarlet and yellow of the flag on the gunboat in the harbour, the turbaned slippered grave Moors the eager half-naked brown urchins—yes, she had enjoyed all that. But Peter——He had been content to wander about smelly streets, to look at donkeys laden with water-skins, when, after all, if one has seen a couple one has seen enough for a lifetime, and had reached the heart of a mystery inside the ugly Franciscan church, gloomy when one could not see and tawdry when one did. All that was amusing, a temporary holiday, to her. Here, here in Piccadilly, was life and reality. Peter would exactly reverse the impression.

But she had come to realize the truth without a heartbreak. Standing there at her window she was honest with herself. She had loved, as a passionate woman can love, the absurd boy, so eager and tremulous, in the old Peter; she had loved his secret strength, his hidden manhood. But all that had gone down into death as really as if he had been killed in Flanders, as so many others had been killed, and there had arisen from death that very essential self of Peter which she had known all along had never been hers, which—which—well, in connection with which one could hardly speak of love. That old Peter would remain the dearest memory of her life; this new Peter was a friend, a teacher, a mystic, the half of whose sayings and seeings were not in her world at all. She could wonder what he would do; she could long that he might find ultimate satisfaction; but she could not break her heart over the loss of him, because he had never been hers to lose. No, standing at her window, listening to the multitudinous cries and sounds of Piccadilly, watching the crowd at the porticoes of the theatre opposite, the

gaiety of the colour and sound of it all knocking imperiously at her door, she was even aware of relief. She had been in company with shadows and with dreams. Here was life.

There must be a place in it for her. She lifted her arms above her head at the thought, felt her still eager body grow tense, became aware of infinite possibilities. Teanie Melville rose before her in her imagination—a little brusque, perhaps, but alive, with her eyes open to life. Teanie had plainly found a place in life, an interest, a purpose; so would she.

She turned back to her room. The man had set her suit-case on the stool, and she went over and opened it. Sponge-bag in hand she turned to her bathroom, turned on her tap, stripped off her clothes. She stepped into the brimming bath with that relief which makes a long journey worth while, and suffered the warm refreshing kiss of the water to run up her body. Luxuriously she laved in it, towelled down gaily, selected silken underwear, a clean, as yet unworn frock, suede shoes. She was glad that she had dined in the train; she did not want a restaurant or theatre. She wanted the streets, people, contact with humanity, the sight, at least, of its thousand types. In the hall, the porter suggested a taxi. She shook her head laughingly, and took him into her confidence. "I've not been in London since the War," she said, "and I've been wandering about Africa. I just must see the streets."

The man nodded. Then, taking her in from her dainty hat to her trim shoes, he became fatherly. "Take care, Miss," he said. "There's bad characters about these days, what with the unemployed and strikes and all that."

"Oh, I'm all right," laughed Julie. "I'm a South African and a nurse; if I can't look after myself by now, I shall never be able to." And she passed out into the traffic.

The man looked after her. He had been in the Cavalry. "Some filly, that," he said to himself.

She went down Piccadilly, just to see the motor omnibuses swing clear of the diminishing traffic and take the great pool of light at Hyde Park Corner at a crazy speed. She looked in at the shadows of the Park, made a little *moue*, and turned away. She took a bus back to Leicester Square, delighting in the gradual reabsorption into the gaiety and bustle. She wandered back, cut across into Shaftesbury Avenue, found herself near the Ambassadors' and St. Martin's, paused for a moment at the open gates of the power-station in the little street, and saw in the engines the great strength of man, controlling, inventing, pushing in and out. Heavens! a policeman on

point duty was more interesting than a water-laden donkey! Men passed her in black coats and opera hats, and she could have screamed with delight that it had all come back again. In Charing Cross Road, two soldiers in khaki looked as out of place as a couple of Boer farmers would have done in Regent Street. She had a mind to go up and speak to them and offer supper. Then she saw that they were drunk, and quite happy.

It was in Trafalgar Square that she realized, with a thrill of amusement and pleasure, that she was being followed. She knew, suddenly, that she had been alone hitherto in her new mirth, and that it would be fun to encounter a human being possibly devastated with the thrill of living much as she. She slowed down deliberately. He drew abreast and their eyes met. "Good-evening," he said.

She saw an over-tall young man with a soft Trilby hat, scowling eyebrows and chaotic eyes, and by the alchemy which has yet to be explained, knew him of her kind. She laughed. "Good-evening," she said, "But you've made an unpardonable mistake."

"Good God!" he cried in amazement, and stood still.

She nodded, her eyes alight with mischief. "Yes. I'm not a Piccadilly daisy, and you ought to have known."

He came a shade nearer. "You're not," he said soberly, "but by all that is wonderful you are a human being."

"Really? And I've been thinking there were seven millions about!"

"Have you? Then you're wrong. This is the damnedest city in a damned world. There are only devils about, and things on two legs that call themselves men and women."

Julie examined him critically. "You haven't been drinking?"

"No. What's the use of that? That is to chloroform life, not live it."

She became aware that he was dressed beneath a light raincoat and that his shoes were shoes. He must also be six feet three or four, she concluded. He carried his hands in his pockets, and glowered down at her, round-shouldered. "What's the matter?" she queried.

"Everything. I'm bored to extinction. And in this damned city, if one is bored to extinction, one has to remain bored."

She chuckled. "Oh Lord," she said, "you must be an artist."

He frowned at her. "I say," he replied, "how did you guess that?"

“Oh, I’ve seen a bit of life. I know your sort. I suppose you are fed up with the theatre and tired of over-drinking, but more than all bored because you’ve run out of nervous energy.”

“Look here,” said the young man suddenly, “come and have supper.”

“Supper?” queried Julie. Then she nodded significantly. “You understand —*supper*.”

“If you wish. But this is an incredible night. We’d much better make a week-end of it at once.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Julie laughed again. “Because you are an amusing young man, but I regret that I do not know you well enough. Nor shall we get to know each other well enough over supper. Besides, I want to go to Westminster Cathedral to-morrow.”

The young man removed his hat and glanced towards the place in which stars appear other than in London in February. “Good God!” he apostrophized. “Am I awake? Whatever for?”

Julie tapped her foot on the pavement delightedly. “Look here,” she said, “I don’t know your name, and I don’t want to; you don’t know mine, and you must not want to to any great extent; but you offered me supper and I’m now hungry. I’ll be your guest, or you can be mine, whichever you like. Only let us cease standing in the middle of the pavement, and get somewhere where we can eat as well as talk.”

The man bowed. “I am honoured,” he said. “I apologize to London for my earlier remarks. Let us go.” And he offered his arm with a gesture. Julie took it without hesitation.

They turned, and under his guidance she retraced her steps. At the Palace Theatre they dived into a side street. Before a small restaurant they stopped and regarded the lobsters and oysters reclining on beds of salad in the window. “This,” said the young man, as one who spreads his riches at the feet of a loved conqueror, “is the best I can do. I only discovered it myself the other day, and I have as yet scarcely shared my discovery. The cooking is admirable, there is no band, they will fetch you excellent liquor, and it is cheap.”

“Let us go right in,” said Julie.

Across a little table they took mutual stock of each other. Julie observed that the other was bigly made, but that he was in condition and carried his size. She liked his face: a trifle heavy, but redeemed by the eyes and brow. His hands were long-fingered and nervous. He was completely at his ease, but with himself more than with the world. He was absolutely natural, and took her, obviously, at her own face value. He made no attempt whatever at a flirtation, and he said the things that were in his mind. She liked his manner instinctively, reserving the right to like his mind. He fumbled for his cigarette-case and offered it her.

"Look here," he said again, "this adventure, say what you will, is remarkable. I don't know if you live in London——"

"I don't. I've arrived to-night from South Africa, via Morocco."

He nodded, much, she felt, as if she had said that she came from the moon. "So. That accounts for it a little. You do not realize that London is, in some respects, the most inhuman city on earth."

"Frankly, I don't. I've been wandering about thanking God that it's so human."

"Well, you're wrong. It's not. It's damnable. It's the city of all cities that drives men to crime and perversion. I have to-night been dining with a fellow—rather an ass, but not a bad sort—a novelist. He has just made a lot of money; without being really envious, I felt up against it, for I haven't. He went home and left me to myself. What could I do? I have seen the only plays in London—there are practically never more than two—a dozen times, and, in any case, I didn't want a play. The club?—stuffy. A bar?—worse. A prostitute?—incredibly dull. Besides, I didn't want that. In Paris, now, it is possible to have a pleasant drink in, merry company on a boulevard; to drop into a house laugh and chat with the girls and come away; to solace oneself with decent acting in a score of places, or with music. But here"—he made a gesture—"one can only get drunk, or bore oneself to death with some wretched girl who has no knowledge of the art of the courtesan, and merely wants £5."

"Hence," laughed Julie, lifting her wine, "you spoke to me."

"Precisely. I watched you for a hectic half-hour. I could not place you. You appeared to be amused and humorous. I thought it just possible that you were an exception to the usual thing."

"And now——" began Julie.

"I know," said the young man, raising his glass politely to hers.

An hour later they stood again on the pavement. “I cannot,” said the young man frankly, “offer you a taxi, because those second liqueurs were the price of it, and I have now but my own tube fare, but if I may escort you ——”

“Right,” said Julie. “Jermyn Court Hotel.”

“Yes,” said the young man, concluding the conversation as they went, “there is nothing in life but religion or sex. One might find other terms, but those will do. Either is merely a reaching-out towards the future, the unknown, an attempt to penetrate the mystery. One, as I should put it, imagines God, and banks upon Him; the other conceives of man, and banks on him. One desires life to perfect his soul; the other submits to life for the carrying on, for the improvement as each conceited little egoist thinks, of the race. There are who live for art, but I am artist; I know; it is folly, a self-deceit, a suicide. I believe some live for learning; their suicide is patent to the world, unless, indeed, in these days, it takes the form of some study for the improved power of the race. You may choose; or, if you like, either refusing choice or not having the power of thought, you will be swept into the maelstrom, willy-nilly, probably on the side of sex. That is all.” And he paused to light a cigarette—without an apology, such was his exultation.

“Give me one,” said Julie.

“A thousand pardons,” replied the young man, offering his case, and then, casually: “I say, do you think I’m mad?”

Julie did not reply for a couple of blocks. At length: “No,” she said. “Being you, you sound a bit insane that is all.”

“In that case,” said the young man, “why not enjoy a week-end? I could call early in the morning, having obtained the needful. I know a village in Sussex or a small inn in Kent.”

“You forget,” retorted Julie merrily, “that I want to go to Westminster Cathedral.”

“In God’s name, what for?” There was genuine amazement in his voice.

“To say a last and definite farewell to a friend of mine.”

“Why not call in on the way out?”

“Because,” said Julie gravely, “I shall not have the heart—yet.”

The young man inclined his head at her tone. “Then you will accept my card?”

“No,” said Julie thoughtfully, “I think not.”

“But why,” cried the young man, at the door of the hotel, “why, in this hostile universe, not?”

“Because,” she replied, “though you mean admirably, you do not yet know sex. And I have not leisure to teach you.” And bowing to him, she disappeared.

The young man bared his head to her departing figure, and stared at the revolving door with his hat in his hand. He appeared to reflect profoundly. At length he turned and addressed the void. “She is indeed right,” he said. “I can now, thank God, go to bed.”

2

The next day Julie did visit Westminster Cathedral. She wanted to see a certain chapel, of which Peter had spoken much, one way and another, the floor of which represents the sea and in it things moving innumerable, both small and great beasts. She found it with difficulty, and having done so, realized that it was but another Peterism. It was both unattractive and rather foolish, in her eyes, as was also the twelve o’clock Mass then in progress. But she was growing wise. Maybe it was all part of an oratorio, which she had not yet ears to hear. There is no folly greater than that of the critic who condemns what he does not understand because he does not understand—and Julie came out into the chance February sun smiling. She must go her own way, whithersoever it led her.

It led to Paddington on the Monday morning, and the taking of a ticket to Coddrington; thereafter, a broken journey down through the Thames valley, richly green to colonial eyes even in February, with eagerly welcomed glimpses of the broad slow flood moving so serenely along under the fretted trees and by the red-brown villages. At the station of the little country town a car awaited her, and she was run out down the wide ancient street, past the weatherbeaten church, and through that wooded homely country that is the true heart of England. Pollarded willows by a sluggish stream, a line of towering elms, a spinney of beech, old cottages hunched up and content, fat cows lazily chewing the cud, a file of geese—all these she saw with a strange heart-beat of which we English, but no Colonials, are ashamed. The little road, too, so incredibly well kept, with a wonderful surface, ditched and hedged into the bargain, that ran placidly in and out and up and down in a happy-go-lucky manner, climbing the hills chequered with fields so that one hardly realized that they were hills, or descending shallow

valley-troughs that seemed scooped out by some kind power that wished to shew how benevolently it could fashion out a country-side—this road took her somehow to its heart. No cart track, straight across the veld for utility's sake, does that. The English lane invites to seclusion and peace; the veld track seems merely to exist as a temporary signpost in a hostile wild.

So thought Julie, anyway, as she hummed swiftly along, peering eagerly left and right. They ran down a long hill and climbed sharply the other side. At the top they turned quickly right, then left again, off the main road, down into a sleeping fold of the quiet country. Under lordly trees now; and then, the ancient church on its little hill a quarter of a mile ahead, with the great house below scanning leisurely for ever its rich acres, clustered the cottages of Andover Cross. The chauffeur stopped by a tall iron gate set in a high mossy wall, a gate that scorned to admit ancient chaise or modern car. He leaned from the driving seat and opened her door friendlily. "Perhaps you'd get out here, miss, as it's fine to-day. The garage is round the corner, and lands you at the back door."

"Sure," said Julie. "Will you see to my luggage?"

"Yes, miss."

Julie jumped out gaily, opened the iron gate and walked in; but then she closed it behind her more gently, and stood lingering a minute. She saw the kind of house that men of English blood remember in distant lands, however lovely, and know they can never build out of England. For a flagged path ran straight before her, without hesitation or pretence, bordered on the left by a great flower-bed in which just now there flowered the first crocuses, and on the right by a Maltese cross of rose bushes set among close-cut turf. The other side of the border was a tennis court, of such grass that Julie longed to set foot on it, and away up against the high wall that hid the road, on a little mound, so that one could peep over the wall or look down on the tennis-lawn, was a summer-house. Straight in front the old house lay, mellow and content. The entrance door stood back a little—open, peacefully. Looking upon the rose garden were four windows, and beyond them a great bay, the casements wide, so that one could see window-seats, spread with cushions, within. And right of the entrance, hidden by lilac bushes, the building swept round gravely, as if to withdraw from sight into a wide semicircle of forest trees that guarded the edge of the hill-side rising behind.

Julie walked forward slowly taking it in—the little crocus-flames, the scent of the grass, bird notes among the bushes, above all, the tranquillity of

the house. The noise of the car entering the garage was no more than an assured background to that peace.

But the car had announced her arrival, and in the porch appeared a gesticulating figure.

"My dear, at last! Julie, you are a sight for sore eyes!"

"Teanie! But there are no sore eyes here, surely?"

"My dear, there are none if we can help it. But come in. Are you tired? Or cold, after Africa? When did you arrive, Julie? Let me take your coat."

A small entrance-hall gave on a wide, high, long hall running right and left, into which descended, from a railed landing above, a flight of broad shallow steps. It was oak-panelled in homely brown and spaciously empty. A few sunny pictures and a tall blue vase of Chinese ware, however, dispelled all gloom. Teanie Melville removed Julie's coat, handed it to a smiling housemaid, and took her friend's arm.

"Come through to the drawing-room. Mr. Sampson's in the study. Ellen, bring Miss Gamelyn a glass of wine, will you, please—and one for me. What shall we have? Oh, I know! Ellen, two mixed vermouths—in memory of old times, Julie."

The two turned to the right and walked arm in arm down the hall, and as they went Dr. Melville indicated doors. On the right: "My study; the dining-room;" on the left: "The kitchen." At the end she opened another. "This is the drawing-room, mainly reserved for the staff, for our visitors usually prefer the smoke-room and music-room, which open out of each other right opposite, down the other way."

Julie found herself in the kind of room that makes one instantly at home. She passed round a piano and discovered a big fireplace on her left and the great bay-window right in front. Big armchairs and sofas enticed one to the fire that leaped cheerfully among logs. Everything was light and airy, while on the high mantelshelf a tall vase of clouded yellow pottery held sprays of the first spring green against the cream of the wall. The room seemed emblematic of spring, of youth, of hope. But not the youthful hope that sits blind on the globe, with but one string left in the lute. It was rather the youth, the hope, of a young Perseus adventuring for love, waving farewell to captivity as the winged horse took the air, that hung upon the wall opposite. Julie dropped into an easy chair and drew a great breath of pleasure.

"My dear Teanie," she cried, "what a gorgeous old house!"

“Doesn’t it strike you as a typical Maternity Home?” laughed her friend.

“Good Lord! I should say not. But then, little as you’ve told me, I expected something different from that. Not this surprise, though.”

“Wait till we’ve done with you. Meantime, tell me about yourself. When did you arrive?”

“Saturday. And in the evening I picked up a young man who wanted to take me for a week-end.”

“My dear Julie! We wanted you in a Maternity Home, but not in the capacity of an unmarried mother.”

“Teanie, you’re impossible,” laughed Julie. “But anyway, I said no. The young man was merely an artist, temporarily out of sorts with life.”

“Well, I suppose we must take your word for it. How did you come?”

“Via Morocco and Spain. Not much of Spain, though. I couldn’t wait. I left my travelling companion in Algeciras. Remember Peter Graham in Dieppe, Teanie?”

“The young parsoon? Julie! You’d been travelling about France with him then, and that was bad enough. You don’t mean you came with him from South Africa?”

“I do. Why not? You see, he’d got himself shot in Africa, on the Berg, and I had to go up and fetch him down. Then he wanted to go to Spain, and I reckoned I might finish the cure.”

Teanie, who had been standing with arms akimbo in the middle of the floor looking at her friend, shrugged her shoulders and sat down resignedly. “Well,” she said, “at least you are precisely the person wanted as Matron for Andover Cross. You are refreshingly modern and unprejudiced, and you’ll need it here. But you might tell me where he is now, and if he’s likely to turn up and marry you.”

“He’s in Spain, I suppose. And he’s quite certain not to turn up and marry me. But that’s enough of him. I’m dying to hear about this show. Teanie, you couldn’t have hit on a better place.”

“We could not. If there is an influence upon the race in the soil of England, it is surely here.”

“And who come?”

“Mainly working-class girls who could not afford Twilight Sleep even when they ought to have it. Very largely, in addition, unmarried girls for whom we want to preserve self-respect. We’re not very big, and, as a matter of fact, we are practically kept full by recommendations from ‘The Society.’ ”

“ ‘The Society?’ ”

“Yes. Simply that. We don’t parade ourselves, and our organization is not one of which the law could get hold. But we are a group of advanced eugenists whose religion is the race. Some of us have professional qualifications, like myself and Mr. Sampson, who lives in Andover Cross and has a small nominal country practice about, but is more especially consulting surgeon here. Others, again, are devoting their fortune to the same ends. Julie, it’s something worth doing. While the folk who made the War talk, talk, talk, some of us who survived it are really at work. And if at present we are few, you would be amazed at the results. Everything is ready for us. The gospel runs like fire among the dried grass.”

Julie watched her with real curiosity. Teanie of old had been a rare combination of energy and humour, but Teanie now seemed something more. There was the same kind twinkle in her eye, but she spoke like a woman inspired. Her enthusiasm imparted itself unconsciously to Julie. “My dear,” she cried, “you take my breath away. But go on.”

Teanie Melville jumped up. “Come and see the house,” she said; “that’s the best.”

The two friends went out into the hall. Taking his hat from a recess was Mr. Sampson. “Oh, just a moment,” cried Teanie informally, “let me introduce you to Miss Julie Gamelyn.”

He turned and held out his hand. Julie took it in her frank way and looked into his face, but to be instantly arrested.

He was a man of average height and figure, of average nondescript hair, wearing a little moustache—so far, ordinary. But he had a chin that told of intense resolution, firm, rather thin, unemotional lips, a head pushing slightly forward, and fevered eyes, deep set under puckered contracted eyelids, that instantly told their tale. Maurice Sampson was an alert, profoundly able scientist to his finger-tips. He reminded Julie instantly of a war type which she had often seen—some keen mechanic driving a high-powered staff car over dangerous roads at top speed without the nicker of an eyelid; some young artillery officer or air-pilot, accustomed to the handling,

the releasing, the controlling of titanic forces wrested from Nature, yet subduing her and turning her to the ends of the great campaign. As they exchanged commonplaces, she was aware that destiny was at work. This man was the antithesis to Peter Graham—Peter with his dreams, his other-worldliness, his early confusion in the great conflict of mind and body. This was the type of man for whom she could never feel what she had felt for Peter. He might arouse passion in her, but for herself—not for him. He——

"Well, Mr. Sampson," interrupted Teanie, "you'll be in to-night, won't you? I know you're busy now. And I want to run our new Matron round the house on her way to her room before luncheon."

He nodded to her, shook hands with Julie, and left them. They paused a second at the open entrance-door to watch him down the path. "That man," said Teanie, "is the cleverest obstetrician in England. What is more, he is a psychologist who keeps his psychology to himself, and a scientific thinker who has not a dozen superiors in Europe. He has private means and he might be anything, but he prefers to be the life and soul of The Society and to continue to work at his plans. He's a wonderful person to know, my dear."

"I should think so," returned Julie. "Do you like him?"

Teanie glanced at her quizzically. Then she shrugged her shoulders. "The spirit is willing," she said laughingly, "but the flesh is weak. He is very kind to his patients, but he would sacrifice anything and everybody to his science, and although I believe in it, sometimes he makes me almost afraid."

"You! Afraid!" cried Julie.

"Oh, well, perhaps not exactly. Perhaps it's only that he makes my flesh creep a little. I'm very human, and he's—he's——"

"Well?"

"I don't know. But come on. Look here, what do you think of this?" And she pushed open a door and stood back for her friend to go in.

Julie found herself in a big room that had plainly been built on to the house. Despite its size, what struck her instantly about it was its middle-class homeliness. Before the fire, for instance, was a patchwork rug and a huge black purring cat. The easy chairs were strongly made, upholstered in faded red material, comfortable. You felt it did not matter how you sat in them or what you did. The pictures were the sort of coloured oleographs that she had seen in her nursery at home—Victoria's Jubilee, A Highland Lassie, The Rock of Gibraltar, The Foundling Chapel. Yet the room did not stay at that. The windows were wide open and the February sunshine streamed in.

There were shelves of books that looked inviting. The *Tatler* and the *Sporting and Dramatic* lay about. There were ash-trays and an open box of cigarettes on the table. And at a littered writing-bureau sat a young man, who glanced up as they came in.

"Hullo, Bert," said Teanie, "ready for lunch?"

"Yes, doctor. I've just finished the letter."

"*The* letter?"

He nodded, his eyes sparkling.

"Well, let me introduce you to our new Matron, Miss Gamelyn. She's South African, and was a nurse in the War. You'll like her. Julie, this is Mr. Higginson."

"How do you do?" said Julie, holding out her hand.

"Fine, thanks," he replied. " 'Ow are you?"

It was just perceptible, and it agreed with the long wave of hair that stuck up on his forehead. Grocer's assistant, said Julie to herself, and was nearly right. It was draper's, in Brixton.

"That's topping," said Teanie, apparently reverting to the letter. "You'll meet again at lunch. Just now I want to show Matron round. Come on, Julie."

She crossed the room and opened a door at the further end, ushering Julie in and closing it behind her. The room was empty. "Music-room," she said.

Julie looked about her. It was much like the first except that it held a piano, a big gramophone and a violin-stand, and that a concertina lay on a sofa. But it had a slightly more feminine air, and the pictures were good if commonplace prints and water-colours. Julie turned on Teanie. "For goodness sake, explain!" she cried.

"Explain? Well, these are the rooms our guests really feel at home in. It's no use taking their sort and shovin' 'em bang into a high-art drawing-room. Both men and girls use both, but there's a kind of unwritten law that a man alone sticks to the smoke-room and a girl alone to this. Unless he wants to play. Bert, for example; he's a marvel on the concertina."

"Bert? My dear Teanie, isn't this a Maternity Home?"

"Precisely. But mothers don't have babies without the aid of fathers, and fathers should, if sometimes they don't, take an interest in their babies."

"And you have the men down here?"

"We do, when we can get them. There's a wing of cubicles, unless the girl is well enough for the man to sleep with her. In a way, it's the biggest part of our job."

"But, if they're illegitimate—"

"My dear, what difference does that make to essentials? You have a mother and a baby, and somewhere or another you have a father whose little rabbit soul, as a soul, has been scared into thinking he's sinned or done something disgraceful, and whose little rabbit mind is only awake to the fact that he can't afford to keep a wife. Well, we're out to change all that. The woman, nine times out of ten, can stand all right if the man'll stand by her. And he's asked straightforwardly down here, and shewn decent living and that somebody cares a lot about his girl and her baby and is damned proud of them both, and *he* gets proud, too—and that's the first step."

"I don't see," said Julie dryly, "that that makes any difference to his account in the Post Office Savings Bank."

"It does not, *per se*, but if he's worth saving, that's where The Society steps in. You have no idea of the wires we can pull, or what an insignificant cheque, which your friends and mine spend without knowing it, can set a man on his feet. And our families don't breed like rabbits, draining a woman's physical strength and crushing her soul, while the man gets dragged back economically into the lowest and dirtiest gutter. They understand birth control before we've done with them, and their children are the product of their reason and their financial ability, as well as of their love."

"It sounds to me rather like a sausage-machine," said Julie.

Teanie Melville's face burst into smiles, but then grew suddenly serious. "My God, Julie," she said, "it isn't. We aren't dealing with your upper classes, civilized out of all sanity from the start. These folk of ours get down to fundamentals cleanly and without shame. But they are humorous at times, I can tell you." And she began to smile again.

"Tell me."

"Oh, nothing. But, for example, a rattling good fellow, a mechanic, and his charming girl who'd been here, came down to pay us a visit. They had

tea with Sampson and myself. Over the buttered toast he remarked quite nicely that they'd come down to see us because they thought it was time they had their second baby, and he wanted her examined, and she wanted him to talk to me over his affairs."

"And?"

"Oh, she came in nine months later. As bonny a boy as I've seen."

Julie swept the room again with her glance. Its air of homeliness this time went to her heart. But she had an objection, and urged it. "Look here, Teanie, don't you put a premium on carelessness? Don't you lay yourselves open to swindlers right and left? Suppose a bounder thinks it a good chance for his fun, without consequences and with a holiday thrown in?"

Teanie Melville held out her hands to her friend. "That, my dear," she said, "is one of the reasons why we wanted you. For we get occasional bounders who are subconsciously beginning to think those very things, and if there's a woman who can detect and convert 'em, it's you."

"I!" cried Julie, clean taken aback.

"Yes, you. I know. I've watched you. And you do it superlatively because you don't know what you're at."

Insistent through the house sounded a gong. "Heavens, we've talked too much!" cried Teanie. "But you've got five minutes. Come on."

They scurried out of another door and down a passage, and somehow found themselves in the hall again. Up the wide stairs, and at the top was Julie's room. She could not suppress a little cry of joy as she saw it. It, too, was oak-panelled, with a simple oak bedstead covered with a blue-patterned coverlet. A few blue-grey rugs lay on the polished floor. The little wash-hand-stand carried brown Devonshire peasant pottery. There was a cosy covered couch, a grave old wardrobe, an elegant little dressing-table and a corner draped with a curtain for hanging clothes. On an occasional-table by the bed stood a few books, and a small bookcase hung on the wall. The windows looked across the rose garden, and a second door opened into a little bathroom out of which opened again Teanie's room, so that they had the private bath in common. The smooth dignity of the high placid walls was broken by three pictures only: a Madonna of Botticelli, a coloured modern print of the church at Abbeville, and a gravure of the Hermes of Praxiteles.

"Your room, Matron," smiled Teanie. "You've a couple of minutes to wash your hands."

