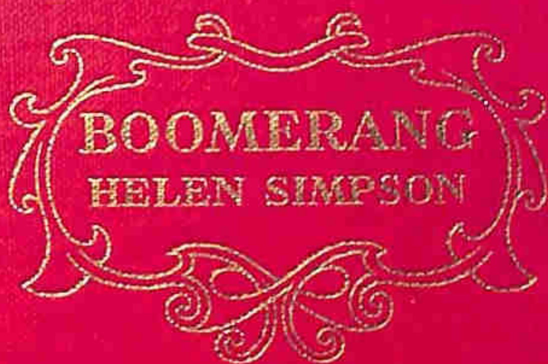
BOOMERANG
HELEN SIMPSON

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ALSO BY HELEN SIMPSON

THE BASELESS FABRIC
CUPS, WANDS AND SWORDS
THE DESOLATE HOUSE
MUMBUDGET

BOOMERANG

BY

HELEN SIMPSON

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TO

WINIFRED

My dear,

I would dedicate this book to you, if dedications any longer meant anything, and if I were not, with the rest of us in our hurry, shy and clumsy at making a gesture. I had better stand aside, I think, and let one of your Elizabethans do the trick for me as it should be done.

Reginald Scot is speaking:

“I do not present this unto you because it is meet for you; but for that you are meet for it (I meane) to judge upon it, to defend it. I hope you will read it, or at the least, lay it up in your study with your other books, among which, and this is sure, there is none dedicated to any with more good will.

“Your sincere loving friend——”
H. S.

Queen Anne Street,
London.

FOREWORD

Of the various incidents related in this book, some of the more improbable are true; for example, the impersonation of “Martina Fields” in a remote continent, and the visit of a woman to the Australian trenches on the Somme. I say this, not to forestall criticism of my invention, but as a pensive commentary on the difficulty imagination has to keep level when truth is allowed to set the pace.

The characters throughout are either imaginary or dead. In no case have real names been used, except that of the King of France who lost his throne in 1830; as for my Governor-General, like my Premier, Cardinal, and Lord Mayor, he is pure fantasy, having no original among the distinguished gentlemen who have held that office in reality.

The chapter headings throughout are taken from Sir Thomas Browne.

H. S.

Boomerang

CHAPTER I

> But remembering the early civility they brought upon these countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; we mercifully preserve their bones.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

Life can afford extravagance, books cannot; for this reason nobody will dream of believing in my two grandfathers. They are too true to be good—good fiction, at any rate; if I try to give some kind of picture of them, it is because they frame between them a vision of a golden age, which could only have existed in brand-new countries, among brand-new circumstances and laws. It was not a golden age for everybody, wives or servants for instance, but for these two it was; they were, to use a word which is almost dead, characters.

I am sorry to think what would happen to these two old gentlemen if they had the misfortune to live now; it would be something legal, that is certain, falling heavily to crush their magnificent egotism and eccentricity. Their wives, who in the ’seventies put up with them with the uncomprehending patience accorded by Insurance Companies to Acts of God, would nowadays divorce them. Servants would bring, and win, actions against them for assault. As for their families, these would scatter immediately after the first row or two, and go forth to earn their livings with all the horrid freedom that the post-war period accords. In an age of standardisation these old crusted, crusty gentlemen, mellow even in their rages as the Madeira which they sent for a roll round the Horn before bottling, would have the deuce of a time.

Doctors, to begin with, who in the last half century have swelled up into demi-gods, would be the first to interfere. They would view the couple, with their picturesquely flushed faces, their sudden wraths after meals, as mere examples of treacherous glands, and hardening arteries. (Character is a word which has died from the doctors’ vocabulary too.) They would accept five-guinea fees to persuade the old gentlemen that what they needed was calm; and there would be a great recommending of suitable institutions—“quite in

the country, you know, cooking not bad, and just supervision, nothing irksome.” When the doctors had done, the lawyers would take their turn. Death duties, they would tell their victims, could best be avoided by making over the estate during lifetime to a reliable son. Relatives would then appear, with hints, backed by statistics, concerning vegetarian diet, and the undesirability of port by the pint twice a day. And at last, having shorn the bewildered unfortunates, for their own good, of home, money, wine and liberty, the twentieth century would turn the key on them with a sigh of genuine relief.

There was none of this in the colonies of last century, which was, for the tyrants, the very grandest imaginable time. There were doctors, true, and lawyers, but they were kept in their place, and the tyrants used them. Land was for the asking. Convicts were done with, to everybody’s relief—the last batch reached Sydney in 1840; but there was labour to be had, labour which, like the doctors and lawyers, knew its place, and took its wage with a finger to the forelock. There were English immigrants who came after gold, and remained to use spade and shears. There were Chinese in numbers, who came, as they explained by an interpreter to astonished immigration officers, to earn prouder lacquered coffins in this rich new land than their own exhausted paddy-fields could yield them. (The price of the coffin once safe in a canvas bag, they broke their term of service and returned to China assured of respect.) To deal with the land and the labour, a great many laws were made, and printed, and forgotten on shelves; while on the land existed superbly a number of men and women who were laws to themselves; characters, obeyed as such, loved, feared, and occasionally murdered as such. And here we come upon those prime old personages, ripe and shocking and satisfying as good Stilton cheese, the despair of their families and neighbours, and worth the lot put together; Great-grandfather Boissy, and his son, Gustave-Félicité.

I may say at once that I never knew either.

CHAPTER II

> All places, all Aires, make unto me one country; I have been ship wrackt, yet am not an enemy with the sea or winds.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

The first unbelievable thing about Grandfather Boissy is that he was born over a century and a quarter ago, in one of those little island colonies which the French and English were accustomed to snap up in passing during the eighteenth century. Great-grandfather, a ne'er-do-weel of family—Boissy de Mortemar was the full name—was sent there for his country's good in 1789, just before the French troubles began, and there remained and was forgotten, very conveniently for him, by his country's successive masters. It must not be thought that this exile, though imposed with a view to relieving a certain irritation which his presence set up in Parisian society, was attended with any humiliation such as the average deportee was obliged to endure. No; my great-grandfather, Auguste-Anne, went off to Santisimo Corazon in style, with a brevet of Lieutenant-Governor in his pocket, to be the representative of his king; my uncle has this brevet yet, with its seals, and its scrolly lawyer's writing, and the brave beginning "Il est ordonné," and at the bottom a fine flourishing signature, "Louis," the L of it three inches tall.

In Paris, Auguste-Anne had, I gather, been a nuisance. In Corazon, freed of relations, with no means ready-made of frittering money, and a climate which after a year or two either calmed or killed the individual submitted to it, he became a very respectable governor. He enjoyed being God, and had a fair conception of how the part should be played. He had a taste for splendour, as had the blacks he ruled. He encouraged their religion, which had withdrawn into the shadows as persecuted faiths will, so that witch-doctors throve; even, they got up a procession or two after the fashion of those held at Church festivals, to the great scandal of the official priesthood. In ordinary times these latter would have protested to France, and there would have been a reprimand, and eventually a new Governor with a narrower mind; but by now the year was 1794, priests were disapproved in Paris, and it was felt, after the news of the massacre of Thermidor, that it would be tactless to invite the attention of Robespierre and his colleagues to

a religious dispute in a distant island. The clergy did indeed send off some form of protest to the Pope, who replied absent-mindedly with an illuminated blessing, and an indulgence of thirty days for whosoever should recite, fasting, a prayer for the conversion of the heathen. After this their reverences gave it up, and retired with dignity from all competition in processions, wherein, as they had the wit to realize, they were hopelessly outclassed.

Meanwhile Auguste-Anne and his blacks went their scandalous and vivid way, working, but no more than was necessary, and breaking off into refreshing orgies of religion from time to time. The governor's religion, true, was that of Dr. Pangloss rather than of his baptism, but it included dancing and a certain show of physical prowess, and was perfectly understood by the governed. These, indeed, so far sympathised as to lend him occasionally their own mysterious drummers, though not the drums—sacred these, and strung with human hide; had they been borrowed and trifled with odd things might have happened. But the drummers had no objection to showing their skill, and condescended to rub knuckles on the garrison kettles, which thereupon spelt out the strangest aphrodisiac rhythms, unmilitary though commanding. Great-grandfather Boissy was probably the first European to tangle his feet in these rhythms, the germ of jazz, which fell upon barren ground, and bore no fruit for another century. It delights me to think of his two fiddlers and his solitary piper drawling out the artless melodies of old France—Bouton de Rose, Tendre Musette, Dans ce Bocage—with this primal wickedness thudding away underneath.

II

Such was his life on the island, while his impeccable relatives in Paris were scurrying this way and that like rats when a haystack burns. With two frontiers to defend, and a new philosophy to impose upon a sceptical hostile Europe, the Republic One and Indivisible had no thought to spare for Corazon. News came, blown in with stray ships, and was discussed, but without much interest. France was too far away. Then, somewhere about December 1794, came a warship flying the tricolour, from which landed two officers in full regalia with scarves of the three colours, to enquire of the governor why the devil the sacred three did not wave above the little mud fortress which guarded the port. They required an immediate lowering of the detested white flag, together with proofs of citizenship and loyalty from Auguste-Anne. The latter, who happily lacked the kind of principle which obliges a man to strike attitudes, had the flag down at once, and put up a makeshift affair of red, white and blue, made by the garrison's wives out of

old petticoats. As for the proofs of citizenship and loyalty, these he provided until the officers were totally exhausted, and unable to deal with a girl or a glass more. He then had them conveyed aboard their vessel by polite negroes, with a note to say that he believed there were English ships in the offing; which hint, when they had recovered sufficiently to read it, they took, and made off under all sail.

When they had gone Auguste-Anne had the tricolour flag hauled down and stowed in a locker for future use. The island dreamed on under the white and gold as before.

A few months later an English sloop appeared, and remained in the harbour a week. At the end of this time another flag, red and white crosses on a blue ground, was stowed in the same locker, and another ship's company went off with aching heads to sea. It was the captain's hope to obtain at least a step in rank by reporting this new acquisition to the territory of George III, and he drew up an impressive report, dwelling on the dangerous nature of the exploit, and the stubborn resistance of the islanders. (More than one of the Governor's ladies had taken fright at his ginger whiskers, which were looked on by the unsophisticated creatures as *lusus naturæ*.) But the Admiralty of those days was ancestor to the Admiralty of these. The king was having a fit when the tidings arrived, and so the report was initialled and docketed, and taken down into the bowels of the earth to be filed; that is to say, it was forgotten with all possible completeness, and the unlucky author remained a post-captain till death.

The years went on. Somewhere about the time when Napoleon was striking like forked lightning through Italy, a deputation waited on Auguste-Anne. He came from his bed to meet it in a peacock-coloured dressing-gown, and learned that it wished him to be king. Now that King Louis was dead, said the spokesman, nobody knew for certain whom the island belonged to. There were the Republicans, who sounded ferocious, and the English, who had run about after a little ball in full midday sun, and were regarded by the islanders as no better than lunatics. Remained Auguste-Anne; and the deputation, which included—privately glaring, but publicly all balm—the Bishop, and the most renowned of the witch-doctors, came to suggest that it was his duty to clear up the situation by accepting the crown. The whites harangued him, and drew examples from antiquity; the blacks wept and addressed him, not without a percentage of truth, as the father of their children. Seeing both parties so much in earnest, Auguste-Anne displayed no false modesty, but agreed then and there, all dressing-gowned as he was, to rule them. They thanked him without surprise and retired

backwards to compose public demonstrations of rejoicing after their several manners. The blacks got up their inevitable procession, which was rained on, to the secret joy of the Bishop, whose Te Deum with augmented choir, and the now Royal piper playing the serpent, was a triumph of comfort and good producing.

Auguste-Anne was present, needless to say, while the canons and choirs felicitated God on having acquired him as vice-regent sitting close to the altar and looking impressive in a blackguardly way. Later, when the Bishop, fired by the success of his performance, worked up to a coronation service, he submitted to the various ceremonies with dignity, and was respectful to such relics as the tibia of St. Athanasius and the *ossa innominata* of St. Stipendius, taken for the occasion from a magnificent charnel-house of solid silver. When it was over, the King, though tired, walked in procession under a canopy to a sort of natural grassy amphitheatre near the bay, and went through the whole thing again, according to the rather more ancient and much more disreputable rites of the blacks. The Bishop, though piqued, feigned not to notice this deliberate encouragement given to Paganism; remembering the result of his application to the Pope, and the distance of Corazon from any authority, he retired with a judicious migraine, and thus avoided taking any scandal. Happily, he recovered in time for the Palace dinner that evening, and did it full justice, which is more than can be said for the chief Witch-doctor, who lay on the shore all night in a sweat of blood, troubled by the resentful ghosts of sacrificed virgins.

III

When these civil and religious sprees were over, life went on as before; that is to say, the people supplied themselves at Nature’s expense with food, and spent the rest of their time with women, or composing liquid symphonies upon a delectable ground-bass of rum. Such was the routine of blacks and whites alike, and Auguste-Anne was the last person to interfere with it. He left matters alone; it was his genius, the one thing he could do really well. Years had taught him that in an island such as Corazon, time and climate do all the ruling needed; glory, by which is usually meant wholesale killing, he left to the tornadoes which whirled through the gulf of Mexico every six or seven years. The anticipation of these disasters, and the rebuilding of life after they had occurred, were the island’s artless substitutes for the thrills of civilised warfare, with this important difference, that the heads of the State and the poorest plodding conscript stood in exactly the same danger while the elements raged.

It was after one such tornado, which had blown in the Palace door as by a charge of gunpowder, flattening a couple of domestics, and cutting Auguste-Anne himself about the head with flying splinters, that the second deputation arrived. Auguste-Anne, piratical in bandages, received them and enquired their business; which was, put briefly, to get him married. They said that what with tornadoes and time they might lose him now any day. (Auguste-Anne started at this plain speaking, but the fact remained, he was forty-three and the climate was not tolerant to middle-age.) They knew, they said hastily, that so far there had been no diminishing of his remarkable physical powers, which had become a legend already, handed down in story from mothers to daughters when these attained suitable age; but all the same ——

Then, as before, the whites harangued, and the blacks wept.

"But where the devil," enquired Auguste-Anne, "am I to look for a wife in this bitch of an island?"

The deputation had an answer to this, having thought the whole situation out with care, amid the mourning and labour of a tornado's aftermath. It would not do, they agreed, to take a wife from the island. Women could not stand splendour; they had no heads for it. Lift up one island woman, and her first idea would be to trample the other island women, and these would rebel, and stir up their husbands, and there would be trouble in no time. (Witness that good-for-nothing daughter of old Tascher de Lapagerie, cocked up on a throne as Empress of the French, making her husband ridiculous with her extravagance and her bad taste in lovers.) Nor would it do, pursued the deputation, to return to France in search of a wife; nothing but parvenues now in France, none of the good old thin blood left, thin noses, thin notions; only a lot of dukes called after battles, and duchesses red-handed from the maternal wash-tub. America was out of the question, as was Canada, and the wilder republics of the south. The only place left where a personage like Auguste-Anne, last of a line of graceful existers, royalist and rich, might best look for a consort, was England. England swarmed with exiled ladies, poor but suitable, bending over embroidery, teaching deportment; even—these too—busied over wash-tubs. (But a wash-tub from which one has risen, and a wash-tub to which, after selling the last jewel, one descends, are two very different things.) The deputation's advice, then, was this: that Auguste-Anne should set sail in the next ship that touched at the little harbour, leaving his people to tidy up the island against his return; that he should take his time in England, look about him, choose, unhurried, some young creature who might enjoy the thought of processions and

progeny, and bring her back to reign. Finances, they explained, would hardly run to a second crown; but there was always the Virgin's, which she only wore on feast-days, and could well spare the loan of now and then.

In fact, they had the whole plan neatly cut and dried.

As usual, Auguste-Anne did not keep them waiting, but assented at once, and dismissed them to such rejoicings as the devastation and threatening famine of the land allowed.

CHAPTER III

> Saltimbancoes, Quacksalvers, and Charlatans . . . . whose cries cannot conceal their mischief. For their impostures are full of cruelty, and worse than any other, deluding not only unto pecuniary defraudations, but the irreparable deceit of death.
>
> —*Vulgar Errors.*

I

Next month, in an opportune trading vessel, he set off to woo.

How he proposed to go about the business on landing at Bristol is unknown, for he was perfectly innocent of the English tongue, save for a few expletives, and had no introductions or passport except his brevet of governor and his still handsome though florid person. Probably this latter would have been the more useful of the two in a country where George the Prince Regent set fashions, but as things fell out he had no need to put it to the test, or to submit himself to the tilted eyebrows of dowagers, with fledglings in charge, ranged round a ball-room in Bath.

For while still in Bristol he met a young female by pure accident; ran her down, as a matter of fact, just as he was driving out for the first time in the immense chariot which had been specially built for him. The girl was small, and fair, and of no pretensions. Her nose was snub, not the aristocratic feature he had come to seek, but it had for the hawk—but purplish—beaked Auguste-Anne the violent attraction exercised by opposites.

She was hardly hurt at all, and had fainted more from a sense of propriety than anything else; and when she came to in the vast hotel bedroom to which she had been carried, and perceived herself to be wearing a gentleman's silk nightshirt, she was in half a mind to go off again. The nightshirt, however, had no immoral significance. The chambermaid had robed her in it at the bidding, but not in the presence, of Auguste-Anne. Still, he had come once to the door to see that his protégée was safely bestowed; and the sight of her lying there with her pale hair fanning out over the pillow caused him first a pang and then an exaltation. He swore at himself, a loud inconsequent French oath, but the exaltation persisted; then with a stamp of the foot, and a—"Why not? Sacred name of names!"—descended the stairs

and ordered his horses to be put up again. He had decided with a truly royal impulsiveness to seek no further.

It must be remembered that he had had twenty years of sun and dark-favoured women, and this girl was fair, and the month an English November. It had rained since the day he arrived. The best inn was panelled throughout with oak, which absorbed any daylight left over from the narrow streets and high buildings. The best inn offered him twice a day mounds of half-raw meat in lieu of meals. There was an entire absence of any person who could converse in the only civil language. He had enquired if Bristol were a considerable city, and got the truthful reply that it was one of the greatest in England. He had enquired if any other part of England were less subject to rain, and was told no. He had enquired if there were anyone in the whole town who spoke French, and was briefly informed that there was a war on. He went to the carriage makers, and found them ignoramuses, unable to understand how the quarterings on the panels of the chariot should go. They had never heard of his illustrious family, and in their easy British way thought that anything ought to do for a Frenchy, and only one of these Markees at that. They were used to Markees, coming round with such pitiful fine bows to solicit the lowest paid jobs, and had got in the way of despising them. Even that anomaly, a Markee with quantities of money, ought, they considered, to put up with such heraldry as they chose to give him. Auguste-Anne nearly burst a blood vessel before he could get his mullets and leopards and blackamoors' heads in the right places.

All this may explain, at least partly, why Auguste-Anne, having set out upon an errand of State, with money in his pockets and the title of queen to offer, should have contented himself—more than that; should have set his heart upon, clung to, and refused to relinquish the first presentable young thing that happened to fall in his way.

II

Literally, to fall in his way; but as I said, she had hardly a touch from the hoofs. She came to, and blushed at the nightdress alone; then rang for the maid, and demanded to know where she was, and to be taken instantly home to her mother. Auguste-Anne, informed through the housemaid of this request, said with a wave of the hand when he had got the sense of it:

"Bring this mother to her."

And brought the mother was, in the identical chariot which had downed her daughter, and put her pale head in the way of a crown. She was a

respectable middle-aged person in a clean cap, who let rooms to the grass-widows of sea-captains, and who somewhere in the Dark Ages had become the genuine, or turf-widow, of a sea-captain herself. It is impossible to guess at what she thought, and what the neighbours thought, when a large gilt chariot, its panels covered with blackamoors' heads, its horses glittering like successful generals, drew up with a prodigious jingling and stamping at her modest door. She was at once told of her daughter's accident, but having been brought up in a more practical and less ladylike way, neglected to swoon. Instead, she got into the vehicle, with a glance which made swift calculation of its cost, reflecting that this upset might turn out to be a bit of luck for the girl after all.

When she saw Auguste-Anne, however, she had something of a shock. Both England and France had grown out of the taste for brocades and bright colours. In civil life young gentlemen's choice for coats had dwindled down to a few sombre greens, black, mulberry, and a brown or two, though they might array themselves rather more picturesquely for any kind of slaughter. But Auguste-Anne, again remember, had not seen Europe for twenty years, and had lived among a people to whom strong colour was as natural and wholesome as strong wine. He wore now, in the year 1804, in Bristol, in November, a coat of bright yellow face-cloth, with, a kind of laced stock, and crimson knee-breeches buckled with gold. Add to this a sword and a rather elaborate wig, curled so as to afford him an extra two inches of height; and the excellent mother's diffidence, her first astonished cry —"Love-a-duck, play actors!"—is easily explained.

Auguste-Anne led the fluttered lady to a chair, and by means of his interpreter, an able-bodied seaman who had been discovered in the tap, made known his project. His meaning was at first obscured unintentionally by the seaman, whose knowledge of the language of Racine had been acquired as a prisoner in the hulks of Toulon. At this intermediary's first statement of his principal's requirements the outraged mother rose from her chair, seeming to fluff out to twice her size, like an angry cat.

"Never!" declared the mother. "Tell him never, the wicked rascal, and you should think shame yourself to repeat sich words, you nasty wretch, you!"

To which the seaman replied without heat:

"Stow your gab, I never said 'e didn't mean to sleep with 'er honest, did I?"

“Marriage?” said the mother incredulously, staring at Auguste-Anne, who recognised the word and bowed, saying in his own tongue:

“I have the honour, madame, as this person says, to demand mademoiselle your daughter’s hand in marriage.”

“Well!” said the mother, at this repetition of the word, and looked once more up and down the flaunting figure of her daughter’s suitor.

“If,” pursued Auguste-Anne smoothly, “as is natural, you should wish to peruse my credentials, I have them here——”

And he took from his bosom the parchment displaying King Louis’ brevet, unrolled and let it hang, ribbon and seals and all, before the uncomprehending eyes of the mother.

“What’s all this?” the latter enquired of the seaman.

“Licence,” replied that worthy readily, “writ out in Greek by ’is Nibs the Archbishop o’ Canterbury. Didn’t I tell yer he wants to (an intolerable word) the girl honest?”

Stupefied, the mother sat surveying the mysterious parchment, while her thoughts played with a dream of riding about to the end of her days behind four horses, and of having done for ever with lodgers. After a brief period, during which it must be confessed that these and similar considerations received due attention while the possible happiness of her daughter went without more than perfunctory enquiry, she signified her willingness to ratify the arrangement.

But certain safeguards had to be thought of first. If there was one thing which a life among the grass-widows of seafarers had taught her, it was the importance of always having a sum of money down, and as far as possible payment in advance. Written pledges to pay she scorned; she had in her younger, more guileless days acquired quite a collection of these, which it gave her very little satisfaction to recall. She sat with folded hands, the primmest creature, while her mind flickered up and down columns of imaginary figures—price of chariot, gold hilt to sword, menservants in livery, diamond pin; and she had arrived at this conclusion, that the mysterious suitor, whatever he might be worth a year, was good as he stood for five hundred guineas. She therefore named this sum in gold as the price of her consent, adding the stipulation that the marriage should be performed by a clergyman of the church of England.

Somehow or other the seaman managed to get this proposition into a form assimilable by Auguste-Anne, with the unimportant difference that the

sum demanded, in the usual way, was increased by passing through the middleman's hands. The seaman's eye had summed up the eccentric being more truly than the mother's could do, so long accustomed to the narrow horizons of lodgers. He had seen nabobs, had the seaman, and if this was not one, though a toad-eating Frenchy, blast his bowels, and so on, with a wealth of physiological detail. He demanded, accordingly, one thousand guineas; and when the Frenchy without turning a hair agreed, and told a servant to hand the purse, could have cursed himself blue for not asking double.

It must have been a curious scene, the three of them round the table in that foggy panelled room. There was the pinched respectable visage of the widow, who sat, telling over the coins with genteelly mittened hands; the tarry-tailed seaman striving to catch her eye with a wink, a plea not to give him away; finally the pantomime presence of Auguste-Anne Boissy de Mortemar, in his canary coat and wig twenty years out of date.

The tally completed—and it may be said at once that the mother never did give the seaman away; but to his blasphemous surprise, all that came to his pocket out of the surplus was two guineas, and those of a suspiciously light weight—the tally completed, it was suggested that Miss should be sent for, and informed of her good fortune. The sailor accordingly, not without protest, was banished; and the mother accepted a glass of wine from her son-to-be, while they waited for the girl to appear.

She came at last, looking timid and frail against the dark panelling, and ran towards her mother at once. There was a quick dialogue, unintelligible to Auguste-Anne, which may have run as follows:

"Oh, mother, whatever's been happening? Have you come to take me away?"

"Sit down, Bella, don't look so agitated. Not feverish, are you? Well, then, sit down."

"But who is that man? What does he want here?"

"That's not a man, child, that's a rich gentleman. Bob to him, do; look how he's bending himself nigh-on double——"

"Oh, the brute, that's him that was in the coach!"

"Well, what of it? He'll make you amends. He's a gentleman every inch—" here the purse in her pocket gave an approving clink—"and I don't want no better for my daughter. Ah, you'll be calling on your poor old mother, my dear, in your own carriage before long."

At this point the girl, turning one horrified glance on the hawk-face which, while it had not forgotten dignity so far as to smirk, was at any rate attempting an agreeable grimace, burst into tears, and subsided to a chair weeping. Over her bent head mother and suitor exchanged comprehending glances, and with a further bow, and a word or two of solace, Auguste-Anne left his heart’s choice to a parent’s care.

The argument was not soon over. Miss Bella had read quite a number of the fashionable horrid books in which mysterious strangers carried off damsels to castles hung with pictures whose hands dripped blood, whose lofty corridors resounded by night with female screams. To her otherwise untutored mind this dark personage was just such a being, and she had no fancy for screaming in corridors however lofty. She preferred, being a nice, ordinary, unadventurous girl, and a milliner’s apprentice, to remain at home making bonnets for the gentry of Bristol, and told her mother so, as firmly as she could for tears. But she was no match for that lady, or for that lady’s strict sense of honour, which having accepted payment, insisted upon delivering the goods. Finally to tears she opposed tears, louder, saltier, more abandoned. The daughter weakened, was assailed more closely, and at last yielded; on which the mother, her victory won, pocketed her handkerchief after a brisk final blast, and sent a servant to tell the foreign gentleman that the young lady would see him now.

Though the interview which followed from an English point of view could hardly have been reckoned a success, being in fact nothing but a series of silences linked by sobs, Auguste-Anne was not disturbed by it. Marriages, in his pre-revolution world, were entirely affairs between parents. Red eyes at the betrothal were to him only decent, a proof of sensibility, nothing out of the way. He looked his acquisition up and down, discreetly, not to cause her embarrassment, and putting his gleanings with the more particular information afforded by the housemaid who had undressed her, sat down content, and in good appetite, to the supper he had ordered.

III

The marriage, which took place soon, by licence, must have been an absurd and pathetic ceremony. Bella would have let it go over without fuss, swallowing Auguste-Anne like a pill, in private. Auguste-Anne himself, to whom a marriage service conducted by heretics was about as binding as a thread of cotton, would likewise have preferred to keep it quiet, and have the show on their return to Corazon in a climate better adapted to display.

But the mother was inexorable. Not content with the certainty of ease, she was determined that all Bristol should know of her divorce from the obloquy of furnished rooms, and of her daughter's elevation to a gilded coach. She had visions of lawn sleeves blessing the couple. Was there not, only a dozen miles off, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and was a Bishop any too good for a man who could hand out a thousand guineas without a blink, like so much copper? A thousand pounds in thy courts is but a day, thought the widow, transposing the psalmist to the tune of Auguste-Anne's pockets, while she urged making a semi-royal spread of it, and asking the Mayor. She even went so far as to broach the idea of the Bishop to her rector, but that humble priest was so aghast at the idea of asking the Bishop to drive a dozen miles, and don his lawn sleeves to join a milliner's apprentice and a person who looked like a pirate, was in fact so sincerely shocked at the notion of requiring the Bishop to do anything but exist, that she gave way, and relinquished her dear ambition. With the Bishop departed hope of the Mayor, and with hope of the Mayor the whole official character of the thing, so that in no time it had come down to a pullulation of captain's wives and millinery companions, and the glory had quite departed. It was the Rector himself who undertook to marry them in the end, and the service at any rate was fully choral.

It must have been a grand sight—though some of the milliners tittered—to see the ruler of Corazon in really full fig, heels, wig, colour, everything slightly higher than ordinary. Even his nose seemed to have a more pronounced cant upwards at the bridge; but this may have been due to the amused contempt with which the whole ceremony filled him, comparing it with what his own witch-doctors and canons could do in the same line. A puffy post-captain on leave borrowed for the occasion from an ex-lodger gave the bride away, so that her mother, who could be perfectly the lady when occasion called or opportunity offered, might ply the smelling salts and be genteelly overcome. One unfortunate though picturesque circumstance was the intrusion of the seaman whose exaggeration had obtained for the widow five hundred pounds over her due, and who had been so smoothly bilked of his rightful commission. This unbidden wedding-guest, having waited till the ceremony was well under way, began, in a voice that in its time had competed with tempests, to deliver his version of the bargain which had resulted in the present ceremony.

He made a most unbecoming uproar, and his neighbours and the vergers, though scandalised, were too much filled with respect for the Lord's house, and also perhaps too completely scared by his appearance, to make effective protest. They remonstrated in whispers, which availed against his bawling

about as well as a lady's fan against a hurricane; they looked with disapproval, or else feigned to ignore. The rumpus increased with their efforts until the bridal couple, who had got to the exchange of vows, could hardly hear themselves speak; at which point it occurred to the groom that the noise, which he, accustomed to oddities in religion, had at first supposed to be an integral part of the Church of England service, was in fact an interpolation. Accordingly, not being troubled by any scruples as to the sanctity of the place, he put the ring back in his pocket, and leaving the bride to the clergyman's mercies, advanced towards the disturber drawing his sword; seeing which the disturber fled, vaulting pews, and escaped with a thwack on his backside, which split his breeches and showed a semi-circle of white, as though that part of his anatomy grinned. Having purged the sacred edifice of din, the groom returned at the stately pace to which his heels compelled him, and concluded the business of getting married with the utmost decorum.

IV

A ship for the West Indies sailed that night on the tide, and they went aboard her from the church. There was a good deal of the kind of British merriment which seeks to veil with jocosity the deadly possibilities of every marriage. There was a good deal of assorted liquor of the very best quality; rum for the sailors, and champagne for the puffy post-captain, and for the ladies a little mild punch with ratafia biscuits. After justice had been done to these, and all the refined jokes had been made—the vulgar ones are inexhaustible, but were confined to the forecastle—the captain, being anxious for his tide, cleared away the guests with nautical finality. There were tears, and on the part of the post-captain, dragged from his liquor untimely, a protest or two; but he was prevailed on, and departed at last, weeping, between a couple of seamen. The widow was, as was right, the last to go. She was in fact anxious to be quit of her daughter, whose behaviour during the fortnight of the betrothal had shown a complete lack of gratitude to fate; but the girl clung, down in the dark and narrow cabin, and it was only decent to remain, and pat her shoulder and prophesy, and take every means to console and reassure. Thus the widow, though glad to leave, was last along the gangway. She had, as has been said, a strong sense of right, and never failed to pay the tribute of a gesture to virtue. Accordingly, she remained on the wharf in a fine mizzling rain until the ship was warped out and began to slide down-channel. Then, full of elation, charged with the enviable task of selling the gilt chariot and keeping what she could get for it, happy in the consciousness of a thousand gold guineas safe hidden behind

the chimney, she made her way up and down the curling streets of Bristol, home.

Her conviction that she need never more let lodgings, and that she would ride behind four horses was proved true, for two mornings later she was found by her new servant lying before the fireplace, from which some bricks had been removed. She had been dead since midnight, and there was an ugly knife, of the kind that seamen carry, standing up out of her breast.

V

Corazon, not having been warned of their majesties' arrival, which in any case was far sooner than anyone expected, had no flags out as the ship crept in on a light dawn wind to Seven Wounds Bay. The flagstaff was bare—it may be told here, unofficially, that the military had gone off duty the day after their ruler's departure, and the flags of three political systems had shared the same sea-chest for months. The wreckage of wattle and daub houses was still to be seen everywhere, and the master's eye, looking towards the summit of the cathedral tower, observed that the gilded Virgin who formed the wind-vane no longer caught the sun. His telescope sought her, for she was one of the chief landmarks, and it was customary to take a bearing by her at a certain point in the narrow entry to the port. But she had gone, leaving only her pedestal.

This was the first news that greeted Auguste-Anne when he came on deck in the most gorgeous dressing-gown of all his repertoire. He was not much upset by it; he was seldom ruffled by any event which did not intimately affect his own comfort, and the Virgin, though celebrated and useful to mariners, had never really captured his attention, save when he cursed her for predicting the devastating nor'-west wind. He stood still, watching the morning light grow pink over the town, and for some few uncounted minutes was completely happy; that is to say, he did not know himself to be so. He breathed, and existed, and ignored time, like a god, until a touch on his arm brought him out of the clouds to realise that he had been experiencing a number of outmoded emotions such, for example, as love of home. It was his wife at his elbow.

"Augustus," she began, "my love——"

She persisted in this form of address, which humbled her husband but which he could not prevail on her to drop. She could not pronounce properly the "Monsieur" which to his mind was all that was permissible to a wife, and his couple of surnames prevented her from employing the Bristol idiom

"Mister ——" followed by the initial letter of the name. Mr. B. de M. would have been altogether too complex.

"Augustus," said she, therefore, "my love, is this really the place?"

He signified that it was. She looked about as the ship drew nearer to the ravaged waterfront with an air of being dutifully willing to be pleased with what she saw: but in her heart she was obliged to confess that it was indeed very different from Bristol. For one thing, there was, although it was barely dawn, more light: and this light, streaming up from behind the mountains, was increasing every instant so that her English eyes could hardly bear it; but they were not so blind but that they could observe the general dilapidation of the town, like a tattered patchwork quilt tossed over a couple of hills. It was not ashamed of its raggedness, did not tuck the broken-down streets away out of sight as was the custom in England. There were gaping roofs everywhere, even a very palatial building had a temporary wig of thatch, and a list to eastwards. A qualm overcame her.

"Is that," said she pointing, "our residence?"

Auguste-Anne, casting a careless eye in the direction her finger showed, nodded with no diminution of his calm.

"But," she insisted, "that building is all askew!"

Auguste-Anne nodded once more, and vouchsafed a short explanation.

"We have a gale, it does so, pouf! The next gale—pouf—blows it straight again. What matter?"

And he resumed his contemplation of the approaching port.

His wife would have wept, but at the end of a six weeks' voyage in her husband's company she knew better than to weep. Nevertheless she inwardly thought both the residence and its prevailing angle shocking, and had a momentary daughterly pang of resentment against her mother. The pictures that inspired lady had drawn! The visions of splendour she had known how to call up, out of an imagination nourished upon seafarers' tales! As the dutiful but disillusioned wife went below to finish her packing, she had privacy to indulge in a tear or two. But she was married now, and in her inmost heart of a milliner's apprentice and lodging-keeper's daughter, she knew that while without a husband a woman was dross, for a woman armed by marriage against the world there was sometimes hope. And she resumed her packing resigned.

By the time she came on deck again the news of their arrival had swept through the town, in the manner so surprising to those unused to the ways of blacks. The mud fort was dotted with gay uniforms, and as she looked the squat gun poking out from its casement gave a kind of loud bark, and recoiled for an instant out of sight. Down every street, out of every door, window, and other practicable aperture people were swarming, calling to each other, waving bits of bright stuff, assembling on the front to watch the ship berth, and receive her gig when it should come ashore. Auguste-Anne, perceiving these preparations, and mindful of the politeness of princes, turned to go below and array himself. But first he looked at his wife.

She was dressed in her wedding-dress of silk. It was the finest she had, it would have stood alone had it been set on the floor, but it was grey. Her bonnet, self-made, was also grey, though stuffed with pink roses. She looked, no doubt, very charming, and would have made a picture against a background of tender English green; here the background gave her no chance. It was daubed in like a very modern picture, in the strongest primary colours, blue and yellow and blinding white, and against it Madame la Marquise would not do.

"What is this dress?" he asked abruptly in French. "Why do you wear the costume of a nun?"

She swallowed once—after all, it was her wedding finery—before she answered in English:

"It is my best dress, Augustus."

"Have you nothing more suitable? Grey! Come, you see for yourself ——"

His hand indicated the startling shore and the harbour now filling with small boats, red-sailed. She understood what he meant, but this was an eventuality she had not foreseen. She had nothing but what, in England, was suitable and in good taste, little pink dresses, white dresses, one grand flounced dress with sprigs; nothing that would accord in the least with this glare. Auguste-Anne shrugged, saying drily:

"We must remedy that," and went below to do his subjects' expectation justice.

Bella remained, looking down with fascinated eyes at the swimmers and rowing boats that now by dozens surrounded the ship. They kept up a continuous yelling, and those in the boats splashed madly with their paddles. This, had she but known, was not occasioned by the wildness of their

enthusiasm, but from the need to terrify sharks, which frequented the harbour in schools. She gazed, then averted her eyes with all possible speed. The swimmers were unclad.

"Oh!" thought the unhappy Bella, wondering whether or no she should swoon, "Never, never did I think such things could be!"

And it is possible that in this comprehensive wail she included certain practices of her husband, Auguste-Anne Boissy de Mortemar.

"Well, meddarm," said the captain's voice behind her, "you don't see this sort o' thing much in Bristol."

"No, indeed," she agreed with feeling, and blushing.

No indeed, people did not cast away all restraint, all clothing in Bristol. People did not yell, nor live in pink houses all blown to one side. There were matrons in the boats, grinning and publicly feeding naked babies, while what clothes they wore seemed to serve no decent purpose. No, things were very different in Bristol.

The captain took a few walnuts from his pockets and tossed them down among the swimmers, who dived as they saw them coming, and then caught them accurately between their teeth; caught and cracked with one motion, and ate with one more.

"Look at that," said the captain, "monkeys ain't in it with these coves."

And he laughed heartily, searching his pockets for more nuts.

"I think they are terrible," said Bella, faintly, averting her eyes.

"Well," said the captain, considering, "I don't know. They have human sacrifices, by what I've heard, but not for eating, more in the way of fun. And they get up to a lot of mischief, with spells and such-like. They go mad a lot, too. But I don't know that they're so terrible, taking them all round."

At this point, just as Bella had decided that she could bear no more, Auguste-Anne, dressed for the occasion, came majestically on deck, and the welcomers began to arrive.

VI

First, the Bishop, rowed by six unclad negroes, his processional umbrella fringed with gold held over him by a priest. He was a bishop of the old school, rounded and jolly, who always found plenty of words in season to say to brides; and he had been devoting the past months to getting up a

ceremony of uncommon splendour for the coronation, and to thinking out in private, with chuckles, something appropriate for a christening. It was with a conscience at ease and a mind alert with benevolent curiosity that he permitted himself to be hoisted by his negroes up the ship's ladder, into the presence of the island's lord and master. Auguste-Anne, who enjoyed the Bishop and played up to him, sank to one silken knee for his blessing; Bella, completely awed by this tribute, sank to both of hers; and the Bishop let off a good long Latin benediction over their heads, which, owing to the incurable fruitiness of his voice, sounded more like an excerpt from Petronius Arbiter. Then they rose, the bride keeping an eye on her spouse for cues of behaviour, like a parvenu watching a duke's manipulation of forks, and there was an outburst of foreign chatter. She was able to catch a word here and there of it, and understood that Auguste-Anne was introducing her. She had been coached, and should have known what to do when the Bishop thrust out his exquisite little rosy hand towards her; she did know what to do, she remembered perfectly, but at the popishness of it all the Bristol blood in her revolted, and she did not kiss the hand, but shook it; timidly, civilly, and with a curtsy as she had been taught at school.