It was an unforgettable day. First there was luncheon, at which there sat down Mr. Bert Higginson (to whom she took at once, for he was a mere boy exalted by the fact that he was now a father and had a stake in the world), a couple of convalescent girls, a nurse off duty, Teanie and herself. What struck her most was, that Bert, although alone with five women, had entirely lost the disparaging effect of his class-consciousness and was as simple in his talk and behaviour as one of her friends might have been. After luncheon it was, indeed, Bert, Teanie being busy over an expected confinement, who took her round. He shewed her, with an air of proprietorship, the big chicken-run opposite, the orchard, the vegetable garden, the hothouses, the paddock wherein a couple of ponies came nosing for sugar, the wing which was known as Visitors' Block and lay separate save for a covered way from the main Home, and the pleasure-ground that lay between, with its winding enchanted paths and its great mulberry-tree. He was even talking familiarly to her by the time they reached this tree. "Yes, Matron," he said, "Bessie and I fixed it up yesterday, and I wrote to her people this morning. She's a wonder, is Bessie, and she'll be downstairs to-morrer."

"Why didn't you agree to marry her before?"

"Well, Matron, you see, my people were agin it. Dad's got a business of his own and 'e's doing fairly well, while she's bin a housemaid. Said I'd bin caught by a pretty face and it damned well served her right. I've given 'im a piece of my mind now, I have. She's a wonder is Bessie, as I say, and Dr. Sampson he's fixed it for me right here in Coddrington. He's got me a good job in a draper's there, and a little house and garden. That's why I'm so keen on them fowls. Reckon we can have a run ourselves. And Bessie's been country. She fair loves flowers."

"It all sounds splendid," agreed Julie.

"Yes," he went on with absurd importance, "and it will be so good for the kiddie. Doctor says he's as fine a baby as she's seen, and I want him to grow up proper like. 'E wouldn't have no chance in Brixton, not really. These great cities are ruining the Race, Matron. I'll have a little home in the country, and two kiddies, or at the most three. And maybe I'll live to be proud of *their* kiddies some time."

"Let me come to the wedding, Bert."

"Oh, we ain't having much of a wedding, Matron. Just going to the Registrar's, you know. I don't hold with weddings. And why? Me and

Bessie love each other and we've got our kid. What business is that of anyone's, eh? We don't want nobody's blessing but our own. But you come and have a bit of tea with us, Matron, when we're fixed up, and that'll be splendid."

Then, later, Teanie took her through the wards. They ran right round the house, separate rooms, each a picture of simple beauty and cheerfulness. There was no sick-room paraphernalia visible anywhere; from the white-tiled bathrooms to the nurses' sitting-room all suggested clean homely living. The little theatre was there, it was true, ready for emergencies, but somehow sickness seemed absent from the place. At the approach of pain the trained efficient nurses took control, interposing a wall of scientific restraint between the soul of the mother and the nerve-racked body; otherwise peace and beauty and naturalness reigned everywhere supreme. Teanie knew each patient by her Christian name and was plainly welcome in each room. In one, however, the windows were curtained, the nurses in attendance, an odour on the air. Julie was taken in. The expectant mother lay quietly asleep, her face to the wall. On a little table all was prepared. Quiet brooded in the darkened pretty room, and impressionable Julie felt that she would almost like to stay and watch the reasoned prepared entry of another life. It was as if two mighty systems waited, one to give from the unknown shore, and one to receive. Each knew its business. All outcry was stilled, all phantasms of suffering and fear banished utterly. The watching nurse smiled at Teanie. "In an hour, I think, doctor, but perhaps you would come before?"

"Yes, if Mr. Sampson is not here. He wished to be in this case."

And lastly there remained impressed upon her memory as she lay in bed that night the conversation of the three of them in her friend's study after dinner. It was a brown-papered room, with a great open fireplace, the rough-hewn logs supported merely on firebricks, and a shelf of books ran right round the room. A desk by the window and a great chest in a corner, made up the furniture, with the chairs and a small table. But there were many pictures; photographs; odd mementoes of Teanie's varied busy life—a bit of a shell-case from France, an ivory Ganesh from India, a glazed scarab four thousand years old from Egypt, and the like; and some bigger curios on the walls—carved paddle-racks from Scandinavia, snow-shoes from Canada, and a Maori war-club. She had sat opposite Maurice Sampson, with the fire between them, and Teanie Melville, rather silent, before it. He had done most of the speaking.

Julie had expressed her pleasure in the place, and they had listened to her. Then Sampson spoke. "Yes, but you know half our work is mere

alleviation of what never ought to be. That child this afternoon. Well, what could you expect? The mother is consumptive, the father won't disclose himself; some furtive rat gone to earth to escape the gods of religion or convention, having made it impossible, first of all, that his child could be healthy. We shall do what we can; we have saved the mother incredible pain and shame; but it never should have been."

"Still, surely, what you do is worth while."

"Worth while! If, Matron, you could see what I've seen of the confinements of these poor girls driven into any pitiful hole and corner to bear their children, you wouldn't doubt it for a second. But that doesn't touch the incredible madness of a social and religious system that has almost created such things, that has blocked the windows and shut out the light of sane charity, that practically exists because it has taken in hand centuries ago the breeding of domestic animals, and yet will do nothing to improve itself in the human direction. Do you know how many thousands of children go through the wards of our big hospitals every year damned to torture from their birth by venereal disease, or to inefficiency by tuberculosis or the like? And that, in a sense, is not the worst."

"No?"

"No. Look here, what would you say of the sanity of a man who was out to breed racehorses, and who bought anything on four legs that called itself a horse and shoved it into a common paddock? That is what the promiscuous mating in our villages and cities is like. It doesn't matter whether it is a court in a London slum or a street in suburbia. Boys and girls, sex-ridden, thrown at each other's heads, forced to outrage nature by suppression of instincts for years, tied together by a relic of superstition for the rest of their natural lives when they do mate, and instructed not at all as to procreation. The most vital factor in the progress of the Race is left to chance, the most vital instruction forbidden as immoral."

No one spoke. Sampson leaned forward, the light shining in his burning eyes. "Matron, why does nobody face it? *I* know what young mothers and children suffer physically through sheer ignorance, and young men and women alike mentally from the same. Here are we three grown people: which of us was told one thing, one solitary thing about such matters by parents, teachers, or clergymen?" He looked round on them, pausing a moment. "I can see that neither of you were. You learned the lessons of sex and procreation each of you knows how, and each of you, perhaps, knows what you have paid or lost through that fortuitous learning, through your

blundering with sex, through your repressions and ignorant imaginations years ago. But Dr. Melville knows—and you, Matron, shall know—why *I* dedicate my life to this Crusade. I blundered into absurdly early marriage that was forced on me by parents because I was socially compromised with a girl by a sheer mistake. We married knowing nothing, and my son was born a lunatic. I know now that I ought never to have had a child by my wife, but I have no legal remedy, and, besides, she is a Catholic and bound by religion. She makes my life and her own intolerable without even really knowing why. But without conceit, I am no fool. My child might inherit a mental equipment which could serve mankind. It might; but the years go by."

He stopped abruptly. A little clock ticked on the desk and presently sounded loudly enough in the silence to reach his consciousness. He glanced at it, and stood up. "I ought to go," he said.

"But what exactly is the remedy, Mr. Sampson?" asked Julie.

"The remedy? First, instruction in sex matters ought to be given to every child at the moment when it asks questions; secondly, marriage ought to be primarily the official concern of the medical profession, and not of the Law or the Prophets; thirdly, the feeble-minded, the mentally and physically unsound, should be rendered sterile; fourthly, some children ought not to be allowed to live; and lastly, men and women should be taught how to mate." He smiled suddenly at her serious face. "That's about all, I think."

"But what a programme! And—and it's so unnatural!"

"Miss Gamelyn, are you so positive about nature? The facts of biology are curious! The common hen has a capacity for egg-laying; treated scientifically she lays tenfold; but naturally her ovaries are so constructed that she ought to beat the best record that science can turn out. Is it unnatural to help to fulfil nature? Or, again, for untold centuries man tortuously evolved among the beasts until he reached a point at which he was able to recognize something of the laws that had made him. Conscious participation then began—and history. Man had crawled; now he strode and ran. Was that not natural? Then at what point are we to stop conscious participation in the evolutionary laws?"

He glanced from one to the other. "It's late," he said, "and I could easily bore you. But, Matron, let in the light of commonsense and knowledge, and we shall see then what is natural to 'man in the highest' and what is not."

They saw him to the door and to the frosty moonlit tranquil path. The house was very still in the shadows behind them.

“Where does he live?” asked Julie.

“In a charming old seventeenth-century house down the road near the church. You shall see it to-morrow.”

“Alone?”

“Oh, no. With his wife—and child.”

“My God!” cried Julie, and understood why Maurice Sampson’s eyelids seemed to be drawn by pain.

CHAPTER TEN

1

But Julie paid no visit to Sampson's house on the morrow. February having been fine for a couple of days, March was ushered in with sleet and even snow, and Julie, used to Natal, was—to use her own expression—perished. She began the day by heroically visiting the chicken-runs at the instance of Bert, but in an insufficient mackintosh and with all too thin boots, so that she finally returned laughing from the treacherous tufty grass hummocks of the fields and from the piled sleet of the road with no alternative but a complete change. And she vowed that nothing would take her out into the cold damp misery again.

Yet as day succeeded day without any particular change and she began to wake up to the realities of English weather, it became evident that she would have to break her vow. One afternoon, then, she and Teanie sallied out for exercise, and Julie, muffled to the eyes in a heavy old trench coat and wearing laced-up riding-boots, found herself on the village road attired much as she had been in the old war years in Le Havre and Dieppe.

The two women walked quickly, with an interchange of conversation at first that was no more than question and answer concerning places and people that they passed or saw. Despite the fact that it drizzled and that the heavy moist air clung like a pall to field and tree, Julie's spirits rose as she walked. The week had seen her settling into her duties as Matron at the Home with an ease that delighted her. She had taken over from the overworked Teanie and from a nurse who had assisted her, all the housekeeping side of the enterprise, and she had settled easily into the position of a kind of social head. Teanie had come into her room one evening and, sitting on her bed, had explained what she wanted. "You see, my dear," she had said, "you and I know each other so well. We're not exactly like an ordinary doctor and Matron: we are friends, and you are trained to more than a Matron's work. I want you to become in time the nominal head of the place. I want you to interview newcomers, and especially the men, setting me free not only for the medical work here, but also for the lecturing and writing I am trying to do. See?"

And Julie, looking anything but a Matron in a crêpe-de-Chine nightdress of ethereal texture embroidered with a butterfly that might have been deemed an inappropriate symbol of her activities, had consented seriously.

Whereupon Teanie, herself in workmanlike pyjamas, had risen to bid her good-night and added, looking down upon her: “Only, my dear, if there should be an emergency call in the night, I think I should put on a dressing-gown. Of course, the men would be charmed, but they might be less inclined to remain devoted to their ladies.”

At any rate, now, they swung along in the damp down the village street. On one side were neat new bungalow-cottages, for the squire looked after his people, and on the other a village club possibly unique in England, for the parson cared for his flock. Teanie explained. “That,” she said, “is a wonder of a place, my dear. You shall go in some time. There’s a fine billiard-room with two full-sized tables, a cosy smoke-room, a library, and upstairs a hall with a stage and dressing-rooms all complete. There are baths and tennis courts and even stables, and the place is licensed. It has the dinkiest hall, with jolly chairs and a little bar that is somehow the antithesis of a public-house. It’s rather wonderful, really.”

Julie looked at the charming club-house, with its drive and neat lawns, and smiled. “And where’s the wonderful parson?” she demanded.

“He lives at Turton Major. The poor devil has to run three villages—this, Turton Major and Turton-on-the-Hill. He lives as centrally as possible and has let the vicarage here to Sampson. That’s his house.”

They were passing, beyond the club-house and a couple of cottages, a delightful, sober, red-brick, square-faced house that stood back from the road in a sunk garden with the date 1620 over its entrance. An espalier pear-tree climbed the side wall of an enclosed kitchen-garden, whose fruit trees nodded over the low wall that divided it from the road, and behind was visible park-land and an avenue of great limes. “The park’s behind,” went on Teanie, “and through that gate ahead you get to Andover House. It’s empty now, though. We go up here to the left.”

The road wound round by some thatched cottages, and opposite them, on a little hill studded with village graves, stood the church. Its squat stunted tower hardly rose above the level of its jumbled roofs, for it was a crazy patchwork of such varied fragments of architecture as had survived the transitions of the centuries. Teanie indicated a high ancient brick wall that skirted the further side of the churchyard.

“That’s the wall of the monastery,” she said. “They say it was Carthusian. There are curious niches in it that possibly held Stations of the Cross. But I don’t suppose you care much for that sort of thing, Julie.”

Julie swung her stick and stepped out. “No. Religion’s beyond me,” she said. “But I’d like to see the parson who could build a licensed club-house with a stage and a billiard-room.” And yet, lightly as she spoke, she could not quite banish a memory that seemed so far from that peaceful English country-side—a memory of herself in the doorway of a little shack, the range of stark African mountains on every side, and a voice behind her saying in its poor English: “The Agony in the Garden; the Scourging at the Pillar. . . .” She did not know the difference, but it sounded like enough to the Stations of the Cross.

“Well,” said Teanie, “you shall. The vicarage is a mile or so away. Parson Platner is a man worth knowing. He isn’t married, and he’ll probably be in. We’ll make him give us some tea.”

“What does he think of the Home?”

Teanie laughed. “I don’t quite know,” she confessed “I *think* he’s in complete agreement with it, but not in quite so definite agreement with The Society. I mean he’s all for what the Home does, but not entirely for all that The Society aims at. Perhaps, however modern a parson, he could hardly be. *And* he’s a cynic. He’s clever, clever enough to argue even with Mr. Sampson, but he will argue against whatever anybody says. He sees both sides to every question, and has an air of sitting aloft among the gods deciding none. I like him; Sampson doesn’t. They’re rather amusing together.”

A little gust of unexplained passion swept across Julie. “I shall hate him,” she said.

Teanie looked surprised. “My dear, that’s not like you. Why ever?”

Julie cut at a stinging-nettle with her stick. “I hate people that go on contentedly as if nothing mattered. They never *risk* anything. He sounds like that. Don’t you know?”

“Humph—yes. But Geoffrey Platner has risked a good deal in his time. Even his club-house. What do you suppose the Bishop thinks of it?”

“Oh, well,” said Julie, “I’ll wait and see.”

They were walking across a park by now, down a road that was spanned with a gate and was plainly semi-private. The rich wooded country rolled beneath them, field on field mounting the farther slopes, and in the valley one could see the chimneys of a big house and clustering elms that suggested a hidden church.

“This is lovely,” said Julie.

“I know. It’s so English. One loves it at first, and always in a way. But Turton irritates me often when I’m in a bad mood. It’s so illogical and hopeless, and it goes on and on complacently as if all were for the best in the best of all worlds.”

There was such comical irritation in her voice that Julie burst into laughter. “Good Lord, Teanie,” she said, “whatever’s the matter?”

“Well, we English are such incongruous fools. Look at that.” She swung her stick in a vague semicircle. “There’s a great house, rented by London folk with a fortune made the other day out of margarine. Quite all right, but it was built for a resident squire who cared for his peasantry and rode to hounds and employed the village. There’s the church—you can see it now—a sweet little place. It’s neat and proper and clean. But it’s a kind of picturesque adjunct to the house into which about 5 per cent. of the village go occasionally, and no wonder, for its service and its appearance are both completely remote from village life. And there’s the vicarage beyond, with Geoffrey Platner in it, who’s got no gospel that either the house or the village will listen to, or would understand if they did, and who’s stuck down here in the Church of England system, when he might, at least, attract a crowd of thinking people if he were free in London. And there’s one of the loveliest country-sides in the world all about, that is neither holding a decent peasant population nor pleasing its new squire.”

Julie pushed open another gate and stepped out into a narrow road. “Heavens, Teanie,” she said, “my head whirls.”

“Well,” retorted her friend, opening a wicket opposite in a neatly trimmed hedge, “here’s the vicarage. Let’s go and talk to parson.”

A winding little path ran up an old-world garden to a smiling little house. Even on that dull day it looked delightful. Not as old or definite in period as the Home, it was set quietly, nevertheless, among lawns and garden and shrubbery, with the peace of rural England resting upon it. From the gate there was but one cottage in sight; from the house a glimpse only of the church across the road, and that because the larch and oak and tall elm that surrounded the latter were still unclothed. An open door gave on a little hall, but the vicar saw and heard them approach. As they reached it, his study door opened, and he came out.

“Hullo, doctor,” he called, “come in. You’re most altogether welcome. I thought you were never coming again.”

"Did you?" retorted Teanie. "So did I after last time. This, by the way, is Julie Gamelyn, our new Matron. Julie, Mr. Platner had the audacity to tell me, last time I saw him, that woman was incapable of logical argument."

The clergyman held out his hand to Julie, surveying her deliberately with vivid blue eyes. "They're capable of so much better things, Matron," he said, but Julie was not sure that he meant it. "And how do you like Andover Cross?" he went on.

"I shall like it better when the sun shines," said Julie.

"I expect so. Dr. Melville said you came from Natal, and you must find it damnable. But come in. You'll take tea?" He pressed a button and a bell rang in the distance.

Julie walked first into the room. She looked about her with interest. There were many books, but a richness of colour and decoration that told of other than merely bookish interests. The room had an air, she knew not quite of what. But of one thing she was sure. It was not definitely the Buddha who looked from the mantelpiece to a German Christ on a side table, nor the Venus who stood beneath a wonderful photograph of a nude man poised on rocks above a sunlit sea, but the study did not suggest the ministry of the Establishment. Nor for that matter did the thick-set, rather burly man with the heavy thrust-out jaw and thickish lips, in the rough tweed suit, breeches, stockings, and red tie who motioned her to a chair by the fire and received her trench-coat. But she liked him. It was plain to her that he appreciated her trim figure in the fawn costume she wore beneath, and he had a hearty downright air that was an improvement, at any rate, on the visiting clergymen at Grey's.

"Many more babies?" he enquired quizzically of them both as he returned from the hall.

"A few," said Teanie, "all up to time and correct. And a young man who wants horsewhipping."

"Oh! Is that why you've relented and called?"

"No, rather not. We've an eminently capable Matron."

Platner glanced across at Julie, smiling. "Literally, or morally?"

"Both," retorted Teanie, "but we prefer moral suasion."

Platner shook his head. "That's the worst of you idealists," he said. "I am inclined to think that in many cases the other would be better. But what do you think of this young man, Matron?"

Julie looked at her friend half enquiringly. “Oh, say what you like, my dear,” said Teanie, taking a cigarette from a box. “May I smoke, please?”

He rose hastily. “I’m so sorry I forgot. Well, Matron?” handing her the box.

Julie took one. “Well, you see,” she said, “he’s religious. He’s sinned deeply and he’s profoundly sorry. He sent the girl to us and now he’s come down to do the right thing. He wants to marry her—would have done, only she didn’t let him know about the baby until too close on time. He’ll probably come and see you in the vestry next Sunday morning.”

“Why shouldn’t he?”

“Because,” broke in Teanie, “he’s a miserable little worm, whining away about his soul and hers. She’s a healthy hefty country girl, and her father’s a farmer in Somerset. He’ll probably give her the strap when she gets back and say no more about it, and the boy’ll have some chance to grow up decently on the farm. As for little Albert, he lives in a clergy-house at present and runs boys’ clubs.”

“Where?”

Teanie named a big London church in the East, renowned for its clergy-house of young Oxford men with whom lived other young men engaged in social activities in their leisure time.

“Good God!” cried Platner. “But he doesn’t want to take her *there*?”

“Oh, no. He’s a clerk somewhere—a publishing company in Paternoster Row, I think. He wants to take a flat in West Kensington, within reach of St. Cuthbert’s, Philbeach Gardens. He says the boys’ clubs are temporarily finished for him, but he would like to be ‘within reach of the service of a Catholic altar.’ ”

Platner frowned. “How did it happen?” he asked.

“That’s decidedly obscure to us. Probably he’ll tell you in the vestry. She was a housemaid in town. Went to the church, I believe.”

The clergyman stirred restlessly. “The old story,” he said. “The boy’s male and she’s a healthy animal. Probably she thought him a fine gentleman and he was quite sure she was attractive. Reaction from the clergy-house did for him; animal spirits did for her. They’re no match?”

“Utterly hopeless. He wants her to be a Catholic, and she’s more likely to become a happy prostitute if she stays in town. In the country she’d

mother a dozen successfully. Besides, he whines, and always will whine."

Platner reached for the tea-table as the housemaid's step sounded in the hall. " 'I think I could turn and live with animals,' " he quoted. " 'They do not sweat and whine about their condition; they do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins.' "

The girl entered with the tray. As she withdrew and Teanie began to pour out, Julie spoke. "I say, padre," she said, "I must say I don't understand how a clergyman can talk like that."

"No? Because I suppose you think a clergyman must talk always to rule."

Julie shook her head slowly. "You have me there. I don't think that. But what has become of your position if you can speak as you do?"

Geoffrey Platner got up and reached his pipe down from a shelf. "You won't mind if I smoke this?" he asked. There was a look in his face that Teanie knew. Behind his back she raised her eyebrows at Julie. He was plainly out for the verbal warfare that his soul loved and in the strength of which it lived.

"You see, Matron, I do not know what is my position."

"Well, you're a Church of England clergyman——"

"Who is not entirely blind to the fact that a Church of England clergyman may be anything from a Roman Catholic to a freethinker."

"With honesty?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "My dear madame, who are you or I to judge honesty? And if you want to split hairs over definitions of articles and creeds, don't ask me to join you."

"I won't. But I'd like to know your own position. How can you maintain that Albert should not worry about his sin?"

"When did I? That is woman's logic! But waive that. What is sin?"

Julie hesitated. "Look here," she said, "who's doing the questioning? Still, surely the Church teaches that breaches of the Ten Commandments are sin."

"And do you or I believe in the thunder and lightning on Sinai? What do we know of *moral* laws? Natural laws, yes, under the urge of which your Albert put that girl with child. After all, he has been silly, not sinful. He

ought to have selected a better time and a more suitable companion. But his clergy-house and his Catholicism, and Paternoster Row and his own little mind, never gave the poor devil a real chance."

He smoked hard, his eyes on her. As she didn't speak, he went on: "And do you think it is really possible to get very worried over poor little Albert? If there's a personal God big enough to have staged all this, do you think He's going to worry to pick up little Albert and drop him into hell? Do you think a God big enough to hold the stars in His hand and watch without a sign the machinations of big financiers, is going to damn little Albert for getting bowled by the trickiest of all balls when he didn't know the first thing about cricket? No, you don't, and nor do I. He ought to be told to be proud of himself for having sufficient virility to beget a child. And he ought to be shoved into a healthy atmosphere and given hard work."

"Don't you believe in heaven and hell then?"

"Hell—yes, the hell a man makes of his own life; heaven—I'm not sure."

"But what's life *for*, then?"

"Matron, if I could tell you I'd be the wisest man in the world. But how can I? How can anyone? Heavens, the fools people are to ask that question! Since history began they've asked it, and since history began it's never been answered. One way and another, they go round the circle of answers in every generation. Some live for religion; some for philosophy, which is another form of religion; some for the Country; some for the Race, which is only an enlargement of the same thing. Our friend Sampson is mad for the improvement of the Race; my brother in the ministry and neighbour, Higginbotham of Fernley, is equally mad for the salvation of Alberts. All little puppets, intoxicated with their own importance! He's hackneyed to death, but Omar's right:

> "Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
> I rose, and on the throne of Saturn sate,
> And many knots unravel'd by the Road;
> But not the Knot of Human Death and Fate."

"Then where does the Church come in at all?" Julie demanded.

He waved his pipe-stem. "You have caught me in a black hour. Old Timothy up at Elms' End died this morning. It's taken him ten years of steady drinking to do it, and he's made his wife's life a misery and been an infernal nuisance to his neighbours all the while. Now I've to read over him:

‘our dear brother here departed . . . in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.’ I *hate* it. That’s the kind of honesty that I question. I can only nerve myself to do it by realizing that, after all, neither I nor Timothy matters a damn either way. But in these moods I like to meet Dr. Melville. Not that your little experiment is going to alter human nature. Nothing is. The comedy has to be played out. Only I like to take a back seat and watch.”

Teanie jumped up. “Come on, Julie, let’s go. When his reverence is in that mood, it’s better. Besides, it’s late.”

They walked the greater part of the way home in comparative silence. The rain had ceased and the birds were out in the hedges. But suddenly Julie burst out:

“Teanie, much of that would drive me mad. Do you suppose that man has experienced life?”

“He has. Too much of it, perhaps. That’s his trouble.”

“How?”

“He’s seen through things. I thank God I haven’t.”

Julie glanced sideways at her, tramping through the mud, her shrewd steadfast face looking ahead resolutely. “Oh, dear,” she cried, “I wish I were like you! I used to take life as I found it, but I can’t now. You just carry on; I can’t. If there’s nothing in it, I’m beat.”

“Rubbish,” retorted Teanie. “You’re the last person to say that, Julie.”

“I was, perhaps; I’m not now. Perhaps I’ve experienced too much of life as well.”

“Chuck yourself into this job, then. Whole hog. It’s a great game, and worth it.”

“By God, I will,” cried Julie fiercely; “anything but that.” And she jerked her head back down the road they had come.

“Ah, but that’s not all of Geoffrey Platner. We’ll get him in one night, and you shall see. Go and hear him preach, too. There’s power in that fellow.”

They rounded the corner by the church and swung into the straight past Maurice Sampson’s house. But there, just at the gate, arresting them, sudden and dramatic, a little incident, over in a moment, stamped itself for ever on Julie’s brain. There came the bang of a door, the sound of running steps and

the cackle of silly, half-childish, half-inhuman laughter, that froze the blood of one listener, at least, to whom it was wholly unexpected. Down the path came what Julie took, at first, to be a child of five or six, and then with a shuddering glance at the face, realized might be ten years older. A child's body, but a great misshapen head, with slobbery mouth, big hideous ears, and swollen eyes that rolled inanely, it ran giggling towards the gate and the road. It was dressed in a knickerbocker suit, and in one hand, with the gesture of a child but with something of the purpose of an adult, it grasped by the tail a mewing kitten that cried pitifully. Before either could move, the door of the house opened again and a woman appeared, running foolishly in a full skirt and crying: "Hughie, Hughie, come back! You naughty boy! Poor kitty, too! I shall have to smack you! Come back!"

She reached the pitiful figure and caught it crossly and senselessly by the arm with a jerk. The child resisted as a naughty child might, but with the strength of its years. The mother slapped it, and its face puckered horribly to howl. It dropped the kitten and struck back at her, aimlessly, with a kind of pawing stroke, the woman tugging still and scolding crossly. There on the path the two figures struggled, and at the gate the two women, still arrested as they had been by that first inhuman laughter, stood helplessly.

And then, in a moment, came Mr. Sampson, white-faced, striding from the open doorway, swiftly, purposefully. He caught the child up bodily, turned, and strode back without a word. The monstrous head dangled over his shoulder as he went, half frightened, half too astonished to feel anything but its helplessness, as a child might be. The woman straightened herself and put her hands up to her fluffy fair hair. "Maurice," she said fretfully—and uselessly, for he was gone too suddenly to hear—"you might have told me he was in the hall."

Teanie caught her friend's arm, and hurried her on. "I don't think she saw us," she said. "Come on quickly."

"*He* did," whispered Julie, horror vibrant in her voice.

"Sampson?"

"Yes. I met his eyes. Oh my God, Teanie!"

"I know. It's terrible. I never see it but I'm in terror for him."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, he's a scientist to his finger-tips, for one thing. And she's a damned fool: she won't allow it to be sent away. He's quixotic enough to

feel that she has a right to her wish, and he feels that the other thing shirks their responsibility."

Julie was puzzled. "But what do you mean, then—'in terror for him'?"

As she spoke they reached their own gate. Teanie turned her head and looked at her, her hand on the latch. Julie met her eyes. "My God, Teanie," she cried again, white-faced, "not that!"

Dr. Melville nodded. "If only he had another child to fill his mind," she said as they walked up the path, "or the least chance of one."