Auguste-Anne glowered, while the Bishop appeared surprised. Another outburst of rapid French permitted her to guess that she was being apologised for as a heretic. Strangely enough, the Bishop did not seem in the least put out, but taking her hand kindly in his own two, like scented cushions, made her a little speech, from which she gathered that he promised himself great pleasure in taking on his shoulders the responsibility of her instruction in the Faith. She had not French enough to repudiate this, nor strength to withstand any longer her husband's sombre eye; and so she blushed, and looked appealing, and could not help being the prettiest creature the Bishop had ever seen. He said, measuring every word:

"You have a treasure, monsieur. We have lost our Blessed Lady (figuratively, you understand), and we will make of Madame a little golden saint to replace her."

And he chuckled again, and motioned the pair to a share of his umbrella, which already was totally inadequate for one; and they all three stood in state to survey the arrival, in a dug-out canoe hung with skulls, of the chief witch-doctor, his reverence Hele Tombai. This personage needed no help from his rowers to ascend the ship's side; he was up and over it in one bound, bowing and grinning, and finally whirling dizzily on his heels, while in the canoe his assistants waved a mysterious shape on the end of a thong,

which gave out sounds like an angry bull. Auguste-Anne said to this power, when he finished his introductory dance, in the pidgin French of the island:

“This woman queen alonga me, you bloody well love her, name of a sacred name of a sacred pig, Tombai!”

Sacred pig was not at all an inappropriate term for the witch-doctor. His calling and station excused a good deal in him; but then the same might have been said, for that matter, both of the Bishop and of Auguste-Anne. This latter, while the Bishop feigned an aside to his chaplain, continued and closed his harangue with the simple words:

“She bring luck all same Yellow” Mary (the black’s name for the lost Virgin). “You make tella your people, species of sacred goose, Tombai!”

Sacred goose was not bad either, as a piece of description. The witch-doctor was always cackling warnings, and the hurricanes which came along punctually every few years always bore him out as a prophet of disaster. His reputation rested on these hurricanes. It was supposed that a man whom the deities forewarned of their intentions in one important respect would hardly keep him in the dark about such minor matters as lost goats and sore eyes. But he was not, or perhaps the deities themselves were not, quite so strong on good-luck prophecies, and Auguste-Anne thought it as well in his exordium to offer an immediate and suitable substitute for Yellow Mary departed.

This image was the only fragment of the island’s official faith that the blacks were able to take to at all. They had been used to revere and say prayers to her, standing there so high, telling the winds which way to blow, bidding with her outstretched sceptre. Mistress of the Winds was their secret sacred name for her, and she came in for a good deal of devotion, mingled, as the blacks love to do, with fear. Auguste-Anne was aware of this, and seized his opportunity to set Bella in her place; she was as unbelievably white and gold, and every hair of her head was most evidently as good for the strongest kind of white magic as the gilded Lady brought from Seville two centuries ago.

The witch-doctor gave Bella an all-over glance as the Bishop had done, but no sentiment, whether of delight, covetousness, or contempt, was betrayed in the glaucous mirrors of his eyes. (They were greyish and opaque, the colour of oysters, but by no means blind.) He looked, then gave a final caper and twirl, and leaped over the ship’s side again into his waiting, roaring canoe.

When he was out of reasonable earshot the Bishop began, in a tone of some concern:

"Excellence, my dear friend; I perceive that you appreciate fully the situation which the loss of Our Lady brings upon us. May I congratulate you upon your quick-wittedness in setting up—" he bowed—"an equivalent? The facts are these——"

"Facts?" repeated Auguste-Anne, drily. He knew the turn of the Bishop's mind, which could make a good story out of a mule consuming an over-ripe orange. The everyday glowed in rainbow hues when he set tongue to it. In the pulpit he could lend to Christianity the strangeness, the interest of an Eastern fairy-tale. Therefore Auguste-Anne repeated, without malice, the single word:

"Facts?"

"Aha!" said the Bishop with good-humour, "you do not trust me; well you are right, perhaps. We will let the abbé tell my story."

Thus encouraged the chaplain began.

VII

"Excellence, after the last tornado—you were gone soon after, and may not have observed it—Our Lady was discovered to be growing very stiff in her bearings, by no means so active or so accurate with regard to the wind. She was oiled, every care was paid her by steeplejacks, but with no effect. She creaked. She groaned like a soul in purgatory. Finally, she stuck."

"Stuck, abbé?"

"Stuck, Excellence; at south-east by east. Whether she had been bent by the excessive force of the wind is not known. This was one evening. Next day at dawn she was gone."

"Alas!" said the Bishop with a comfortable sigh.

"Hum!" mused Auguste-Anne, his eyes upon the swarming boats with their freight of monkey-like humans. "Your steeplejacks, were they black men?"

"Certainly," replied the abbé, "they were black men, Excellence. They are accustomed to hurry up and down tall trees in search of fruits and I don't know what else. Certainly our climbers were blacks."

"And have you seen them since?"

“Yes, Excellence, oh indeed, yes. Poor fellows, they were much distressed when coming in the morning they found her gone.”

“She had not fallen?”

“There was no sound; no trace. Our Lady weighed some hundredweights, you know. She could hardly have fallen unnoticed. His Lordship, to begin with, must have heard the noise in the palace, which is so very close by——”

“Hum!” said Auguste-Anne again. He had himself been present at parties in the said palace when the sky might have fallen without any one of the guests being in a condition to observe it. He took a few steps this way and that upon the deck, eyed by all; then faced-about abruptly to declare:

“Your steeplejacks have got her.”

“Excellence!” exclaimed the Bishop and his chaplain together. “What atrocity, our Blessed Lady in such hands!”

“Permit me. They have taken her away to worship. She will be treated with every respect.”

“They will set skulls full of rum before her,” moaned the chaplain.

“Force her to witness obscenities,” added the Bishop, with a regretful sigh.

“Gentlemen,” said Auguste-Anne, “you exaggerate. Our Lady can take care of herself; besides, she has influence——” He pointed upwards; then, seized by a sickening thought: “she was not of real gold?”

“Lead, gilded,” replied the chaplain tearfully.

The Bishop and the ruler exchanged a glance which seemed to say “that would have been sacrilege indeed.” The Bishop, taking a scented handkerchief from under the lace of his cotta—for the crowd of boats was growing thicker every moment, and the odour of their human freight mounting higher—said to the chaplain in his comfortable voice:

“Remind me, abbé, to curse the miscreants to-morrow morning before my Mass. They must not go unscathed.” Then, turning to Bella, to whom the whole scene was a mystery, and who stood looking more adorable than ever in her bewilderment—she was one of those women whose faces an expression of intelligence kills:

“Madame,” said the Bishop, bowing as well as his rotundity would allow, “here at last is your state barge coming, with, let us hope, a somewhat

less perilous ladder. Will you honour my arm by taking it towards the descent?"

She slipped her white fingers under the Bishop's elbow, and found them caught close to the Bishop's side by muscles of unexpected strength. Together they took the ten steps to the ship's bulwark, Auguste-Anne following contemptuously with the chaplain. The state vessel indeed was there, hung with brocades that looked as though they had been dyed in wine, gilded, carved, its rowers dressed in liveries copied from those which had served poor King Louis upon his ornamental waters. A kind of boatswain with a whip stood in her prow, flailing off the encroaching negro eyes. Another official fixed the steps and came half-way up them to take his new mistress's hand. The Bishop gently urged her. She came to stand upon the broad top stop, lifted up above the boats, for the first time in full view. The crowd yelled, seeing her, and timidly she put a hand to her breast, while the other hand still stretched out and down. She did not know it, but she stood for ten seconds in the very attitude of the lost Virgin, and the quick eyes of the blacks perceived it at once. The yell came down to a duller crooning noise, with a rhythm to it, so that the Bishop, who knew that prayers sound the same in all languages, gave a start. Then she stepped down into the gilt cabin of the barge, and was lost to the worshippers' sight.

What an experience for Bella! The whole old story of Cinderella was being lived by her over again. There she sat, amid hangings of silk, with a Bishop, who for grandeur could have played His Inertia of Bath and Wells off the stage, bending to her lightest whisper; and a husband whom thousands feared; and a whole dark people smitten with wonder at her pale beauty. Her thoughts are not to be known; but it would surprise me to learn that there was nothing in them of regret, no hankering for the bonnets, the sameness, the dear respectability of Bristol, as she set foot that morning in the island's preposterous only town.

VIII

Almost immediately after her arrival things began to happen in Corazon. This in itself was unprecedented; things, caprices of the elements, often happened to the island, but it was against nature for the ordinary lotus-life of the islanders to engender events. Auguste-Anne, having reigned twenty years over docility, found actual problems presenting themselves to his lazy and despotic eye. The blacks, to begin with, were restless. He supposed that they had installed some new gods—they were always getting tired of the old ones, and inventing conquerors for them—and that their irritating drumming

in the hills would soon die down. Possibly it was the cathedral statue, he thought, idly listening to the thuds through his netted windows, and they were offering her the kind of treats which in their innocence they supposed a virgin must enjoy. But there was no telling. The witch-doctor, questioned as closely and subtly as the simplicities of pidgin-French would admit, was bland, and civilly ignorant.

No, he knew of no trouble. All were busy, all were contented. There had been no reshuffling of gods.

Then perhaps Tombai could tell them what had become of Yellow Mary? Tombai shrugged so that his necklaces of teeth rattled ominously. Behind the glaucous eyes Auguste-Anne, long attuned to him, perceived a sullenness.

Yellow Mary, answered the witch-doctor, was very holy no doubt, very strong for magic?

It was a question. Auguste-Anne answered, feeling his way through the dark of Tombai's mind, that she was indeed strong. Had she not for two centuries beckoned the winds to the island?

"Ha!" replied Tombai, in a grunt so expressionless that Auguste-Anne knew it concealed something. But what? Was the witch-doctor afraid, or plotting, or shielding the thieves who had stolen Yellow Mary from her tower? Auguste-Anne could not resolve the problem, and in the end had to let his chancellor go. It never occurred to him that the poor ageing man was trying to keep his temper and his face, and pretend that all was well while in his spiritual dominions heresy raged with the fury of the recent hurricane.

But this was the truth, as appeared from the terrified confession of one of the house-servants one evening after his fingers had been held for a minute or two over a live candle. (This was such a very short way to the truth that local morality did not frown on it.) He could speak easy French, having been in the Governor's service many years, and the story came out comprehensibly enough to make Auguste-Anne swear, and take turns about the room.

The blacks were, said Boule de Neige, dissatisfied with Tombai. They thought him a true, but a disagreeable prophet, always faithful to disaster. He predicted cyclones, cyclones came, and there was endless rebuilding and work, to say nothing of personal danger. It seemed as though he had authority only over storms, for his other prophecies about children and crops and live stock were not notably accurate. There had been murmurings for some time. It had occurred to a good many people that they might do well to

unfrock Tombai of his magic masks and necklaces, but they found themselves up against the usual difficulty of finding someone to put in his place. Half the population had watched and adored Yellow Mary for years, as presumably half the population of England in Newton's day had seen apples fall, but only one among them all conceived the notion of electing her in Tombai's stead.

Once the idea was grasped, it was acclaimed. Yellow Mary, as everyone with eyes in his head could see, was beckoner to all winds, not the dreaded nor'-wester alone. Her sceptre held magic to make the airs gallop which way she pleased; and it seemed to them that any person who could contrive, with the utmost respect, of course, to keep her sceptre towards the calmer quarters, might put a stop to tornadoes and their laborious consequences for ever.

So the steeplejacks one night ran up the spire and with reverence tried the experiment of roping the figure to one of their desired directions. They did it after much prayer, and with terror at their hearts, realising that the audacious experiment might well provoke a chastening tempest. But nothing happened save a few groans from the straining statue; then they realised with ecstasy that she was theirs, and that if only they could get her down safe from her height they might snap their fingers at old Tombai, and set up as popes for themselves. A nice stroke of irony directing the Bishop's choice, they found themselves summoned to deal with the immobility which themselves had caused. They used this daylight opportunity to reconnoitre, to slacken certain screws, to attach certain pulleys; and by the following morning there was no more trace of the Virgin than if she had had a second assumption, and been drawn up to heaven, points of the compass and all.

Since then, Tombai's offerings had been falling off, and the new worship had been sending the people into unequalled frenzies. Even the old man's drummers had deserted, and sat thumping day and night in the distant grotto where Yellow Mary stood, pointing with her sceptre always south-east by east. And except for a few women, always apt to lag behind where new ideas were concerned, nobody came any more to ask magic advice of Tombai.

Thus Boule de Neige, sucking from time to time his roasted finger.

"Do you know this grotto?" the Bishop asked.

(He was present, and none the worst for two bottles of claret.) Boule de Neige fell to gibbering, from which they gathered that he did know, but that it was as much as his life was worth to tell.

“She must be rescued,” the Bishop avowed. “Our Lady in the hands of infidels, never! A new crusade——”

And he began to describe, with delicate gestures, the joys of suffering, of marching, of fighting amid blood and sweat as Our Lady’s knights.

“As to that, I don’t know,” said Auguste-Anne slowly, impervious to eloquence, “I don’t know, monseigneur, that we need go to all this trouble. I have done some campaigning, when I was younger, in this scrub of ours; they have only to sink the figure in a swamp, or bury her, and we may hunt till our tails turn blue. No, my advice—with deference, monseigneur—is to leave them in possession.”

“It is sacrilege,” said the Bishop firmly, for he would have enjoyed organising a crusade, and might even have accompanied it in a hammock between porters on the first day’s march as far as the foothills.

“It is infernally bad policy,” retorted Auguste-Anne. “(You may go, Boule de Neige.) If we lend importance to this theft, we set these black fellows thinking, ‘Ha, we have stolen the goddess of the whites, their power lies in her, we have stolen their power, ha, he!’ Then trouble begins,” said Auguste-Anne slowly, “that’s all that comes of crusades.”

The Bishop gave the faintest shrug, and as he imagined turned the subject.

“When is it your wish that Madame should be crowned?”

“You can take a hint, Monseigneur,” answered Auguste-Anne, with his saturnine smile. “That is, of course, the answer to these thieving monkeys. Madame is the new goddess in person, and I wish this made clear to the people. She must be dressed like the statue; the sceptre and crown should be easy, and with a few yards of cloth of gold——”

“You refer to her robes for the coronation?”

“What else? Then, seeing her enthroned, messieurs the blacks say among themselves, ‘Ha, these whites are more foxy than we thought, they have still the power, the true Yellow Mary comes down from the sky to them, they are still our masters, ha, he!’ ”

“Excellence,” replied the Bishop after a moment’s smiling thought, “as a Christian I must approve your detestation of force.”

“Ay, do,” said Auguste-Anne with his sneer. “Force would have had us all barbecued long ago. Force recoils. Inaction—there’s the policy for this island; ruse, *laissez-faire*. I remind you that the blacks are to the whites in a

proportion of a thousand to one, all a great deal better equipped than we are with muscle, force potential. But I do not believe there is a sou's worth of intelligence to set up a rattle in the ten thousand empty cocoanuts they call their brains; and so we shall continue, if we use our wits, to rule."

"You are right, no doubt, my dear Lord," the lazy Bishop answered. Then, with a fat chuckle, lifting his glass, "To our new little golden saint!"

Auguste-Anne glowered, but drank.

IX

The coronation ceremony drew near. Bella, poor little creature, was rapidly losing the stiffness, as of Bristol board, which at first had kept her backbone poker-wise. She had, in the space of a month on the island, become much suppled in her ideas; whether the climate, or the lack of example, or the Bishop's persuasions were responsible, is not known. She still jibbed at being baptised, but the Bishop—who, if he had ridden, would have had good hands for a horse—had got her to the point of tolerating the coronation ceremony, and their catechism hour had turned into a kind of rehearsal for this. The abbé, shyly laughing, they installed as bishop, and Bella would approach his chair with a silver coaster on her small head, genuflect, put her hands between his, and come in pat with her amens. (This word, with its strong Church of England flavour, was the only one of the responses her conscience would permit her to make: the others, a sub-deacon was to voice at her shoulder.)

The Bishop, that connoisseur of ceremony, stood aside during this go and come with the cool eye of a theatrical producer, nicely calculating the adjustment of his means—Bella—to his end—the maintenance of white rule. He was jolly, but he was also a strategist, and it cost him little on the whole to let the abbé press the creamy fingers, smooth now after nearly three months neglect of the needle; for on his pupil's right behaviour depended, to put it very bluntly, the Bishop's own skin, with which the blacks would not hesitate to rig their drums in case of a successful revolt. Women, he may have meditated, are all very well, but a skin is essential to the full enjoyment of them. So he held off, and criticised, and was kind in the most fatherly way till her timidity almost vanished, and she stepping about in her absurd coaster-crown as to the manner born. Then the Bishop gave the hint, and Auguste-Anne gave notice, by means of trumpeters in the market square, that there would be a coronation, oyez, oyez, and a procession after it on the following Monday, and that there would be a general amnesty for all prisoners (thus enabling their guards to swell the

ranks of the uniformed and add dignity to the affair). The new queen, added the trumpeters, would be proclaimed by the name of Golden Mary.

When this was announced, in French and the native tongue, there was something like a commotion in the market-place; all the dark eyes rolled up to look at the cathedral spire, as if they expected to see the new queen perched on it; and then down scowling. Evidently they did not in the least know what to make of this announcement, although, having seen Bella on the day of arrival, it did not take anyone quite by surprise. Auguste-Anne had kept her pretty close since then and except the palace servants few had set eyes on her. She was flesh and blood, so much they were sure of, but whether this gave her an advantage over her gilded rival remained to be seen. They dispersed chattering, and somehow or other the news came almost as soon as the trumpeters had done with it to the two usurping witch-doctors as these sat outside their grotto, making a very good meal off recent offerings. The message did not come by word of mouth, and since they were alone when it reached them they could give their real opinions play. Said the first steeplejack-pontiff, with a laugh:

"How can this other Mary be the true one? How can a woman be a goddess?"

"Our black women," answered pontiff the second seriously, "are beasts and witless, but even they prophesy now and then, after there has been singing. This white woman is strong magic, we know, for even the greatest, even Sword-Face (Auguste-Anne) himself bends before her, and kisses her hand like a slave."

"It will be a nice thing for us, if She can't hold her own. Back all the rats will go to Tombai, and this"—a gesture included the broken meat and maize and sugar—"will come to an end."

The other, still laughing, rebuked him.

"How is Her"—a nod—"praying-stick set?"

"In the way of the good wind," answered pontiff the second.

The first wetted his finger and held it up.

"Do the same, brother. Which side do you feel it blow cold?"

"The side of the good wind," repeated the second, relieved.

They wasted no more words, but nodded at each other in a satisfied kind of way, and buried the superfluous victuals with the carelessness of men who know for certain whence their next meal is coming.

The fact was that a pleasant and persistent trade-wind had blown from exactly that quarter for a month, as was its habit at this time of year. But they had never had leisure to note the habits of winds; it was a branch of blessing which they had been content, in the old days, to leave to Tombai. They presumed that they owed this month of constancy to Yellow Mary's firmly wedged sceptre and, in the confidence engendered by the belief, made a plan—a plan that was more in the nature of a challenge. They brooded and shaped it for days and delivered it full-blown to Auguste-Anne on the very morning of the procession.

It will be remembered that the island's Excellence was himself a patron and encourager of the black rites. He found them interestingly archaic, though far from effete, and had submitted indulgently to certain of the ceremonies which were appropriate to his dignity and his sex. But his stupefaction, his rage at the calm proposition of these two jumped-up witch-doctors, none of Tombai's disciples, but a pair of heretics in imitation necklaces, was unchancy to behold. What they proposed with such calm was nothing less than a trial of strength between the two Marys, with the suggestion—half a threat—that there were a few ceremonies of their own which Golden Mary had better attend, after the Bishop's affair at the cathedral. Their tone, though glazed with the official whine, was confident to insolence.