2

Julie slept badly that night. The remembrance of the pitiful monstrosity of the surgeon's child haunted her, and Teanie's words had gone deep into her subconsciousness. She awoke in the early hours muffling a scream, having dreamed that she saw the man, armed with a knife, pursuing the child down the road. Unable to sleep thereafter, she got up and went to the open window, standing there a while to watch the sleeping country-side in the moonlight. The house was still, though once a child cried a little in one of the rooms. Then the cold struck her and she shivered, cast one last glance up the street towards the house of horror, and got back to bed, lighting up her candle and trying to read. But even that was impossible. Her imagination tried to picture the nights of Sampson's life down the road. She knew nothing of his *menage*, but she conceived that there would be a nurse and that the child would have its own range of rooms. Probably the father immersed himself in study. She could picture him bent over his books or his microscope in his own room far into the night, a figure lit by the shaded lamp in the surrounding darkness. Then she realized how foolish it all was, mentally shook herself, and forced her attention on her book. She awoke in the dawn to find the candle had guttered out.

Mr. Sampson called early to see Teanie over a case. Julie met him in the hall. She smiled and wished him good-morning, and he, in his courteous way, inclined his head a little to her and stood aside for her to pass. Neither betrayed any thought of the previous day's scene. Teanie was closeted with him in her study for an hour or more, while Julie went about her household duties. In the end the routine of the day, and of the days following, engulfed her, and the incident might not have been for any reference anyone made to it.

Mrs. Sampson, indeed, called on Julie about this time. The call was strictly formal, and it was not without pathos in Julie's mind. The fair, fluffy

woman, primly dressed, had an air of faded prettiness. She conveyed, without, perhaps, meaning to do so, her own utter disapproval of The Society and the Home, root and branch, but in the same breath she referred to her husband's skill in words of real pride. She even mentioned the child. "You will have heard, Matron our poor little boy is mentally backward. It is a great grief to us both. But he is a dear little fellow, and, as I think, God has entrusted him to us. He may, perhaps, improve. If the doctor were not so much against it, I should take him to Lourdes. As it is——"

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson," said Julie, mastering her astonishment, "it must be very trying for you both."

Mrs. Sampson rose to go, leaving cards unobtrusively. When she was out of sight, Julie rushed upstairs to Teanie's room.

"Teanie! You there?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Come for a walk."

"My dear, I can't. Awfully sorry. I'm just sorting garments, and after that I've my lecture to finish. You know I've to go for the week-end to town?"

"Right. Well, I can, can't I? I must. I want to tramp the fields and get my lungs full of fresh air."

Teanie surveyed her shrewdly. "Was that Mrs. Sampson who called?"

"Yes."

"All right; off you go then."

Julie took to the fields beyond the church, skirted some arable, and delighted in striding over the rich pasture-land below that had been under grass for generations. There is nothing in Africa like the English meadows. The fat cattle stared at her in sleepy mild amaze, and the rabbits scurried, with a contemptuous flick of their tails when they saw she had no gun, into their holes, more for the sake of practice than because they were afraid. She climbed gates, leaped a stream, picked her way over a morass and entered a spinney of young larch that were just putting out their pink flowerets and the miraculous green of new leaves. She sauntered through the little wood, unaware that the exercise and the tempered wind and the clean fresh scents had flushed her cheeks and given new grace to her figure and new light to her eyes, but supremely happy for all that. And when, jumping a fence and coming out on a road at the top of a hill, she saw Sampson himself in his

little two-seater bearing down upon her, she waved her stick without a second thought.

He slowed down, a grave smile on his face. “Hullo, Matron! Had enough exercise? Like a spin home in the car?”

“I’d love it, Mr. Sampson. What a topping little bus!”

“Yes. It’s rather jolly, isn’t it? Well, and how are the rabbits?”

She snuggled in beside him, watching the long fingers move on brake and gear and steering-wheel with the sure nervous touch of the skilled surgeon, and noting the ease with which he made himself one, as it were, with the purring engine. “Oh as cheeky as they could be,” she laughed. “I was almost tempted to try and put salt on their tails.”

The smile flickered across his face again. “Do you shoot?”

“I never have in England, but I have a good deal in Africa.”

“Really! What sort of shooting?”

“Oh, birds for the pot when we’ve been on trek, and once I had a fortnight after buck in Zululand.”

“Then you must certainly come out with us. You look as if you’d enjoy a tramp over the turnips.”

“Rather. Do you?”

“Yes. I like the precision of a gun. It’s a good tonic, too, for one side of one’s mental activity. But I don’t get much chance.”

She studied him reflectively. “You work too hard,” she said.

He neither denied the charge nor laughed it aside. “I believe I do,” he replied. “But that is all there is for some of us to do, Miss Gamelyn.”

All the woman, all the nurse, in Julie, took control of her. “Rubbish,” she laughed. “I can hear you saying that to any of your patients! I guess I’ll have to look after you a bit. What’s the good of being a Matron if I can’t? And I tell you what, I wish you’d give me a lift into Coddrington or even Leamington occasionally, when you have to go there. Andover is very charming, but the shops might be better.”

He laughed this time. “They might,” he said. “Of course I will, Matron; I had not thought of it.”

She settled herself demurely. “Do you ever go to Warwick? I should love to see the castle.”

“I do sometimes. You certainly ought to see it. And we might go by Edgehill. You can still make out the positions of the King and the various forces if you care for that sort of thing.”

“I know nothing about it. I’m a fearful ignoramus. But if you’d shew me, I should be most awfully pleased.”

He slowed the car down into Andover Cross and drew up at the gate of the Home. With a boyishness of movement she had never yet seen in him, he was out and at her side to open the door before she could move. She jumped down and held out her hand. “Thanks ever so much for a topping ride.”

“Thank *you*, Matron,” he said, taking it. “You’ve done me the world of good. I shall be going to Coddrington in a couple of days or so, and I’ll look in and see if you are free. May I?”

“Rather. And I shall be free! I’m beginning to learn the despotic power of a Matron.”

3

The day following, a Saturday, Teanie Melville left early for town, and that afternoon Julie was brought face to face with the first unshared responsibility of her new life. It was late afternoon and she had been writing letters in the study. She heard the bell ring, but could not see from her window who it was who had called. With an inward sinking feeling that it might be another social visit, she listened to Ellen’s steps in the hall and for the voice of the visitor. It did not come. Instead she heard Ellen give a little cry of consternation, and then her feet hastening the few steps to the study door. She herself jumped up as the door opened without a knock.

“Oh, Matron, I thought you were here. There’s a girl in the hall, fainted or something.”

Julie was out and past her in a moment. Within the porch, on an oak settle that stood there, lay a slight figure whose exhaustion was manifest on the instant. The girl, for she was not more than nineteen or twenty, if she were that, had plainly rung the bell, collapsed on the settle, and promptly fainted. Julie did not hesitate a second. She gathered her up in her own strong arms and carried her into the study. There was a long Chesterfield under the window, and she laid her down on that. “Ellen,” she said quietly,

over her shoulder, “the brandy from the cupboard by the fire, and then the smelling-salts from my room. As quickly as possible, please.”

With swift fingers she removed the girl’s hat. It was big and fashionable, but hardly anything more unsuitable for the country and for walking at this time of year could be imagined. Yet the girl had walked, and walked some distance. Her shoes, as unsuitable, but as fashionable as the hat, were ruined, her silk stockings stained to the knee with mud, even her short skirt bedrabbled. Ellen handed Julie the brandy and a glass, and she poured out and forced a little of the spirit between the girl’s closed lips. Then, as the maid went for the smelling-salts, her steady hand felt her patient’s pulse, and thereafter rubbed a little of the brandy on the hands and forehead. Ellen returned with the salts as the girl’s eyes began to nicker. “Thanks,” said Julie. “That’s all right, Ellen. Go and see that I can have tea when I ring. She will do nicely now.”

The girl’s eyes opened. “Where am I?” she demanded faintly. Then, her gaze taking in Julie’s uniform, “Oh, nurse, nurse, is this Andover? Oh, take me in, take me in! Please, please! I don’t know what to do. I shall die if you don’t.” And she burst into a passion of tears.

Julie’s arm went round her neck, and with her other hand she wiped the child’s tears with her handkerchief. “My dear,” she said brightly, in her firm confident voice, “whatever’s the trouble, you are all right here. Take a grip of that and stop crying. People don’t cry here. You know that, don’t you? What you want is a cup of tea and a comfortable chair—that at once, at any rate. You’re only tired with your walk just now. I’m all sorts of clever things! I know!”

The girl smiled faintly and turned her head with a pathetic tired gesture on Julie’s shoulder. “Oh, thank God, thank God,” she said brokenly. “I never thought I’d get here.”

Julie restrained her desire to ask questions. “Look here,” she said, “I’m going to get a basin of warm water and a sponge for you first. Lie still a minute. Nobody will come and I shan’t be long.”

She was back quickly with a basin of water that smelled refreshingly of Eau de Cologne. Bending over her visitor she bathed her face and hands, and dried them for her as though she were a baby. “There,” she said at last, “how’s that? What about the tea now? Let me get you into a chair.”

Ten minutes later she felt she might ask the necessary questions. “Well,” she said, sipping her own tea, “and where do you come from?”

The girl flushed instantly. She set down her teacup and stretched her hands out on the arms of the chair, grasping them convulsively. Her lips quivered.

Julie put down her own cup resolutely and leaned forward a little in her chair. “Listen,” she said firmly, “I’m not being a bit unkind, but I’m Matron of this house. I’m also a trained nurse. Now, of course, I can guess why you’ve come, but you know I can’t take in anyone who comes to the door without explanation. Naturally, people who come to us have been arranged for, and you haven’t. I can see you need help, but even if the details go no further than myself, I must know them. Will you try to remember that? I’m not here to scold or blame in the least, but I’ve got to know, for I’ve got to decide. See? Now then, where do you come from?”

Julie spoke at length to give the other time, and she spoke firmly because she knew well enough how near the girl before her was to hysteria. But she did not reckon on the effect of her little speech. The child in the chair grew white-faced, but with resolution. The trembling lips set. The hands on the chair-arms gripped tightly, it is true, but no longer convulsively. She straightened herself with a pitiful little effort. “My God,” said Julie to herself, “I bet that’s breed.”

“Matron”—and there was more resolution than despair in the voice now —“of course you’re right. And it was silly of me. You must ask questions, and I’m entirely at your mercy and must answer them. But, naturally, I’ve not been used to this. I haven’t even been to a hospital before. First, forgive me for arriving like this.”

The pathos of that plucky foolish little speech went to Julie’s heart. She smiled cheerfully across at the girl, sought swiftly in her mind for something to put her at her ease, and reached out her hand for a cigarette. “Oh that’s all right,” she said. “Would you like a cigarette? I think you might have one. And I’ll follow suit if you don’t mind.”

The girl smiled back at her, understanding. “I would like one,” she said, “if it won’t make me sick. I haven’t been able to smoke lately.”

“One will do you good,” said Julie, striking and holding out a match.

There are ways and ways of taking, lighting and smoking cigarettes. This girl’s every action betrayed her. She did not take it as if she had been used to occasional Woodbines offered on the sly by young men, nor as if the particularly expensive brand of Turkish that Teanie affirmed was her only luxury was a surprise to her. She leaned to the match with an air too. But as

she leaned back, her face gave a twitch of pain. Julie was up instantly and slipped a cushion under her.

"Thanks awfully. Now. What's the first question?"

"Where do you come from?"

"London."

"How did you get here then?"

"I trained to Coddrington. Then I hadn't any more money. And I walked."

"You walked from Coddrington!" Julie could not help that.

"Yes. I don't know how long I took. I rested a good bit. But—well, I had to, you see."

"But——" Julie stopped herself. Of course there had been devastating trouble somehow. That could wait. "Well, and what's your name?"

The girl hesitated perceptibly. "Must I give that?" she asked at last. "Won't a made-up one do? And you mustn't write to my people. If you want to do that, I'll—I'll—I'll go. I—I cannot see them. I would rather—die."

Once again the absurd resolution of the exhausted child before her made Julie almost forget her part. But she just smiled. "Well," she said, "if I don't write, it's because I shall trust you, and if I trust you, you must trust me. Going from us as you are is, of course, out of the question; besides, it is plain that you've nowhere to go. So won't you trust me?"

"Angelica," said the girl.

"Yes. Angelica——?"

And with a faint signal-colour leaping into her cheeks, the girl added names.

Julie could not help it. "Good Lord!" she cried.

For the first time, at the exclamation, something other than pain and fear and pluck looked out of her visitor's eyes. "I know," she said, "but it's not so amusing for me."

"I don't suppose so," returned Julie dryly. Then, with a rush of pity, "But, my dear, what in the world have you been at?"

The girl tossed her cigarette into the fire and leaned forward. "Listen," she said: "I'll tell you. You know my mother at least by name; you know her

charities and her religion. Well, I sometimes wonder if my mother has a heart. At least she hasn't an intelligence. Matron, up to the other day, I did not know one word about life. I had seen nothing, been taught nothing. I had been whipped as a child for asking questions, and in my teens nothing was allowed to come near enough to me to suggest questions. But twelve months ago I had to be let out—just a little. And when I was staying with some people whom mother considered safe, some of us had a chance for a bit of fun, and took it. I thought nothing of it, Matron. We motored to another house—some people whom mother wouldn't know, but our class in a way for all that—for a scratch dance got up on the spur of the moment. We agreed to stay the night. The dance became a rag, and eventually we had a pillow-fight in pyjamas and nighties. Of course, I was mad—mad, but I never knew. I had champagne, too, much more than I ought, and—and——" She broke off, hiding her face in her hands.

"You needn't tell me all this," said Julie abruptly.

Angelica lifted a scarlet face. "I want to," she said. "Why not? I'd rather you knew, in case—she faltered—in case anything happens to me. Where was I? Oh, I know. Somehow we got playing hide-and-seek—really, I don't remember how!" Such a despairing little cry, that was. "Anyway, I hid with a boy in a little attic, and they didn't find us, and—and—he wouldn't let me go, until he'd kissed me, and—and—done everything. Even then I hardly realized what it meant. I got to bed all right. We went back in the morning, and nobody knew."

Julie reached for another cigarette. "And then?" she queried, as the other did not speak.

"I guessed, after a while. Oh, my God, Matron, you could never understand. I couldn't tell *anyone*. Mother takes family prayers and I used to kneel and *scream* in my heart. She was so awfully—oh, I don't know what! —*coldly* good, I think. My sister's such a kid. Father"—she smiled faintly even then—"well, dear old daddy's *hopeless*, you know. Besides, mother would have seen he knew something and got it out of him, when he was drunk, perhaps, and he's mostly drunk. I hadn't much money, either, and—it sounds silly—I didn't know if one could go to any doctor or how much it'd cost. I couldn't write, for mother would have seen the answer. At last I bought a book on a bookstall. I was sure by this time and getting desperate. And then—then—well, I went to a shop in Charing Cross Road, one of those *awful* shops, you know. . . . Matron, I don't know now however I got the courage, but the man there—oh, why does God let some men live? I wish now that I'd killed him and been hung—hanged."

The tears stood unreservedly in Julie's eyes. The silly, hopeless, hideous tragi-comedy of the child before her seemed expressed in that absurd correction. But her next words struck something like fear to Julie's heart. "I—I took medicines then," she said.

Julie made a mental note that she would tell Sampson that as quickly as possible, but she did not interrupt. "Well?" she queried kindly.

"Nothing did any good," the girl went on more listlessly. "Six weeks ago I went to stay with friends. I stayed a few days and then I went to lodgings. Only they thought I'd gone home, and mother thought I was still with them. Mother doesn't bother about me now—she never did in a way, if you understand; she was too busy. I managed it up to—yesterday."

Once more Julie helped her out. "Yes, and yesterday?" she asked. "Why did you leave your lodgings?"

The self-control that had helped her so far gave out at that. All the horror of weeks of fear and loneliness stared suddenly out of the child's hunted eyes. "I couldn't stay," she burst out. "For one thing, I'd no more money. It went so quickly; things were so dear. Then I was all alone, except for the landlady, and she was awful. She'd have sent me to some dreadful place. And the pain, Matron—I couldn't endure the pain in that terrible room. Or I think I could have stood that if I had had anyone to trust, anyone to speak to, anybody of—of—our sort. As it was, I—I——" She broke off, devastatingly. "Oh, Matron, Matron, take me in! I'd heard of Andover Cross. I'd just money to take me to Coddrington. I can't go back, I can't go on, I can't do anything! Take me in, take me in, or I shall die! I shall *die*. I shall kill myself."

Julie rose swiftly. She took a couple of paces to the girl and halted in front of her, but not touching the sob-racked body that she longed to comfort. "Angelica," she said; "Angelica."

The tone of her voice had magic in it, cooling compelling power. The child's sobs died down and she turned despairing eyes to the other. "Yes, Matron?"

"Child," said Julie, "listen. All that is over—*over*, do you hear? Put it all utterly and entirely from you. I take complete responsibility—see? The pain, the fear, the loneliness—they're all over. You're going to be warm and comfortable and happy, with books and music and flowers and nice things, for the most wonderful thing the world has to give is coming to you and you've got to be ready to receive it."

The tears brimmed out of the girl's eyes and rolled down her cheeks, but she did not take her gaze from Julie's. Looking down at her, Julie saw such adoration grow there that a lump arose in her own throat. "Oh, Matron," she whispered brokenly, "you're kinder than God."

4

Outside the door, Julie waited for the Staff-Sister. She came at last. "Sister," said Julie in a low tone, "I know we're full, but a case has come in which we cannot refuse. Will you kindly prepare my room as quickly as possible and then come here? The name is Angelica Smith. I will move into Dr. Melville's room; there's a camp-bed we can fix up, isn't there? And, Sister, I want this note to go at once to Mr. Sampson. Will you see to it?"

The uniformed, capable-looking woman nodded. Whatever she thought, she asked no questions. No one asked questions unnecessarily at Andover Cross. Julie turned back to the study.

"Your room will be ready for you in a few minutes, Angelica," she said. Then, looking at her more closely, "How do you feel?"

The girl smiled faintly. "It'll only be a few minutes, won't it, Matron?"

The nervous energy that had sustained her was draining away: Julie saw that. She poured out a little brandy. "Drink this," she ordered, and took the thin little wrist again into her hand. The stimulant brought back a faint colour, and Julie moved over to her desk. She wrote for a moment. Then she looked up and out of the window into the gathering dusk before her.

"I must just be sure of one or two things," she said. "Trust me—it's all right. First, this is your mother's name and address, isn't it?" And she repeated what she had written.

"Yes," said Angelica.

"And your late landlady's name and address?"

Angelica gave it her.

"Have you any things there?"

"Nothing that matters. I left a little I couldn't pack. I've a bag at Coddrington. Here's the ticket." She fumbled in her purse. "She knew I was going."

Julie couldn't help the question. "And she did nothing? She didn't care?"

"Oh no," said Angelica. "She knew I hadn't any more money."

“Good God!” swore Julie beneath her breath, and registered a vow. But there was no need to tell Angelica that. Only one thing that she could think of remained. “When will your mother perhaps grow anxious if she doesn’t hear?”

“I wrote yesterday—on Coolidge House notepaper. She won’t expect to hear again for a week at least.”

Julie considered this. Then she turned. “Dear,” she said, “—now remember you are not to worry—something may have to be done about this. I must think it over. Will you leave it entirely to me?”

The white drawn face turned imploringly towards her. “Don’t let mother see me, Matron,” she begged.

Julie set her lips. “I can promise you that, dear,” she replied.

Once more she scanned her paper. “Angelica?”

“Yes, Matron.”

“I want you to give me—under the strictest secrecy; I will never use it except with your consent—the name of the man.”

“I—I don’t *know*, Matron! The introductions were all mixed up. There was a big crowd, and I’d never seen him before. They weren’t quite our set. And afterwards I couldn’t ask!”

Julie did not comment upon that at once. She remained there, sitting at her desk. She visualized it as she sat—the pathetic little figure, ignorant of everything that mattered, carried completely away by the fun, more than a little intoxicated probably; the worldly, excited, heartless crowd, not quite “our set”; the man. She imagined him youthfully middle-aged, skilled, wise, cynical, veneered; and against him, in the background, rose somehow the vision of the lady-mother whom she had seen once in the War, opening a bazaar. “Well, it doesn’t matter,” said Julie grimly.

5

It did not matter. Maurice Sampson did not get in from an urgent call to Turton till close on ten o’clock, but he came on at once, tired as he was. Julie met him in the hall and drew him into the study. Briefly she told him the story, suppressing little. “There was nothing else to be done, doctor,” she said, standing there tense across the fire from him, “right or wrong. I won’t keep you now; you must see her at once. Of course, I don’t know, but—— She’s delirious to-night,” she added.

"Will you look in as you come down?"

He nodded, without a word, and turned to the door. Her heart went out to him as he mounted the stairs. Beneath that keen intellectual face, weary as he was now, she had read the swift sympathy, the womanly tenderness. Angelica had indeed come to the right place.

When he returned she had sandwiches and whisky ready for him. He glanced, as he entered, at the little supper spread daintily on the napkin and set on the table near the fire, but he did not comment upon it in words at once. Instead he walked to the desk and scribbled on paper. "Have the dispensary make that up at once, Matron, please," he said.

She took it, and disappeared into the darkened hushed house. There was a shaded light on the landing above, and she thought how, behind the shadows, the night-Sister watched the tossing fevered frame of the child upon whom had been visited the righteousness of her mother. Julie's brown hand clenched as she walked swiftly through the kitchen to the room of the nurse-dispenser who would make up the prescription.

When she returned Sampson was eating. She sat down in silence, and waited, watching him. He was famished, she saw. He finished at last, pushed his chair back, and rose. "Don't sit up, Matron," he said.

"What!" she cried in genuine astonishment. "Are you going up again? Is it serious then?"

"So serious," he said, his hand on the door, "that I think we should wire the mother."

Julie stared at him as he stood there, thinking desperately. Then she shook her head swiftly. "Doctor, it can't be done. I gave my word. But I will go and see her to-morrow and assure her the child is safe. If there is trouble, I will bear it."

Maurice Sampson hesitated perceptibly. "We must not get The Society into notoriety," he said.

As in a flash, Julie saw all that lay behind those words. Tender, sympathetic, lovable as he was, Maurice Sampson put before all his devotion to the Cause. Nothing and nobody counted beside that. And, curiously, she admired him for it.

She thought swiftly. "At any rate, it is hardly possible to-night," she urged, pleading in her voice.

He considered her. “No,” he said at last, “it scarcely is. It would mean motoring to Coddrington. Mine is the only motor, and I can’t leave.”

Her mind caught at that. “Can’t leave?” she asked.

He shook his head. “She is poisoned with drugs and God knows what else,” he said, “poor ignorant child, and that walk was her last effort.” Then, with the first flash of passion she had seen in him: “My God, this is modern England! There are some that ought to pay for this.”

He turned and left the room.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1

The train service from Coddrington to town on a Sunday morning is not extensive. You may leave at 6.30 a.m., or 1.15 p.m., but if you leave in the afternoon you take an hour longer over the journey and stop at every station. Hence Julie bicycled into the sleepy little place while it was still scarcely light, and was knocking at No. 19, Burleigh Square, soon after ten. No. 19 was as like Nos. 1 to 20 as pea to peas in a pod, more like, in fact, for Nature works as irregularly in individuals as she works true to type in the mass. It was like in its pretentious small-souled blatant ugliness, for architect and builder alike had been inhuman in their sociology. Study and dining-room were right and left of the porticoed pillared entrance, and out of study led breakfast-room through a partition usually kept closed. Below stairs and as nearly as possible below ground, as at the top of them and as nearly as possible out of the house on the roof, dwelt those members of the lower classes whom Providence had designed to serve my lady. The curious inscrutability of Providence in the present difficulties connected with this arrangement was one of my lady's minor pieties. She did not lose Faith. She only lifted her head a little more proudly, made a few more preposterous concessions to the Power that has licence to vex the righteous in this world, and bore her cross with a satisfaction that implied the richness of her future crown.

The bell that Julie rang gave tongue only in the subterranean depths, and left her on the doorstep with just that foolish suspicion of doubt as to whether it had rung at all, that makes for a slight irritation in the unaccustomed caller. But the psychological effect of the bell, of the house, of the Victorian Square, and of the gravity of the empty London Sunday morning on her colonial humanity, was profound. One might almost say profane. The Matron of Andover Cross, Angelica's face haunting her, was in no mood to make concessions to Angelica's mother, and Miss Julie Gamelyn of Natal was only not worrying in the least about what she was going to say because her fiery resolute mind was wholly decided in the matter.

A trim parlour-maid opened the door. Julie had, as has been said, bicycled to Coddrington, and that early, and in no circumstances would she have looked the kind of person who called on her ladyship on Sunday morning at ten o'clock, unless, that is, she was one of the numerous

applicants for charity concerning whom precise standing-orders had long since been given. My lady did not relieve at the door, and would only be approached through secretaries at stated hours. Julie's request, therefore, to see her ladyship brought an immediate and simple reply. "She is not at home," said the parlour-maid. The door commenced to shut.

Julie accepted the statement literally, which, the maid perceiving, caused her at once to lose social status still more definitely. But she had not bicycled to Coddrington red-hot from unconscious Angelica's bedside for nothing. She proposed on this precise Sunday morning to make her guarded statement somehow and wipe No. 19, Burleigh Square, thereafter, as completely as possible from her memory. And what Julie proposed to do, she usually did. She did not interpose her foot to stay the already just discernible movement of the door to close, but she spoke again with an authority that carried weight. Pleasantly enough, however, for she had no quarrel with the maid. "Oh dear! Well, I must see somebody and write a message. I fear it is absolutely imperative. I have come some distance on business that cannot be postponed. And the letter must be sent to her ladyship as quickly as is humanly possible." The maid surveyed her again from top to toe. The survey reassured her. "Her ladyship does not transact business on Sundays," she said.

Julie smiled as one human being to another. "That," she said, "is of no importance. I want to do the transacting. I have news for her which she must receive, Sunday or—or"—her mind strove to find a more sacrosanct day than Sunday, and failed—"or any day."

Unfortunately, the human being in the individual before her had long been hidden under a layer of superlatively-trained parlour-maid. Julie's manner offended her. Nevertheless, Julie had a manner of speaking, which, if unusual on the doorsteps of Burleigh Square, carried weight. "I will go and see that Miss Stacey is informed," she said. "There is a waiting-room down the steps." The door began definitely to close.

"One moment," said Julie, in another tone now, "and who is Miss Stacey?"

"Private Secretary. She will inform her ladyship if necessary."

"That means that her ladyship is in the house. I misunderstood. You will kindly have her informed immediately, waking her if she is asleep, that Miss Gamelyn must see her at once on a private matter of the first importance, personal to her. She will not know my name. Say that I am Matron of a hospital."

The maid hesitated for the fraction of a second. Julie lifted her eyebrows. “Will you please come in, ma’am,” said the maid.

The moral value of her victory was immense: she was shewn into the study, with its two desks for my lady and her secretary, its books of reference, its framed groups of committees of societies, its ormolu clock and flanking ornaments, and its text. Julie read and re-read the lovely words while she waited. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” But, unfortunately, the study as a place of waiting did not at once occur to her ladyship still seated in the breakfast-room, and the partition was thin. The maid spoke deferentially and Julie could not hear her, but she did hear her mistress. She could not help it.

“Sparks, you forget yourself. This is Sunday morning and I cannot see anyone.”

. . . .

“Really. And what is the name?”

. . . .

“I do not know it. The Matron of a hospital?”

. . . .

“And is this person in the waiting-room?”

. . . .

Julie smiled, unfeignedly amused. But she had time to cease to smile, while she read and re-read the text and the names of the books of reference, looked out of window, looked in again overwhelmed by the Sabbatarianism of Burleigh Square, and heard church bells begin in the near neighbourhood. When at last the door from the hall opened, she was truly keyed to the conflict.

“How do you do?” said her ladyship. “I understand you wish to see me. As a rule I never see anyone on Sunday morning, and in any case, I have very little time.”