Sword-Face had a moment's unreasoning impulse to string up the two blackmailers in front of his palace and chance a row; then his own words concerning force recurred to him, and he mastered himself. He did not reply to the challenge, nor even go so far as to indicate the door; he merely laughed, once, and resumed perusal of the papers on his table. The pontiffs, disconcerted, made some attempt at argument, and stood shuffling. He ignored them more completely than if they had been flies. The first, who believed most firmly and therefore was most sure of himself, lifted a hand and said to the disdainful master in ugly bastard French:

"We know who will rule the island, and it is not you, mossié."

On that they departed, the second of them more than a little cast down, for Sword-Face seen close was really alarming; but the other consoled him.

X

The coronation went off well enough while it kept to the cathedral. The canons sang loud, and the Bishop was dignified, and the abbé was devout as though he had never sat dressed as the Bishop in a red shawl to bless Bella

with the coaster on her head. But the anxious time came afterwards. She was to have walked, crowned, from the cathedral to the palace, no very great way, and the procession was taking its final orders in the canons' robing-room when it occurred to somebody—the organ having stopped and the bells not begun—that outside the cathedral things were suspiciously silent. The abbé went to look out, and came back with both pink cheeks faded.

"Not a soul," said he, whispering in the Bishop's ear; "the market-place is bare as my hand; and one can hear drums."

"Hum!" said the Bishop, and communicated the news to Auguste-Anne. That authority considered, then answered with the half of a grin:

"We had better take our chance of a procession while we can get it. March!"

And march they did, under a canopy heavily fringed, across the burning white dust of the market-place. Bella in her heavy golden dress had to press upon her husband's arm; the ceremony had lasted a good while, and she was carrying a child. However, she had vanity to keep her up, that stronger supporter than a husband's arm, and she did not know enough to be frightened. She walked then with dignity, the milliner's apprentice, thinking with scorn how once she had nearly fainted from awe trying on the bonnet of a mere Viscountess. And here she was with a crown on her head—the Virgin's loan—and a train yards long, sweeping back to her own palace. She thought now with gratitude of her mother's strength of mind, and vowed to write the longest letter to that lady, of whose fulfilled destiny she was not yet aware. The guns down at the port were going, and the bells by this time rollicking in the cathedral spire, so that the drums, which were distant, had their warning covered over, stifled, entirely silenced. But their rhythm went on in the calculating heads of the Bishop and Auguste-Anne.

The moment they, with the new queen and such white officials as were necessary, had entered the doors of the palace, their attitude of joyful composure was abandoned with their swords, baldrics, and other excrescences of State. It was a council of war that, without warning, Bella saw come into being before her eyes. A dozen men about a table; shutters carefully closed; a map; voices in which sounded both haste and dismay.

"Incredible!" one pasty-faced gentleman was repeating. "A rising, but it is irrational. It lacks common-sense. Why rise?"

"Because," answered another, "it is the property of scum to do so. We must skim them off, skim them off as they come——" and he made the

gesture of a cook with her ladle.

Auguste-Anne replied impatiently:

“They rise because they want to be masters; because for once they have an idea rattling in their skulls, and it is driving them mad. They have our fetish, as they think.”

“The proclamation was a mistake,” said the Bishop, shaking his head, “they have not been taken in by our goddess.”

“Madame Marie is endangered by it,” another put in, “they have only to try a silver bullet——”

Auguste-Anne hushed him with a scowl. Madame Marie was in the room, glowing but forgotten. He went up to her with his grand manner of the husband-consort, and offered his hand, saying:

“You should rest, Madame, you are fatigued. These gentlemen will excuse you.”

But she had learned a little French by now, and the sentence about the silver bullet had not escaped her.

“Augustus,” said she, clinging suddenly to his formally-arched hand, “is it me, trouble through me? Is there danger?”

“None,” said he, with his formal smile. “Will you come?”

“But what is happening with the blacks?”

“That, Madame, is what we would give something to know.”

And with this for sole satisfaction, her train looped into a bundle on her arm, she was obliged to depart, and submit herself to her servant women, who to-day—these too—were sullen and silent.

Below, the conclave went on. Where to defend? There had been no such threat as this for fifty, sixty years. Defence had sunk to mere decoration, as the plates of steel of the man-at-arms dwindled at last to epaulettes of gold braid. The fort’s cannon had not been asked for generations to take charges of ball. The walls of the palace had grown thick with mosses, and the climbing plants of the tropics made living ladders over them. They could still be defended by an adequate force, adequately supplied, but what force was there? Perhaps three hundred able-bodied white men in the town; and the walls, conceived and built in more spacious days, enclosed a park, and wandered for a couple of miles before they met again at the iron gates. There were no muskets, save the fifty down at the fort; the butts of these were

shiny with the slapping of hands during a half century of presenting arms, but as weapons they would need, to be effective, to be held by the barrel end. The stocks of powder were low, and the last lot, purchased from the English warship, of doubtful quality. The ten gentlemen, made aware of these facts, turned as underlings will upon a leader at a loss; and Auguste-Anne had to defend, as a deliberate policy, his past years of aimless pure idleness. He made, however, no long protest.

"If there were nothing but discontent in this," said he, "if it were only a question of who is to wear the regalia, that might be settled. I have no wish to lie uneasy at night for the sake of being called Excellency by day. But there is a bitterness in this brew of trouble that—with deference to monseigneur the Bishop—only religion can give. Oppression will not wake our indolent islanders to frenzy; it is this deuced godliness that is too strong wine for them. Their heads cannot stand religion as European heads can; they take it seriously. I was wrong, I confess, to start with them a competition in saints."

"True enough," admitted the Bishop, whose lackadaisical airs were now overcast by the shrewdness of his native Normandy, "but if religion stirs up danger, gentlemen—which is part of her task in this world—she is also the provider of refuge; and it is my suggestion that the cathedral, which possesses narrow windows and towers admirably loopholed, should shelter God's flock while the present storm threatens."

There was a murmur of agreement. Then the literal gentleman who saw no common-sense in a negro rising took up the last words.

"A storm?" said he, sniffing the air, "I believe his lordship is right. What says the barometer?"

"I spoke figuratively, sir," said the Bishop, impatiently.

"Oh, did you?" replied the unabashed gentleman. "Well, I think you've hit the truth, for all that."

And going to the shutters, he threw them open and stood breathing deeply of the leaden air. A broken spider's web hanging loose from one of the slats did not even tremble. The sea, far down below, was steel. Colour, movement, and sound had gone together out of the atmosphere; yet the stillness was dangerous with movement withheld, violence to come.

"Feels like a hurricane," said another gentleman, coming to stand beside the first in the window.

At that they were all down on him. The last disaster was not six months old. Hurricanes took time to gather. No, no, he was altogether wrong. He subsided, and the conclave went on with its business; but the first obstinate gentleman remained, shaking his head, and looking out to sea in the direction which usually vented the first gush of storm wind; that is to say the nor'-west.

XI

He could not know the interest that point of the compass was exciting among those who were gathered in the hills to cause the whites uneasiness, and would only have damned them heartily had he been aware. But the fact was that alarmed by the portents, which they could recognise very surely without the aid of barometers, the blacks had interrupted their drumming and other preparations to beseech the steeplejacks, and to pray that Yellow Mary should show herself. Both pontiffs were averse to letting the goddess be seen, though since all the world had looked at her for years, beckoning on top of her pinnacle, there might seem nothing very sacrilegious in it. But they had to pay the penalty of those elected to power by the people, and give the people what the people chose, loudly, to demand. Everyone knew they were not genuine papaloi, real priests who got knowledge by years of silence and starvation. Everyone knew that they had once been mere climbers, and that the goddess had come into their hands by trickery and thieving. This did not mean that the goddess was less potent, but only that her devotees would not stand the priesthood putting on airs. The goddess was mighty, the steeplejacks were nothing; anyone might take their place, anyone could keep a goddess prisoner in a grotto. This having been made clear to the two, they gave way.

Yellow Mary, her sceptre still pointing south by east, was rolled forward, somewhere about 4.30 in the afternoon, out of her sacred darkness, and down went a great many thousand black heads in adoration. The priests had tricked her out in decorations copied from those worn by Tombai, a scarf of crimson stuff, necklaces, shining beads. She glittered through these, indifferent, with her weathered smile unchanged and the sceptre rigid. There was silence, and much bowing. Then the chief of the drummers rose, tiptoeing, and went to his tall drum which stood beside the impromptu altar. He struck out a solemn tune which they all knew, and by and by the thousands were singing their hymn of the Mother-Goddess:—

She who nourishes,
She who keeps with safety,
She who is not afraid,
Help us, Lady!

Over and over they sang it, the petition to be fed, and delivered from fear, and kept out of mischief. They droned it until the words lost significance, and the drumming and stamping rose above and drowned them. A bull died by the knife while they sang, and some goats; the blood of these creatures, drained into a long trough-shaped wooden bowl, was sacramentally drunk. Women began to writhe, and froth at the mouth; they prophesied before they fell. Men raged at each other in mimic fights, brandishing weapons which had been anointed with brains. The bull-roarers whirled. Amid the fury, Yellow Mary smiled, and a darkness gathered, unnoticed, in the direction opposed to her sceptre.

XII

When night had fallen, with the abrupt finality of a theatre curtain, the white pilgrimage to the cathedral began, unimaginably different from the morning procession. There was no light; they were afraid that the blacks, from their vantage point in the hills, would spy the lanterns and learn of the panic. So muskets and blankets, and children, food, pet monkeys and birds, powder, skins of wine and water—all were brought by men and women, shoving and struggling like ants in the complete darkness. It took three hours, from six till nine, to get the cathedral munitioned, though the Bishop and clergy, who could work unobserved, had been busy in the crypt since early noon. All told, there was little confusion. The building was huge, and hugely strong. It had been set up in earlier days, and those first essentials of all good building, time and unlimited slave labour, had gone to make it. The windows of the aisles were, as the Bishop had said, narrow and high. The east and west windows, wherein flaunted a Last Judgment and a terrifying Crucifixion, were more attackable; but the builders—Spaniards, always on guard against possible treachery—had provided galleries with loopholes which commanded them. Altogether the cathedral made a passable fortress, thought Auguste-Anne, looking about with the casual eye of the amateur soldier.

Nor were the ghostly forces at the Bishop’s command neglected. Before the high altar, where the red lamp burned, the woman and older priests were engaged upon a litany, preparing, much as their enemies had done, for death and battle by a passionate appeal to the Woman.

“Tower of ebony,” sang the leaders,
“Tower of ivory,
House of gold—”
“Pray for us!” implored the chorus.

And the Bishop had caused to be rigged, with pulleys, strong lamps just inside the Judgment window, in particular near that corner on the left of the central figure which was thronged with devils, convincingly imagined. These lamps were not to be lit until the besiegers were actually at the doors; for—

“If I cannot save my windows,” said the Bishop, “at least they shall earn us a minute’s grace through fear.”

Apart from the crowd that worked, and planned, and prayed, sat the cause of half the bother, little Bella the milliner’s apprentice, upright on the Bishop’s throne. She still wore her gold gown, and felt heavy in it, fatigued and perplexed. She could not be busy, women’s hands were unneeded among the barrels and great sacks of provisions; and as for prayer, the English liturgy did not seem to her memory to be designed for such emergencies as this. There was something green and peaceable about most of the prayers she could recollect; they were recited orderly, and without much emphasis or meaning, as though they apologised in a well-bred way for taking up God’s attention. But these prayers—the people were opening their mouths wide, and clamouring:

“Queen of Patriarchs,
Queen of prophets,
Queen of apostles—
Pray for us!”

It was as though they said:

“We’ve tried flattery. Now we’ll try what old association can do. We are in great need, Lady, and shameless. You must listen; surely one of these titles will catch your ear——”

And on they went, tirelessly, while Bella, even in her fright and her languor a little contemptuous, sat up, and said a prim prayer or two decently, within her own mind.

XIII

A watcher had been posted in the tower. He sat there in the dark, among the bells, keeping an eye on the far camp-fires. By daylight the whole town

could be seen from this vantage point, which was its apex, and by daylight the watcher might have enjoyed his task. There would have been ten thousand lives to spy on, and the masts of ships pricking up over the horizon a good ten minutes before they could be seen in the port below.

But to-night the town and the very air seemed dead. No lights, no footsteps, and the rats were disquieting. They rushed about, continually squealing, and there were more of them every minute. They came scampering over his legs, racing past him up the bell-ropes and even on to the bells. The rafters were clotted with them; they fought, squealing, for places. The watcher had never heard anything like it before, and he did not care for it. He struck a light, thinking to frighten them, and only frightened himself; for the flame was reflected in ten thousand beads of eyes, and showed him, besides, the brown ordinary rats outnumbered and outfought by lean buccaneers from the waterside. Brown corpses were being devoured. He stared, neglecting his scrap of tow, which gasped once and went out. Swearing and sweating, he lit it again. It was bad to see the brutes, but worse to hear them capering and scampering in a black world which contained no other sounds. To distract his mind from the problem they offered—waterside rats? waterside rats in the tower?—he turned to his spy-hole again.

Downhill the lights were moving, torches he judged, and still a couple of miles away. There was a regular path of them, a winding line coming down through the bush, quick and regular as if their bearers marched to a drum-beat. The attack! And thank God for it, thought the watcher, kicking his way through the still increasing tide of rats, and making for the rope knotted and looped by which he had come. Rats were on it, and he heard, as he kicked again, one or two of them thud down on the belfry's stone floor. As he lowered himself hand over hand, they swarmed over and past him. The musty stink of them was in his nose, and twice he felt teeth in his forearm.

"Eh, well, man, what is it?" asked the Bishop, whom he found in the crypt, burying—not without a certain impatience and perfunctoriness—the reverend fibulæ and pelvices, to put them out of the way of sacrilege. "The attack, you say; from which direction? Torches and drums? Excellence," to Auguste-Anne, from whose pocket hung the seals of his Lieutenant's brevet, all that he had troubled to salve, "as we feared, the priests are with them. That means madness."

"We'll keep them out while we can," responded Auguste-Anne, "and when they overpower us, I have a bullet here for myself and another for my wife. I have no fancy to be barbecued, nor, I imagine, have you. Your cloth forbids the carrying of arms. Permit me——"

The offered weapon was accepted and stowed somewhere within the Bishop's draperies, and a final question tossed to the watcher:

"Nothing else of importance?"

The watcher signified No. He was ashamed, amid these preparations and courtesies and impending mighty happenings, to mention anything so sordid as a gathering of rats. Even when he was sent up once more to observe he did not protest. Rats, thought the watcher, though dirty brutes, were but animals after all; while the blacks, lit up by their priests, would be devils. There was a chance, up in the steeple, of a not too courageous man being forgotten. Without more ado he climbed his stair and his rope again.

Steadily yet restlessly, on came the torches. They were nearer now, at the first outskirts of the town. He saw points of light dive into the narrow channels of the streets, and show only as a glare between the houses. There was noise, yelling, with a rhythm of drums behind it. The glare advanced, turning this and that corner, until it burst into a thousand flares in the open space before the palace. He could almost distinguish faces now, and could see individual movements. A man in a necklace whirled an object, made some gesture or other. Instantly the swarms were on to the palace's broken walls, poised, and over. He thought of the rats; and indeed the blacks looked very like them, crowding, trampling each other to be first over. In no time the thatch blazed, but the stream of black bodies assailing the walls did not cease, and the noise, which had been a continuous excited yelling, turned, he thought, to something uglier still. They had been cheated; they were searching. He saw the torches run in groups this way and that, quartering the gardens. Other groups pushed forward along the streets to other houses. Soon the whole of the white quarter was throwing up flames towards the sky, and from nearly all the streets of the town rose the glare of hidden lights and the clamour of voices.

Below, in the cathedral, the men were at their posts, the women recited prayers, and Bella, swaying a little sideways, had fallen asleep on the Bishop's crimson-hung throne. Auguste-Anne cast one faintly contemptuous glance at his goddess, lovely as ever despite her crown askew, and refrained from waking her. Time enough for that and the pistol-shot. He sat down on the altar steps, and pulling his ivory box out of a pocket, began throwing dice, right hand against left, until the business of the evening should begin.

Noise and the lights drew nearer. From all the five streets which led to it the blacks poured upwards into the little square. The Bishop gave his orders for the cressets to be hoisted, and the demon rout began to live before the

besiegers' eyes, dancing to the capricious measure of the flames. From this, the west window, the yelling menace shrank away, but at the others it was loud. A stone, twenty stones came crashing through glass, and set children screaming. There were detonations; an acrid smell of burnt powder crept about the nave like devil's incense. The men, recharging their pieces, waited grimly for the beginning of the end, the thump of a tree trunk against the weak northern door.

Above in his tower, forgotten, the watcher sat with a candle off the altar burning by his side, watching the rats. He knew now what was wrong with them. They were mad with fear. But he had been a sailor, and had seen enough of them to know that rats cared little enough for men's disturbances. Noise did not scare them much, and as for fire, there was no sign of that yet. The one thing that drove them to panic like this was fear of being trapped in a hulk and given no chance—against what? Against water, the rush of invading water.

God! thought the watcher, white-faced; and the sweat began to shine on his lip and forehead. His spy-hole looked north-west; another duplicate opening faced down towards the waterfront and harbour. He ran to it, treading living bodies underfoot, and keeping his balance with difficulty, stared down.

XIV

All the water of the bay was running out of the harbour. No ebb—and the tides in those parts are strong—had ever drawn it away at such a pace. Some of the fishing boats, moored together as was the blacks' custom in a cluster, broke from the single buoy that held them and went bobbing and circling out to sea. By the quayside down sank the water, drawing with it shingle and weed, further, and always more quickly, until the whole floor of the harbour was laid bare, a new landscape shining in the moon; hills, forests of weed, and a narrow valley, the channel for navigation, through which Yellow Mary had been used to give pilots their course. Upon this new territory, soft with slime, such boats as had not dragged anchor settled down, listing sideways. The watcher heard behind him the strangest mad scuffling and crying among the rats; then the moon, hanging low in the sky with no cloud near it, went suddenly out.

He shut his eyes. From the square outside there floated up to his loophole a wail, thin and pitiful, with no fight left in it, no frenzy, only terror. All the prayers he knew went out of his head. He could only stand with shut eyelids counting the seconds while the monstrous roaring wave

advanced. It took its time. He counted a slow seventy before he heard the roar burst in a sound that nearly broke his ear-drums, and set the belfry shaking under his feet. All other sound was engulfed in that one. The watcher sat huddled in the dark, waiting without hope for the water to pour in upon him through the loopholes set two hundred feet above ground.

But none came. The roaring retreated. He stood up and peered and saw the moon upon the horizon, calmly on guard again. Her light showed the retreating water foaming backward, cascading down the hill, and bearing black specks that were the remains of roofs and boats and bodies. Houses were beaten flat, trees sailed in the current like straws, but the cathedral stood safe. He turned, and struck his light again, to see the rats fighting their way towards the bell-ropes and his ladder, to get down; there was no panic now, and the fighting was only the usual clan-battle between black and brown.

"There'll be feeding for them in what's left of the town," thought the watcher with disgust, "the filthy beasts!" But they were a comfort to him, for all that. As they had known of the danger, so now they knew that it was over. He kicked his way among them, and slowly—for his hands were still wet, and his whole body weak as if with fever—came down to earth.

The cathedral hummed, rhythmic as a huge engine, with prayer. The Bishop, kneeling before the altar, hands upheld and the pistol-butt showing in his sash, was giving out the litany of the Blessed Virgin. Beside him Auguste-Anne knelt on one knee, one hand inside his deep pocket busy still with his dice-box. Under the Bishop's canopy stood Bella, awake now, and very upright. She would not kneel, for that was Popish, nor could she sit, for that was hardly respectful to the God who had just preserved her. She stood, therefore, one hand at her heart, in the very pose and likeness of Yellow Mary; and to the watcher's eye it seemed as if the whole congregation, Bishop and all, were saying their prayers to her.

"Tower of ivory—"
"Pray for us!"
"House of gold—"
"Pray for us!"

These were the very phrases; no others could have described her so well, standing there in the faint light, with her hands and face of ivory and her dress and hair of gold. Auguste-Anne, kneeling inattentively at the Bishop's side, triumphed in his mind over the blacks and their childish competition in goddesses.

“And by Christ’s bones, mine won!” thought His Excellency. “We’ll have them licking her feet to-morrow—what’s left of the poor devils.”

It was not many. They reckoned something like eight thousand dead in that disaster, the first submerging of Corazon.

CHAPTER IV

> Thus it is observed, that men sometimes, upon the hour of their departure, doe speak and reason above themselves.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

It is a pity to have to confess that life missed a dramatic opportunity here. It would have been so easy to allow this upheaval to coincide with my grandfather's birth, to let him make his first appearance on earth scandalously in a church, like that most inapropos child of Pope Joan; but occasionally life, which has so many other opportunities at command, disdains these theatrical strokes. My grandfather arrived six months later, in the normal way, and was christened Gustave-Félicité-George. This last name, such an abrupt resolution of the previous harmonies, was due to an outburst of Englishness on the part of his mother, who thought Gustave bad and Félicité worse, and was determined that her boy should have something solid in the way of a name. Auguste-Anne, who was not difficult on minor points, gave way readily enough, and continued to refer to his son by his title of Morhange. "Is M. de Morhange at liberty?" he would enquire. A servant would go to see, and on returning would answer gravely: "M. de Morhange is having his binder adjusted. He will be at his Excellency's disposal in a few minutes." Bella, however, for the rest of her life never spoke of the boy except as George, nor could she acquire habits of ceremony with him. She loved him passionately in the most middle-class way, and when she died two years later of fever, though her delirium called and thirsted for him, she had the strength, in her lucid moments, to forbid him to be brought within range of the infection. She died crying his name, and thrusting his imaginary presence away with her hands.

II

It would be possible to make a complete and not uninteresting book about Bella. Not many women in the course of their lives pass from milliner's apprentice to queen, with an interlude of goddess by the way. Emma Hamilton, of the same period, had something of the same story, but the course of her fortune followed more everyday lines; men took her beauty, like a box of bricks, and built memorials with it to their own

infatuation. Bella had beauty too—must have had, though there is no record of it, no portrait; but she had backbone, which Emma Hamilton never possessed, from the days when she wandered about Hove, her stockings mended with pins, to her zenith in the Queen of Naples' drawing-room. Bella was frightened of her husband, and stood up to him; awed by the Bishop, who still could get nothing out of her more Popish than the word Amen; and she had heard a tidal wave grind ships to powder within fifty yards of her with no audible or visible yielding to terror. It is strange to think that the mainspring of all this good behaviour was not courage, nor religion, nor duty, but simply an honest, healthy British contempt for foreigners and their ways. God bless this great-grandmother! I think—I hope—that I have a lot of her in me.

III

Things went on unchanged after her death. The boy grew, his father read Corneille to him, the Bishop conducted him here and there among the classics, as an able courier shows a traveller the sights of Rome; not too many stupendousnesses in one day, and ample intervals left for refreshment. He grew fair like his mother, beaky and lean like his father, and seemed to have no troubles in the world, and no ambitions beyond those of his years; to extend his body, and do better at sports than his fellows.

But greatness, as everyone knows, is thrust upon an unlucky few. In the year 1816 a ship came into the harbour, rebuilt by this time, and untroubled for a full ten years by storms. The ship was a French one, flying the old white flag, and named the *Bon Souvenir*, the Happy Memory; enough to show that she was an emissary of the Good Old Days, which somehow or another seemed to have come back to France. Her commander confirmed this impression; he came to inform Auguste-Anne of the accession, thanks to the goodness of God, Prince Metternich, and the higher powers generally, of Louis XVIII, brother to the late sainted king. As luck would have it, all the flags of the various political systems had been engulfed in the island's disaster, and the easiest to replace being the white, this was now flying over the fort and the palace. It did not need the brevet, signed by the lamented saint, to convince the commander of M. de Mortemar's persistent loyalty. He acknowledged it with tears of emotion, and begged the favour of doing so gallant a loyalist any service in his power. Auguste-Anne considered for a whole morning upon his verandah shaded by wistaria, and at length sent for M. de Morhange.

“My dear son,” said Auguste-Anne when the boy presented himself, “there is once more a King Louis; and this being so, I propose, with your approval, to render him this island. God forbid that a Mortemar should strive with a Bourbon for a few square miles which may at any moment sink into the sea. You know the deathless motto, which our cousins Rohan stole from us centuries ago and changed—Crown he wears not, honour shares not, Mortemar cares not. There have been in Europe of late years, and still persist there, too many adventurers aping kings; a name such as ours does not enlist in such a shabby company. Better King’s lieutenant, and hold our heads high, than a petty cringing equality. And so I have decided—always with your approval, monsieur—to send you to France in our good friend’s charge to give His Majesty an account of our stewardship. If King Louis should offer you a place about the court, you may accept, that is only polite; but you are not to solicit any such thing, like a footman that renders a service for hire. This, I believe—with a recommendation against taking a mistress from your own class—is all the advice I have to give you. The first is a matter of dignity; as to the second, it is not to your interest to encourage lightness in a society which you hope may provide you with a wife.”

With this inconsiderable amount of mental ballast the child—then aged twelve—set sail with Saint Louis XVI’s brevet in his pocket for credentials, and the abbé and two or three old steady servants in attendance.

It may be said at once that he never set foot in Corazon again, never again saw his father, or trod, hand in hand with the Bishop, the maze of Latin prosody. For the next tidal wave was final. Earthquakes under the sea set it in motion, deep tremors affecting in their first onset only the bones of a few wrecks. But the subsidence meant the sudden shifting of a great mass of water, which tilted up in a wave five hundred feet high, and travelled solemnly, like a mountain walking, half-way across the Mexican Gulf before it struck land, curled, and broke. A few look-outs in the masts of distant vessels saw the slow-rolling horror go across their horizon; but there were no witnesses of the submerging of Corazon, and no survivors. Ships setting their course for the island months later found only water gently wrinkling and sank their lead many fathoms before they could discover where had been the town.

IV

Which event left Gustave-Félicité-George an orphan and dependent upon that very chancy factor, the gratitude of a Bourbon, for the means of continuing his existence. It may be wondered how he managed to survive;

for Bourbon memories, though tenacious of such matters as court etiquette, old injuries, and a contempt for the third and fourth estates, were not otherwise reliable. Besides, there were many young men, of as good family, with better claims to gratitude than this latest sprig of the Mortemars, who could only proffer the submission and loyalty of an island, now, by a caprice of the earth's surface, entirely unpeopled. The Bourbons, however, could be capricious too; and the head of the family chose to exercise the family right in favour of this boy who asked nothing, to the annoyance of the other worthy young persons who had been assiduous, and were for the most part left kicking their heels. Gustave-Félicité became page of honour to the old king, whose brother, Charles X, when he succeeded found him similar employment. The family estates in Artois had been sequestrated; and so, although most of the pious and scandalized relatives who had hustled his father out of the country were conveniently dead and he was heir, it would have meant much money and long waiting to oust the tough Napoleonic general who was in possession. Gustave-Félicité had in his bones some of the indolent quality of the island which had bred him, where enough was enough and no man with ample leisure cared to waste any of his time looking forward. "Mortemar cares not." The motto lent authority for his disdain, the court gave him a sufficient background. He had not grown up like the other youths of his day, amid thrones toppling to the gutter and dominations rising out of it. A kingdom, to him, was something established and sure, in which people went about their business, and if now and then they loosed off guns, did it only in the sovereign's honour, and with the best intentions. (He had been told the story of the witch-doctor's rebellion often enough, but always at the end came in that convulsion of nature in support of the monarchic principle.) He witnessed, therefore, without any dismay the various experiments in government made by the witty and foolish old king. He saw the press being muzzled, the priests creeping back into their old places of power behind the throne, and being unaware that the citizens' attitude towards presses and priests had changed since 1790, thought his majesty well advised. Ministers came and went rather rapidly between 1825 and 1830; a certain restlessness invaded the court. Gustave-Félicité was touched by it; in a spasm of energy he volunteered for the expedition to Algiers, and at once got some inkling of the way democratic principles had invaded even the services. For the generals and admirals concerned in this venture actually consulted, before drawing up their plan of campaign, a little captain, of no importance, whose sole recommendation was that he knew the ground to be fought over, besides depths, and channels, and possible landings. His advice, though mauled about a good deal in the interests of discipline by his superiors in rank, was taken on the whole, with the result

that the expedition met with quick and complete success. The force was limited, and even young gentlemen of the King's Household, in uniforms like the most elegant and gleaming strait-jackets, had to do their share of fighting. Gustave-Félicité did not resent this. He had something of the practical turn of mind of his grandmother, the lodging-house keeper in Bristol, to whom any situation, even disagreeable, was something to be grasped and looked at all round, and if possible used to advantage. He galloped, and went thirsty, and did his general's unintelligent errands with complete good temper, until the town of Algiers ceased to struggle, and the triumphant despatches began to speed home. He was one of the envoys chosen to bring the news to Paris, and astounded his general almost to apoplexy by respectfully applying for permission to remain with the troops in occupation.

The fact was, Gustave-Félicité liked all those things which set the general and most of the rank and file panting for home; he liked the heat and the glare and odd odours, and best of all he liked the blacks. He had, as a child, been used to all these things, and in his heart of hearts had missed them while he trotted obediently about vast chilly palaces, and laughed with the gaiety which springs cold from the mind. These Algerians were more solemn than his own native blacks; their religion stalked perpetually by them, instead of being resorted to only when they felt in a good mood; a wifely religion. Still, he liked them well enough to stay with them, if the general would allow it.

But the general had, after the manner of generals, his own ideas on the subject. "Lieutenant of Chasseurs the Marquis Boissy de Mortemar," wrote the general, cursing the flies and dripping sweat, "will make his report to the Minister of War according to orders." Then, with a growl to his aide-de-camp, "All this zeal makes me tired. Bah! I hate a careerist!"

The aide-de-camp might have rejoined that he hoped this lack of charity did not begin at home; but being a careerist himself—as was every man in the army with the exception of the unfortunate conscripts—refrained, and agreed with a nod. Thus Gustave-Félicité was despatched with the story of Hussein Dey's capitulation, and had the novel experience of sending it on twenty-four hours ahead of himself by means of the new telegraph station at Toulon. He arrived in Paris in time to put on his most superb uniform and attend the Te Deum in Notre Dame. That was on July 11th, a time of year when the temperature was trying pretty highly the ambition of careerists left behind in Algiers. But they could say, as they unhooked their stiff collars and cast down their bearskins—the expedition was fought throughout in

parade uniform—“Our troubles are over.” Gustave-Félicité, riding home through Paris streets after the King’s carriage, seeing the lowering faces, hearing no cheers but only a threatening murmur, said to himself, “Our troubles begin.”

What had happened to these Parisians, who so short a time back could get drunk on glory? They let the old King go by without a cheer; the flags on public buildings only showed how bare and unenthusiastic were private windows. The fact was, glory at second-hand no longer touched them. If old Charles X, that puppet of Jesuits, that muzzler of journalists, were to get all the credit, then down with glory, and spit on it! Napoleon—*passe encore*. He used to ride out and direct his own battles, and risk his own life. But an old Bourbon, with a face like the handsomest imaginable sheep, and the kind of wit that goes clean over people’s heads—why should he take the cheering? Ah, that, no! said the Paris populace, swapping stories of the kind of thing Jesuits did, and being flicked to the point of madness by a popular press fighting for its life.

V

The tidal wave of revolution gathered during that fortnight, and sucked back in its withdrawal all the surface prosperity and gaiety and charm of Paris, until an ugly city showed, as sinister as that under-sea landscape which the watcher in the cathedral tower of Corazon had seen for a short time exposed to the moon. On the twenty-sixth of July the Ordonnances appeared, pat on the prophecies of the press. It was as though the poor king moved at the bidding of a malevolent hypnotist. Whatever enormity the journalists suggested he might do, that, after hesitation and fumbling, he at last triumphantly did. Their malicious wills goaded him ceaselessly; he was unaware of them, there was a crowd of defenders between them and him; yet somehow their commands reached him, somehow he always obeyed. The Ordonnances were the fine flower of their spite and his stupidity; a rigid censorship, a dissolution, and the disfranchising of a whole class of his own supporters. Trouble was bound to come, and it came. On the twenty-eighth there were barricades building in Paris streets, and a marshal, Marmont, who had once notoriously played the traitor, was given the task of restoring order. Delegates from the people approached him.

“Marshal, the Ordonnances must go.”

“Gentlemen, I deplore the Ordonnances; but”—a shrug—“I am a soldier.”

An answer equivalent to saying:

“Gentlemen, go ahead with your barricades.”

The citizens translated it so, and proceeded tranquilly all night with their preparations, Marmont having withdrawn his troops to barracks after their day’s work. The barracks, unluckily, were found to be ill-provided with necessaries, and the martial spirit of the soldiery was considerably lowered by the very circumstances which had been calculated to maintain it—tight uniforms, heavy shakos. To fight thus encumbered, and light of belly—is it any wonder that the following day saw traffic rather than bloodshed round the barricades? Cartridges were swapped for bread and wine with the barricade holders, comfortable in shirt sleeves. There were desertions; two whole regiments, the fifth and fifty-third of the line, went over to the mob. And always the heat increased.

July 29th saw events still more alarming, regiments bowling each other over, like a disaster among ninepins. The Swiss were fired upon in the Louvre by a few sharpshooters. Small blame to them if they remembered August 10th, 1789, when a previous company was massacred to a man in that very place. Attacked by a handful, and that memory, they ran. They ran in a mob towards the Tuileries, carrying panic with them. The picked gendarmes by the Arc de Triomphe were caught up in their rout; the gendarmes in turn swept away two battalions of the guard camped in the Tuileries gardens; and the end of it all was, a general riding like a madman to St. Cloud, stumbling into the King’s presence blind with dust, standing painfully at attention and making a report in brief phrases, cut short by tears.

The old king had dignity. He did not interrupt, but when the general—Coetlosquet was his name, a Breton—at last hung his head, he asked with resignation:

“All’s lost, then?”

“Not all, sire; but Paris.”

VI

After that, excitements of all kinds. Marching and counter-marching of citizens, pistol in one hand, the other arm about a female patriot’s waist. Two hundred loyalists burned to death in the barracks of the rue de Babylone. Poets scribbling in rooms through whose windows spent bullets came flying. M. Hector Berlioz singing and conducting the “Marseillaise” from the balcony above a mercer’s shop:

“First verse: silence complete. Second verse: same effect. This was not to my mind—I, who had scored the national hymn for ‘every man with a voice, and bowels, and blood in his veins.’ I could stand it no longer, and when after the fourth verse they still were mute:

“ ‘Sing!’ I bawled at them, ‘God damn you, can’t you sing?’ ”

At that five thousand voices tore the refrain away from M. Berlioz, with an effect so exactly like a clap of thunder that, stunned by it, he fell backwards in the accommodating mercer’s bedroom.

No doubt of it, the Three Days were glorious for the young. Not too much danger, just enough to spice the adventure of living; magnificent weather, when it was no hardship to sleep in the open upon some looted sofa at the summit of a barricade; the songs of Béranger to sing, and posterity to astonish. It was well to be M. Berlioz, aged twenty-seven and an artist, or the Marquis Boissy de Mortemar, aged twenty-five and with a range of becoming uniforms to choose from. As a careerist, however, this latter young gentleman was proving a failure. How easy to have approached Louis-Philippe with offers of sympathy! How easy to have gone to old Lafayette, that stormy petrel, with offers of service in the National Guard, now re-forming! How easy to put the country’s good and one’s own advancement together, and emerge as a patriot, conscience at rest! M. de Mortemar, however, did none of these things. He galloped about a good deal, true, but on the losing side, bearing messages of delay, unreasoning withdrawal, or equally inopportune defiance. This by day; at night he would stand by the green-clothed table while the old king, with voluntary tranquillity, enjoyed his habitual rubber of whist. Nothing of Paris, sweaty, loud, and merry, intruded upon that quiet room at St. Cloud. It was decorous, the wide windows admitted no sound nor ruffle of wind, only the scent of lime-trees in bloom; the old king with a firm thin hand added his tricks, laughed kindly, and pushed counters across the green baize to his victorious opponents. Not one sentinel more than ordinary, nor one less, guarded him during the three momentous days, and what apprehension or whispering there may have been confined itself to rooms outside the King’s hearing.

Wilful blindness, or the disciplined calm of the gamester? Charles X had two essentials of a gentleman: he always picked up a challenge, and he was a good loser.

On July 31st, 1830, he lost with a shrug to Louis-Philippe, who came out of the Three Days as First Citizen of France, a title which immediately ranged him among the unconsidered personages of drama; First Citizen,

First Murderer, and so on, necessary rôles but not star ones. However, there he was, wearing the crown which his father had helped to vote down into the guillotine basket, and out of France went Charles X, with no reproaches and no lament, save one ironic word. The young Duchess of Berry, flaunting in a riding habit, pointing with her crop to the provinces north and west which she would raise to save him, was gently snubbed:

"Dear child, you've been reading Walter Scott. Pray let us slip out of history with dignity——"

And his berlin rolled on along the Calais road.

VII

Gustave-Félicité, orphaned by a tidal wave, beggared by a revolution, now found himself exiled in perpetuity, and penalized here and there as well under various articles and sections of the *Code Napoléon*. His property was confiscated, there were penalties of the gravest kind attached to his presence in France, "or any of her dependencies"; an ironic reward for one of the victors of Algiers. But since he had never possessed the confiscated property, and was young enough not to find exile a burden, he went cheerfully into the northern mists, and served Charles X with affection until the King died at Holyrood six years later. Not till then did questions of occupation and domicile come within the scope of his plans for continuing to exist. But if he was penniless and proscribed, he was also free. The world was his oyster, and if he could no longer depend on family influence or royal patronage to provide the Chablis to go with it, he had energy and youth, together with curiosity. An atlas picked up and opened at random showed a clean and distant territory called Australia, half of it well within a comfortable Tropic. (The Scottish mists and draughts had been his severest test of loyalty.) He pulled a string or two, all that was left in the way of influence, and there fluttered down into his pocket a grant of five thousand acres in New South Wales. With this, and the famous original brevet of Auguste-Anne, the one rich with past pride, the other with hopes for the future, he set sail.

"At least there'll be blacks in Australia," thought Gustave-Félicité-George.

VIII

Somewhere about the same year, 1837, Grandfather Geraldine took ship for the same destination. I can give no biography of him, except to say that he had all the scoundrelly qualities of the best type of Irishman. He set out

with the notion that Australia would provide none of the luxuries of life at all, and equipped himself accordingly with a wife, a wooden house numbered in parts, a great many hogsheads of claret, and several tons of Irish earth, which served during the voyage as ballast, and afterwards as a foundation for the wooden house and a protection against snakes.

He set up the wooden house facing Sydney Harbour on the pleasant heights which overlook Rushcutter's Bay. Perhaps in that year people still were cutting rushes there, or purses for a change when any plutocrat was mad enough to take a stroll by its shores. It was rustic, with the arid yet exotic charm of Australian scenes before they become professional beauty-spots. The wooden house, too, was rustic, and must have looked paltry among the stone palaces which other pioneers had built with the help of convict labour, and which were staffed with a nice assortment of forgers, poachers, and even duellists who had been assigned as servants. It rotted away fairly soon, however, having been contrived in a country which knew nothing of white ant, and was replaced, inevitably, by stone. This, the second house, was still there ten years ago. There were broad arrow marks chipped into many of the blocks, and as a child I remember one with initials, perhaps those of a convict who laid it: Y. R. What Christian name begins with Y? Or was it only meant as a tribute, from a subject distant and obscure, to little Queen Victoria; and the chisel slipped? I used to finger that inscription often as a child, with some idea that any writing on stone signified treasure if only one had the clue. Now I shall never know, for the house is pulled down.