Julie surveyed the imposing woman before her, and as she looked, all the bitterness, all the annoyance, disappeared. She was overcome by a rush of pity. It did not in the least alter in her mind what she had come to say, but the spectacle of the futile pride and pomp that she expected to see so

suddenly fall, left in her nothing but commiseration. “May I sit down?” she said. “And won’t you? I fear I have very bad news for you.”

The other sailed to her desk and seated herself behind it. Julie had suited action to her words, and as she could hardly bid her stand, she entrenched herself in the next strong position. She was interested more than alarmed. She had too great trust in Providence for that, and besides, her bankers, solicitors and brokers were of the soundest. “Indeed,” she said, “it must be of the greatest importance.”

Julie suffered the implied rebuke, but it spurred her to fence no longer. “I am the Matron of a hospital,” she said, “and last night we admitted your daughter, seriously ill.”

Her listener flushed. “And why,” she demanded, “was I not informed at once?”

“Unfortunately we are in the depths of the country. It was not possible. And, besides, the full seriousness of your daughter’s condition only became apparent late in the night.”

The woman at the desk frowned. She picked up a pencil. “This is an extraordinary story. My daughter is staying at Coolidge House. I heard from her only yesterday. What in the world was she doing in the depths of the country, and why could not Sir John have ’phoned me?”

Once again Julie’s pity came uppermost. “I am afraid,” she said gently, “you have been misinformed. Personally, I would beg of you, just now, not to dwell on that. I am the Matron of a Maternity Hospital.”

The pencil fell from the hand that held it with a little rattle. Otherwise there was silence. The blood drained from the haughty face at the desk, leaving it singularly pinched and angular in appearance. But only for a moment. It flooded back angrily. The lady rose sharply to her feet.

“What ridiculous nonsense! There must be some mistake. My daughter ——How dare you insult me in this way!”

“Please sit down.” Julie’s voice was still gentle. “Of course, it must be a great shock to you. But Angelica told me herself and gave me far too many details for mistake to be possible. And her underclothes are all marked.”

The lady did not sit. If anything, her colour deepened. The impertinence of this person! “But what is my daughter doing in a Maternity Hospital?”

“Oh,” said Julie—stung by the tone at last—“I thought you would understand. Your daughter is expecting a child very shortly.”

Even then her ladyship did not sit, but her hands gripped her desk. “A child! My daughter! You don’t mean——”

The two women looked at each other. Their eyes met, and so stayed. Julie’s, little as she knew it, had knowledge and accusation written plainly in them, and her ladyship’s probed, and understood a little, and hardened into righteous indignation. And then she sat down. She took up her pencil firmly enough, though her fingers did tremble. “The name of the hospital?” she asked blankly.

“I am afraid I cannot tell you,” replied Julie firmly.

“What!”

There was no escape from the explosion of the word. It rang in the room. To be defied in her own study, at such a time, by a person whom she already envisaged vaguely as in some obscure way responsible for this incomprehensible tragedy with which, nevertheless, she must deal—it was more than she could stand.

“Yes,” said Julie, imperturbably. “I am afraid you have not yet realized the whole seriousness of the situation. Your daughter came to us in the last stages of exhaustion, penniless, on the verge of what may easily be a fatal premature confinement. It was impossible not to take her in. But I am sorry to say that she could only be temporarily quietened by a promise of secrecy. In some degree I have broken that by coming to you this morning, but we felt late last night that that was inevitable. For all that the promise that she should remain in peace must be kept, at least till the child is born. I can promise you that she shall lack for nothing.”

Julie spoke at length, and slowly to give her hearer time. She had, indeed, done so. The wrath and indignation of the proud, distorted nature before her had had time to accumulate. It burst out.

“Never in my life have I heard so preposterous a thing! Are you aware that my daughter is under age? I shall communicate at once with my solicitors. You will find, my good woman, that you are going a little too far. I am inclined to disbelieve every word of your story. Your insolence in coming here——”

Julie raised her hand. “Stop,” she said. “In the first place, you are talking of what you cannot do. You cannot keep me here by force, and the moment I leave this house, I am lost to you. In addition to that, your daughter is at a public hospital. You can be furnished with a medical certificate to the effect

that any interference at all at the moment would endanger her life, and if the facts were made public, public opinion would certainly justify our action."

"If the facts were made public!" It was those words that completed the lady's defeat. Public opinion! She saw the story in the newspapers. "Titled Lady Philanthropist's Daughter Runs Away; Curious Legal Case; Birth of a Child;"—if the facts were made public.

She rose, her hand moving to the electric bell in the desk. "Very well," she said, speaking with difficulty in her anger. "I understand. You may go. You will tell Angelica that I will never see her or hear from her again. She is no longer my daughter. Nor shall she communicate with any of the family—I shall see to that. She has disgraced her name beyond all words. No doubt she will consider it a small thing, but she has also broken her mother's heart. To think that a daughter of mine should come to this! May God help me." Already she was the injured woman, still devoutly submissive to a strange Providence. For the life of her she could not help her conclusion. " 'Though He slay me,' she quoted, 'yet will I trust in Him.' "

Julie sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing. "Stop!" she cried again. "Do you understand that Angelica is possibly dying? Have you no heart for *her*? Poor, pitiful, broken child—do you know *I* wept for her all last night? And—if you appeal to religion—isn't there something in the Bible about forgiving seven times?"

Poor Julie! Her stumbling quotation that betrayed to the woman before her her real ignorance of Scripture, her daring to judge, to condemn, to appeal to religion, in *her* case, completed the arming of the lady at all points. Her hand, indeed, still trembled, but she was once again President of rescue societies, Chairwoman of philanthropic and evangelical committees. She drew herself up to her full height.

"And who are you," she demanded, "to speak to me so? I should think it would be wise if you considered your own soul, while there is time. I am aware of my duty as a Christian and as a member of Society. You will go at once, and deliver my judgment. I have stayed too long as it is. I may even be late for Morning Prayer."

She pressed the bell firmly. It rang in the hall, audibly, and the door opened almost at once. Sparks, expressionless, stood there. She had plainly been in attendance at a sufficient distance.

"Shew this woman out," said her ladyship.

Julie looked from one to the other in frank amazement. The situation was completely beyond her simple and natural imagination. She even reached for her handbag with a smile trembling on her lips. But as she passed out, the sight of Angelica's mother momentarily overcame her. She forgot Sparks, and she did not realize how fundamentally she hurt the woman to whom she spoke by that. "Morning Prayer!" she cried, "when your daughter is dying! Well, I trust you will be in time to confess that you are a miserable sinner!"

Sparks did not visibly move a feature. It was another temporary triumph for the Social System. But in the basement she subsided into a chair. "Called 'er a miserable sinner, she did! Sakes alive, that I should 'ave 'eard it! Oh, my 'oly harnt, cook, you should 'a bin there!" For the Social System is tottering to its fall.

2

Julie found herself in the street—that is to say, in Burleigh Square on Sunday morning. It is true that sundry elegant gowns and frock-coats were passing leisurely on their way to Morning Prayer, but otherwise left or right nothing was visible, especially nothing that in the least met her need at the moment. She was aware that she was tired and hungry, and that in addition she had a sickness at heart which she could not easily have put into words. She walked slowly along considering, and then suddenly had an idea. Teanie was in town—stopping somewhere in Redcliffe Gardens. She had written down the address in case it was wanted over the week-end. She thought she remembered the number, 81, though she was not quite sure. Anyway, she might as well taxi to Teanie for sympathy and a cup of tea as eat in some Lyon's when it opened and waste her time till the train started.

It was a wild-goose chase for all that. She found her taxi at long last, was duly dropped in Redcliffe Gardens, climbed the stairs and watched it clatter away while she waited for her ring to be answered, and then found she had got the number wrong. She tried 71 and 91, and then made for 18, giving it up at last more tired and more hungry than ever. Moreover, Redcliffe Gardens offered little more possibility of relief than Burleigh Square in those respects—when one couldn't remember one's friend's number. Standing disconsolately there, Fulham Road seemed to her more likely; she could take a bus to Piccadilly Circus and go to the Jermyn Court Hotel. She walked more quickly to the corner, but before she reached it a bus came screaming up from Fulham. It swung round the corner out of her sight, but she ran after it. The crowd emptying from St. Mary's Catholic Church impeded her here, however, as it also filled all too quickly the empty seats.

As she reached it, the conductor stretched out an obstructing arm and jerked his irritating little cord.

Julie said "Damn!" a little too audibly, and found a big policeman regarding her with a smile. She shrugged protesting shoulders at him. "When's the next, officer?" she asked.

"Twenty minutes, mum, Sundays," he replied.

"Can I get a taxi?"

He stepped out into the road and glanced up and across the street to the rank. "It's empty just now, mum," he said. "It's a busyish time, but there may be one in a minute."

Julie felt more tired with every disappointment. She glanced about her. The gateway into the church, now practically empty, suggested itself, and she turned to it. "I'll go into the church and wait," she said; "and repent of that 'damn,' " she added, smiling at the man.

Leaving him to his broad grin, she entered, to be rather pleased with the stone-flagged passage running so far back from the road and with the dim pillared vestibule into which it led her. She walked slowly in, looking for a chair. And it was then that she saw Peter.

She knew him at once, and that she had made no mistake, though he was kneeling before a veiled crucifix with his back to her and she had thought him still in Spain. She caught her breath and stood arrested at the chance of it. But why was he here? Reckoning swiftly, she remembered that she had left him at Algeciras to wait for her P. and O. steamer home from Gibraltar. She had had to wait three days and the voyage had taken a week or so. Then the time had flown at Andover. Yes, he would have had six weeks and more in Spain and might well have been content to return. But what was he doing now?

She watched him. He was wearing an overcoat, from below which flannel trousers peeped out, and brogues, all unmistakably worn. He looked to be curiously commonplace as he knelt, this man who had figured so much in her life, whose years, after all, had been chequered so far out of the ordinary. She must, of course, speak to him. She would wait for him to finish. . . .

Why was the crucifix veiled, with that faded ugly blue or purple—she could not make out which? Images about were veiled too. Silly, to veil an image, and perhaps sillier to pray before the veil! She would ask him in a minute, as in old times.

He stirred, rose, turned deliberately and came towards her. She gave a little gasp of astonishment. Had he known that she was there? It looked almost like it, but next moment he was grasping her hand and shaking it. "Hul-lo, Julie," he was saying softly. "Fancy you being here!"

"Fancy you!" she retorted in the same argot. "When did you get back? Why didn't you write?"

"I only arrived last night," he said. "I didn't wish to write from Spain, and I thought we should meet in town."

"You had a hope," she said with a low laugh. "I'm only here by chance."

He smiled back at her slowly. "Is there any such thing?" he said. "But never mind that: what are you doing now?"

"I'm at a loose end. I go back to Andover Cross this afternoon. I had just missed a bus. I was going to find luncheon somewhere."

"How toppingly arranged! You wait half a moment while I ask leave to take you out to lunch. I won't be a second."

Julie glanced round the practically empty church in amazement. "But you're not staying here!" she cried.

He chuckled. "You funny old thing," he said. "I am, temporarily. With the Fathers, that is. This is a Servite house, you know."

"Indeed, I didn't. Get along though. I'll wait outside."

Outside, however, she grew anxious. What if the wretched bus came before he did? There it was in sight! Well, here he was, coming out of a front door by the side of the church entrance. He wore a cloth cap and carried a stick. He was buttoning up his coat, and she could survey him more closely now as he came. And it was at that moment that she became aware of a change in him, or, perhaps, formulated a change that she had realized instinctively without being able to express it to herself in the church. He was the old Peter, more the old Peter than ever. But there was a new look in his eyes.

"I was afraid you'd miss it," she cried; "come on. If you do, there isn't another for twenty minutes."

"I wouldn't care," said Peter; "I could stand on the pavement and talk to you for twenty minutes easily."

"So," retorted Julie, settling into a seat on the top of the bus, "you learned to pay compliments in Spain."

"Compliments? Not a bit of it. It's just the truth."

"What did you learn in Spain then? How did you get on?"

Sitting half turned towards him, her glance strayed back again and again to his face, especially to his eyes. Julie, knowing him so well, was immensely struck with the look in them. She tried to put it into words, but could not do so at all easily. It was not in the least any far-away dreamy look; on the contrary, the mere mental suggestion made her feel that it was the exact opposite—a practical, alert look. But Maurice Sampson's eyes were also practical and alert, and those of Peter were not in the least like his. She felt that in a sense they were fey. They were the eyes of a person who sees clearly enough, but from another standpoint altogether than that of the ordinary. And as Peter talked—rattling on the top of a motor-bus up the Fulham Road to Piccadilly; could that be beaten for the normal and commonplace?—she understood.

"Spain, Julie, was wonderful. At every turn things opened up. I knew before I met Father Gerard that my feet were on the Way of Illumination, but he was the interpreter at the journey's end to make it plain."

"Father Gerard? Who's he?"

"He's one of the Fathers there." Peter nodded his head back towards St. Mary's. "He was visiting some of the Servite houses in Spain on business and I met him in Toledo. It was very strange and delightful. I went into the cathedral and sat down in the shade of it, not praying, but just sitting there because I was hot and tired. Then, suddenly, I knew that I had reached an end. I knew that I had come as far as I was to come alone. I turned round as I sat. Father Gerard was coming up the aisle and as I moved he looked at me. He came straight up to me then and held out his hand."

Peter chuckled to himself, with an amazingly contented happiness speaking plainly in the sound. Julie smiled in unison, though she could see nothing to smile at. "You extraordinary creature! What's the joke?"

"The joke?" He turned and looked at her, laughter written on his face. "Oh, there isn't a joke. Only it's all so simple and splendid. One has to laugh somehow. Of course, he was looking for me."

"Looking for you? Had you met him before?"

"Oh no. But our Lord arranges those things, you see. I was led to Toledo, and Father Gerard just came in to take me over. Just as you were led to St. Mary's this morning and I turned and found you there. I mightn't have seen you again if that had not happened."

Something like fear caught at Julie's heart. She stretched her hand out and took his, indifferent to the other occupants of the bus. "Peter! Peter!" she cried.

"Yes. What is it, dear?"

Meeting his eyes again, she could not put her fear into words. But swiftly she reviewed exactly the series of thoughts that had swept through her mind. First, that he was a little mad; then, banishing that, the realization that, although she sat next him and they both spoke in English, Peter and she were in different worlds; and on the top of that a tag of remembrance: "There is a great gulf fixed." And on that she had snatched at his hand to bridge it, snatched and, as their eyes met, achieved what she desired. For, despite everything, she knew the gulf was bridged between them, that they were linked by some chain that would never be broken.

She tried to put it into words. "You made me frightened suddenly. When you talk like that it is exactly as if you speak another language. And you never used to talk so. You speak in a way like a man possessed, if such things were possible: as if you were millions of miles away from me, although you're on the seat next me. That's why I caught your hand. But when you look at me I feel as if we were still friends."

He nodded. "More than friends, Julie," he said happily. "I told you in Natal; I know it ten times more surely now. And yet——" He stopped abruptly, and she saw that his eyes grew very tender.

"What? What is it? Do say," she urged.

He twisted his hand over, making a little stroking movement on her palm with his fingers that she could feel through her glove. "No, dear. Not yet. This is not the moment."

The bus swung round the corner to South Kensington Station and drew up, with a grinding of brakes, at its halt. The movement recalled them. "Well," said Peter, "and how are you getting on?"

"Splendidly, Peter. I believe you'd love what we're doing. And it's so amusing too—sometimes."

"Topping. All the things worth doing lead to laughter. Tell me."

"Peter! Why, I believe they do! You odd boy, how did you learn that? Yet how could one laugh over Angelica?" she added, half to herself.

"You've got *me* now. Who's Angelica?"

Julie told him. Leaning back on the swaying bus, up Brompton Road and Knightsbridge and Piccadilly, she told him the story, omitting nothing relevant, watching his face. When she came to Sampson's verdict, the tears stood quite openly in his eyes, but a little smile of gladness flickered about his lips.

"Tell me why you smile."

"Oh, because she's come home. Because she's got you and dear old Teanie Melville and this Sampson fellow, who's a sort of big baby himself, really."

"A baby!"

"Yes, of course. So serious over his science—I can see him! And you sent along to mother him back to humanity somehow. Oh it's as plain as a pikestaff!"

"Peter!—honestly you see it like that?"

"Of course. Good Lord, how blind you all are! And Angelica—poor kiddie, she'll find peace. Lucky Julie! It's a great thing to bring peace to anyone."

"I don't always. Listen." And she told him of her morning's work in Burleigh Square.

When she finished, Peter was staring out up Piccadilly. He drew a deep breath. "My God!" he exclaimed. "I used to visit Burleigh Square! Not there —I think we were a little too High Church for her ladyship, Low as we were. But that type, that kind of person, that religion! No, Julie, I can't laugh now. Except at you and your miserable sinner. Miserable sinner! Good God, Julie, the girls that walk this street at night are nearer Christ by a whole purgatory than that poor woman. Almost one wonders——But that's not my job. Well, God has saved Angelica from that."

Julie had a flash of irritation. "You talk of God these days, Peter, as if you understood Him!"

"Understood Him! Good heavens, Julie, what do you take me for? I don't understand the first thing about Him scarcely. Or about His plans, of which life is a part. No one does, Catholics least of all."

"You are a Catholic then, now?"

"I was received in Spain."

"But surely Catholics think they understand Him?"

Once more merriment bubbled up in Peter's face. "Good Lord, no. We've got a bigger difficulty to face than any of you—why in the world He continues to give grace to Protestants and—and Eugenists, Julie! Why in the world you are not all Catholics, seeing what He does for you; and how He can continue to tolerate us for whom He has done so much and who are so damned ungrateful."

She did not smile. "You are playing with words, Peter," she said as the bus stopped.

They climbed down, and in the Circus Peter took her arm and continued. True, it was Sunday morning, but it was the Circus for all that, and she walked across it, listening to Peter and wondering if she were awake. "You see," he said earnestly, "we don't understand Him, but we know Him. We know that all love and all grace and all gladness and all good in the world is God, and all but a little part of what He is too. He is the sun and the moon and the stars. The world walks in the night by the light of the stars. We walk by day in the light of the sun. But it's the same light. We see the source more plainly, that's all. I suppose we are nearer—immensely by our standards, infinitesimally by His. I suppose we can see more of the qualities of light, and we are certainly much better off for purposes of investigation, but—why, in some ways you actually score! You can look up at the stars, but we see enough to know that we cannot even raise our eyes to the sun shining in his strength."

Julie drew a deep breath. Surreptitiously almost, her eyes travelled over him, from his cloth cap to his battered brogues, to his gloveless hands and the rough ash-plant he carried. She knew that she had never loved Peter as she loved him now, now that he was already plainly entering in upon that heritage of great things that she had foretold for him. And she knew that more than that had come true. In her heart she was worshipping him, and for him no sacrifice would ever now be hard.

They came to the door of the hotel. "This will do," she said. "They know me here. We can lunch, and sit afterwards looking on to Piccadilly."

"Right," he said, unconcernedly.

She was secretly amused. They had a little table by the window to themselves and the dining-room was not very full, but when Peter's great-coat was off, the waiter glanced superciliously at his deplorable Norfolk jacket and his flannel trousers. Peter seemed serenely indifferent; indeed, it was perfectly plain that he was even unaware of scrutiny. And that was not the least change that had come over him. She knew well enough that once it

had been he who had watched her for colonial solecisms. Once he had taken eager note of her dress and gravely considered his own. Now, if she had eaten with her knife and worn gingham, she doubted if he would have noticed. She had needed no proof, but if she had needed, she had one of his complete sincerity in this.

"Coffee?" she asked in the lounge, close up to the window, through which, looking down, one could see the Circus, as she had said.

"Thanks."

"Black or white?"

He glanced at her hand holding the cream-jug. "Oh—er—white," he said, obviously on the impulse. And this was the Peter who had considered white coffee an insult to a good meal!

"Well, now," she said, "tell me about Spain."

"Yes, I've been wondering however I can. You see, if I were to try and tell you everything, we should be here for hours. And if I told you the tourist things, I shouldn't tell you anything at all really. Of course, I went to Ronda —oh, my dear, the gorge by moonlight! you can't imagine! a great drop cut sheer between the two halves of the town that itself is a fortress standing up clean out of the Vega, encircled by mountains; a drop spanned by ancient bridges, and you stand on them and see the moonlight lost in the depths and in the mists of the river below. And then Granada. The Alhambra is wonderful—up to its reputation, which is so much more than most sights; but the Generalife—that is the dream of Granada. It's just a garden, a garden of Omar Khayyam exactly. You can hear Sultan after Sultan passing in his pride. And the wild asses of tourists like you and me stamp on Bahrám's head and he lies fast asleep!"

"Go on," cried Julie a little breathlessly.

"Well, then, Seville. You have to disentangle Seville. It's a flourishing city. I found a view from across the river, and a little convent that's part of the real story."

"Tell me."

"In a moment. Then I went on to Córdoba. Imperial Rome is still there. There's a milestone over the bridge that has told passers-by for two thousand years how far it is to the Capitol. . . . Then, oh, well, Madrid. Pizarro's sword held me there. He climbed the Andes with that in his hand, and saw the Pacific, and set it cross-hilted in the sun on the edge of the unknown.

Talk of a true fairy tale: I could have kissed the blade! And then Toledo. The Cathedral. Of course, it's just the Catholic Church in miniature: austere, ornate; poor, rich; imperial, republican; old, young; dead, alive; a dream of beauty, and a Person at whose feet one falls as though dead."

Julie perceived that he was already far away from the "tourist things." She glanced into teeming Piccadilly. There was a glint of sun on Eros, and flowers beneath. What magic the boy had! She had never understood before!

"But I would rather tell you the steps, Julie. They are so definite to me. One by one, one by one, as I was able to bear them. After you left me in Algeciras I took the first."

"Yes?" She did not follow what he meant, but what matter?

"Yes. You took the afternoon ferry. When you were gone, I climbed up the hill through the town to get a view of the Rock and see your boat arrive. In the plaza is the parish church—there were weeds growing green among the stones of its face—and the door stood wide open. Naturally I went in out of the sunlight, and I saw that the altar—oh, the quaintest monstrosity!—was a blaze of lights. The Sacrament was exposed in a kind of window-box that had a Venetian blind shutter to run up and down. There were perhaps a dozen people praying. I went in and knelt down.

"It was very still. Suddenly there was a clatter in the porch. Horrible! Hobnailed boots on the stone. I turned to look, though nobody else took the slightest notice. Two little boys, one five, perhaps, one ten, came running in —*running*, Julie!—up the centre aisle. They clattered past me, through the choir (nobody attempted to stop them) into the sanctuary, up the steps, up to the foot-pace of the altar itself, with the Sacrament there above them. The elder had led the younger by the hand. Now he pulled the baby down on his knees, where he played with the red carpet. He himself genuflected, went down on both knees, put his tousled head in his hands on the marble of the step. Then he jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, stood on tip-toe, picked up the altar-cloth a little, and kissed it twice. Another bob, and he was pulling the baby to its feet. He was made to genuflect, all askew, you know. Then clatter, clatter, clatter—out they went.

"And I saw. A Venetian blind rolled up inside *me*. Dear old Louise! I said a prayer for her at once."

Julie did not speak. She sat and watched him. She was aware of a curious mixture of love and amazement, for she saw what he meant but understood no word of it. He might almost have forgotten her as he went on.

"Ronda came next. I stayed a day or two, and wandered about at all hours. I see now I was searching for something. Heavens, the job it was! I wasn't so used to it then. I went down to the Vega, and climbed up again. I heard Mass in the parish church; I wandered out down the old road; I peeped in at the dim Moorish doorways through which one gets glimpses of exquisite colour and shape in ancient courtyards; I could find nothing. Then, the third day—rather nice that, Julie!—I went for a long walk up the valley. I came back very tired in the heat, for it was quite hot there, and dusty, by the winding Moorish road into the lower town, and I got lost. I stumbled on by crowded whitewashed houses, in and out of little squares, up and down on the cobble-stones, and suddenly I saw a tree leaning over a turning. I took it. It led to a small triangular bit of ground enclosed by a high blank wall, a church, and the houses the other side of this lane. There was trampled grass and an old tree or so in the triangle. The church looked shut, but I was very tired and it was getting dusk, and I thought I would go and see if I could get in. The door was not locked; I pushed it open. Inside it was almost too dark to see anything, but queer carved gilded-stone tombs and suggestions of altars and shadowy coloured statues and a beaten sheet of copper for a font, glimmered a little. I sank down on an oaken bench till the light over the altar grew brighter. As it brightened just that little, such rest as I had never dreamed of came in upon me like a strong man armed. There aren't words for it, of course. It was like a Presence. I struck a match in the porch to see the title of the church. It was 'Our Lady of Peace.' . . .

"So I was able to go on to Seville with Jesus and Mary. It was They, I suppose, Who made the trams and modern shops and busy streets so amusing. I wasted time in Seville, as it were; the feeling that I could do so was so delicious. But at last I went to see a little convent with a queer history. A nobleman of the sixteenth century founded it, after a life of dissipation and rowdiness which culminated in the plague and as nearly as possible in his death. After that he built a hospital, endowed it with all that he possessed, and used himself to go out by night and pick up the wretched dying beggars and carry them in. There's a picture of him doing it in the chapel, he just becoming aware of the angel who helps him. It's like a Rembrandt: the dirty dark street, the beggar's filthy rags, the gleam of the angel on the wall. He is buried in a little crypt under the altar. It's a sisterhood now—so quaint! A little cloister round a garth set with flowers—there was an old stork on one leg against the blue on one of the ridges of the roof—and nuns with great flappy hats who lead you to the chapel. There are masterpieces in it, protected with blinds, and the Mother-Superior, who was praying there, herself ran up the blinds and shewed me the pictures. Then

she took me into the crypt and shewed me the tomb. She was a wonderful Spanish lady. 'His life goes on,' she said simply, 'in our work and prayers.' And I saw for the first time what life meant. . . .

"At Córdoba I got the last and oddest lesson: at least, it wasn't really at Córdoba. Outside the town is a little village that's not in the guide-books, though I was guided there. I can't tell you all the story—it'd take too long, but of all the odd places. . . ." He laughed at the recollection, staring at Julie without seeing her. "There's a high wall enclosing a religious house, I suppose, a garden and a church, and you go in through a little gate into a kind of cloister leading to the church door. Well, the walls of that cloister are plastered, literally *plastered*, with the most absurd pictures you ever saw! There are motor accidents, and train smashes, and bicycle catastrophes, and sick-beds, and flooded rivers, and sinking steamers, mostly drawn with about as much knowledge of art as, say, I have. In every one is Our Lady of Fuensanta pulling the artist out of the smash or the accident. Mixed up with these are crutches galore, and war models of parts of the human body, some quite improper, and a stuffed crocodile—why the crocodile, God knows, unless Our Lady saved somebody from him! The dates run from 1690, the earliest I could see, to last year. In the church are more plaques on the walls, and one was in English, recording how a *Punch* artist thanked God and Our Lady of Fuensanta for escape while boating on the Guadalquiver! An old lady was trying to trim and light the sanctuary lamps, stumping about, and the wind kept on blowing out her matches. I lit them for her, and when she was gone, I sat down and laughed till I cried at the simplicity of truth and the foolishness of wisdom. I went on next day to Madrid and as quickly as I could to Toledo. I knew that that would be the end. You see I saw in that village church that God still works miracles in the Catholic Church as simply as ever He did, and I knew that one would happen at Toledo. It did. Father Gerard was waiting for me. He shewed me that everything homes in the Catholic Church, and I just walked in."

He finished. Julie turned away her head and looked out of the window. Suddenly Peter leaned forward. "Why, Julie," he exclaimed, "don't cry!"

"I'm not. It's all right. Only——Well, and what are you going to do now?"

Peter's face grew suddenly very solemn. "I'm going to try my vocation with the Carthusians," he said soberly.

Julie stifled a little sob. "The Carthusians? Who are they? I'm sorry I don't know."

"It's a religious order. I don't know that I really stand a chance: they're so strict and the rule is unusual. But Father Gerard is sure. I can't go against him. Besides, I think he may be right. If I have vocation, I shall pass there, God willing, to the Way of Union."

"Oh, Peter, talk so that I can understand!"

He surveyed her gravely. Then: "When you saw me this morning—I was praying before the veiled crucifix, for it's Passion Week."

"Yes, I meant to ask you why. It seemed silly."

"Silly? I don't understand. Never mind. Well, Julie, when first I knew you I never perceived, so to speak, that the crucifix was there at all. My eyes were set on other things. I had to have a spiritual surgical operation—a long one. You helped it through its final stages on the Berg and in Grey's. When I got over it, I was 'illuminated.' I saw the crucifix then. Now I *see* it there; I *know* it there. But the outline is still veiled for me. . . . See? And next, God willing, the veil will be taken away."

"I see. . . . That is, I see what you mean. And what will you do among these Carthusians?"

"Oh—pray. Mostly pray. You work a bit too, in your garden and study. But mostly you pray."

"I see," said Julie again, seeing this time not at all.

"One's parish is the world," he added, smiling at her.

Peter saw her off at Paddington. She got a corner in a smoker and shut the door, he standing cap in hand on the platform. "Well, Julie darling," he said, "good-bye. What I wanted to say was that I don't expect to see you again down here. It's no matter. We shall never forget each other, and we'll meet next wherever it is planned. By Jove, it will be jolly!"

"But what am I to *do*, Peter, what am I to do!"

"My dear, carry on. Go right on. Don't fear and don't shrink. You can't escape God if you are true to yourself. That is all. Good-bye."

The train began to move. "Good-bye, good-bye," cried Julie. "Peter, don't forget."

"Never. *Never.* Understand?" Peter was following the compartment. "You carry on, and it will be all right. Good-bye. God bless you."

"Good-bye, Peter, good-bye. Pray for me, Peter!"

It was wrung from her, that cry. She meant it, whether Peter is right or wrong as to what it ultimately will mean. And as the train took the curve, there he was, waving his ridiculous stick, his cloth cap on his head.

3

A mile out of Coddrington she had to light her lamp and bicycle on in the dark. The gloom of a damp day in the country that had been neither really wet nor decently fine lay heavy on field and tree, and the hills that the car ran lightly up and down that first day of her arrival were monstrous and wearying now. At the top of the last she stood awhile to recover her breath, leaning heavily on her handle-bar. She could hear a little occasional patter of drops of moisture on fallen leaves, and once the snap of a twig as some woodland creature broke it. There was not a light visible. Cottages, indeed, were scattered about not so far away, but she might have been anywhere for any sign there was of human life, save that country road that ran on and on before her. She wondered what Peter Graham would have made of that. He would, she supposed, see in it some fantastic meaning, some leading of God. She smiled ruefully but tenderly in the darkness, and pushed her machine forward to mount.

She was hardly in the saddle, the cross-road in sight if it had been day, when she heard wheels, and the lights of a trap passed across the top of her road ahead of her. It came from Turton-on-the-Hill and she guessed instantly that Geoffrey Platner was returning from his evening service there. Her heart sank a little: she could not bear with him to-night. Then she remembered Peter's words and had an instant's reproach. The clergyman was in the habit of dropping in for supper when he went to Turton-on-the-Hill, though she had forgotten that this was the Sunday, and Teanie, with her unfailing kindliness, had made it a kind of rule. Teanie was away; anyhow, she was Matron. She turned the corner of the lane and easily overtook him without any extra effort on the down grade. He peered from the trap. "Good-evening, Mr. Platner," she called cheerily.

"Why, Matron, is it you? Where have you been?"

"London. Coming in?"

"May I? I'd love to." His voice came back to her as she ran past the horse. A little later she wheeled her machine up to the front door and rang for a maid. Ellen came. "Oh, Ellen," she said, "Mr. Platner's coming in. I passed him on the hill. Is Mr. Sampson here?"

"No, Matron, not just now. But he's coming later."

"How is the young lady?"

"She's very bad, Matron, but she's quieter now. Doctor was with her all the morning. Sister Henson is there now."

"Thanks. Will you take the bicycle, Ellen? And will you serve supper for two in the drawing-room? I haven't had any. Shew Mr. Platner in there when he comes. I'm just going to change."

The clergyman usually arrived too late for the ordinary evening meal at Andover Cross, and it was customary to serve him with a cold supper on a wheeled table in the drawing-room. It was cosier there, and except for Teanie, Julie and Mr. Sampson, no one used it, as Sunday nights were as a rule a great time in the music-room whither everybody usually adjourned later on. Julie, then, ran hastily upstairs to Dr. Melville's room, slipped out of her clothes, washed her face and hands, got into an evening blouse with satisfaction, and hesitated a minute at the dividing door which led to what was properly her own room. Then she turned the handle gently and peeped in. The nurse by the bedside looked up warningly, smiling reassured, however, when she saw who it was. Julie entered soundlessly and approached the bed.

Angelica lay, breathing heavily. She was wearing one of Julie's own nightdresses, the soft silk cut low at the neck. Julie noticed with momentary surprise how thick was the red-gold hair that stretched in its plait on the pillow and caught the glimmer of light that escaped the shaded lamp by the bedside. The face was marble white, except that little blue veins shewed up against the pallor of it where the hair was drawn back on the forehead and behind the ear that Julie could see as she lay on her side. One arm lay outside the blue coverlet, and the little hand looked somehow aristocratic and fragile, lying listlessly there on the coloured stuff. The third finger still wore pathetically the wedding-ring that had been conventionally necessary with a landlady, who was, nevertheless, the last person to be deceived by it.

"How is she?" whispered Julie.

The nurse did not reply in words. As one professional to another she slightly shrugged her shoulders. And Julie understood.

She stood a moment watching. Then, impulsively, she bent over the child and lightly kissed her cheek.

Geoffrey Platner was warming himself by the cosy fire as she entered the drawing-room. He got up as she came in. "Why, Matron, you look dog-

tired!"

"Do I? I've had a long day. How are you?"

"Oh, well, another Sunday over, thank God."

There was such a comic mixture of gratitude and ruefulness in the tone that she smiled. "As bad as all that?" she queried.

"Pretty well, especially to-night. The Hill's worst of all my three places, you know. The good folk still remember the ministrations of an evangelical vicar and expect me to save their souls."

"When you can't save your own!"

"When I'm extremely dubious if I've got one to save!"

Supper was in, and Julie knew herself hungry as she saw the eggs, ham, cold chicken and salad. She turned to the table. "Oh well," she laughed, "we've both bodies and I'm precious hungry. Let's eat first, Mr. Platner, and discuss souls afterwards."

But a little later she set down her wine-glass to watch him finish. "What an odd world it is!" she said, half jocularly. "To-day I've met a soulless woman who insisted that my soul was in jeopardy; an ex-parson whom most good people would damn most heartily if they knew about him, but who is more sure of the existence of souls than he is of policemen on point duty; and a clergyman actively engaged in parochial work who is dubious whether I have a soul at all!"

"Oh, I say," protested Platner, "I said nothing about yours. I merely questioned the existence of my own."

"But surely it's a case of all or none."

"I suppose one would think so, but I've given up being dogmatic on any point. There are the sensations of the moment and the Book of Common Prayer. I admit the stupidity of the latter, but it's my job to read it, and some folk seem to like it, and I don't suppose it does them any harm. For the rest, I am now warmed and fed, and I'm extremely grateful to—Matron."

Julie pushed back her chair. "Come to the fire, Mr. Platner."

He rose and followed her, feeling for his pipe. "I may smoke, may I?"

"Rather. Have you a cigarette? Thanks. Now sit over there and talk to me. I want you to. I was joking in a way, just now, but not altogether. I've said good-bye to-day, probably for ever, to a very dear friend, a man who

would once have married me, whom I refused. I knew to-day that I was right those years ago. He has gone to be some sort of monk—a Carthusian, he said, whatever that may be. He is as convinced about it as I have ever seen anyone convinced about anything, but convinced in a way that I don't understand in the very least. If I did not know him very sane, I should believe him mad. Now, you too are a clergyman. You know what you are talking about, though anyone less like a clergyman I never met! Tell me honestly: do you believe in God?"

The man's blue eyes had been upon her the moment she began to speak seriously. They met hers frankly now. But a flicker of amusement crossed them. "Thanks for the compliment!"

"What compliment?"

"That you had never seen anyone less like a clergyman."

Julie laughed. "Well, now we've been polite! Come, Mr. Platner, can a man, can a woman, bank on God?"

"You didn't say that, but it's shrewd. . . . Believe in—bank on; yes," he mused, "it should be the same thing."

"Well, honestly now—Mr. Platner, I don't know that I shall accept your verdict, but I should like to know what you think—can one believe in God?"

"In the God of any recognized orthodox religion, Matron—no."

"The Christian God?"

"In an eternal Father patiently and lovingly sitting aloft and accepting sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins—no."

"Then you live for nothing but 'the sensations of the moment'!"

The scorn in her voice might have seemed rude to a lesser man. But Geoffrey Platner was bigger than that. He smoked quietly and watched her for a while. Then he spoke abruptly. "Have you got a Browning?"

"Yes, why?"

"Matron, may I read to you? I would like to read you *Saul*. I will not say that I even believe it at all; I will confess that I fail horribly to live up to it; but I think Browning has an answer for us. Let him say it. It is possible that the sensations of the moment—the stars, the stone, the flesh, the soul, the clod—may be God. Unnamed. Unknown. But—enough to 'bank on,' Matron. Will you give me the book?"

He settled himself under a lamp, and read. She got back into the shadows.

"Said Abner, 'At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,'—"

Was this Geoffrey Platner? She looked at him in astonishment. She had never heard reading like it. The man's whole face and manner was transfigured. David was indeed speaking. She saw him kneel to the God of his fathers, run over the sand burnt to powder, pull up the obstructing spear, enter the blackness, see something more black than the blackness—

"Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof, shewed Saul."

He read on and on. Julie was carried utterly away. Song after song leaped into her heart. She caught her breath, even, tears standing in her eyes, as the great voice reading hushed itself into wondering tender awe—

"I looked up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power
—
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower. . . ."

The reader moved in his chair. His voice changed. It had a new ring in it. ". . . Then the truth came upon me. . . ." Julie had never read that poem with understanding—

> "I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,
> In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
> In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.
> And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
> (With the stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
> The submission of Man's nothing-perfect to God's All-Complete,
> As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet!"

The door opened gently and Sampson looked in. The reader did not hear him. Julie made a little gesture, and he nodded back eagerly. He slipped into a chair that was half in shade, and Julie, her mind wandering a moment, took in yet again the weariness, the pain and yet the strength of the face turned in profile towards her, resting on a hand, tired. Her thoughts raced as she looked at him. Peter gone with a smile to his unknown destination; Maurice thrust into her life with the utter burden of his, the hopelessness of it. And

then, like a lash, the reader's voice, raised a little, cut across her consciousness. What mattered it that she had missed the context?

"Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever! a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

How, then, would it end, the sublime poem, the secret message?

"I know not too well how I found my way home in the night. . . ."

No, no; how should one! This thing, cleaving the night, left one dazed, dazzled. She slipped a glance at Maurice; he did not move. What was Geoffrey Platner reading? . . .

"E'en the serpent that slid away silent—he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned of the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar, and moved the vine-bowers.
And the little brooks witnessing, murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—'E'en so! it is so.' "

None of the three moved for a little. Then Platner closed the book, and put it down, still silent. Sampson roused himself. "If I had your voice, Platner——But there, that's mean. Thank you for a great treat."

"If one could only always remember . . ." said the other sadly.

" 'E'en so! it is so,' " cried Julie suddenly, out of the shadow.

Both men started, and turned to look at her. Her eyes shone.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1

Julie slept soundly, being emotionally tired out. It was thus not at once that the night-Sister succeeded in awakening her in the early hours. When she saw the Sister's face, however, her mind became alert quickly enough with the trained facility of years. "Yes, what is it, Sister?"

"Matron, the girl is dying. She wants you. Come at once."

Julie sat up in bed. "At once," repeated the Sister; "Mr. Sampson is holding back an injection."

Without a word, Julie sprang out of bed, crossed the floor and entered the next room in her nightdress. The situation at once explained itself to her. Angelica lay propped up a little with pillows, her eyes shut, her arms stretched out on the coverlet before her. On one side sat the surgeon, his left hand on his patient's pulse, his right out of sight among the shadows with a deliberation obvious to Julie. His face turned to her door as she came swiftly in. She had left him the evening before to sleep on a couch in the study. He did not speak, but Julie understood the message of his eyes. She had not long.

On the further side of the bed, between it and the small round table that held the ruby-shaded lamp, a medicine glass, a bottle, and the book that the night nurse had hastily placed face downwards on her patient's awakening, stood a low cane chair. Julie moved quietly but quickly over to it and sat down. In both of her own she took the girl's other hand.

Angelica opened her eyes, saw Julie, and smiled. "Oh Matron," she said dreamily in a whisper, "how nice of you to come. I've been asleep."

"Happy dreams, dear?" questioned Julie gently, smiling down on her.

"Ever so happy. And I'm so comfortable. But I don't properly remember getting here."

"Well, that doesn't matter, does it? Don't worry. Your friends aren't going to let you go, anyway."

The girl smiled again faintly at her. "No," she said contentedly. Then, with a little flicker of humour. "Even the doctor's so kind!"

Julie wondered what part of her story that pitiful little reference hid, but she would never know. “We shouldn’t keep him if he weren’t, you know,” she said.

There fell a little silence. The eyes closed once more. After a few minutes Julie glanced enquiringly at Sampson, but he shook his head. Before she could look back, the girl herself surprised them by speaking again without other movement.

“I never said my prayers, nurse,” she whispered. “Mother will be cross.”

The mind was wandering back down the corridors of time, Julie guessed, half-forgetful of the present. How the little sentence conjured up the childhood of the girl before her! She pressed her hand gently. “No, no, dear. Mother isn’t here. She won’t know. She won’t be cross.”

Angelica opened her eyes at that. This time it was plain to the watchers that the enemy was stealing back on the patient’s consciousness. There was a shadow of fear, of delirium in her face, and both knew how soon pain would follow, how quickly it would be necessary to deliver the frail spirit. “Oh, but she will know,” cried Angelica in her faint voice. “She always knows. Say my prayers for me, nurse, please, please!”

“Angelica,” said Julie firmly, “don’t worry, dear. Sleep, will you, sleep, sleep. . . .”

Her voice steadied the wavering mind. “You’re sure it will be all right?”

“Quite all right. You sleep, that’s all—sleep—sleep.”

“You won’t leave me?”—sleepily.

“No, of course not. I’ll stay and hold your hand. Sleep now, dear—sleep—sleep.”

Both thought that the reiteration had worked its charm. The eyelids fluttered down and the child gave a little sigh of content. But a moment later she moved slightly, and next instant a swift shudder quivered through the slim body outlined before them. Once again the eyes were wide, but this time staring into the shadows, big with fear, conscious of at least the approach of pain. “Oh,” she cried, “oh—oh!”

Sampson’s face changed. He bent quickly forward and peered into his patient’s face. Then he leaned back; his right hand came up; Julie caught the glimmer of glass and metal; he laid the arm back on the coverlet and stood up.

“There, there, darling,” said Julie. “It’s all right, dear. I promised you no pain.” With her free hand she smoothed the hair back gently on the hot forehead, bending forward to do so.

A flicker of relief passed across the other’s eyes. “A-a-ah!” she breathed. Then: “I know. And—and—to be quiet—Matron.”

“Of course, dear.”

“Kiss me.”

Julie leaned right over now and put her lips to Angelica’s. She felt them press her own ever so weakly, with a little flutter, and be still.

“Miss Gamelyn,” said Maurice Sampson in his ordinary tone, “will you call Sister Henson at once. She will not again be conscious. We may save the child. We must take the chance for what it is worth. Nurse, get her ready as quickly as you can.”

Julie turned and left without a word. Down the corridor she went to Sister Henson’s room with a grave set face. She had seen death too often to have much dread of his approach, and if there was an element of the unusual in this, it was not of that she thought now. But she knew that she had watched the end of as criminal a sacrifice as ever had been made. Sampson was right: Andover Cross was largely mere alleviation of what never ought to be. In its own way, it was like the War, she thought. Even the mother, with her grim prudish creed, was not wholly to blame, any more than the Kaiser or anyone else who might have been the more immediate cause of the War. No, it was the system that was wrong, and systems within the system. Almost unconsciously, as she went, Julie pledged herself to do whatever lay within her power to right that wrong.

But, as in the War too, there was instant action to take, holding up thought. She knocked and entered Sister Henson’s room, and wakened her. She went back to the sick-room where already was subdued bustle and activity, with the obstetrician to speak with her at the door, in his white overalls already. “You can do nothing, Matron. It’s not your job. Go back to bed. Heavens! You’re still in that thin nightdress.”

“I’ll put on a wrap. I am sure I can’t sleep. I’ll wait in the study. If I can do anything, call me, won’t you?”

He nodded and the door closed on her.

She went on to Teanie’s bedroom and slipped into a dressing-gown, brushing her hair too. Then down to the study, lighting a lamp, sitting down

for a little, listening, then rising to make ready a spirit-stove and set on a kettle. She could have tea ready at least for the workers upstairs. She smiled to herself a little grimly as she did it. It was queer being a Matron, and not on the professional side of things, in a way. She realized that it made a big difference: that somehow one had a more human interest in all the patients and in the staff too.

But how slowly the minutes went! She could hear feet moving on the floor above her, and once the door opened and she went quickly to her own. But it was only one of the nurses, going methodically to a bathroom. She came back, and the door closed again. There had been no sound within while it had been open.

Her mind switched, for no reason particularly that she knew, to Peter Graham. He would be asleep in that queer church, or at least in the house attached to it. She speculated vaguely as to his room, with nothing better to help her than memories of romances and of Longfellow and the poets—a stone cell, with a little slit of a window, and a bare wooden bed? Surely not in modern London! Then what could it be: a sort of servants' bedroom?

And then, suddenly, the wailing began above. It rose and fell, monotonous, penetrating, and she listened intently. Then she breathed a sigh of relief. That was not the crying of conscious pain, her experience taught her that. But it foretold the end probably. There might be soon the first cry of new life that she had learned to recognize since she came to Andover Cross. What would they do with the baby? She supposed they would have to communicate with the family, and that even that grim figure under the text in Burleigh Square could hardly refuse the "fatherless" (and motherless) in its "affliction." But, poor baby, how much better if it were refused! She had a little spasm of revolt and anger as she thought of it. Grandmother would be "cross" if it did not say its prayers. It would be "whipped for asking questions." Would it ever even know the name of the girl-mother? If so, with what unnatural and secretly repudiated shame! And then, there, what chance would it have, born so, brought up so? If the Car of Juggernaut, with religion and society for its wheels, had rolled crushingly over the mother, how would the child escape?

Then, as the light of earliest dawn glimmered pallid behind the blinds, that wailing above ceased abruptly, so abruptly that Julie's heart stood still a moment, professional as she was. "*We may save the child; we must take the chance for what it is worth.*" . . . At the time, she had scarcely understood the words, but now they shot across her mind. She did not doubt that she had heard their consummation. The pursuing enemy, that had been staved off so

vigorously, so tenderly too, had been given its victim. She, she—well, she had been a nurse in the War. . . . But for all her experience she turned from the window by which she had been standing, and sat down heavily in her chair.

She listened intently. There should be another cry. Five minutes had elapsed, ten, fifteen. The door opened above again. She leaned forward to hear better. It was a male tread, descending the stairs. For the life of her, she could not get up. Mr. Sampson came in.

He shut the door behind him and moved over to the table, resting his hands on it, standing there. Instinctively she glanced at those hands. . . . But only for a second. "Sit down, please. You look tired out. I keep on telling you you work too hard. Teanie will have to drop her dratted lectures or I shall have to qualify as a doctor. Will you have tea?—the water's ready: I've kept on seeing to it. Or a drop of whisky?"

He responded to her naturalness. "Tea, matron? That would be splendid. Yes, I've been done out of my sleep lately, what with one thing and another. I am tired." And he sank into an armchair.

She moved quickly about. The man supplied, she thought of the women still upstairs, and glanced at him. "I might as well take them up a couple of cups?"

"Yes." Then the full significance of the question dawned on him. "Or they could come down for a moment. There is no reason why not. The child never really lived."

"I'll take it up," said Julie. "They can have it in my room."

When she returned, he had finished his own cup and was putting on his overcoat. "What, going at once?"

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson always likes me to return at once."

There was an intimacy about the words, simple as they were, which he had never permitted himself in her presence before. Julie made no comment. She lifted his hat from a chair and held it out to him.

"Thanks." He stood a minute, brushing it. "I can never get used to these things, Matron," he said, half apologetically she thought.

"I am glad to hear it," she retorted.

"Why? They would be less difficult."

"And you would be less human. Your patients would not be so likely to find you 'kind.' "

The word moved him. "That poor, poor child!" he exclaimed. . . . "Well, well. . . . 'There is no god found stronger than death, and death is a sleep.' "

"I think I am glad the baby did not live," she said quietly, watching him.

He nodded, absent-mindedly. "Oh, so am I, for that matter." And then the fire of the driving enthusiasm of his life awoke in him. "Good God, Matron," he cried, "did you never think how fine human birth might be? If it were not haphazard; if parents brought affection, yes, but wisdom too, to birth; if we had a social system that thought of human happiness and progress, not in terms of machinery and money, but in relation to freedom and harmony and knowledge? Such little effort as The Society can make towards that is indeed worth while!"

"But what can it do?"

"Oh, well, not much. The economic revolution we can hardly influence. But we can defy society as at present constituted, and the house in Devonshire would exist, of course, for that."

Julie was puzzled. She had not heard anyone speak before of any house in Devonshire. "I don't understand," she said.

Maurice Sampson glanced quickly at her. "I thought you knew. I'm sorry. Not that it matters, Matron, in your case. You're rather one of the family, aren't you? Still, ask Dr. Melville to explain, will you? You ought not to be kept in the dark over anything if you remain here. Well, good-night."

"Good-morning, rather," smiled Julie. "You'll be in to-day?"

"Perhaps. If I'm wanted. I'll send up the certificates. Dr. Melville returns this morning?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Right. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

She watched him down the path with a familiar air. She was "one of the family," and glad to be—she knew that. Life was opening up for her again, somehow. Nevertheless, with Peter still so recently in her mind, she did not yet perceive what manner of star it was that was rising above the horizon, that was already leading her to a far haven.

It was only when Teanie Melville walked up that same path at about half-past ten, the sound of the taxi that had brought her from Coddrington diminishing in the distance, that Julie realized, with something like a shock, how much had been packed into that week-end. "Well," called Teanie cheerily, as she went to meet her, "everything serene?"

Julie took her arm. "Oh, my dear," she exclaimed, "but *yes*, now, in a way."

Teanie looked at her keenly. "You shall tell me all about it," she said. And again, within the house: "What have you been doing?"

She seated herself at her desk, with the unopened letters of that morning's mail in front of her. Characteristically, she liked the position. To her hand were the memoranda, the papers, the pens, the letters, the accounts, that made her work; by her side, ash-tray and cigarettes; before her, the photograph of an officer, in the staff uniform of pre-war days, whom Julie had never known and of whom Teanie never spoke. Throned among these, Teanie's shrewd eyes held you wherever you sat in the room. She rather liked you to move freely about while you talked to her, and to be at home. Her hair, greying on her temples, was brushed back in a methodical kind of way, and her eyes would sparkle friendlily. She would sit with her capable hands resting on the desk, and her shoulders squared, her head erect. She was very easy to talk to, but she usually talked herself a good deal less than her visitors.

Julie threw herself into an armchair. "What have I been doing? Most things, I think, including a run up to town and back again. Like a fool, I forgot your number or I'd have called. But I'll begin at the beginning and tell you everything."

But she did not tell everything. Peter played no part in her story: there was, of course, no reason why he should; Sunday's supper was dismissed in few words; she did not relate her last conversation with Mr. Sampson. Still, there was enough, in all conscience, to hold her listener's attention, and Teanie was a good listener. Once only did she interrupt: after she had heard of the visit to Burleigh Square.

"Thank God it was you who had to do that and not I."

"Why?"

"I should have been far more rude. I should have told her to go to hell."

"Would you? I didn't feel like it. It has been too tragic for that."

"No, but I should have done. You see, you're new to the work. When you've seen all that I've seen, and realize that it is that class of woman which abuses us on the platform and in the Press, you'll understand. However, on you go."

Julie finished at last. "Sister Henson telephoned to Coddrington as soon as the Post Office opened; she knew to whom to speak. For the rest I've waited for you."

"Good. I shall perhaps have an opportunity, after all, of meeting her ladyship, at least of writing to her. Meantime——"

She broke off, her eyes on Julie's face. "My dear, you mustn't take it so much to heart. You can have general righteous indignation to your heart's content, but you've got to steel yourself to this sort of thing like a 'pro.' to 'ops.' "

"Do you see so much of it, then?"

Teanie picked up a paper-knife and balanced it on her fingers. "Do you know why this place is at Andover Cross?" she asked abruptly. "Pretty much out of the way, isn't it? No gilt letters on the gate, and no one much to see them if there were. Well, one reason is because it's The Society's second home. The first is in North London, on a main road. I was there for a while, but I don't think I could have stood it. Every sort of girl came to that gate, from the prostitute to the peeress, and we should have required to be about as big as the London to take them all in. It's not till you get down to it that you realize what the state of things is, in a city like London, in a country like England. For one thing, we could have kept a large consulting staff giving advice alone; and if women had realized that we could tell them how *not* to get into trouble and how to control the size of their families, we should have required six."

"Are things really as bad as that?"

Teanie Melville upset the balance of her paper-knife, grasping it as it fell. "Julie, do you realize that never for one night since you've been here has a bed been empty? Yet yesterday I saw the Secretary in town. She implored me to empty more quickly. I said that if ever we were to do anything with the men, it was necessary often to keep the girls a bit. She's a hasty wench. She said: 'To hell with the men. Teach your girls to have nothing more to do with them, and arm them at all points if they do.' "

Julie smiled. "What did you say?"

"Oh, I told her to think before she spoke and to be sure not to speak before strangers."

Julie looked at her reflectively. "Yes," she said at last, "that would indeed be to do nothing but alleviate. But, Teanie, aren't there plenty of other homes?"

The woman before her exploded into speech. "Good God, yes. There are homes in which they will take a repentant, unmarried, poor mother, if she swears never to have anything to do with the child after it is born. That's one sort, God damn them."

"Don't tell me of any more," said Julie.

"Oh, well, of course you needn't suppose there's *nothing* else. But nowhere, except at The Society's Homes, is all given, even Twilight Sleep, that any money can buy and skill provide, to any girl, under any circumstances, because we are glad of her motherhood and want her to be glad of it too."

Julie leaped to her feet. "Oh, Teanie," she cried, "that's fine, fine! That's Christlike."

"It's commonsense," growled the other, still a little grim.

Julie set off restlessly on a tour of inspection. "And how many homes has The Society got?" she asked, from the Canadian snow-shoes across the room, her back to the doctor.

"Two, so far. One here, one in North London."

"Then what," asked Julie in a casual tone, turning round with an ebony Indian elephant in her hand, "is the house in Devonshire?"

Teanie Melville flicked her paper-knife. "Who's been talking?" she demanded.

"Mr. Sampson mentioned it by chance. He thought I should know of it. Having mentioned it, he told me to ask you."

"Why didn't he tell you himself?"

"Only, I think, because he was in a hurry to go. . . . Teanie, what's the secret?"

Teanie Melville dropped the paper-knife and spread her hands out before her. She studied her squarish capable finger-tips for a while. "In a sense there's no secret," she said at last, "but the idea of the house in Devonshire

represents the most forward movement of The Society, and—well, it *is* forward. Public opinion is uneducated, and the Law limps behind it. A newspaper syndicate, properly paid, could tell enough of the truth to make the most beautiful lie since the War for public consumption."

Julie crossed to the fire and leant against the mantelpiece. "I still do not know any of the truth," she said.