But to go back ninety years, there is no need to describe the existence of Grandfather Geraldine in his new surroundings. The shock that decided him to leave Ireland had evidently spent its impetus, for he was respected, despite a temper. A copy of Burke's "Irish Landed Gentry" which he kept on his desk was apt to fall open of itself at "Geraldine: Fitzgerald Michael, Esq., of Corpus, Co. Sligo"; his father. Apparently nobody minded this touch; the distinction between "currency," the Australian born, and sterling, the English immigrant, was of importance, and made all the difference to a man's credit. Grandfather Geraldine had other eccentricities, but they were confined to his home, and did not affect the public estimate of him as a solid citizen to be esteemed. He threw out of the window, for instance, any dish which happened to displease his palate. He danced in all solemnity upon such of his wife's bonnets as did not, in his opinion, suit her. He insisted that their cook—a baby-farmer with the best of characters—should attempt to compound a dish of the locusts which trilled all summer in the pepper-trees by the stone house. These oddities were accepted by everyone as the kind of caprices to which overfed middle-aged gentlemen were liable. I cannot

discover that anyone ever tried to protest, or that he was thought, as a paterfamilias, to be anything out of the way.

But for all this, he remains to me rather a shadowy figure. His children, my mother and uncles, never spoke of him. He loomed like the God of Israel; they could never manage to view him as a man, who suffered from indigestion, and might now and then be over-reached in business. Grandfather Boissy is different. He, too, loomed; but much more in the manner of Satan in the old Miracle plays, terrifying but rather comic, and carrying most of the sympathy since his was the losing side. Moreover, there is this difference. Grandfather Geraldine was a country man—Corpus, Co. Sligo, was extremely remote, a few hundred bare acres of tussocky grass, useless except for snipe shooting; while Grandfather Boissy was a man of the town, and of the creamiest life of that most pulsating town in the world, Paris. Yet it was he who went inland, over the ranges, to a new settlement so small that when he arrived it possessed no other traveller's accommodation than a thriving gaol. And he went with no capital, no knowledge of what one did with land when there were no peasants to hire and work it; no acquaintance, save a very nodding one, with the English language; no clothes save those suitable to the Place Vendôme or Princes Street. He went, in short, unbelievably ill-equipped, and ought soon to have gone to the bad and died without reputable posterity. That he did not is a tribute to his character; and it is also the reason why I choose to follow his fortune. Character makes happenings wherever it goes.

CHAPTER V

> Man is the whole world, and teeth of God,—woman but the rib and crooked piece of man.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

Gustave-Félicité had, unlike most sons, been made aware of the circumstances of his father's courtship and marriage; not through Auguste-Anne's personal confidences, for he was not a personage who spoke freely to his juniors, but by way of the servants who had accompanied the wooing expedition, and later, grown dependable and grey, were sent off with the young master to France. They considered it, rightly, a romantic story, and told it often; which leaves a doubt whether the son's impetuous marriage may not have been due to vague emulation of his father's exploit. Possibly; but possibly too it was a family trait, a laziness, an unwillingness to spend much time securing women, those necessary accompaniments of a man's life. The Mortemars as a family were careless of quality. To carry the metaphor of the accompaniment further, they cared very little what was being vamped in the bass, so long as they had the tune to themselves. Their marriages appeared romantic, because they were surrounded by lucky or dramatic circumstance, but looked at closely they seemed as humdrum as their neighbours; and if they did not break asunder, that was due to laziness too. They took no trouble over women at all, win or lose, and the result was that their wives married them angrily for money or pique, and stayed with them, simmering down gradually through neglect to a passionate gratitude for not being interfered with, which served as well as love.

II

Witness the ridiculous wedding of Gustave-Félicité, which took place five weeks after he landed at Port Jackson. His bride disliked him. She could understand hardly two words in ten of what he said. She hid, in a hopeless kind of way, under her bed on the morning appointed for the wedding, and was discovered by a startled mother bent on verifying the housemaid's statement that she had swept beneath it. And there was a last minute attempt to get her younger sister to take her place.

This astounding incident occurred apropos of the wedding bonnets. That of the bride was, of course, white. She was dark, and looked sallow in white. The bridesmaid's bonnet was pink, and the bridesmaid, being fair, looked over-ripe in it. To swap headgear was unthinkable, but the bride's despair suggested an expedient.

"You have it, Harrie," said she piteously, "and the dress too."

"What next?" enquired her sister ironically.

"The Frenchman!" was the astounding reply. "Oh, do have him, do! At any rate we'd both get the bonnets we want——"

However, sanity and their mother with a dose of sal volatile prevailed. The sal volatile brought home as nothing else could have done the fact that Laura, the bride, was now grown up. Throughout her nonage the remedy for wilfulness had been castor-oil, sal volatile being reserved in a kind of tabernacle for maturer ills such as headaches and languor. With the first sip of it she felt herself inescapably a woman, and turned, sighing, to tie the strings of the white bonnet under her chin.

They were married by a hearty priest, whose address on the Marriage Feast of Cana was notable for its jolly translation of the Evangelist's material into a living and topical West of Ireland wedding fray.

"And the Mother of Jesus saith to him, they have no wine. (Some dirty fella drank more than his share, I suppose.) Ah, the Blessed Mother of God couldn't say that in this country! There's too much of it altogether at weddings here, more's the shame. No, what our Blessed Lady'd say here, she'd say, 'They have no wine, Son, and they're best off without it, so don't you go standing treat now.' "

But there was wine all the same, or rather spirits, blended together in certain nauseating but soul-stirring drinks which the ingenuity of exiles had invented. (The cocktail, for example, makes an interestingly early appearance in Australia, somewhere about 1853.) It was a grand party, for Laura's father was in government service, and "sterling" of the most ringing kind. There were officers there in stiffly frogged uniforms—War Offices being all the world over the same, and disdaining climate as an unsoldierly factor in designing military dress. There were a judge or two, and some young men from Government House; there was even a bishop. (How that fact would have delighted young Mortemar's grandmother, the lodging-house keeper!) A pleasant visiting bishop *in partibus it* was, of some apocryphal see such as Nineveh or Beth-Shemesh. He was present at the

ceremony, but it is not known what he thought of the Reverend Aloysius Healy's address.

The festivities lasted some time, since there was no tide to hurry them, such as had bustled Auguste-Anne aboard the lugger with his bride. The inevitable post-captains and their potations were here allowed full scope, and—with the possible exception of the Bishop—no man departed altogether sober, not even the bridegroom. Still, he could carry liquor, and made a gallant enough show handing his bride in to the vehicle which was to convey them to Parramatta for the honeymoon. The bride herself, sustained only by sal volatile and a sandwich, found the whole performance impossible to credit; and as the triumphant feeling of being a cynosure wore off, she perceived with chill and mounting horror that she was in for it now, and with a perfect stranger.

Their three weeks' courtship had not taught her much. The actual proposal was on her in a flash and over before she knew where she was. It was the simplest story—a dance at Government House, and Gustave-Félicité in his dress uniform of lieutenant of chasseurs, a little out-of-date, a little tarnished, but straight out of a fairy-tale, with a great hanging sabretache and glittering boots. He looked, among the sober reds and blacks and blues, much as his father had looked in the inn at Bristol, something rich and strange, from an older and forgotten world. He had not worn it since the Te Deum in Notre Dame, and perhaps this thought saddened him; at any rate it was a Byronic figure that stood by the mantelpiece drawing the eyes of Laura Willis and her compeers in figured muslin. His attitude was a challenge which they took up in turn. They eyed him, fluttering. They lisped at him in the French which was fashionable at conversaziones, to which he smiled bewildered recognition. Then Laura had the presence of mind to feel slightly faint in the middle of a dance—nothing much, but the kind of ladylike indisposition which it is every man's first instinct to treat with air. On his arm, leaning with a dependence that was flattering, for she was taller than he, they went out into the reviving moonlight. She had the advantage of her faintness, and a full knowledge of what Sydney moons could do. But the splendour that evening was something out of the way; every object—the fringed leaves of pepper trees, the long elegant leaves of gum, the spars of distant ships—had a clear edge to it, and yet the light was kind. Laura's still and strapping beauty needed, in the ordinary way, no help; she too was black and white, foolish clothes could not spoil the lines of her body. But seen thus under the moon, she looked a goddess, and against all the cherished principles of Gustave-Félicité his braided arm went round her in a compelling grasp.

Goddess! That was one of the words, and one of the attitudes that enraged him. Women were inferiors; that a man should defer to them, save of course in trifles, or that he should seek companionship from them, was a ludicrous state of affairs, and one into which no sane man would let himself be drawn. One must desire them, one need never elect them to equality. They should not share the other, the true male hungers, for knowledge or glory or gain. Why, then, this braided arm with its convincing pressure?

It must be remembered that Gustave-Félicité had just endured a four months' voyage, out of sight, most of the time, of land or women. Remember, too, his exile; it rankled, though he laughed at it. This gesture represented a hidden spurt of determination to sigh no more for France, to bind himself body and soul to another country so that his children should care nothing, even if he himself should never get the French iron out of his soul.

"Marriage? Eternal plat du jour? After all, why not? One cannot live always à la carte," thought Gustave-Félicité as he kissed her.

They went back to the lighted rooms with decorum, but engaged, and when Laura saw the other girls' envious faces she did not repent it. When she went to bed that night she was still quite satisfied, being in a state of glamour, and beholding marriage as a triumphal procession through life, with rivals envying and making way, with a perpetual or at any rate frequent moon, and a young man in blue and gold always at her elbow but never too ardent.

Next morning came the shock. She rose late, and was lying in an oldish dressing-gown on the verandah, eating bananas in the sun, when she heard hoofs, and the click of the gate-latch. She sprang up, gave one brief sufficient look, and fled inside to collapse upon her bed, and laugh, laugh like the kookooburra that haunted the garden.

What she had seen was her admirer coming in state to demand her hand. No uniform for such an errand; instead, a costume which had been the last word in 1830 Paris, executed by an Edinburgh tailor apparently in the spirit of mockery. There was a vogue during the Romantic period for tartan, a vogue which still persists in French provinces, and lingers in the blouses and other trappings of children too young to protest. M. de Mortemar wore trousers of tartan. He wore, in the pale but deadly Australian sun, a coat of green velvet. His white cravat would have made a veil for a first Communicant; there must have been two yards of it at least, the very finest net, puffed up like a well-made meringue under his chin. On top of the

whole array was a tall hat of the shape which Englishmen have decided to regard as comic, though its angles and curves are not noticeably more absurd than the angles and curves of their own stove-pipes. The horse from which M. the Marquis dismounted was a hired horse, a tired horse, a horse whose spirit flies and spurs had long since broken. It did not approach with any such proud gait as an ex-lieutenant of chasseurs might expect from his steed; it lounged along the street, stretching its ewe neck to snatch illicit grass, aware of the fact, and presuming on it, that the costume of a suitor does not include spurs. There was hardly need for a hand on the bridle to induce it to cease progress at the appointed gate; it drew up of its own accord, having reached the limits of endurance, and slumbered with bent baker-knees, ignoring the flies that crowded on its quarters.

And this, it occurred to Laura as she lay laughing on her bed, was the man she would have to live with, eat and sleep with, for the term of her natural life. The laughter abruptly ceased. It did not come to her mind that she might refuse Gustave-Félicité; the reputation of a jilt was not a desirable one, nor was it profitable to be considered a flirt. Flirts had a good time, but they did not get husbands; and in after-years no one would believe in the good time, while a husband, dead or alive, was a sure tribute to feminine prowess. She perceived that there could be no drawing back, and rising, began to look to her weapons. Off went the old wrapper, and on, after some striving and assistance from housemaids, went the new poplin. Hair-irons made their appearance, sizzling, from the kitchen range. At last, prinked and with never a crumple, she could go hatless down the steps to the garden, and stray among the flowers with as ethereal an air as if bananas had never existed.

There had been voices in the study as she passed—or rather one voice, as is usually the way when two languages meet; one must take up the burden of speech, leaving to the other the nods and becks and wreathed smiles of comprehension. The voice in this case was that of Gustave-Félicité, who in the absence of any heavy male relative to do it for him, was extolling himself as a possible match. This disconcerted Mr. Willis, accustomed as he was to diffident wooers. There had been proposals before, which had run somewhat on the following lines:

"You wished to speak to me, Mr. So and So?"

"Yes, sir. The fact is——"

Pause. Attempt to assist by Mr. Willis.

“It is not business that brings you, I imagine? You would have come to my office.”

“No, not business exactly. Well—I don’t know—in a way. I don’t suppose you’ll listen to me, though.”

Mr. Willis, from a listener’s attitude:

“You have my full attention, on the contrary, Mr. So and So.”

Pause.

“Well—of course you’ll say it’s confounded impertinence and all that. I know it is. I know I’m not much. I had a bad year last year, what with the drought, and then Firefly not getting placed for the Cup. And it’s not the place it was since we had the fire in December——”

Mr. Willis, intensifying the listening attitude to an alarming degree:

“Mr. So and So, I am pretty well aware of your prospects. Should you wish to borrow, I am not in favour of any young man starting in life with a weight round his neck.”

The suitor, crimson, but seeing an opening:

“That’s just what I’m after.” With a burst of eloquence. “It’s Laura!”

But this was not by any means the interview of which Gustave-Félicité took charge, tartan trousers, preposterous hat and all. To an astounded father he retailed at length his own desirability as a son-in-law. He traced back his ancestry, discoursed to his auditor’s entire bewilderment of the marriages which had resulted in distinguished quarterings, described his own physical condition with frankness, his prospects with optimism, and at last, pausing to draw breath, couched the hat upon his thigh in a satisfied manner and awaited his answer.

All this in French, slowed down out of consideration for barbarian ignorance. Mr. Willis was intimidated. He put, in English, one or two of the orthodox questions, in which a disapproval of foreigners was veiled by concern for the future happiness of his daughter. But the answers were satisfactory, and he knew in his heart that it was no good. He was a timid man by nature. His daughter frightened him, for she was larger than he, and could be mulish. He was unaware of her feelings, but he presumed, from what this flamboyant young man had implied, that she too was set on the match. He could not know that behind her serenity her thoughts were running this way and that, like wild birds beating about a room into which they had flown.

“He felt nice last night. He—he smelt nice,” Laura’s thoughts were confessing as she ranged the garden. “He looked so handsome in his uniform. But he looks funny this morning. We’ve nothing to talk about. I don’t want to be married to anyone, but everyone laughs at old maids. Here he comes! Those trousers—oh, what can I do?”

He was coming, certainly, in a brisk and satisfied way, with her father hovering behind; coming to look for her. She turned, for no reason, the loveliest pink, and stood still, waiting. She could not even pretend to be engaged with the flowers. There was nothing in that part of the garden but a loquat tree, whose fruit, too stony to be worth the eating, lay untidily on the ground. Gustave-Félicité approached and bowed with his heels together, never attempting to touch her hand. Mr. Willis made introductory, explanatory noises behind him.

“Er, Mr. de Mortemar, my dear. He has been asking me a very important question. I informed him that you alone knew the right answer to it—ahem!”

Neither of them heeded him. Laura saw that she need expect no help from that quarter. She was not aware of her father as a person easily bluffed, timid and shy. She saw him invested with the paterfamilial panoply, as something between an uncle and an ogre, and supposed that his consent meant her doom. Her father, finding her tongue-tied, was aware of relief. This young man, thought Mr. Willis, would take her away, right away, and replace her, after a suitable interval, by grandchildren, who would make the house feel young. He had never succeeded in liking his daughter after she had passed the age of seven, though he could never admit it and always agreed with people who said how proud he must be of her. He was proud, as an ordinary suburban citizen might be who had been presented by some potentate with a puma; but he was also embarrassed. He observed with gratitude how the young man’s presence daunted her already; not a giggle was to be heard. He excused himself. Gustave-Félicité trumped his bow with a bow far more sophisticated in which the tall hat played its part, and forgot him with most civil ease.

“Avez-vous,” said Laura, stammering, really nervous, and finding his presence more disturbing and moonlightish than she had expected, “jamais goûté un—loquat?”

Gustave-Félicité had, strangely enough, in that now nonexistent island of his birth, tasted loquats, and retained no opinion of them. He replied:

“Oui. C’est exécrable.”

Conversation dropped. Laura tried again, with one hand indicating the sleepy and shimmering harbour below:

"Aimez-vous——" a comprehensive gesture—"la Nature?"

Gustave-Félicité was a disciple of the gloomier romantics, such as de Vigny, who believed that Nature liked to have her laugh at man. Accordingly he replied:

"Non."

There was nothing left to say. They stood silent, always with the feeling of tension, of attraction, growing stronger. At last he said softly, in English:

"We marry soon, I think."

A statement, not a question. Any other man saying that to her would have been met with a flash, and a detonation:

"You think? Hadn't you better think again? Your thoughts will be getting you into trouble one of these days——"

But to Gustave-Félicité she answered, with the strangest mixture of reluctance and fascinated curiosity:

"If you want to."

She expected an outburst of proper gratitude, a declaration of unclouded happiness. What came was, if anything, a declaration of independence. He put his heels together once more, bowed; said in tones of no particular transport:

"That is very satisfactory. Mademoiselle, au revoir."

And with that clapped the hat on his head, and strode off, a fantastic figure seen against the background of the garden, with his waist like a wooden soldier, and his legs encased in swearing stripes.

The remaining interviews followed the same pattern. The suitor punctiliously came, and bowed, and ate, if food were offered, but made no attempt to endear himself. Why should he? After marriage would be time enough, when, besides, there were more facilities. Laura, who had always supposed the period of engagement to be the happiest of a girl's life—plenty of clothes and attention to look forward to, and love-making kept by decorum well within bounds, as most women prefer it—was disillusioned. And finally when all the guests and Father Aloysius were gathered together to tie her for life to this polite but laughable stranger, it was all she could do not to yield to the inevitable last-minute temptation and rush from the

church screaming “No, no, no!” She surmounted it however, biting her lip. The presents would have to be returned, and such a display would spoil her chances of getting anyone else. With the ice-cold logic that sometimes assails women at a crisis she realised that marrying Gustave-Félicité would also spoil, with completeness, her chances of getting anyone else. Then another consideration came; standing by his side, in bridal white, she envisaged herself in weeds, and was consoled.

III

The party came next, and after the party, Parramatta, which was to the 1830’s what the Blue Mountains are to the 1930’s, the only place suitable for honeymoons. There were good reasons for this, though the name, which in blackfellow’s language means only “Eels sit down,” lacks romantic promise. Even as early as 1822 a prize poem addressed to Sydney Harbour has the lines:

> “Whence she, coy wild rose on her virgin couch
> Fled loath from Parramatta’s am’rous touch.”

And though I believe the coy wild rose in question typifies the bush retreating before civilisation the last phrase gives some notion of what might be expected in Parramatta.

Still, it served a purpose; it was unfrequented, save by other honeymooners, and such criminals as had qualified for a term in the female gaol; and there were many well-to-do villas there which friends, with a chuckle, lent. But there was nothing whatever to mitigate in any way the deadly aloneness that was *de rigueur* for couples. One could boat, but not in parties; one could look at the view, but arm in arm. The house-keeping, which might have provided the luckless brides with distraction, was taken off their hands by the careful orders of the aforesaid friends. As for the husbands, their lot was yet more unhappy; they could not even smoke, save in a room set apart, and wearing a specially embroidered cap; besides, their brides as a rule thought it womanly and charming to dislike the smell. In short, the full misery of honeymoons has never yet been told, and can now only be lightly touched on. Enough to say that Laura and Gustave-Félicité emerged from this seclusion at last, and returned to society’s bosom with an impulsiveness and gaiety which told cynical observers just what their boredom had been. Their feelings about each other and the deathly fortnight may be crystallized in two sentences.

His:

“She is well-made and has—thank God, in this climate—dry hands.”

Hers:

“None of the people who write novels about love can ever have been married.”

But neither of these sentences found their way into the listening air.