Teanie pushed her chair back a very little, and pronounced judgment. She was plainly weighing her words. Julie was aware of a distinct impression that her friend was speaking a piece. She said: "It is at present no more than a project conceived by some of the members, though the details are practically determined already. A house on a big estate in Devonshire is to be bought by The Society. In essentials it will become a Maternity Home, much on these lines. There is to be a first-class staff, Twilight Sleep if advantageous, and every aid that beauty and music and calm can give. There will be built, in the same grounds, a home for the children up to nine or ten years, just as there will be, across the county, when the other is finished, a school for those above that age. Every facility will be made for the mothers—and fathers—to visit their children; there will be every possible care in the selection of the teaching and nursing staff. In a word, the scheme is an attempt to usher children into the world under the best possible conditions and to build upon that the best possible education."

"How utterly splendid!" cried Julie in a low tense voice.

Teanie looked at her judiciously. "And why?" she demanded.

"Because there will be a chance to give England sons and daughters of whom she would never be ashamed."

"Except," said Teanie dryly, "that they would say the World and not England, you echo the sentiments of the Committee, even if you do not yet wholly understand their method."

Julie was puzzled. "Teanie," she said, "what are you hiding? What don't you like? There is something you don't agree with. What is it?"

For once she perturbed her friend. Dr. Melville moved restlessly. "My dear," she said, "the truth is not exactly that. It isn't so much that I disagree as that I can't make up my mind. Perhaps it's because I'm a woman; perhaps because I'm not sufficiently scientific. Sampson is, for example, wholeheartedly in its favour. You see, it is to be an establishment for children who are not only to be catered for supremely after they arrive, but whose coming will have been as deliberately thought out."

Julie did not change countenance. It seemed to her that she had guessed it. “In other words, what Mr. Sampson said as to breeding is to become a fact of The Society’s programme?”

“That’s it. And that’s what might be made a lovely lie. For whatever is to be said for or against it, except on orthodox religious grounds there is nothing loose or immoral about any of the people who have to do with it.”

Julie sat down deliberately. “Will you explain a bit more?” she asked.

“Surely. I want you to know. It’s daring and it’s great. There are, of course, as yet in the world comparatively few men and women who would lend themselves to it, who *could* lend themselves to it; but there are some. There are some, usually devoted to science or art or social politics, who do not want marriage with all that it entails in Society as at present constituted; there are probably very many more who cannot afford it—who cannot, that is, consent to bring children into an extraordinarily difficult world in which their development, as they would wish to see it, is almost impossible. Yet such men and women want their work to live after them, want to ensure the progress of the Race along certain lines. Add to that that they are convinced of the evils of promiscuous mating, and you will see that two such might gladly consent to have a child under the conditions The Society will make possible.”

“I see,” said Julie.

“The idea is as old as Plato—the breeding of the best from a certain caste, but the world has never really tried it. It is a huge scheme, anyway, and takes thinking out. And that’s where you get me. I’ve never yet been able to think it out. So far, I’ve abstained from voting for or against on committee.”

“It doesn’t seem to me so difficult,” said Julie slowly.

“Shucks! Then you haven’t thought it out. Sampson’s writing a book on the subject. It involves most ‘ologies’ that you can think of. You should see his chapters—The Spirit of the Race; The Unit—Family or Individual? The Place of the Family in History; The Economic Dependence of Women; Malthusianism; The World State; Man in the Highest; and God knows what else. It makes my brain reel. You want to be a super-scientist to follow it.”

“Or,” said Julie thoughtfully, “perhaps you want to be something else.”

“Eh?”

“I said that perhaps you wanted to be something else.”

"And what the devil's that? These cigarettes are finished: throw me one, will you?"

Julie reached for the box on the mantelpiece in silence.

"Well?"

"Teanie," she said, stretching herself with a slow smile, "I'm damned tired. I was up half the night. I'm going to lie down for an hour."

"Right," said Dr. Melville heartily, noting once more the feminine grace of the other's figure.

3

As day succeeded day, the routine of the Home did indeed become more normal to Julie, as Teanie Melville said it would do, and incidents which had at first arrested her attention no longer seemed worthy of particular remark. But it is precisely in such a condition of affairs that our own development proceeds quicker than we know, and Julie's was no exception. She was becoming obsessed by an idea, interested in a personality. Moreover, as days became months, and the silence that enshrouded Peter never lifted, she came increasingly to realize subconsciously that he was removed from her life, which must, nevertheless, flow on without him. She could think of him now without pain. Looking back, he marked the birth within her of a desire for a purpose in life, he became the kind of model of one who has dared all for an ideal. She was stronger and surer because of him, but, that settled, her old nature began increasingly to shew itself. She became the heart and soul of the Home; she became the outrageous Julie who, at first sight, was a comedy of a Matron, but who, in fact, could scarcely have been surpassed. The girls adored her, and she gave them back gaiety which was what in truth they needed most of all; the men worshipped her, and she exploded them out of their conventional prejudices, which was what *they* needed most of all.

At the foot of the orchard there was a pond, and in a dry May and June it emptied itself. Julie, surveying it one day, had a brilliant notion, which she at once took Sampson down to expound. It was on a morning when he had arrived more grave than usual, and she knew him well enough now to know why. His wife would have been, as Julie used to put it to Teanie, extra-specially "fluffy." She met him in the porch.

"I say, can you spare me five minutes?"

"Why? I dare say I could." His tired eyes were lighting already at the sight of her.

“Come on, then. No, you won’t want your hat or stick. Give them me. That’s it. This way. The bottom of the orchard, please.”

He stumbled after her, over the ruts, past the chicken-houses, among the trees, and stood at last on the edge of a considerable depression of dried mud and rotted leaves. “There!” cried Julie excitedly.

Maurice Sampson looked at the empty pond in bewilderment, and then back at Julie. He smiled dryly. “Admirable, Matron. I dare say an examination of that mud under the microscope would prove most instructive.”

“Oh, get along with you! Damn your microscope! Mr. Sampson, I believe you perpetually look at things down the wrong instrument. Now I suppose *you* see filthy bacilli?”

“Filthy is a question of taste. But, in general, yes.”

“Well, *I* see a swimming-bath!”

“*What!*”

“A swimming-bath. Very nice for Teanie and me in the first place, but above all things admirable for the young men in the second.”

“By Jove,” said Sampson interestedly, “I believe you’re right.”

“Of course I am. There is nothing in the world for them like cold water, open air and commonsense.”

“But do you suppose for a second that they’d use it?”

“Of course I do. I should drag ’em down and push ’em in.”

“Would you propose to soap them?” queried Sampson gravely.

“Duck them rather. You shall try yourself and see.”

The surgeon could no longer contain himself. He shook with his silent laughter, his eyes alight with the merriment that banishes mental pain. Julie watched him, arms akimbo. “Well,” she said at last, “will you have the goodness to make some reasonable comment?”

“An open-air bath with a lady instructress at a Maternity Home!” gasped Sampson when he could speak. “Julie,”—he called her that now—“you’re preposterous.”

“It’s not I that’s preposterous,” she objected; “it’s the world at large. After all, *you* began it. You upset all my preconceived prejudices, and when

I add a little commonsense to your science you laugh at it. What in the blazes do you get young men down here for at all? Isn't it to banish the mental and moral cobwebs of Brixton? Well, there's nothing like getting them out of their wretched reach-me-downs into flannels and bathing-drawers for that!"

He sobered. "You're absolutely right," he said. "Now explain the idea."

"Well, this pond's dry, isn't it? But the one down below in the Park is not. Why? Because it's fed by that spring and stream up on the hill that disappears underground the other side the garden. Now, if we concreted this and ran a pipe from that spring to the pond, I bet we'd have a topping bath in the hottest summer. And it would not cost so very much. We do that sort of thing in Africa; why not in England?"

"There is no reason," he said. "What is more, James is your man. I'll send him to you and give you *carte blanche*."

"Maurice Sampson," cried Julie, "there are times when I could kiss you!"

Sampson thrust his hands rather suddenly into his pockets. "I'm grateful for the will," he said, "if not for the deed. But I must get back."

The handy-man at "Sixteen-twenty," as she always called the surgeon's house, did indeed appear that day, and shortly made an excellent job of it. Julie's pool became a feature of Andover House. Tall willows leaned over it and trailed their long streamers on hot August days in the cool water, and the sun of a particularly warm and bright September threw dappled light and shade on its surface. Thither went Teanie one afternoon, seeking Julie. Laughter greeted her, and she stood to watch for a minute unseen behind a tree-trunk on the bank. Before her, at the water's edge, on a rough seat, sat one of the young mothers, whose confinement comfortably over, was staying on with her man in the Visitors Block for a few days' extra convalescence. She was laughing happily. Julie stood by her side in her A.S.A. costume, holding the seat with one hand, gesticulating with the other and leaning out over the water. She was shouting encouragement as well as she could for laughter. And two young men, who might have been "whining about their sins," or going home to their lodgings by different streets to avoid passing certain doors, were wrestling in the water for the possession of a metal disc for which they had been diving.

"Oh, splendid, Harry!" cried Julie. "Mary! he's got it!"

Harry's rival, at the end of his resistance, had spun the disc from him. Harry with a clean quick turn of his white back, had shot down under the other after it, and then, beneath the clear water, could be seen gripping it as it slithered this way and that, swimming underwater to the bank. "Splendid!" cried Julie again, as he emerged spluttering. "Harry, anyway, you're our underwater champion!"

"Only when you're out of the water, Matron," put in the girl by her side.

"Oh no. He'd beat me."

"Try, Matron, do try! Both stand here and throw the disc right over into that corner. Give it time to get down. Then see which of you can get it quickest."

"And I'll time," said Teanie, coming forward, "if you'll be quick about it."

They turned and looked at her. "Splendid, splendid, doctor," cried the girl, clapping her hands. "Oh, Matron, do do it!"

"All right," said Julie. "Come and beat me, Harry."

The young fellow hauled himself out of the pool by the root of a tree and emerged in the swimming-trunks of a London club. He was not one who had had to be taught to swim. What was new to him at Andover Cross was the multitude of sensations induced by being routed out of his bed in the dawn, companioned to the open-air pond by an athletic young woman, and bathed with in a frank companionship that never for a moment treated sex as of no account, but equally allowed in it nothing ugly, nothing surreptitious. Harry was a lad of few words, and for his new experiences he had fewer than usual. The third morning, however, he had tried his hand at expression as he towelled down on the bank.

"Matron," he had said, still a little nervous of his thoughts, "I don't know what it is, but you make me feel like a god."

"Which, my dear Harry," Julie had retorted, towelling down likewise, "is exactly what you are."

At any rate, he made a fine figure, standing there in the September sun. Mary thought so anyway. His supple muscles moved easily under his satin skin; he carried his head so proudly. She sighed a little. It seemed wrong that he should spend all his days in a stuffy shop—after Andover Cross, anyway. If he could be a swimming instructor now!

He won by four seconds, and Julie climbed out of the water, laughing with pleasure. “I told you so. Oh, but the water’s good! Well, Teanie?”

“Sampson’s just sent a message. He’s got to go to Coddrington, but he’s free after that, and is going for a spin into Warwickshire. Would you care for the run?”

“I’d love it. But couldn’t you go?”

“No. Clean impossible. He asked either of us, but it’s you or neither. You might to-day, too. I’m sure Mary here would run tea for you.”

“Course I would,” the girl urged. “Do go, Matron. It’d do you a world of good.”

“Well,” laughed Julie, “since it’s a conspiracy——”

“You’ve a quarter of an hour to change in if you’re not to keep him waiting.”

She did not. As the little car purred to a standstill at the gate, she ran down the path to him in her furs. His face broke into smiles as he saw her. “It’s to be you, Julie, is it?”

“Yes, though it ought to be Teanie. I get all the fun.”

“I don’t know. You’re never away, and she has her lecturing jaunts occasionally. Still, you both work like horses. In you get.”

“Will you be long in Coddrington?” she asked, as the car slid round the corner and began to take the hill.

“No. Five minutes. Then we’ll have some tea. We can have a real run afterwards. No need to be back till supper. My wife’s away, you know.”

“And how’s things to-day?”

It had come to that between them imperceptibly, just when neither exactly knew. Nor had either attempted to define the measure of their intimacy. Maurice Sampson was naturally a reserved man, and the manner of his life had increased his reserve, but it had increased it, about the time that Julie arrived upon the scene, almost to breaking-point. In Teanie Melville he had found, indeed, a sympathetic colleague, a friend, too, with whom he could talk his science, yet possibly for these very two reasons he had not found more. But Julie was different. She was complete relief, fresh in her outlook on his work and life, free in her comments, womanly in her sympathy. And Julie was aware intuitively that he felt so about her, was proud of it a little, was glad of it in any case. Thus, then, they drifted, while

a purpose formed in Julie's mind that this, that, and the other event of the months past made ever plainer, and in his grew something of a resolve so curiously unlike his scientific attitude that it should have given him pause. For Maurice Sampson was aware already that his liking for Julie had better not be analyzed.

"How's things to-day?" he repeated. "As they have been, are, and ever must be."

She knew his mind when he answered like that, and it was the mood in which she pitied him most. There were days when he would explode to her with the folly of his life, but at least the explosion did him good. On others he would be interiorly much more quiet, speculative, viewing the catastrophe of his position almost resignedly, even scientifically. She hated him then. It was that side of him that Teanie saw most frequently, the mood in which his own child became something of a case which, perhaps, should be treated as a desperate hopeless case, and his wife's religion and "fluffiness" another. But to-day the man was uppermost, the living natural man, who was infinitely sorry for his wife and who saw in his child a burden which could in no wise be lightened all his days. Yet of all his moods this was the most difficult to help. There was perhaps only one way.

She sat up a little in the car. "You are too sure, Maurice," she said.

"I fear not."

"You are always too sure. That's the worst of you scientific people. Life has infinite possibilities. Better still, man has. The only irrefrangible fetters are forged in his own soul. And that's a dam long word for me! I'm growing up. My African friends won't know me after a few years at Andover Cross!"

He smiled momentarily. "Perhaps. But against one's own desire, such fetters are forged, imperceptibly, inevitably."

She shook her head vigorously. "I don't believe it. I *won't* believe it. While there's life there's hope, you know."

"So little sometimes," he retorted, "as to be negligible."

"Rubbish; and look here: I'll be scientific. I believe that *hope* grows imperceptibly, almost inevitably. I'm only just over thirty, but I've thought my life finished once or twice already."

He stole a sidelong glance at her. "I have seen that in your eyes," he said.

"That's what Peter used to say."

"Peter?"

"Yes. The boy I loved in the War. Such a boy! I spent a week-end with him in town."

"I'm glad you had the pluck. You've at least the memory now. When was he killed?"

"He wasn't killed."

"Oh! Sorry, Julie dear."

"You needn't be. I wouldn't marry him. You see, he was a padre whom the War was shaking to small bits. But deep down in him was something it couldn't shake, and I had the good luck to see it. What's that bit in the Bible about falling on a stone and being ground to powder?"

He hid a smile, and gravely quoted: " 'Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.' Is that it?"

"Yes. That's it exactly. I never used to understand it, but I do now. You see, if we had married, I would have fallen on that rock and been broken, but it would have fallen on poor Peter and ground him slowly into powder."

"My dear Julie! You are infinitely various. I had no idea you were a theologian."

"Now you shut up ragging. Probably you hadn't. Nor am I."

He laughed outright. "Julie, my head whirls. Let's call a truce, and for God's sake tell me what you mean. Even Platner in his pulpit is not nearly so confusing."

"Well, you've said it. Flippantly, as usual, I know, but still you've said it. 'For God's sake.' That was why I couldn't marry him."

"I had no idea you were ever religious. I congratulate you more than ever on the week-end."

"I was not religious, but I had enough gumption to see religion in him. Curiously enough, I've got far more now."

"Religion? How?"

"You remember that Browning? God in everything, God in a man? 'See the Christ stand.' I believe I am coming to something like that. And, as a matter of fact, that is your religion too."

“Julie, really you are talking a good deal of nonsense. I have no religion.”

“Maurice, really you are talking a good deal of nonsense. You have a religion.”

He pressed his foot a little more on the accelerator, and the car leaped forward on a stretch of straight road. “It is undignified to scream,” he said, “but the only answer to your talk is, as it, to exceed the limit.”

Julie settled back a little in her seat to avoid the greater rush of air. “Oh, this is ripping!” she cried; “but for all that, Maurice, I never heard a worse pun in my life.”

He was silent until they had to slow down into Coddrington. Then, as they passed the church, he said: “But please explain, as to a little child, the parable of Peter, stone, powder, and yourself.”

Memory crept again into Julie’s eyes, sobering them. “Well, you see,” she said, “he was religious to his heart’s core. I guessed he always would be. On that rock my happiness with him would have been broken, for I shall never see God as he did, but his happiness with me would have been fretted to powder.”

“Where is he now?” asked Maurice after a little, slowing down at the door in the main street.

“In a Carthusian monastery, or going.”

“Good God!”

4

“There! I told you I should only be five minutes. Where now?”

“Tea first. Old Mrs. Jones’ will do. Then into the country. Race out. I want speed for a bit. And then slow her down and talk to me. I’ve got something I want you to explain.”

The trees were assuming russet and scarlet and gold for the coming of that god than which, as once Maurice had quoted from Swinburne, there is found none stronger. Yellow and white for its birth, scarlet and gold for its passing, Life goes heralded with royal trumpets in our sight. It is surely, Julie thought, as they raced a little later by hedge and copse while the sun sank slowly over the far-flung fields, a procession of beauty and wonder in which wise men would indeed take “conscious participation.” The phrase had rung often in her head since Sampson had first used it. It was about that

she wanted to speak to him. In all these months she had found no opportunity good enough, but she had waited, and it had come to-day. Somehow, with those royal colours spread so lavishly around, while they two slid swiftly and easily over the wonderful English roads at which she never ceased to wonder, the time seemed prepared. That curious sense of destiny was with her so strongly. It was almost as if, at some time long ago, they two had met, had separated for a little, had come together again. And for this moment. She let the miles slip by without fear that the afternoon would pass without that being said which was surely planned.

It was Sampson at last who slowed down and spoke. "Well," he said, "you're very quiet. What do you want to talk about?"

"The house in Devonshire."

"Oh! And what especially about it?"

It took her a few seconds to arrange her thoughts. At last she laughed a little inconsequently. "I don't know. Not about the house particularly, perhaps, after all. I want you to explain your religion."

"My religion!"

"Yes. Your religion. For it is that, you know, say what you will. Do you know, you and Geoffrey Platner and Peter stand together in my mind. Geoffrey Platner is in the middle, the middle that I've no use for."

"I'm glad of that," he interrupted, smiling at her quizzically.

"Don't be absurd." She pulled the rug closer, contentedly. "I've no use for him because he's muddled, vague, purposeless. He's very like most of the people you meet in life, though few of them can put things into words as he does. They take things as they find them, and in all the problems, they see the problem and never any answer. Though, of course, Geoffrey Platner always sees two answers, and invents a third. But that's as bad."

"Julie, there are times when you are honestly stimulating."

She shot a glance at him. He had at least for the time forgotten his worries.

"No doubt," she went on imperturbably. "But I haven't finished. Both you and Peter stand out from that vagueness. Peter has 'banked on' God. (I met a young man in London who was good enough to supply me with that phrase.) He has determined in his own mind that the end of life, its meaning, its explanation, lies in a Carthusian monastery. Well——" She shrugged her shoulders. "You, on the other hand, bank on the Race. It's your hobby, your

life. You see no God, but you do see Life, and you think that it is evolving on and on, that man is its summit, so far, that man can improve himself, that he may yet—yet——"

" 'Pace upon the mountains overhead
And hide his face amid a crown of stars,' "

supplied the other.

"Yes, though it is love that does that, isn't it?"

"Love, yes—sex, essential man."

"There you are. That is your religion. Sex. The Race. All the little people in the middle play with sex and God; you and Peter stake your all on one or the other."

He considered that for a while. "I suppose we do," he said at last.

"Of course you do. And your Devonshire house scheme is the other end of logic from the Carthusian monastery."

"And so?"

"I want you to explain the Devonshire house scheme. The other has been put before me by Peter. I have no place in it."

He started. The inference was obvious, too obvious. Yet—yet he banished the idea. He even smiled at the thought in his head at that moment, and she saw him smile.

"What's the joke now?"

"There isn't one. I like your way of putting things, that's all. For you are right, Julie, or so I believe. People do play with their lives. They do drift. It is the world's way, possibly the inevitable way for the majority. Those of us who pioneer consciously in any direction are hailed as fanatics, or worse. Catholic religious and Eugenists are alike in that respect, at any rate in the world's judgment."

"Well, explain this scheme. Teanie called it cold-blooded. I don't know why I don't."

He jumped at that. "Ah! Now I can explain that. Teanie is old-fashioned enough to have a notion that the great impulse of sex ought to be—what would she say?—spontaneous, hot-headed, super-reasonable. She would begin with 'spontaneous,' anyhow. The rest is a logical conclusion; is, in fact, what happens; though Teanie is clear-sighted enough to begin to shy at the other words."

“And what’s the answer?”

“The answer is that the sex-impulse ought not to be less controlled than any other. As a matter of fact, fleeing its vital importance, it should be more controlled, perhaps superlatively, most controlled. The world has largely realized this in a dim way. Marriage among most nations, from the Zulus to the French, has been an arrangement of the parents. The modern world largely revolts from that, but it revolts, in reality, because as a rule parents are little more qualified to arrange marriages than modern sons and daughters, and in fact they have largely arranged them for ends that the moderns rightly reject.”

“Then you want a society in which doctors arrange marriages!”

“Julie, if you would keep your head in this matter, you must at least decline to be facetious. That is exactly what the cheap Press and the conventional public says. We are not so entirely insane.”

“Sorry. I see. What then?”

“Well, let me begin with the ideal. In an ideal human society, individuals would approach sexual union and the reproduction of their kind more seriously and more enlightenedly than anything else. The spurious sanctions and prohibitions of so-called supernatural religion would be gone. A union would depend first on real and not merely proclaimed unity. When a man and woman felt themselves one in sentiment and desire they would fulfil their unity in bodily union, provided that other things were equal, so to speak—just as one doesn’t eat anything that looks pretty because one wants to eat merely: one enquires if it be poisonous or indigestible. So one of the requirements for marriage would be physical and psychical fitness. We foresee a day when sensible human beings will no more enter on sexual union without recognition and proof of this than they now swallow poison. And given full sex-instruction, real knowledge of what does make for real union and truly wise issue, it will not be necessary for the medical profession to arrange marriages in the sense in which you use the words.”

“What did you mean by proclaimed unity?”

“Two persons go to a priest, and he pronounces a formula. You are now one, he says. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred he is simply talking rubbish. That is the stark practical fact.”

“Most people know that.”

“They may do,” he retorted, “but precious few say so. And still fewer set about the attainment of real unity. Precious few realize that if one has made

a mistake, the fact that it is a mistake is enough to shew that there has been no union or that the union is at an end. Nothing, in fact, can regulate *true* divorce. That makes itself in each case, willy-nilly."

"The State must deal with it."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It might recognize the *fait accompli*. It is the wrong end of the stick to attempt to accomplish it. But why the State at all?"

"Children. Their support. One's responsibility for them. I suppose that's why most of us moderns still feel that there must be some interference, some regulation."

"Precisely. But it is a parallel matter."

"How?"

"It would solve itself in an ideal State. Just as marriage is tied up with religious grave-clothes, child-bearing is tied up with social, economic and legal grave-clothes. Something might be done at once. For example, the one matter to be determined by a law court in a divorce suit ought to be provision for the children. The one thing to avoid is that they shall continue to be brought up by a man and woman between whom there is no real union —that does damn them, poor little devils. But of course there is only one final answer. If for the family you substitute the Human Family, and if for the State, that Human Family localized in a unit really functioning as a *family* and not as a greedy soulless inhuman agglomeration of units, you have the answer."

"That is Communism."

"Oh, damn your isms! Once you say that, people gasp 'Lenin!' and think that finishes the matter. Why they don't at once say 'Jesus Christ' I don't know. There would be greater reason and less cause for fear."

"Well, I can give it another name if you don't like that."

"What?"

"Utopia."

"Granted." He turned eagerly towards her as well as he could. "And it is the first article of my creed that men have it in their own power to create Utopia, and the second that it will never be created by merely talking about it."

"And so the house in Devonshire?"

He sobered suddenly. “Yes, Julie,” he said.

It had grown dark, and he leaned forward and switched on the lights. The blaze of them stabbed the darkness ahead, and made, by contrast, a greater darkness on either side, behind and before. The radiant glow ran before them, on and on into the night, and something of that sense of the mysterious, the unreal, that everyone has felt motoring swiftly through the night, descended upon Julie. For a few minutes, until he had become accustomed to the night driving, Maurice Sampson did not continue the conversation. But as they turned at right angles off the main road into the heart of a silent dim country-side and made for home, he spoke again.

“Yes, Julie. The house in Devonshire is as yet only a scheme. True, I have little doubt, now, that it will go through committee and before long materialize into fact. But it is a scheme at present. A good scheme, I think, the least we can do. People have a right to ask of us theorists that we should justify our theories, or at least shew that we are prepared to risk everything for them. That is why a man like your Peter wins my respect. Nothing could be more extreme than the Carthusiasn ideal, and nothing——”

“What is the Carthusian ideal?” interrupted Julie sharply.

He glanced at her. “Don’t you know?” he queried curiously. “Why, it is almost perpetual silence. Each man lives alone, in his own little cottage, and works and prays alone. They talk for an hour a week, I believe.”

Staring out at the swiftly advancing stream of their lights ahead, Julie saw plainly the years of Peter’s life. She gave a little shudder. “Good God!” she cried. Then, fiercely, “The very negation of the family, anyway.”

“Yes,” he began slowly, warming as he spoke. “Our ideal is the family ennobled, enriched, completed, as we think. It is to be no more selfish, exclusive, but broad-based as human life, disinterested, a means to a great universal end. In Devonshire we shall anticipate your Utopia in a sense. By private effort we shall make possible what will one day be public will.”

Sitting there, Julie was suddenly moved by this odd mixture of cold science and dreaming visionary at her side. She saw him convinced, enthusiastic, and yet chained by circumstance to a woman legally but neither spiritually nor any longer even physically his wife, and to a child legally but neither spiritually nor mentally a possible man. His enthusiastic vision had temporarily lifted him out of the hopeless despondency of his life, but every mile took him back to it. Without her, he might be bound for ever to his theories, to his books. She stretched her hand out and laid it on his knee.

“Maurice,” she said, “men and women, liking each other, attracted to each other, who desire children to carry on the battle of the Race, to push out even further and further into the darkness, to be freed from the hampering restrictions of ordinary social and conventional upbringing, will agree to mate and will dedicate their children to this mission—is that it?”

“Yes,” he said, carried away by her. “Julie, is that mean, is that debasing? Is that less noble than the old ideals?”

“No, no,” she cried fiercely. Then, suddenly turning upon him, “Maurice, give *me* a child.”

And then the inevitable happened. So close upon her words as to seem to them, afterwards, the work of a stage-manager, the little car cried once or twice feebly, and, of course, uselessly upon its maker, and broke down. They were thirty-four miles from Andover Cross and twenty-one from Coddrington.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1

Perhaps it was necessary for something like that to happen in order to restore them to sanity, for human sanity, like faith, is the gift of the high gods, and beyond reason. Reason and logic lead to madness more surely perhaps than anything, unless they are seasoned with the salt of the personal human equation. Thus the world does indeed say that Catholic monasticism and eugenics are lunacies, which indeed they are for most people. But there are individuals who can embrace the one or the other and remain human, and it is arguable that we may all be of that sort one day. Meantime, the main thing for the experimenter is to be sure that he or she has not lost humanity.

Julie and Maurice shewed at once, and for twelve hours thereafter, that the high gods had left them the great gift. They both jumped in a twinkling from the rare air of the mountain-top talk of science to the highly diverting level of ordinary existence, where anything may happen, and one is lucky if one sees to the next milestone. He twiddled levers and wheels for a few seconds and stared at Julie. “Oh, my God!” he cried as humanly as you or I might have done, realizing in a breath that women and motor-cars were both practical affairs of ordinary life, and both beyond him. As for Julie, she threw back her head and shrieked with laughter that grew every second more uncontrollable as she realized what the predicament meant.

Maurice threw open the driver’s door and descended. In a couple of seconds he realized that there was no moon, that outside the lane of light created by his own electrics it was pitch-black, and that save for the matches in his pocket he had no illuminant. He began to curse still more desperately as he struggled with the bonnet.

Julie gurgled into language. “What’s the matter?” she was finally able to enquire.

“God knows. I’m not a mechanic even in daylight, and I can’t make head or tail of the thing now.” He plunged his head again into depths and his voice rose from there. “But I guess it’s a bad smash. She stopped so suddenly. Some infernal thing clean gone, I expect.”

Once more Julie wanted to laugh, but this time she restrained herself. She got out of the car on her side and came round to him. “Never mind,

Maurice. It's the greatest fun. We shall probably have to sleep in a ditch. Instead of cursing, give great thanks that it's not raining."

He straightened himself and flung round on her. "But, good heavens, do you know where we are? *I* don't. Only that it's donkeys' miles to anything like a garage. There's one at Chisholm, I think, of a sort that is, but that's seven miles if it's a furlong. And this isn't even a main road. As likely as not nothing will pass. And I'm getting hungry."

Julie put both her hands on his shoulders. "You delicious person!" she cried. "Thank the Lord the car did break down. You're human for once. Getting hungry indeed! And what about me, pray?"

The touch of her hands, the sight of her looming there in the half-dark of the edge of the radiant lights, banished the accident momentarily from his thoughts. "Julie," he exclaimed, "Julie!" And there was in his tone that which made words unnecessary.

"Maurice!" she cried in her turn. "Oh, Maurice, I never guessed that."

"You didn't. Well, I suppose one isn't trained in self-control for nothing. . . . But you mean to say that you haven't seen how I adore you, how you've come like the sun into my life, how you are everything to me—everything? You are more than my—my 'religion,' as you call it, Julie. I cannot live for my work alone any more. There are days when I cannot write a line because of you. I love you, I love you, Julie."

The old magic of it touched chords anew in Julie's heart. "You poor old darling," she whispered tenderly.

He literally leapt upon her at that, his arms thrown out, crushing her to him. "Then you love me, you love me, Julie?" he demanded.

She leaned her head back and looked at him, her eyes alight. "You poor old darling," she whispered again. "Kiss me."

And Maurice Sampson's lips sought hers as passionately as any Bert or Harry in Paternoster Row or Brixton.

She disengaged herself gently at last. "And you will give me a baby, Maurice?" she asked simply.

His arms fell to his sides. She herself, still clasping him, felt him grow rigid. "But—but—I—I can't marry you," stammered Maurice Sampson, as any gentleman for miles around might have done in like case.

Julie moved her fingers up his coat. “My dear,” she queried, “what has that to do with it?”

“But I love you! Don’t you understand, Julie, I love you! What will your people say, your friends, if I do such a thing? Julie, it would be to ruin you! Think what the world would say!”

Julie’s rich little laugh rang out again on the night air. “Oh, you are too delicious! My dear old Maurice, what in the world have you been talking about for the last hour? What in the world is the house in Devonshire to exist for? Heavens, do you think I took it all as a proposition in Euclid!”

In the darkness the man peered down on her. “But you, Julie,” he cried, with a little catch in his throat. “Anyone but you! You’re so wonderful to me. Do you think for a moment that I could give you less than all? Do you think I could experiment with you?”

“Why not? That is precisely what I want you to do with me!”

“Julie, Julie! Then you don’t *love* me!”

It rang so pitiably true that Julie reached her hands up to his head and pulled it down towards her. “Dear old Maurice,” she whispered, “but I do. That is the queer part of it—queerer than you think—I do. You are such an absurd old thing. And also you are so clever. I love you, I want you, I want to mother you, to makeup to you for all that has gone wrong in your life. And, since above all it is a child that you want, I want that too, for you, a child to whom I can give all that is left, a child with your cleverness and my passion, that will be a prince among children.”

But the blood drained from the man’s face as he fought with himself. “If I could marry you,” he groaned.

Julie let fall her hands and straightened herself. She looked at him tenderly, considering him. Then, with a twinkle in her eyes, “I don’t know that I want to,” she said.

“Not want to! If you love me at all! Why not?”

“Because you don’t want a house and servants and fuss. Because you aren’t an ordinary civilized member of Society, though you are talking like one now. Because I don’t know that I am either any longer.”

He stared at her, puzzled as any bank-clerk, he the great Eugenist, Mr. Maurice Sampson, F.R.C.S. “I don’t think I understand,” he said at last.

"Why, you're so *right*. I've been through the mill—I've told you. I'm not content with—with ordinary things any longer. *I* don't want a place in Society either. I want to help our girls and boys; I want to try new things; I want to do something towards your great Utopia, something practical. Perhaps, after all, it is only we women who can be practical."

"But I love you so," he cried. "For months I've tried to hide it, just because I love you so. You're too—too *good* to be put in the forefront of the battle!"

"Traitor!" She laughed gently at him.

"Traitor?"

"Yes, exactly that. Traitor to all your ideas, to all your work. Maurice, you've thought your personal life ruined, empty. I can fill it, regain it for you. Come, don't you think I'm physically fit enough to mother your son?"

We are oddly made. Sampson's habitual thought actually responded to that and took the question seriously. "Yes," he said, "I think you are. But, of course, we could make sure. Teanie could determine."

It was too much for Julie. She exploded once more into a riot of laughter while he stood there on the road by the car they had both forgotten, and watched her helplessly. At last she leaned up against the door of the silent machine, panting. "Oh, you sober old lunatic," she cried. "Why don't you propose to examine me yourself?"

"Julie!"

"Well, why not? Who better? It would be such fun! Imagine yourself kissing me very seriously and saying: 'My dear, the heart is a little weak. The left ventricle seems to me unsound. I much regret, but of course that makes it impossible!' "

And then Sampson returned to the starting-point. "Oh my God," he groaned.

2

Julie became practical. "Well, old dear," she said, "we'll temporarily abandon a discussion which most young women would find humiliating, and you will tell me, as scientifically as possible, what immediate steps you propose to take towards supper."

He smiled slowly. "Really," he said, "I begin to think, Julie, that I have never yet truly appreciated you."

“Of course not,” she retorted. “It’s taken me ages to reconcile myself to being nice to you at all. And if you don’t produce a supper, you’ll find you know me even less than you think.”

He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly, for he could not take his mind off her. “What do you suggest?”

“Well, if this were Africa, of course it would be simple. You’d gather *liso* and make a fire on the veld. You’d catch one of those sheep that I hear bleating yonder and in a short time you would offer me, on the point of your pocket-knife, a succulent chop. You would then gather grass for a bed and watch over me all night with your trusty spanner ready for action.”

“Julie, *do* be sensible!”

“I will, seeing you’re so utterly unpractical in a pinch. Here goes for your own logic. Are those not sheep? Are English farms the size of a decent county? Will there not rather be a farm-house within a mile or so? Can you not walk to it?”

“And leave you here?”

“Why not? Are there lions or highwaymen? Lend me the trusty spanner, or even monkey-wrench. I don’t know what it is, but it sounds fearsome. I shall be all right then. Or stay yourself and let me go? I should love it, and even irate farmers are always more compassionate towards young women than middle-aged scientists. I think we had better not both go, in case any relief did come down the road and there was nobody here to claim it.”

He stood bewildered as she talked, the breakdown, the need for food and shelter, hardly of importance. Her words spun a kind of filmy cobweb over his thoughts, that was all,—themselves rubbish, but serving to keep his mind from dealing accurately with her and her amazing demand. Still, something must be done. He roused himself, and stared about him as if he had not appraised half a dozen times already the blackness of the night, the loneliness of the road, and the movement and cries of invisible sheep somewhere away on the right. However, this time he reached a conclusion. “It is madness to go wandering in those fields,” he said.

Julie laughed excitedly. “Why? In Africa——”

“Oh, damn Africa! God knows what you would do in Africa. In England there’s a hedge every couple of hundred yards, which you can’t get through more often than not, and there will only be one gate, and that a damned small thing to find in a circumference of——”

"Oh, damn *your* circumferences! Look here, Maurice, I will concede that this is not a romantic adventure if you will concede that it is not a mathematical problem. *Now.* Let us both commence to treat it as a practical predicament."

Maurice became suddenly and acutely aware that she was bubbling with mirth and eagerness in which was mingled high nervous tension. He was oddly conscious that his trained mind was telegraphing that to him across his own emotions. Having caught the signal, however, he knew what to do. He spoke for the first time since the breakdown with real incisiveness.

"Right, Julie. Practically, then, what we will do is to push the car to the side of the road, lock the tool-box, dim the lights, and walk straight before us until we come to Featherstone, which is the first village and some three to four miles ahead. If we strike your farm-house or any other first, so much the better; if we don't, at the most we have an hour's walk to civilization. Sorry, but that's the end of Africa."

"And why," she demanded, "did you not talk sense before?"

"Because I was intoxicated by your nonsense," he retorted.

"Bully," said Julie enigmatically; "now shew me where to push, for the love of Mike."

He shewed her, and together they coaxed the small car more into a ditch than either liked, but as they could not coax her out again, there, perforce, she had to stay. While he fumbled with the tool-box and other gear, she stood back in the road humming merrily to herself. He joined her presently. "There," he said, "now we can go. Not tired? What's that you were humming? I never know your songs."

Julie laughed. "Come on, then," she cried, "I'll sing it. It will speed your steps no end." And she broke out into:

"It's the only, only way,
Yes, the only, only way,
She's the only girl, and it's only fair,
For she's only got half an hour to spare;
So you kiss her on the spot,
With the only lips you've got,
If she's only cute, she will only say:
'That's the only kiss that I've had to-day.'
Then you only cough, but you don't leave off—
It's the only, only way!"

"And pray," said Maurice sarcastically when she had finished, "who was the author of *that* little poem?"

"I haven't an idea."

"Hurrah. I breathe more freely. I feared he might be a friend of yours. Also you've relieved the colossal rebuke which my own intelligence once received in the railway train when a young man, with whom I got into conversation, was rendered dumb by the discovery that I had never heard 'Where do the flies go in the winter-time.' "

Julie chuckled. "For all that you neglect these weighty matters. In future you shall take me occasionally to the theatre and I shall take you sometimes to the music-halls. You will then go singing about your work, as I do. Think how you would enliven a confinement by entering jauntily and singing, depositing your silk hat on the commode the while:

> "Oh I must get home to-night, I must get home to-night,
> I don't care if it's snowing, blowing—I'm going!
> I only got married this morning and it fills me with delight,
> I'll stay out as late as you like next week—
> But I must get home to-night!"

He stared at her in the darkness as she sang. He could not see her face at all clearly, but he had it in his mind's eye—her still childish face, with its clear brown eyes and little fringe of dark hair over the forehead, and he fitted the memory to that lissom taut little figure stepping out bravely into the night on the unknown road, her voice ringing clear about them. He thought calmly enough to himself that she was a type of the age, a woman of the men in the War who had gone forward steadily to death at an odds never before taken in the story of the world, unnoticed individually in hosts of a size passing imagination, swallowed up in battles upon a stage so great that the very word had become almost meaningless, a cheap, self-seeking Press their bible, and comic songs their battle-cries. In a sense, there was nothing particularly striking about her. She was just one of those millions whom democracy has pitchforked into the battle of life as never before, who are in reality as yet inarticulate, who jest with the only words of comedy they know, because the inherent nobility of their human nature must at once hide and yet find a vent for the passion of their souls. But even as he thought of it, something quickened and leaped up in him. It was indeed this woman of the people whom he would choose if he could to mate with his own knowledge. Her child might give it life. She was the woman of the fiercely-lived to-day; he was the man in whose brain lay gathered something of the

knowledge of all the yesterdays; what if she and he together were to create to-morrow?

" 'Oh, I must get home to-night——' " began Julie again, rather plaintively, and he realized he was not being companionable. "I'm sorry," he broke in. "My thoughts were running away with me."

"Were they? You looked rather like it. Well, and where to?"

He slipped his hand into her arm. "The future that you outlined just now," he said gravely.

She was instantly sobered. "Then you will let me mother"—(she hesitated hardly perceptibly)—"a child for you, Maurice?"

Their steps rang on the road. A dozen paces or more they took before he replied, and her heart exulted at that—there was no longer that swift refusal. But when at last he answered, it was something of the Maurice of the study who spoke.

"Julie, have you realized all that that means?"

"Well," she said, "sum up."

"Right. First, there is the stigma with which you will be branded. Even Teanie Melville will—I may be wrong, but I doubt it—think that we are both doing wrong in some vague way which you will see in her eyes, but which she will not be able to express with her lips. Even if we managed secrecy now, and with the aid of The Society for some years, it will come out sooner or later with the child. Probably both of us tend in our mutual enthusiasm to underestimate it—let us be frank about that. We think of our immediate friends: they will know and not care, or not know. But there are bound to be others, acquaintances, the unimportant folk one meets casually, who don't seem to count, but who do really. Oh, I don't suppose you even guess it, but I do. You will be branded in their eyes. I——"

"I do," said Julie. There was a tone in her voice that was conclusive, though her next words served once more to cloak emotion. "Lift-boys and hotel porters."

"Don't laugh, darling." She caught her breath faintly at that word. "But now, secondly, consider how we shall have to live. We have precipitated matters, even now. Can you go on at Andover Cross and I at—at Sixteen-Twenty, and the child in Devonshire, with this between us? The Society has mainly considered individual free-lances. I—we, perhaps, are neither of us that. What plan have you? What do you see ahead?"

Once again a little tramp in silence. Haystacks loomed large, and both scanned them without words, questioningly. Only haystacks. And then Julie suddenly pressed the arm she held. "Maurice," she cried tensely, "I've been drowning, *drowning*, do you understand? It is enough for me that there is a ship in sight. I do not mind how far the final haven may be, or what weather we must face to make it."

The man held back his desired reply to that with difficulty. He would not end reason by taking her in his arms. "Look here," he went on, a trifle harshly, "maybe. But, Julie——" he broke off. Then, suddenly, he brought it out. "See here, Julie, I love you. I could find a haven indeed in you and in a child, but could you find such in me? You said you loved me, but—well, I'm not quite blind. I don't want charity, Julie. Wouldn't another do? Do you want *me*, Julie?"

The long black road still stretched ahead. . . . Julie looked down it, endlessly. Behind her, as it were, there had been vivid lights, and she knew she searched fruitlessly before for exactly such again. But she drew a little closer to the man by her side. "Oh, Maurice," she said, "what is love? We talk about it so glibly. I can't analyze the love I have had, that I always shall have, for the Peter I told you about. If I try, it seems to me somehow that I wanted to mother him, to be the person on whom he leaned and to whom he turned. I wanted him passionately, of course; there is nothing dishonourable in that: I longed, passionately, for the touch of his body and to touch him. But does love exclude love, Maurice? I don't think so, I can't think so! It seems to me too great, somehow. It doesn't *empty* you; it seems to me that true love increases one's capacity for loving. And, Maurice, I have come to love you—no, one minute, don't interrupt—your helplessness, your strength; you in your sorrow, and you in your pride of knowledge. You are very, very dear to me somehow already—as if you were a gift, and I think you would grow dearer in a son."

"Oh, Julie, Julie, I have waited so long for words like that."

The intensity that rang in his tone lost nothing from the restraint of his manner. Meeting them, you might have thought them conversing on some ordinarily engrossing topic. The flood-gates were not yet loosed.

"And you would not feel yourself cheated?"

"And you, Julie, you could suffer me to—to take you?"

Neither answered the other's question. Yet they went on together with both answered.

"And where," demanded Julie, "is the civilization you so kindly promised me?"

A bend in the road had brought them finally to Featherstone, that is to say it had brought them successively to half a dozen cottages in which all lights were already extinguished, a closed village shop, a duck pond, two more cottages far back from the road, a barn, and finally "The Featherstone Arms," where lights glowed in a side window. A board above announced that Isaac Colburn was licensed to sell beer and tobacco, and on pushing the door open it became plain that he was selling both. Maurice peered through the half-open door of the lighted room, with Julie close beside him in the dark little passage outside smelling of stale beer, and called "Landlord!" across a few square feet of sanded floor, two wooden benches, and four or five men who appeared dimly in a haze of tobacco smoke. A figure in shirt-sleeves, who leaned on a rough wooden counter beneath notices of local agricultural auction sales, a railway excursion to Bristol, and an advertisement of Black and White whisky, heaved itself up and came heavily over to him. "Oi be he, mister."

"Well, look here, we've had a breakdown about three miles back. I'm a surgeon from near Coddrington, and this lady's a nurse. We must get back to-night. Is there a car in the village?"

"A car? A motor-car? Naw, there's naw motor-car."

"Is there no house about that owns a car?"

"Eh?"

"Is there no gentleman who lives near and keeps a car?"

"Oh, aye. Squire. Up at Featherstone Hall."

"How far?"

"Reckon a mile maybe. First turning on left after you pass blacksmith's."

"Right; thanks. Sorry to have bothered you. I should think we had better go ourselves right up at once, Julie."

They were already in the porch when it struck Sampson to call back. "The Squire will be at home, I suppose?"

"Eh? At 'ome? Naw, oi should reckon not. 'E live in Lunnon mostly."

Sampson uttered an exclamation, and they stopped irresolutely. “Good heavens, what a fool!” he said *sotto voce* to Julie. Then to the man, “Is it any use our going there?”

“Naw, oi should reckon not.”

Julie gurgled in the dark. “And where,” she had thus demanded, “is the civilization you so kindly promised me?”

Sampson disdained to answer, and stepped reluctantly back to the door. “Well,” he said finally, “what can you suggest?”

“Eh?”

“That’s it, old dear,” whispered Julie behind him, “keep pegging away. This country doesn’t have free education for nothing. You’ll get him to speak English if you try hard enough.”

An infuriated Sampson threw “Shut up!” savagely at her over his shoulder, and once more entered the porch. “Look here,” he said, “our car’s broken down. Understand? And I’m a—a doctor, and this lady’s a Matron. We must get back to Coddrington to-night somehow. What can you suggest?”

Mr. Isaac Colburn spat with deliberation. He was a man with an orderly mind. “Thought ye said she were a nuss,” he remarked cautiously.

Maurice heard a muffled exclamation behind him and the sounds of a hasty retreat. He was forgetting himself entirely, and all the resources of science, and had indeed got as far as a decided “My God!” when one of the gentlemen smoking in the bar-parlour, all of whom had been listening intently, appeared in the lighted doorway and took up the case.

“ ’Scuse me, sir,” he said, “but I reckon I can do it. I’ve as pretty a little mare as you could see in these parts, and if I put her into my trap, I could drive you over.”

“Come,” said Sampson with satisfaction, “that’s talking. How long would it take?”

“Well, it’s close on twenty miles. We couldn’t do it under two hours, not by night.”

“Two hours! If we started in half an hour——” He pulled out his watch. “Heavens! we shouldn’t be in till midnight.”

“That’s so, mister.”

Sampson stared at him blankly, and then turned and called Julie. "I say," he said, "we're in the devil of a fix. Worse than I thought. If we take this trap to Coddrington, we won't be in till midnight, and then we'll have to dig out a taxi. And meantime the car's in the road. . . ."

She whistled. "*And* I'm hungry. Look here, what about that place with the garage? There's a station there, isn't there?"

He turned back to his man. "I say, what about Chisholm? How far's that? Isn't there a station there?"

"Aye, there be a station, but there baynt no more trains at this hour o' night. It's only a matter o' ten mile or so, 'owever. And you could get on early to-morrer to Coddrington. Say, Isaac"—looking over his shoulder —"what time's milk train to Coddrington?"

" 'Alf-past five."

"Half-past five, sir. How will that do you? There's a fair inn at station."

Sampson turned irresolutely, but Julie had been listening. "That's all right," she said. "We shall be at Coddrington by six and at Andover Cross at half-past or thereabouts. Besides, if there's a garage at this Chisholm, it might not be too late to send them out for the car. It's possible that they could fix it up, and then we shouldn't need the train at all to-morrow."

Maurice nodded in his grave way. "Yes," he said, "I can't think of a better plan."

"Of course not, old sober-sides, and now while our friend here gets his trap, I'm going to forage for supper. Where's the delightful Isaac? Back in the bar? All right; I'll get something out of him."

She slid by Sampson and entered the parlour, bright by contrast with the dark outside. Sampson, having given his orders to the man of the trap, followed her. The easy way in which she crossed the sanded floor, glanced friendlily at the men, one or two of whom shuffled to their feet, and approached Mr. Isaac Colburn as though she had known him all her life, amazed him. With the landlord she began at the right end. She did not ask at once for impossibilities or difficulties.

"Good-evening, Mr. Colburn. I say, we're most awfully hungry; could you let us have some bread and cheese, and some beer?"

"Yes, miss; certainly, miss. If you'd step across the passage, I'll see they bring a light. Bread and cheese and beer, m'm?"

“Yes. That’ll do capitally.” She half turned away. “I say, you haven’t any cold ham, have you?”

“Why, yes, I think we might manage a little cold ’am. Maria! Maria!”

While Julie stood there, one hand tapping the bar-counter, a smile on her face, Maria’s approach was heralded by shuffling feet in the back regions. Round an open door she came. She was plainly shrewd and wideawake. Her thin face and greying hair bound tightly back off her forehead were anything but propitious, but Julie acted as if they were.

“Oh, good-evening,” she said. “Mrs. Colburn? Oh, Mrs. Colburn, the doctor and I have got horribly stranded. Our car’s broken down. We’ve got to be driven into—into—what is the place, Maurice?—oh, yes, Chisholm. We shan’t get there till half-past ten, and meantime we’re real hungry. Your husband has offered us bread and cheese, but I thought perhaps, ham . . .”

The woman bustled forward. Colburn looked sheepish on the spot. Maurice stood there marvelling inwardly at the ease of it, at the despatch with which the unfortunate man was being thrown to the lions. He had nothing but sympathy for him as his spouse turned and rent him for the sake of this obviously simple pleasant lady, from whom might easily be extracted at least five shillings.

“Isaac, what do you mean? Bread and cheese! I never *’eard* such a thing. Don’t you know a lady when you see one?” The shrill voice calmed marvellously as she turned to Julie. “What about ’am and eggs, ma’am? I could make you a little toast, and p’rhaps you and your good gentleman would like a pot o’ corfee?”

“Splendid,” cried Julie. “I would like the coffee. But I expect Mr. Sampson would prefer——”

“No, I’ll take coffee, Julie.”

“That’s it, then.” Julie turned to her, smiling. “And may we go to the parlour?”

“Certainly, ma’am. This way.” She bustled in and across the room. From the door she cast withering words at her husband. “There, Isaac, go you and find them heggs. An’ quick too.”

The unfortunate fellow lurched out. “She *said* bread and cheese,” he muttered to an unsympathetic world.

Across a red rep tablecloth, under the scrutiny of Queen Victoria in her Coronation Robes, Julie and Maurice surveyed each other in the light of a

hanging oil-lamp of uncertain cleanliness. “If it were not for Queen Victoria,” said Julie, glancing up at the picture, “I should believe this was a fairy tale.”

“Why Queen Victoria?” queried her companion, amused.

“Oh, because fairy-stories are all imagination, but nobody could possibly have imagined Queen Victoria in her Coronation Robes. Our run this evening—by the way, doesn’t it seem ages ago since we started?—that critical breakdown, our walk, this amazing inn, in England, in the twentieth century, are all of the stuff of fairy-stories, but Queen Victoria restores one to everyday life. Still, she’s dead, isn’t she? And we’re alive, aren’t we, Maurice?”

He reached his hand out across the table and took hers. “We are, dear, very much alive, though I’m not sure that I have been until to-night.”

She pressed his fingers. “But you are now?” she asked smiling.

“Very sure. At least, almost sure. I shall be when it’s an established thing.”

“Maurice, a great deal is established already. It is established that you are no longer alone in your life, with your theories alone to interest you. We are setting out together on a great adventure. Such an old adventure too, Maurice, though we do make it under new conditions. Do you think, perhaps, it is the only big thing there is in life?”

His eyes rested softly on hers in the dim light, and she saw that already a change had been worked there. “Yes,” he said, “I think it is, Julie. All our striving and experimenting and living come down to this. It is vain in so far as it dies with us; it is profitable only as we can wrest it free from death and hand it on. Ultimately, that may be woman’s supreme share. Hers, after all, is a bigger work in that respect than man’s. She is the mother. It is good that she too should try to enrich the future with knowledge, but how much more actually to assure its life?”

“And you and I are thrown together for this.”

He nodded. “You and I are thrown together for this.”

She leaned back in her chair, still holding his hand. “Isn’t it all amazing, Maurice? I see myself in Africa, a girl. Then a young woman. I got engaged, and more, and I got badly let down, Maurice. There wasn’t much I didn’t know about life when I went to France in the War. But it taught me scores of things, after all. It taught me to look for realities and not for shams in life. I

don't see how people escaped being taught that. And when Peter came along, that too was reality. And because it was a real thing, I didn't hesitate. Do you understand?"

"I do, understanding you a little."

"Do you? Oh, I hope so, Maurice. You see, there were men being hideously wounded, and it was no use offering them quack medicines in hospital, and there was poor old Peter desperately sick, and it was no use offering him a quack medicine, either. I gave him the real thing; all the love and passion there was in me. Anyone can say what they will, but that helped him on. Only—only—it left me—stranded."

"Julie," whispered the man across the table, "don't, don't. It hurts."

She smiled at him. "Never mind, Maurice. That's over. But how was I going to fill up the gap? All my friends expected me to marry him, but that couldn't be. Or someone else, I suppose. Only there was no one else. There must be heaps of women like me, Maurice, in England. Haven't you got two millions that you can't marry anyhow? Two millions for whom there's nobody else! It's rather sad, old thing."

"Practically every walk in life is open to them now," said Maurice.

"Of course, and to me too. Walks in life, indeed! Maurice, where do they walk you to?"

He laughed uneasily. "You odd girl, what do you mean?"

She gripped his hand, as it lay there in hers on the table, with a fierce intensity, leaning across to him. "I mean what I say. Is life filled with a science, an art, a business? Is it? Is it? Has yours been? Ah, well, perhaps it may be for some people, but it never could be for me. What have I a body for, eh? To carry me over London Bridge and back to an office every day? To carry me up and down the wards of Grey's Hospital all my life? Some people may believe that, but I don't. There is something in me on fire to *live*, to fulfil myself, to—what do you clever folk call it?—to *function*. I was made for it. If it's horrible, blame my Creator, but my body was made for man, and I crave for life."

He stared at her like a man in a dream. "You're right," he said, "you're right."

"Of course I'm right. I won't be put off with stop-gaps, with second-bests, with make-believes. I won't be an old maid with tabby-cats or Pekinese."

"My dear Julie," he said soberly, "I don't see you with a Pekinese."

She gave a glance at his sober face and then threw herself back with a ringing laugh. But it died almost as suddenly. She leaned across the table again. "I tell you, Maurice," she cried emphatically, "I'd sooner be a prostitute in Piccadilly."

"Julie!" he protested, "Julie!"

"That's true. The day I came to London I realized it. I'd been mooning round with Peter, trying to see God and the saints with his eyes. But I haven't his eyes. And when I got back to London I saw life again with my own. I walked the streets for a bit and looked at men. Oh, you poor things—men!"

"What do you mean, dear?"

"Why, just that. You're such poor things. Wait a minute. I can tell you. You remember that diary—a queer book that was published as the man was dying? He worked in the British Museum—a naturalist."

"Barbellion?"

"Yes, that's it. Well, on board ship I read that. Do you remember that he tramped alone in all weathers about London, hungering for sympathy, afraid to ask it, on fire to do things, burning with unrest? Do you remember? Do you remember the pathos of it? Well, when I read that I knew that I was the sort of woman that that man wanted, if only for a night. And failing Peter, failing permanency, *that* would have been *life* for me."

"But the end, Julie, the end!"

"Oh, damn your ends! I never can see ends. And I don't want to."

His eyes wandered over her, over the room, over the red cloth, up to Queen Victoria, back to her again.

"Well, well . . ." he said. Then: "And so, Julie, you've come to me?"