IV

A month later they set off up-country, to spy out the land with which his grant endowed him. They took the road through Penrith, over the Nepean by ferry, and on to Emu Plains and the first gorges of the Blue Mountains. A wild road led them through trees that were tall pillars of charcoal with sprouting green crests, branded by bush fires but not killed; it proceeded by leaps and bounds, sometimes over steps and ledges of rock, called jumpers, sometimes through the dry beds of what in winter were mountain streams. The peculiarity of the road was its invariable, and almost conscious, choice of the greater evil; if a valley offered, this curmudgeon of a road chose rather to climb one of the neighbouring hills, and this not in zig-zag, but by direct perpendicular ascent. It crossed rivers for no evident purpose, as if to throw travellers off the scent, providing neither bridge nor ford, but only a ramshackle arrangement of tree trunks padded with dead turf, which tilted, sagged, or fell utterly apart according to the weight of the vehicle which ventured upon them. Beside the road at frequent intervals lay the bones of oxen, stragglers or failures who had died under the yoke in the journey to Sydney from over the ranges. This road, with its too-steep gradient, its narrow ledges precipice-bounded, its unreasoning disregard for topography, was the conception of a former government surveyor, one Major Mitchell, a cross-grained personage whose delight it was to invite obvious suggestions from his subordinates, and then give orders for the opposite to be done. The perpendicular ascents were selected to annoy; the dangerous ledge-crawls rebuked all spirits less fiery than his own. His tantrums came expensive to the trade from inland to the coast.

Main road! The Frenchman, accustomed to the grand military roads of his own country, or the winding and unstrategic but smooth thoroughfares of England, found this track over which his barouche crawled and lurched a nightmare. It was no easier to ride, for the surface was pitted with holes, rocks of razor-like sharpness lay hidden under the dust. At one point, called Soldier’s Pitch, was an incline cobbled with loose stones, whose foot was cluttered and almost impassable with heaps of wood; whole trees had been

hooked on to drays at the top of the slope, lest, in spite of locked wheels, these should rush down and overrun their teams of bullocks. Nowhere was there an open prospect. The ranges folded in and behind each other as if they could go on till doomsday. And always the same grey leaves, the same mocking rustle that was never water, the same loneliness.

There were bushrangers about, convicts escaped from the chain gangs mostly, ugly customers; so that travellers, even the bullock teams, joined forces till they were through the passes. Gustave-Félicité, whose notions of what constituted danger and wild country were derived from his experiences in Algiers, mocked at these precautions. “One must go with an army corps,” said he, thinking of the fleeting Arab bandits, “or alone.” He provided himself with pistols, two menservants and a black guide called Jimmy, supposing, after the manner of fervid nationalists, himself to be a match for any three men of any other race. He had not reckoned with Major Mitchell and his opinionated road.

For just at the foot of Soldier’s Pitch, that supreme practical joke of the whole engineering feat, things went wrong. The device of the tree trunk was tried once too often. Half-way down one of the chains that held it parted; the other took full strain a moment, then snapped with a sound like a shot. The coachman, in a last attempt to save the barouche, pulled the horses over across the track. A wheel heaved up on to a hidden stone, adding another three degrees or so to the vehicle’s list of forty-five. It went over, laden as it was, like a brick wall falling, the pole snapped, gashing one horse badly; and bonnet boxes, crates of fowls, bottles, a ham, somersaulted down the incline from the barouche’s laden roof.

No one was hurt. Laura, seeing the hill from the top, had decided to go down on foot. Gustave-Félicité, out of civility, had descended to give her his arm, though of the two she was more sensibly shod and better enabled to cope with rolling stones. The only casualty was the coachman, cut about the head, and he had the satisfaction of hearing himself damned with great heartiness in a foreign tongue.

“Oaf!” stormed his employer, “your head, you say! Who cares for your head, species of sacred unnamable camel that you are?”

To which the coachman made suitable reply, while Jimmy the black fellow, disengaging his big toe from the stirrup, kicked the already plunging horses with dispassionate comment:

“Budgeree[1] pfeller you, do no more work to-day.”

But the fact was that there was not much more of the day left, and they were five miles still from the public-house that was to harbour them for the night. It was a question, argued out between the men in a symposium complicated by the admixture of two foreign tongues, whether to walk on in a body to the inn, or whether someone should stay by the wreck of the barouche; for if there were no bushrangers there were dingoes, starved brutes to whom the stores of food would be tempting. Things were settled at last by the determination to leave Jimmy on guard with a pistol. He protested that this particular track of country was the chosen haunt of devils, awful ones who walked with their feet turned heels first. He demanded, besides the pistol, such other aids to valour as the coachman's Wellington boots and a white pfeller's hat. These were refused, and a compromise was arranged which included a pannikin of rum and seemed to content him. The horses were disentangled, the stores piled, and the barouche righted; and the last seen of Jimmy was his face grinning above the light of a smoky fire while his fingers held strips of ham above the flames, and his toes manœuvred the pistol.

It took no longer than fifteen minutes after that for the sun to die. It slipped down the sky with a rush, the ranges lifted above it like huge extinguishers, and there was darkness of a most satisfying blue, through which the silent party tramped, leading their horses, with only the barouche lantern to guide their steps. It was a stony and difficult five miles, with nothing much to be expected at the end. The inns were, for the most part, drink-shops only, for all they marked the stages of the road, and travellers had presumably other needs besides the drowning of care. They were, in their squalor, their insolent mishandling of food, their contempt for all custom which demanded service, an unholy revelation to Gustave-Félicité, used to the civility and infrequent drunkenness of France. Even Laura, though accustomed from earliest youth to the sight of men and women the worse for drink—the Willis's had a coachman who, when he took the family to the theatre, had orders to drive himself on to the police station, thus ensuring that he should be sober to get them home—even Laura had found the up-country publics a little too much for her. Apart from noise, there was dirt, and flat nightmarish bugs on the spotty sheets, and the foulest odours everywhere. She walked her five miles gallantly but hopelessly. There were no sounds in the bush. The wind had dropped with the sun, there was not even a rustling of grey leaves, and it suddenly came upon the Frenchman that to talk of this country as new was madness. It was not new; it was old, and worn-out, and dying. There was no generosity left in its earth. The blue-gums were sapless, the scent of the colourless bush flowers was

concentrated as though by fire in an alembic, the very soil a mere sprinkling of sand upon lava. It was a country like an old courtesan, done with man, and cynical.

These reflections were, however, without effect upon that singular pioneer. His patrimony elsewhere had eluded him, sinking under the sea, or falling into other tenacious hands; these few thousand unseen acres, therefore, he was determined to possess. The sneering country woke a kind of gallant devil in him, that would not take an insult even from the ground beneath his feet. There was nothing but defiance in the look he threw upwards from time to time, through the branches to unfamiliar stars.

Lights began to show, the track widened to a clearing treacherous with stumps, and surrounded by a phalanx of ghostly trees, ring-barked, bled white. The inn known as "Blind Mick's" was before them, straggling like a small village with its out-houses and sheds. They pressed forward with relief, even while their memories of previous shelters warned them to expect little, and knocked on the door that, strangely enough, was closed. No answering movement could be heard in the house, though there were lights, one of which flitted to another room while they waited, and there was extinguished. They tried the door; it would not yield. One of the men was ready with the only too likely explanation that the household was in the after-throes of a "blind." He had not been on this road before—none of them had, except Jimmy—but pubs were and would be pubs the continent over. He proposed to get in somehow, through a window, and rouse the publican to a sense of duty; but as they stood in perplexity before this silent yet living house, steps came to the door, and the bolt shot back.

A man, the landlord presumably, stood before them with a lamp in his left hand. He was not drunk, to all appearances. He had shaved perfectly clean very recently, for his cheeks and jaws were shiny. He stood there confronting them, and seemed to be summing them up; but neither by gesture nor glance did he invite them in. There was nothing odd or ugly about him, nothing notable at all. He just stood there, and allowed the silence to continue.

It was Gustave-Félicité who broke it.

"We have an accident," said he briefly, "five miles back. My wife has walked and is tired. You will please accommodate us."

Still the man said nothing, but looked at Laura, and at the men in turn.

“This is an inn, I think?” Gustave-Félicité persisted. “It is your duty to receive travellers. It is the law.”

On that the man gave a sudden sharp yelp of laughter, and an exaggerated bow. He did not let them pass him, but went before them down the entry, calling “Frank! Hey, here!”

A further man appeared at a door; his hands were covered with lather, and one held a kitchen knife like a weapon; he had the strangest look of angry apprehension.

“Frank,” said the first man, “hustle up with that beauty treatment o’ yours. Here’s company come.”

Frank’s expression changed to a daze, and his eyes rested with incredulity on Laura.

“What’s the sense, looking like that?” enquired the first man sharply, “this is an inn, ain’t it? Aren’t going to get us into trouble with the law, are you? Turning custom away——”

And on that, disregarding Frank, he opened the door of a room. Laura entered, her husband after her. Their host lit a candle, showing a bed, on whose counterpane dusty marks seemed to tell of a former occupant who had lain upon it in his boots. This was the more noticeable since the rest of the room was not merely cleanly, but almost prim. There was a toilet mirror dressed in some coarse stuff, on which the flies, which fouled clean curtains in a week, had not yet begun to make impression. There was a decent print of some historical carnage, and a text above the bed, while on the floor a rag rug, newly washed, held pride of place. It was so much more homely and kindly than the other inns along the road, that Laura could not reconcile it with the host’s mocking and reluctant welcome, nor with the tumbled bed. She said, feeling her way:

“I thought it was—didn’t they tell us that it was a blind man who kept this house?”

“That’s right,” the host agreed with a grin, “he’s blind right enough.”

Laura thought of the double significance of that word, and pursued her enquiries no further. She sat down thankfully, and opened her little toilet bag to cope with the dust of the road. The host brought water, but when asked for a clean counterpane looked nonplussed; he moved off, however, and she could hear him rummaging in cupboards. She changed her stockings, settled her dress, and was giving some attention to her hair, when a shouting arose,

sudden as a dogfight, every word audible through the unpapered wooden partitions. It was the man called Frank, resenting some intrusion.

"Get out! Wot yer poking yer nose in 'ere for?"

The voice of the coachman, Andy:

"Where the 'ell am I to go? I want 'ay for my 'osses."

"You want yer face bloody well knocked in——"

The voice of the host, steely and quiet:

"Shut yer head, Frank. You"—to Andy—"keep where you belong."

"I got to see my 'osses gets their feed."

"That's right." A pause. "That's my business. I'll look to it, all in good time. My house, ain't it?" Pause. "Ain't it?"

"Yes, boss, I reckon so."

"That's more like. Frank, I want some candles; and where the hell's the sheets kept?"

" 'Ow should I know?" With a laugh: "what's the idea? Not going to wake 'em, are yer?"

"Shut your mouth."

That was all. A minute later the host came in, after knocking, with a clean sheet to replace the soiled counterpane. The eternal up-country meal of ham and eggs would, he told them, be ready in ten minutes.

He was as good as his word. The meal came in, smoking, and the two menservants, standing awkwardly by, were bidden to sit down to it with their employers. Frank, too, made his appearance smelling of hot grease, and carrying a damper, unrisen flour cooked in ashes which served throughout the inland country as bread. It was, despite the inevitable nature of the food, an unusual meal. For instance, in such places it was not usual for the host to sit at table, nor for him to be sober, as this man was; cold-sober, and with a sobering eye that rested often and meaningly upon the sullen Frank. Then the parlour, like the bedroom, was clean, and had ribbon bows on the curtain-loops, such as a woman might have tied; but there was no sign of any woman. The lamp in the table's centre, trimmed and bright, lighted no laughter, and little conversation. The two servants were awkward, Laura was tired, Gustave-Félicité was preoccupied with the problem of mending his carriage, Frank went in awe, it seemed, of his employer, and looked to him

between each mouthful. Only that personage was at his ease, and though not talkative, saw after their wants and kept order. He listened to the story of the disaster to the pole, questioned minutely as to the exact site of the accident, and promised to "have a look at it" for them in the morning. At the meal's end, when Laura stood to go, he picked up the lamp to escort her; the light, shining direct on his face from below, showed her something—but what was unusual, what was strange, in the sight of a chin shaved? Only it seemed as though a thick beard had been cut away, for the chin and lips were white, while the rest, even the eyelids, had the tan of years. It gave him an unhealthy look, as a sick dog goes white round the muzzle; and perhaps it was the contrast of this look with his brown and steady hand, the continued contrasts all through the house that set Laura's mind quivering, and made her sleep uneasy. She lay long awake after the house was quiet, save for snores; then dropped off, and started up out of an unremembered dream with a phrase in her mind.

At home, in Sydney, Laura was accustomed to be served by Catholics, men and women from Ireland. Teresa Mary McCarthy was the cook, James Kinehane was the groom. From a child she had listened to their talk, knew the ins and outs of their meaning, and the light of that knowledge threw fear into the remembered phrase. It was Frank's—"Not going to wake 'em, are you?" delivered with an ugly laugh. "To wake——" to dress up a corpse in state and hold a funeral feast, drinking round the coffin.

It frightened her so that she put out a hand to her husband and shook him by the shoulder. He was instantly alert; but when he asked "Yes? I am listening," she could find nothing to say of the play that her anxious mind had made upon some everyday words, and the feel of the house. She did ask, however, had he his pistols? One, yes; it was on the table loaded. Was he sure? Yes, yes, of what importance was it, the pistol? She said nothing more, but slipped out of bed and groped her way to the table, where, sure enough, the pistol lay. She brought it gingerly back to the bed, and thrust it under her husband's pillow, barrel turned upwards, but ready to his hand, or to hers. Gustave-Félicité laughed, and said something about these not being the kind of arms he preferred to take into bed with him. She hung awhile on her elbow, listening; there was snoring still, but no movement. She lay down, her heart thudding. Nothing stirred in the house. Slowly the heart slackened, her whole body seemed to grow heavy. She slept again, and soundly, till morning.

As a rule, in such wayside houses it was impossible to sleep after six. Drink or no drink the night before, someone had to milk the cows, who

otherwise came roaring in misery to the sliprails; an unwilling boy of twelve it was as a rule, booted out of bed with all the savagery that a six o'clock head can engender. Other travellers, stockmen and teamsters, eager to get half their mileage done before the heat of the day, had to be fed with chops and tea at dawn, and set off amid musket-cracks from their whips, and shouts to the bullock-leaders: "Git up, Bawly! Git on, you bastards!" But this house reposed like a gentleman's villa till the sun was up. Gustave-Félicité, fumbling under his pillow, found the pistol-butt with his fingers, and laughed; then his watch, and swore. It was the half-hour after seven, and he had meant to be up, and off to the wrecked barouche by that time. He got up stealthily, not to rouse his wife, put on half his clothes, and went to look for water to wash in. He had seen enough of the colony to know that water lived, not in pumps as at home, or as in Africa, in wells; but in square tanks of iron that caught all moisture from the roof. He went out through the back door, which was open, into the level sunlight. Involuntarily his head went up, his shoulders widened to get a full draught of the air, fresh yet warm as new milk; his eyes ranged idly about the clearing which last night had seemed, with its dead trees, so sinister, and now looked a pleasant haven.

The horses, who had been turned into the back paddock the night before, came to the fence to greet him; and a parliament of cockatoos, observing him, took no notice, but continued their council, bowing gravely to each other, and gobbling with the utmost respect for decorum. Sinister! The place was full of promise. There were green flats behind the whitewashed house, and an attempt at a garden had been made outside the back door, where among the flowers pushed up sturdier growths—potatoes, and that dire English hybrid, neither fruit nor honest vegetable, detested rhubarb. He forgot, as he drank in the sunlight, his vision of the night before. The country was no longer a courtesan, sterile and weary, but an honest farmer's wife in a sun-bonnet, her apron full of food.

"Ah, my dear," thought Gustave-Félicité, bending his arms to clench the muscles of his shoulders, "we shall get on together well enough, you and I."

The sentimental moment of idleness passed. The stillness of the house roused him to energy. Where were the men? The horses should have been watered, breakfast should have been prepared and eaten by now. Fresh from his sluice in a bucket he went authoritatively into the house, calling, knocking on doors.

"Hey, what the devil? Is there nobody to take orders in this place?"

Apparently not; no one answered. He thrust his way into the parlour, where his own two men had slept. Each clutched a bottle; other bottles, dead marines, were by their sides. He kicked the snorers, who opened glazed eyes, and rolled helplessly. What was all this? How had they got at the drink, with that sober-eyed man holding the keys? And where was the sober-eyed man?

This time he went back to the doors at which he had first knocked, kitchen he supposed, and the other some kind of doss-place. The kitchen was empty. The other room——

He stepped back involuntarily, and threw up a hand as a cloud of flies rose with a loud singing hiss from something on the floor; dried blood, a great pool of it, that seemed to have run out from under a cupboard that stood in one corner. He pulled open the cupboard door. A man and woman stood in it, very stiff. Their throats had been cut, and their bodies, bundled instantly into this hiding place still warm, had stiffened, propped upright by the closed door. The woman's face was comely, and she was tidy, save for the gap in her neck. The man's eyes were open, but opaque. Blind Mick, the tavern owner, with his wife, who had put bows to the curtains and tended the garden, looked out incuriously at their white-faced guest. By the side of the cupboard a text hung: "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. Ps. 101."

Gustave-Félicité crossed himself, banged the door to, and ran in blind haste for his pistol. He had to rouse Laura to get at it; she looked up sleepily, with a question. He snapped an order to stay quiet, and went through the house and outbuildings, pistol in hand. But the murderers, their hosts of the night before, had gone. (It is odd to have to relate that Laura, amid this panic search, turned over and went to sleep again. She had got her terror over, as is the manner of women, well before the event.)

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[1] Lucky.

V

These bushrangers, a pair of no particular distinction in a brotherhood which includes such spectacular figures as Thunderbolt and the Kellys, enjoyed no very long lease of dangerous life. Six months later they came before Mr. Justice Strutt at Bathurst, and Gustave-Félicité was one of the witnesses. The leader, that smooth and sober man, gave cool details in the

dock. It seemed that the double murder had been done not more than twenty minutes before the traveller's arrival, and the bushrangers, taken unawares with their hands in stained soapsuds, had been afraid to tackle an armed party. They bluffed, then in the earliest dawn cleared out with their loot, having slept some hours on the bed in that room with the cupboard.

CHAPTER VI

> —for omitting those improperations and termes of scurrility betwixt us, which only difference our affections and not our cause, there is between us one common name and appellation, one faith.
>
> —*Vulgar Errors.*

I

The land, when after these vicissitudes they arrived at it, proved to be a fertile tract inland from Bathurst. There was, in summer, a river flowing through it, the Wollondoola, so called by the blacks, with their gift for smooth and water-sounding names; and the rich treeless flats promised to the eye of the ex-lieutenant of chasseurs a living as a grazier.

The place once surveyed, and being found to include no habitation of any kind, save the gunyahs of brushwood tossed up by a black tribe on the river's eastern bank, Gustave-Félicité turned his attention to the construction of a dwelling. And here again his curious unimaginativeness comes in. He was used to countries in which people had for generations lived, where certain natural features—a harbour, or a well, or a rock easily defended—made the nucleus, and went on being used for centuries. In the most deserted tracts of Africa great chiselled columns would be seen lying broken in the sand; in France, no hill or ford that had not its traces of use, the bones of houses scattered here and there. In Australia was nothing of the kind. The blacks' shelters of bark fell to pieces in six months, which was just as long as they were needed before the tribe moved on to fresh hunting-grounds. It had not occurred to the Frenchman that he would have to build his house in a wilderness, out of such materials as the wilderness could provide. It may have seemed excess of caution on the part of Grandfather Geraldine to transport from the old world an entire house, together with soil to build it on; but it shows a truer grasp of the situation than the airy nothing and the name of which Gustave-Félicité's local habitation was composed. He had the name pat; the name which had given his father a chance, and a crown, and a good swift death in full career. It sounded oddly, Corazon, three gentle Spanish syllables, among the tags of blackfellow's talk and names of Scottish villages, as Burrumbuttock, Inverlochty, Pilnagullagai and Fyvie, which served other landowners to identify their holdings.