She nodded, her own eyes blazing. "Yes, I've come to you. I've come with a demand that you can't refuse, unless you deny your teachings and your life-work. And I've come with more—I've come with a mission which you *shan't* refuse, now. Maurice, you're not unlike that poor Barbellion. You're a haunted man. You're hungry for sympathy, for satisfaction, with all your cleverness. I shall feed both. You shall rest on me, my dear. It doesn't matter what you do to me. I'm yours. And when I'm spent and useless to you, you shall glory in our child."

Her voice broke a little and she turned away her face. Maurice half rose in his chair. “Oh, Julie,” he cried, “what a woman you are! Has there ever been one like you?”

4

Looking back on it afterwards, Sampson saw that night as long drawn out, a lifetime in a night, and as a kind of struggle between them. Now one was strong and now the other; now one urged and now the other. Its first stage had been his own instinctive revolt from Julie’s offer of herself, when the years of scientific thinking, of cool reason, of deliberation, were flung to the winds in a breath. He knew, when he thought of it, that he had known himself before willing, theoretically, to partake in the eugenistic experiment, that he had even anticipated it as a relief and an outlet. But when Julie had made her offer, the thing had become personal, and all his manhood had shrunk from the idea of experiment—for it came to that—with the woman he had come to love.

She had won that round. She had beaten him with his own weapons. The talk, as they had stood by the wrecked car, shewed him just what her strength had been, though he had not seen it at the time, hidden beneath her cloak of laughter. She had been demanding of him something he could not refuse, cost what it might, without becoming indeed the traitor she had called him. She had won him over with that word.

But as they walked down the road, he had been the stronger. He had deliberately reopened the subject. He had not shrunk from putting into words, straightforwardly, the full meaning of the thing that lay before them. It would have been easy to have closed with her offer, sweeping her away, keeping her to the letter of her contract, avoiding the question he had scarcely dared to put: Julie, do you *love* me? He had not done so. He had rehearsed point after point. And when she had accepted each challenge, he had kept an iron grip upon himself. She had made confession in the inn. He saw her weak then, and himself strong. She had broken down barriers between them, for she had stripped her own soul naked before his eyes. The temptation, as that pitiful little story of hers had unfolded, as he had realized bit by bit, by inference, by contrast, what had been her secret conflict, her hidden passion, all these years—the temptation had been to reply in kind, to precipitate their cooler judgment, to urge on her instant flight. He had wanted her so. No tormented soul on the London pavements had ever wanted woman more than he wanted Julie then, he with his years of suppressed desire, his tragic home, his bitter hopeless grief. But he had been

stronger than she just then. He felt that he had come through a fiery furnace in those few minutes, by the grace of his manhood unscathed.

But afterwards . . . There had been a third round afterwards.

They sat silent for a while after his last words. Julie's face had grown tired before him. "I do wish they'd make haste," she said.

"I'll go and see," he replied, getting up and going out into the passage.

He had not needed to go further. Mrs. Colburn came round the corner with a loaded tray and another lamp, and he backed before her into the room. "Sorry to keep you awaiting," she said, "but it's latish, you know, and the fire was near out. Then Isaac is *that* slow. Couldn't find the heggs. But they're fresh, anyway," she continued, leaning forward to spread the tablecloth, and placing upon it butter and a loaf, the steaming plate of ham and eggs, a tall metal coffee-pot, cups and saucers, plates and cutlery. She looked sideways at them as she did so, shrewdly, her own pinched little soul in her sharp angular body sensing that more lay between them than casual relationship. He thought as he noticed her of his own words to Julie, and of her quick laughing reply: "Lift-boys and hotel porters!" Yes, and landladies.

She went out, closing the door. "Hurrah!" cried Julie, all animation again. "Come on, Maurice. Give me Adam and Eve on a raft while I pour out the coffee. I believe I could eat Isaac and Jacob on another too. No; you're laughing at me. It isn't Isaac and Jacob. Who was it, then?"

"Cain and Abel."

"Oh, yes. And Cain killed Abel. If you don't give me more dripping, I shall kill you."

It was one of those meals that circumstance makes to taste superbly and that never can be repeated. "I shall never," said Maurice, with his mouth full, thinking of this, "eat bacon and eggs again as long as I live. Just as I never drink American ice cream soda."

"Good heavens," cried Julie, "if you do, I shall certainly divorce you! My friends would emphatically cut me if they knew that I was gallivanting around with a young man who drank that."

"But I did once, just once. It was nectar, the gift of the gods. I had been bicycling miles on a hot afternoon to a case before the days of cars, and it was the best a village shop could do. The memory has abided with me for ever. This side of Paradise I shall never again risk ice cream soda, but I expect to find all the angels drinking it!"

"You have a hope, my dear Maurice. I forget what they drink in the other place, but that will be your portion. Meanwhile, you may reflect for your comfort on one thing."

"What's that?"

"That I can eat with you in real affection. People are so trying with ham and eggs. Have you ever seen Australians at it? It's the national dish, you know, served with chips. It was one of the minor horrors of the War."

He laughed. "More coffee, please," holding out his cup.

"Greedy brute! I've scarcely begun mine. Still, you talk a lot, and I expect it makes you thirsty. There. Now for heaven's sake do be quiet for five minutes."

And but a minute or two later the trap came up.

"Tell them to wait," mumbled Julie. "I've still half Eve and a section of raft. We're so late we can't be later."

"I'll settle up," said Maurice, "while you finish."

It was jolly jolting along in the trap. The unseen clouds had lifted a little and stars were peeping out. The night wind was keen, but the three were forced to sit close together on the one seat, and they had a thick, coarse rug over their knees. Their driver was a decent fellow and he had not overestimated the mare. The spokes glinting as they spun in the high wheels, the crisp crackle of the surface beneath, the music of the mare's hoofs, the wind of their going—all these, with the chorus of their driver's cheerful chuckles to his beast, seemed the burden of a song to them both. Julie was in the highest spirits. "Can't you imagine we're off to Gretna Green?" she said in a low tone to Maurice.

He chuckled. "With Teanie Melville, in place of nearer relations, following on her bicycle."

"Dear old Teanie," said Julie, and fell silent for a little. How would Teanie take it? She knew in her heart of hearts. The rugged face would turn shrewd eyes on her, eyes that left no secret unread. Her head, with its grey plainly dressed hair that somehow symbolized more than her years, would be shaken, perhaps, but the lips would smile. Smile, yes, but how alone Teanie stood! How little she seemed to need that of which she, Julie, had spoken so fiercely to Maurice but now! Did she not need, or did she rein her nature in? Julie did not know, and she knew she would never know. If there were thousands of women like herself, there were not a few also like Teanie.

They passed through Bancroft with its tall church spire lost in the higher dark, and Ryebridge with two street lamps and a constable with a bicycle at the corner. Sampson had them pull up at the sight of him, and explained their situation and the whereabouts of the stranded car. The man, whose job it was to patrol half a county by night, rode off to keep ward over it until relief came. He thought they would get a mechanic in Chisholm without any doubt. It was only two miles now.

So they mounted the hill under black beech-trees, and were told how in old times it was a favourite spot for highwaymen and that a gallows had used to stand within living memory upon its summit, and then, bowling over the top, picked up the lights of the small town in the valley. Now the station winked at them, red and green. “No locals to-night, but a few expresses run through,” explained their driver.

There is nothing old about Chisholm, a place which the railway practically created, and it was fast asleep as they spanked through the High Street. “The hotel first,” said Maurice.

It was odd, Julie thought, to be standing there with him in the dark on the empty pavement knocking at the closed door. The mare stood sweating between her shafts, her skin glistening in the subdued glow of the trap lamps, as their driver waited to see them settled. Ringing seemed of little use, but a second application of the knocker, echoing down the street, brought a wavering light to the hall. Julie had hoped for a window and a romantic nightcap, but a prosaic and sleepy person in shirt and trousers, who must have either been sleeping in them or nodding somewhere in the back premises out of bed for reasons unexplained, opened the door. He was only moderately obliging till he heard Sampson’s name. Then he woke up.

“Dr. Sampson o’ Andover?”

“Yes.”

“Come in, sir. We’ll fix you up, an’ proud. You attended my darter with her first baby, an’ none of us ain’t never forgot it. We’ve plenty of room for both of you. You can have the two front bedrooms.”

Sampson heaved a little sigh of relief. “There, Julie,” he said “that’s all right. Up you go. I’ll see to the car first.”

“Oh, let me come with you!”

“No, my dear. Please don’t. You’ve only a few hours for sleep as it is. Our friend here will give me a lift to the garage.”

"I shan't go to sleep till I hear you come back," she said, entering the place.

"I'll be in the 'all, sir," said the man in shirt and trousers, "an' the door'll be open. The garage is only round the corner, and a fellow sleeps there for night calls."

Maurice's business was soon done. The mechanic was prepared to risk the loss of any further business in consideration of the note which the surgeon slipped into his hand and to justify it to his master on the ground of the other's profession, and he got out a motor-bicycle that stood in readiness and made the night momentarily hideous with his departure. Maurice watched him go, and his friend of the trap after him, and turned back alone to the empty street and his short walk to the inn.

As he went, all things accomplished, the memory of that short sentence of Julie's as she passed into the hotel, suddenly returned to him. He read a double meaning into it, or tried to do so. A man has moments such, be he whom you will. To Maurice Sampson came in that hour piercing recognition of his own need of her, all the more fierce from the long years of repression. Arguments marshalled themselves swiftly in his mind. There was no one who would doubt the genuineness of their predicament; his own wife was away; only Teanie Melville need ever know of their escapade, and she would know all there was to know soon enough. And Julie? Her earlier words to him that night rang in his head. He was suddenly carried away with pity for her, with longing to comfort her. Besides, why not to-night? Why not at one stroke make their resolution and accomplish it? Why delay that which he desired so passionately and which she had already promised him?

The man let him in as arranged, and gave him a candle. "You can't miss the room, sir. Top o' the stairs, round the landing to the front of the 'ouse, and it's the door on the right. Bed's all made up, sir. It's kep' ready, but I've bin up to see. Good-night, sir. I'll call you for the 'alf-past five. *Good*-night, sir."

As Maurice turned at the top of the stairs, a door closed in the rear of the house on the ground-floor. No doubt behind the fellow; he was alone. The hall, as he looked over the banister, was in darkness. His was the only light. No. As he walked forward he saw there was a crack of illumination beneath the door opposite his own.

He paused irresolutely. He listened. He could hear no sound. He entered his own room, set down the candle, pushed his bedroom door to without closing it, and sat down on his bed. His heart beat wildly. All his knowledge,

all his caution, all his mature manhood, slipped from him. He was a young man again, life vivid before him. He wanted Julie more fiercely than he had ever wanted his own wife, than he had ever, in his student days, thought he wanted any woman. His desire was the more intolerable because he was what he was, the more wholly spiritualized in the truest sense. Women, physically at least, were no mystery to him. He had no callow sensations to satisfy. But Julie's vivid little picture of the lonely young official up from the country in London, restless, eager, unsatisfied, alone, rose before his eyes, and he felt himself another such. She had acknowledged herself willing to satisfy such an one. She had promised herself to him. Why hesitate, then? Why not walk across the landing, and knock?

He got up. It did not strike him, unversed in such affairs and agitated beyond measure, to remove coat or boots. He even left his own candle burning and his own door ajar. He did not notice that her light was out now. He took the two or three steps. He knocked.

"Come in," said Julie at once.

He turned the handle, and entered. She had pulled up the window-blind, as she always did though he did not know it, and the room was not pitch-dark. He could see the bed near the window in the star-shine, a glimmer of white which was sheets and pillow. He shut the door and stood, trembling uncontrollably.

"Is that you, Maurice?" asked Julie, in her firm clear voice.

"Oh Julie, Julie, Julie!" he cried and, scarcely knowing what he did, stumbled across the space between them, dropped by her bedside, buried his face in the hand she held out and in the cool linen of the sheets.

"Poor old boy," said Julie softly. "I guessed you'd come."

He looked up at that. He could dimly see her face, the masses of hair tumbled on her shoulders, her white neck. "You guessed I'd come? And you don't mind? You will take me? Oh, my darling, I want you so much! You don't know how much—you can't know! And what does it matter? Why should we wait? Can you forgive me that I've forgotten to live all these years, and give me back what I've lost? I'm so tired, Julie, so dried up. Refresh me, Julie, comfort me!"

He felt her move in the bed, sitting up a little, withdrawing her other arm, and then her fingers moving through his hair. "Poor old boy," she whispered again, "poor old Maurice. Has it been as bad as all that?"

"It's been worse," he cried fiercely, "worse, worse!"

“Then kiss me,” she said suddenly.

He needed no urging. He flung his arms round her and dragged her head down to his, kissing her mouth and eyes and cheeks, burying his face in the fragrance of her hair. When he released her, she fell back on the pillow a little breathlessly, laughing her little laugh.

He essayed to get up. “Let me go to my room for a second,” he said hoarsely, scarcely knowing his own voice. “I—I left the candle. It was stupid. I forgot. Then I’ll come back.”

Her hand arrested him. “One moment, Maurice. I make no promises—understand? Now go and bring the candle, as you say. Close your door after you, and mine too.”

He stumbled eagerly away, scarcely noticing her words, a boy again. In his own room he sat down, fumbling with his boots, getting rid of them anyhow. Then he threw off collar and tie, coat and waistcoat, caught up his candle, cast a look round and stepped out softly, closing his door. Once more across the passage, but with a furtive glance at the void of the stairs, in at her door, closing it behind him. Then he stopped, momentarily checked.

For Julie was sitting up in bed, her hands on the counterpane before her, leaning slightly forward, plainly awaiting him. He noticed that she was in her chemise, having no night-clothes, and thought absently how pretty it was. But only half consciously. For her head was turned towards him, her hair thrown back, and her eyes held him there, at the door.

He stood amazed, his candle-light suddenly garish upon him in some obscure fashion. He could not read her eyes, but there was something in them that he had not expected. “Julie!” he muttered foolishly, “Julie!”

She smiled then, and held out her hand. He did not know it, but her heart had given a little leap of gladness. He loved her enough to read a look, to understand a little, to listen to her. She saw that. So she held out her hand and smiled. “Come here, Maurice dear, will you? and sit on my bed. I want to talk to you a minute.”

He came, but irresolutely, advancing slowly across the floor, sitting by her side at last. “Julie,” he asked miserably, “you’re not angry? Have I annoyed you? Oh, my dear, forgive me!”

She took his unoccupied hand in hers, fondling it. Then she raised it to her lips. She kissed it and flung her head up with a little gesture all her own, laughingly. “Put the candle on the chair, you old silly. Do you want to set us both on fire? Oh, push the clothes on the floor. They don’t matter.”

He did as she ordered, releasing his hand to obey her. She saw that it shook a little and her heart went out to him. “Now,” she said, “listen.”

He sat back, twisting himself a little sideways that he might see her better. He was still puzzled, but more reassured. She was being far too kind for anger of any sort. He searched her hungrily with his eyes as he sat, and found her very desirable and very lovely in the soft candle-glow. Perhaps she read the dawning of that desire at last, and then, at that, broke the little silence.

“Maurice, I thought you’d come. I’ve seen all to-night how you’ve been holding yourself in, and I know men a little, even a dear old silly like you. I guessed you’d—you’d want me rather badly. And, Maurice, I won’t say that you shan’t have what you want. I’m no prude—hardly, am I?—and we have already accepted each other. But—well, I want you to think of something. I want to place something before you. It’s very real to me. If it is not so to you, I give in—you shall have me to-night. If it is——Well, if it is, you shall do as you think best. That’s fair, isn’t it?”

She paused a minute, watching him steadily. He did not speak; possibly she did not want him to do so. It was rather as if she were searching his face for a sign. He nodded, and she went on.

“My dear, we are neither of us children. I’m thirty, you’re nearly forty. We have both of us hard years behind us, years that have held hectic moments of joy, of passion, of sorrow—we each know what. Much of that passion, that sorrow, that joy, we gathered rather thoughtlessly, did we not? I did. I don’t regret it, but I’ve *rushed* along. Do you understand? Life has swept me away, bowled me over, played with me. I’ve refused to think. But now—now, Maurice, I am grasping something deliberately, with a firm hand. I—I do not want to be hurried.”

He was about to speak, but she stopped him with a flicker of the Julie that sang comic songs along the road. “One moment, old dear. Let me finish. Afterwards, I may not get a chance! Now”—and her smile died down—“that’s the first point, but the second is even more to me. *Why* am I coming to you? *Why*, fundamentally, are you taking me? Maurice, the pressing reason with me is that all the woman in me goes out to you. You silly old thing, with your science! I want to do for you, for ever, what once, for three days, I did for Peter. And you, you want me, the physical me, terribly now, but you are Maurice Sampson, you know! To-morrow morning you’ll be thinking of the child that is to be so much to you. I know you. I believe you’ll want then that I had conceived as it were before the altar of

some god. You won't want this accident, this stuffy old bedroom, this hotel visit, the humiliation of your flight in the morning, and all the rest of it, to be our first movement towards that child. We will plan something finer, lovelier, the best we can think of, eh?"

She smiled at him tremulously, like a child herself, and this time she saw tears in his eyes and knew that she had read him aright. She stretched her hands out to him. "Oh, Maurice," she cried, "I'm weary too, my beloved. My God, how weary! And do you think I would keep anything from you? Do you think I'm a saint in a painted window to blush at giving you my body when and where and how you wish? But that's just it. How *you* wish. Think twice, my darling. You're a haven to me that I've come far to reach, but so am I to you, and I want you to find it fair."

He leaned forward to her now with infinite tenderness, taking her hair gently in his hands, kissing her lips. And as he bent his head still more and kissed her white soft skin low down on her breast, her own lips brushed his eyes.

"There goes the pain, the restlessness, the trouble, Maurice dear," she whispered.

But he paused by her bed as he stood up with his candle. "Good-night, you wonderful person," he said. "But where is it to be, Julie?"

She smiled at him. "Somewhere—let me think—near the sea and near the mountains, somewhere warm and sweet-scented and very lovely, somewhere you and I have never been to yet, somewhere where none of our friends go. It sounds like another Utopia, doesn't it? Can you think of any such place, Maurice? There's a problem for you!"

He laughed at her. "It's solved," he said at once.

"*What!* Where?"

"Corsica. I've wanted myself often to go there. It's exactly all you say."

She lay considering him. "I believe you're right," she replied slowly. "I once saw it from the sea. It looked like a fairy-island then. And it's a far haven, isn't it, Maurice?"

He bent again and kissed her forehead. "Where we shall begin to find the meaning of life together, Julie mine."

He hesitated for all that at the door. "Julie—soon?"

Her lips broke into a smile. “Yes, you old dear,” she said, “just as soon as you please!”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Within the little high-walled garden the September sun shone brightly. It was a small formal place, but with a sedate, self-contained, wise air that was not unpleasing. Just a shade more rectangular than square, there was a border close against the wall on three sides with a gravelled path edging it, and the centre space thus formed was again divided into two by an offshoot of the little path. The prim paths were all in straight lines and no wider than was necessary for one to walk. Of the two centre patches, one was laid out with grass, the other planted with vegetables, and in the border all round flourished a few hardy flowers. A pear-tree on one side, a peach on the other, were trained against the walls.

The walls at once riveted attention. They were high, solid and formidable. They were not exactly prison walls, or the ladder of the pear-tree, at least, would not have been left by which an active man could easily reach the top, but they shut off all sight of the outside world save the faint blue sky and the fleecy clouds of the day's heaven above them. On the three sides they ran; the fourth gave on the arrangements of a little house.

Perfectly plain but solid pillars of stone rose on the edge of the garden and supported a floor of strong timbers above a short length of cloister. Entering from the garden by the short central path, one found this cloister, (or corridor, for it was only that) paved with flat stones beneath one's feet, entered on the left by a small heavily-barred door in a continuation of the high wall of the garden, and completed on the right by a flight of wooden steps leading up to whatever accommodation there might be above. Immediately in front, but whitewashed here to increase the light, one recognized again the walling of the garden. Standing there, the plan of the place became plain. One was in a high-walled square, from one side of which rooms had been built out, the space beneath them being flagged. Upon the square but one door gave, the heavily-barred door at the end of the flagged corridor.

A perky thrush, who appeared out of nowhere and sunned himself for a few minutes on the topmost bough of the pear-tree, looked down into the garden and found it entirely satisfactory. It was true that he was used thus to inspect this and sundry other little walled domains, all perfectly alike, that lay like little toys arranged orderly by a child about the four sides of a great central square garden, a quarter of a mile across, wherein were rows and

rows of potatoes and beans and cabbages and fruit trees. Their symmetry was only broken in the centre by an oblong patch, low-railed beneath a high cross, wherein the rows of the fruit trees were continued by low mounds, six feet by two, without headstones, as regularly as any man could wish. Both garden and graveyard were a paradise for birds. They grew fat and cheeky there. Unmolested, an occasional thrush or blackbird would visit one of the little square domains, but only to escape for a while from the chatter of his friends. Generally these were not untenanted, but it mattered little whether they were or whether they were not. The men in white and brown who lived one in each were all that a bird could wish. Quite often they were practically motionless. One could see them in the little rooms. Or they paced quietly round and round the gravelled path, and did not in the least mind one's searching for caterpillars or worms. Or they dug, and would courteously stop digging if one were in the way of the spade.

But this particular square was empty. The thrush on the pear-tree thrust his head this way and that with jerky brisk little movements, and made quite sure. There was no one in the room, no one chopping the pile of wood that stood in a corner under the stairs, no one pacing up and down the nagged corridor, no one in the garden. He gave a chirp of satisfaction, caught sight of secret marks on the patch of grass that aroused his hunter spirit, and flew down to search for his worm.

He found it, a great succulent thick thing mainly under the soft ground, but feeling blindly with its clean pointed delicate extremity among the grass-roots. He watched his moment and sprang upon it. A tug; his victim was taken by surprise and lugged half out, but only half. With the rest of its length it clung stubbornly to the earth, swelling its segmented rough body against the protecting walls of its cell. The light of battle shone in the thrush's eye. He set his heavily armed feet firmly on the ground, bent his back, took the strain.

But in that tense moment he heard the unexpected, and although he did not at once relinquish his hold, his head went round, his eye grew startled. In a few seconds it was unmistakable. Men were approaching slowly the other side of the high wall, marching along one side of the great square outside, chanting. They might pass; he listened; they did not. The wall dulled all sounds, but the keen bird heard. As the door into the flagged passage before him opened, he abandoned his prey, and flew in a great arc with a swish of wings over the wall and away to his kind.

Peter Graham and another entered, Peter first, to take a pace or so and stand irresolute. His companion pushed the heavy door to behind them and

stepped to his side. For all that he wore a white cassock, and that he folded his hands out of sight under the monastic scapular that fell in straight lines back and front on that garment, he had an air of homely ordinariness about him. Perhaps it was his square-toed boots that appeared below his cassock, perhaps the spectacles on his nose, but more likely the effect was produced by the expression on his face, the kindness of his eyes, the square, clean-shaven chin. He looked practical and real, and not in the least theatrical. Peter, too, in a plain cloth suit, with a soft hat in his hand, was satisfactorily commonplace. He had been more romantic in his old Norfolk jacket. The clothes did not fit very well and they had not cost much.

"This," said the monk, "is your cell, Mr. Graham."

"Yes, father."

"Of course you've been round before, but I want to make sure that you understand everything and that everything is in order for you. So let us go through it thoroughly. First, this hatch. You understand that your food will be placed here twice a day?"

Peter turned with him and watched him slide backwards and forwards once or twice a sort of shutter let into the wall by the door. It opened on a right-angled recess in the masonry, so constructed that while from within you could not look out, as from without no one could look in, nevertheless a tray, platters, a pitcher could be passed through it. The lay-brothers without would leave food of sorts in the morning, and food of sorts in the evening, in that hatch. Fish thrice a week; never any meat; beans. . . . He understood. "Yes, father," he repeated mechanically.

"Don't forget to wash and return the empty vessels when you have done with them. And don't forget to leave a little over from breakfast for your lunch. Otherwise," he added smiling, "you will be hungry, I fear, before supper-time."

"Yes, father."

The monk turned. "Well, here is your garden. You can grow what you like, and do what you like with what you grow." They moved a few paces forward. "The last occupant has not left you many flowers, but if you stay you can soon remedy that. Be strict with yourself as to the regular times for work. There's your spade and rake against the wall. Have they given you a trowel? I don't see it. . . . No, it isn't here. I'll see to that."

"Thanks, father."

“You can’t get on without a trowel. . . . Now, let me see. You’ve plenty of wood. There’s your axe and saw, the mangle for your washing by the wood-stack. That’s your lantern for the night offices, on that nail. Mr. Graham, waking for the night office is going to be the hardest physical part of your life. One never gets wholly used to it. You will soon wake regularly enough, but it will always be a struggle to get up. You must be prepared for that.”

“Yes, father.”

“Now let’s go upstairs.”

In silence they mounted the wooden steps and entered the first room. It was small, neat, quite clean. A window looked into the garden; Father Morris went over to it and undid the latch. Beneath it stood a plain writing-table with pens, ink and paper. There was a prie-Dieu, a chair, a bookcase with two or three shelves of books. Peter walked over and took down the first at random. It was a commentary on the Book of Job in Latin. He returned it and glanced at the others: more commentaries, a treatise on Moral Theology, St. Augustine, the Letters of Cyprian. They were all in Latin.

Father Morris watched him. “You can have books from the library,” he said. “Write for what you want, and leave the letter on the tray in the hatch. You can change them as often as you like. I should advise you to take up some special study later on. From what I know of you, I should suggest Mystic Theology, Mr. Graham. Begin with St. Theresa, not St. John of the Cross.”

“I have read a little St. John,” said Peter.

“Good. . . . Well, there is the bedroom.”

He opened a door before them, and they passed into a second room identical in size and aspect with the first. In it a window also gave on the garden, but opposite the window was an iron bedstead, and in a corner a wash-hand-stand and metal jug and basin. There was a small mirror above a chest of drawers. By the side of the bed was a wooden chair, and over the bed a large crucifix—a white figure on a black cross.

“There is nothing to be said about this, I think,” said Father Morris briskly.

“No,” said Peter.

“Then that’s all,” said Father Morris.

They turned and walked down the stairs again in silence. They had been perhaps five minutes in the little place. By the door from the world without, Father Morris paused. "You see," he said, "the bolt is on the inside, Mr. Graham. You understand? This is but a trial of our life, of course, and in a fortnight I shall come again and see how you have got on. But I want you—I know you want—to approach it with the intention of permanency. Remember, then, that now and always it is that intention you have to watch. No one will keep you here a moment longer than you wish. At any time you have only to undo your own bar and walk out. Go at once to the guest-master if you do. Within a couple of hours you can be free in London, or wherever you prefer. You are sure you understand?"

"Quite, father."

"Otherwise, of course, you will see no one except in chapel—and there you must guard your eyes—before Saturday, when there is each week one hour's conversation and common exercise. But all that you know. . . . Is there anything you want to ask?"

"I don't think so, father."

"Well then, I will leave you to God, Mr. Graham."

He stood looking at the young man for a minute or two in silence, his eyes very kind and tender. Then he held out his hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Graham. God bless you."

"Good-bye, father. Pray for me."

The monk inclined his head. "And of your charity pray for me too, please, Mr. Graham," he said as he passed out.

He shut the door behind him, and within Peter stood listening. He could hear the murmur of a Latin greeting and response the other side of the thick wall. Then Father Morris's voice intoned a versicle and was answered by the louder swell of the chorused respond. Then "Oremus"—he caught the familiar word and the murmur of indistinct prayer. They were praying for him, he knew. Then "Amen," breaking in on that solitary impersonal voice. And then a brief pause; the cantors intoning a psalm; the whole taking it up.

The singing died away, and the sound of feet. Five minutes, perhaps, slid by. Then, in the complete silence, Peter put his hand out and shot his bolt. The iron grated loudly on the stone in the stillness. Peter, too, had come to his far haven—with what thoughts, what memories, now? Or with what future conflict? Who knows? Who shall dare guess?

“The rest is silence.”

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 *Recompence--A Sequel to "Simon Called Peter"* by Robert Keable]