Remember that in his life he had never set hand to a tool; a wrist for sword-play he possessed, but such dartings and twists do not lend themselves to the service of utility. Blind muscle is the wilderness's primal need, where there is the stubborn passive resistance of wood and earth to overcome. In such circumstances the mind takes, for once, its rightful place as the body's follower, and must be idle while the body strives. Gustave-Félicité had no knowledge whatever of how to cope with such primitive masses of material; intimacy with spades and axes he did not propose to acquire. He returned to Bathurst—Laura had been left there, in the charge of the bank manager's wife—with the polish undimmed on his nails, and applied to the governor of the prison for a chain-gang. The governor responded that convicts, being detained at Her Majesty's pleasure, could only be employed upon her lawful occasions: road-making, bridge-building, or the construction of even stronger and more forbidding gaols for their own accommodation. But the governor was secretly in a quandary; for various reasons—bushrangers, floods, or sheer officialdom—he was short of money.

It may be wondered what uses money could be put to in that wilderness; the answer is that whereas in older countries towns were built about an altar, in Australia they were built about a bar. Paddy or Johnny or Alf—the pub-keeper never possessed or needed a surname—was the most powerful of all the citizens, not excluding governor and graziers, for their underlings reposed in the hollow of his hand. It is curious to see how entirely this new-found country was in the grip of liquor; globe-trotters, denizens, all the memoirs of the early times speak of rum as of a personal devil. Let me quote the letter of one Australian house-wife of this period.

"I perhaps praise the tidy appearance and good cookery of a friend's servant: 'Ah, yes, she is an excellent cook, but we can so seldom keep her sober.' I have known a female servant drink camphorated spirits of wine, and suspect the same individual of consuming a pint of hartshorn which mysteriously disappeared from my room; its evident strength being no doubt too tempting. Eau de Cologne and lavender water, I know, they drink whenever they are left about. The universality of this vice is most dreadful to contemplate, far worse to witness and endure——"

Now the governor's plight becomes apparent. No pay, no rum; no rum, no warders, but only a residue of discontented men formidably armed. Warders were not selected for their moral qualities; they were chosen on physical strength, and if brutality went with it so much the better for discipline. The governor was a nervous man, and Gustave-Félicité had brought with him, with the usual French mistrust of paper currency, a good

provision of solid sovereigns. The governor hung back a week or two, hoping for the lawful gold to arrive; his expectation was disappointed, and Her Majesty's dignity was put by for the time with a good grace. He even took the trouble, did the governor, to con the dossiers of some of his prisoners, with the result that an architect, tuberculous and serving a lifer for having throttled his own sister, was discovered in one of the cells. This wreck was removed from solitary confinement and sent, coughing blood, off under escort with a note hoping that Mr. Boissy—nobody could get hold of "de Mortemar"—might find him useful.

II

Gustave-Félicité gave the wreck pencils and a protractor, and a quire of the bank's foolscap, and watched with his ever-curious eye how the cheeks blazed, while the shaking hands slowed to calmness as they handled once more the tools of their trade.

"French, aren't you?" enquired the wreck in tones of equality. "I used to know France once. Made the grand tour once—wouldn't think it to look at me, would you?" A laugh, followed by a coughing fit; then, with a touch of malice, spying the homesickness, "French, eh? I know the kind of thing ——"

And from under the pencil flowed, in steady lines that balanced, curved and met in just proportion, the outline of a house; no château with turrets, but a long low manor. Gustave-Félicité, very silent, watched the pencil. It drew steadily the courtyard, the wall of the potager, a dove-cote; hesitated, as though not altogether trusting memory; then put in, with care, a gable and a preposterous round window, the *œil-de-bœuf*, set a trifle askew in the gable's top. The astonished Laura, looking up over her sewing, saw that her redoubtable husband's face was perfectly white. As she looked a harsh voice came out of the white mask.

"What house is this you make?"

And the wreck, with his head on one side, approving his own picture, answered:

"Some French place. In Northern France it was—I forget the name."

There is no reason to suppose that the drawing was intended to represent the ancient home of the Mortemars, or that the tuberculous stranger had ever set eyes on it; the long arm can hardly be expected to stretch so far. But it called the mind of the exile back to his own country with cruel swiftness;

that dove-cot, those poplars, and most of all the irrelevant round window, all were France, never to be seen again, never to be forgotten.

The wreck went on sketching. His hands, calloused with pick and shovel, moved daintily among the pencils and the coloured inks. He was drawing again, and talking:

"Y'see, they haven't got the right idea here yet. What is the right idea in architecture? Why, to build for the climate, whatever it may be. That's why I don't—didn't—take to the Palladian for England. Columns, stucco—they want sun, don't you agree? No, brick for England; there's nothing like a Thames Valley fog to mellow brick. Those little russet towns—Maidenhead, eh? And Bray——"

The attentive Laura, looking over her sewing, was obliged to endure another mystification; for the shattered creature had, unawares, turned his own weapon upon himself. He had raised, in his starved mind, already drunk with the relief from routine, a ghost which was never permitted to walk, the ghost of his own free youth, sculling and laughing with a girl at Bray. (That was before the sister with her tongue had put an end to his game, and he with a handkerchief twisted and knotted had put an end to hers.) England! The mists that he would never feel upon his forehead again; the grey skies, under which a man might go wide-eyed, and not as here, peering against the excess of light—

> "The willows and the hazel-copses green
> Shall now no more be seen——"

No more, no more! He had the consumptive's unkillable faith in his own power to recover, a faith which could bear up against confinement, loneliness, the distress and pain of illness; but it could not hold fast against that ghost. No more, sounded the voice in his heart; and no more, thought the free man, staring down at the foolscap sheet covered with lines and squares that spelt home for him. Laura, incredulous, saw tears in both men's eyes.

It was the jingle of the escort's accoutrement that roused them all three. Time was up, the routine was upon them. At the first sound of that heavy stamping tread the convict shivered and shrank back, from Mr. James Sparling talking with a client, to Number 10573 returning under escort to a cell four and a half feet by seven; the Marquis Boissy de Mortemar, lord of Morhange, Vœuvre and Geudecourt in Artois dwindled down to plain Mr. Boissy, who had, somehow or other, to get a house built for himself, and earn his living by the base peasant expedient of fattening beasts for sale.

Laura resumed her mental comfort, which had been momentarily disturbed, and the queer little incident sank into time leaving hardly a ripple.

10573 was given a drawing-board in his cell, and some more pencils, and told to get on with his designing. He was at the height of his last flicker of strength, and became dictatorial, complaining that there was not light enough in his cell to draw by. The governor, to oblige his dear acquaintance Gustave-Félicité, but with misgivings, moved him to one more spacious, with a window which permitted light to enter: a concession which implied part remission of the solitary confinement penalty. A dying man cooped alone in darkness! Well, but it was the penalty for those convicts who made themselves nuisances, and 10573 had been hysterical and troublesome all his life, had committed a murder for which he appeared to suffer no particular remorse, and owned a tongue that could lash up his fellows to madness in no time. Hence the misgivings.

But they were unneeded. 10573 became, with the change of air, and the drawing materials, and the renewed sense of importance, the professional man on a job. He drew with unremitting care for two days at his plan to scale, making from time to time such notes as this:

“Memo.

“In view of the cedar forests not far distant, all doors should certainly be of this wood, which takes an elegant French polish, besides possessing an agreeable odour.”

“Query: the rock known as blue metal used in the construction of roads —capable of being split so as to afford flagstones for the domestic premises?”

These notes are written almost undecipherably, as though—as was the case—they were scribbled against time. But the plan of the house, which still exists, is drawn with precision, and perfectly to scale. It has, however, a brownish smear across it through which the drawing shows, and which is the only trace left of the blood which poured from the artist’s mouth in his final paroxysm. This came upon him just after he had written with pride his name, “James Sparling, Archt.,” and underneath, ironically, his number as one of Her Majesty’s guests. The warder arriving with supper on the third evening found the wreck sprawled across his drawing-board, untidily dying, and had the sense to rescue the plan at once before sending for the chaplain. Thus the blood had no time to dry or soak in, and did not ruin the drawing irrevocably. It had been washed with care by the time Gustave-Félicité received it, and still could serve his purpose.

The house that grew out of it, and stands now after nearly a century, is a kindly monument to the brain and hand which so soon after their achievement rotted away to nothing in prison quicklime. It is a rather gracious house, light and livable, admirably proportioned; yet when I turned up, out of curiosity, the report of Sparling's trial, I found him blown this way and that by gusts of weak rage, resentment over trifles, and a kind of dark furtive cruelty. But then, that was real life, always a foreign country to the artist, while the house was a dream in which he was at home.

III

I cannot imagine what put into Grandfather Boissy's head the idea of getting Chinamen as shepherds. In no account of the celestial empire is there any record, to my remembrance, of Mongols understanding the management of sheep. Where did he get them from? How did he train them? The fact remains that five years after the building of the house it was the centre of a village of shanties in which about twenty Chinamen had their unfastidious being. There were gardeners and cooks among them, but for the most part they cared, mated, delivered, dipped and shore sheep. Most of them could not speak English. Gustave-Félicité to the end of his days, though he mastered that tongue, would fly off into French whenever his own feelings demanded it, regardless of whether or not he were understood. And it is difficult to indicate the minutiæ of the care of sheep by gestures. I suppose that he drove them along, as in six months of marriage he tamed his wife, and later, dragooned his family, by sheer force of character. Napoleon spoke indifferent French, the historians say.

These orientals, with occasional gins from the blacks' camp, did all the work of the place during the first few years, and gave the whole settlement an exotic air. Their manners were exquisite. They had their own religious feasts, but invariably remembered the Christian ones, letting off polite fireworks at Christmas and Easter and coming to the house on these occasions in their best rig, with little gifts such as the children adored. There were paper flowers, joss-sticks, rice-paper paintings of ingenious tortures, and boxes filled alluringly with what looked like green gelatine. For a long time the purpose of these last remained a mystery, until one day an enterprising child rubbed one of the sheets with a damp finger. Instantly the finger was covered with a beautiful rose-coloured dye, which transferred to the cheeks in round patches gave a doll-like appearance most objectionable to Papa. The innocent cosmetic was immediately banned, and it was conveyed somehow or other to the donors that henceforth gifts would be censored. The civil Chinese accepted the master's fiat, and when the next

festival came round it brought only the usual fireworks, with a quantity of nicely written paper prayers.

IV

Looking back on what my elders can tell me of that time, the whole life of the house seems to revolve about the servants. Papa and Mamma were aloof and terrible; the servants were accessible, human, and as far as dependence went in much the same boat with the children. It was natural for the two down-trodden sections of Corazon society to league with each other. They had their wars; but the moment a parental raid threatened these were forgotten and no alliance could well have been more strong. They lied zestfully in each other's defence, accepted blame which even parental omniscience sometimes distributed wrongly, knew and kept each other's secrets. Ten children, pretty much the same number of house-servants; on the other side, Papa and Mamma, who for a minority kept their prestige up with a vigour which is very respectable. They had, of course, the tradition of infallibility and all-wisdom to help them; they had religious precept, the social usage of the time, and a whole Commandment of God himself to back them up. They were compassed about with awe. They invented ceremonies and restrictions. For example, it was forbidden that any child should speak to Papa before being spoken to. This, like the prison governor's treatment of his troublesome prisoner, may seem inhuman, but must be considered in its true light as a measure of self-defence. To be at the beck and call of ten children; to be liable to questioning, petitions and other disturbances from morning till night—it was too much to expect of an autocrat born. The result, at meals, of this ukase would be as follows:

Gustave-Félicité was invariably helped first. He did not carve, nor talk; in fact he took no share in the life of the table save to eat, and religiously drink one bottle of excellent claret. As a result, he was always the first to finish, and while waiting for the next course, as he was obliged in decency to do, looked to his children to provide him with entertainment. He would sit at the table's head, a heavy figure in the velvet coat which he was never to forsake, looking like an ageing pagan god; and from time to time, fixing one unhappy child with his small bright eyes, would issue the command:

"Say something!"

What detail of a child's day can be brought with any confidence to grown-up notice? The only topics which rushed to the victim's mind were sins. He would start, swallow water to gain time, look pitiably for help to his

compeers, ranked about him or standing impassive by the serving table; finally in his misery giggle or cry.

After that the procedure never varied. Gustave-Félicité would rise, so gradually as to give the effect of one of Memnon's colossi standing up from his seat of stone; with his dinner napkin, which he manipulated as accurately as a teamster his whip, he would flick the unfortunate from the room, semi-fed and disgraced, and sit down once more, until the next stage wait produced boredom and the same command:

"Say something!"

With the same result. Occasionally a meal would end with no less than six empty chairs, while the remaining children, subduing the nausea which rice-pudding invariably caused, sat finishing the ultimate grains on their plates with mouse-like stealth.

It is difficult to choose among the fantastic events with which the memories of my relatives are strewn; an embarrassment of riches, mere decoration, and useless to propel the story on, but irresistible. There was that child, for instance, now a stately aunt, who once stole her dreaded father's razor to ease the corns of a vagrant who had won her heart with his performance on the ocarina; a cone-shaped instrument this last, made—can my memory be accurate?—of china, with a willow-pattern. It was played held sideways to the mouth like a flute, and the whole hand covered with vents, shifting up and down to produce the strangest mooing ghosts of airs.

There was the incident of Ben Tatton, a disreputable, who finally rose to the position of butler. After a year at this eminence he decided to leave, an event which cast only the faintest of shadows before—a single remark, made to my aunt Sophie, his particular friend among the children.

"If they miss a key," said Ben Tatton aside to her on the eve of departure, "I know nothing about it."

Next day he left, after an affecting scene with his employer.

"Master, you've treated me well."

"Ben, I know it." Then as if excusing a weakness, "But you are a deuced good fellow."

Such sweet sorrow was this parting. Not till the cellar key was missed, the stout cellar door broken open, and the bins found to contain deflowered bottles filled with water to the number of seven dozen, was the measure of Ben's resourcefulness revealed. He was pursued, but had too good a start;

the family lost sight of him. Only my Aunt Sophie, flattered by the confidence with which he had always treated her, kept his memory green. Eleven years later came a letter:

> MISS SOPHEY,
>
> My husband died Tuesday sent his best respects and last wishes for you miss to see him in his coffin. Funeral Thursday, but will keep him to your convenience.
>
> Yours respeckfully,
>
> MRS. B. TATTON.

How did Aunt Sophie, usually a meek and by no means obstinate aunt, succeed in wringing permission from her father to say farewell in person to Ben? Somehow she accomplished it, and set off to the town, not very far distant, where he waited. It was November weather, sultry; but the funeral was faithfully put off until, just as the undertaker and the other occupants of the house were at the end of their patience, she arrived to gratify the corpse's last wish.

Cooks were always Irish, and, owing to the extremes of temperature offered by the Wollondoola plains, nearly always angry. Only one, Mary Considine, sticks like a dart in memory because of the interesting way in which her intellect followed the phases of the moon, and the freakish nature of her final exploit. She was missed from the kitchen one morning. The mistress waited, waited; at last, relinquishing hope of an interview, she turned away across the courtyard—paved, after all, with small squares of black and white local stone—to stand astonished in mid-traverse, stricken motionless by the view of Mary Considine's crimson head protruding from the dog's kennel, wearing an expression of contented malice. The dialogue was brief.

"Mary Considine! Be good enough to come here at once!" (With a fine irony.) "And why, may I ask, have you got into that kennel?"

"Ma'am," triumphantly, "to sphite the dog!"

There is no end to these stories. Perhaps, since I have chosen to follow Gustave-Félicité's life, I had better stick to the incidents in which he figures. They will show the life at Corazon better than any detailed description of the days, which were, after all, much like each other, and melted into years with a treacherous swiftness. The years themselves were remembered by the prices the wool-clip fetched, or by drought, or the discoveries of gold, as at

Bathurst in 1851. (Every station lost personnel during this rush, and the Ballarat rush that followed.) The details of sheep-breeding and rearing are in themselves of no very great interest, and I believe that Gustave-Félicité in his heart hated his trade, though his shrewdness and the pressure of "needs must" kept him at it, and brought success. He continued till the end of his life to present a finished study in contradictions; a man with a wife and ten children, yet lonely; a man self-condemned to live in the wilds, yet who refused to truckle to the wilds, wearing always his velvet coat and plaid trousers, going to bush funerals in full evening dress, hungering for France, yet forbidding all mention of it, and bringing up his children to a language and an allegiance he despised. Sometimes the homesickness slipped through. His house, for instance, thanks to the accurate eye of the defunct murderer and late Grand Tourist, was such as you may see any day of the year in the northern provinces of France; and somewhere about 1860, luck threw in his way an escapee from New Caledonia, who in his youth had learned something of how to grow wine. It was a chance not to be missed. Within a year or two after the arrival of Poquareau, the escapee, the barren sunny slopes behind the house carried vines; and in a year more the vines bore grapes, over which Poquareau watched day and night with a rook-rifle, rarely sleeping, dreading to sniff the reek of the flying foxes, to whom no grapes are inaccessible and none therefore sour. The vintage thus guarded was finally gathered, and Gustave-Félicité may have felt a pang seeing the great baskets filled with purple clusters coming home. He had, however, no press; the carpenter had concocted some inadequate affair, it leaked, it responded with reluctance only to great physical force; there was nothing for it, if the grapes were not to be altogether wasted, but Poquareau's feet. These —after a fully supervised cleansing with Brown Windsor, on which the scandalized Laura insisted—finally took up their solitary jig in a gigantic tub; and it was hard on the children, who petitioned with tears to be allowed to assist, some even going so far as to scour their feet for the purpose, to be kept at bay by the terrifying escapee, who flailed them off with unintelligible abuse and a borrowed stock-whip, his feet keeping up their rigadoon the while.

When Gustave-Félicité tasted the first must from his own vines he dismissed an illusion; something was wrong, soil or climate, that could never be righted. Poquareau's feet had done their work well enough; the whole fault lay with Australia in that it was not France. He shrugged; and after an appropriate period in the seclusion of wood the wine was bottled, and drunk without relish by the family on winter evenings, mulled, with sugar and spice. It was also offered, enthusiastically, to strangers. Gustave-

Félicité himself, after that first sip at the must, the potential vintage, never touched it, but continued to drink the Madeira or claret that had come rolling out round the Horn.

This was failure. Now I shall show him triumphant in two emergencies, and have done.

V

Emergency number one concerned him through one of his few friendships. There lived at Borrigo, not far away as Australian distances go, some twenty miles, a Corsican family. (Persons whose habit it has been to think of Australia solely in terms of English convict stock must revise their imaginings. Within a thirty-mile radius of Corazon were, in addition to these Corsicans, stations owned by Germans, Dutch, and Scottish Highlanders.)

No one knew the cause of Count Rotti's emigration; but fortunately Corsica is one of those countries, like Ireland, to whose inhabitants exile comes naturally. He was, however, very evidently a personage of distinction, and though he had not the same entire contempt for public opinion in the matter of clothes as Gustave-Félicité, was still something out of the way to meet in the remote bush. He wore a cut-away bottle-green coat by day, with a stiff stock under his chin, and legs arrayed, whether he rode or walked, in long white trousers strapped under the foot. Compare this with the attire of the currency cavaliers escorting a governor of the period—"handsome-looking men in loose tunics and blouses, broad belts, tweed pantaloons strapped inside the legs with wide leathern stripes, cabbage-tree hats tied under the throat, bare necks, and with beards and ringlets in hirsute profusion." He and Gustave-Félicité recognised in each other something of the same metal, and got on as well as two men may who meet only very rarely to converse in a tongue not their own. Both were Catholics, too, and took an interest in the Church as something which had followed them from their own continent unchanged, like an old servant whose turns of phrase go on down the generations, and who will never leave the family. They both subscribed towards church expenses pretty liberally, and had their money's worth, driving in on Sundays and festivals to the town in waggonettes overflowing with children, and spending the whole day on a spiritual spree; confessions, then Mass, succeeded by lunch at the public-house and three hours' torpor; then Benediction under the full glare of the four o'clock sun, with the candles on the altar keeling over slowly in the heat. The Rotti boys and the Boissys served the priest at all these ceremonies, in red cassocks and cottas starched till they cracked like icicles. The girls sang, with more or less

success, innocent and tuneful little masses by obscure Italians, in which the Gloria and the Sanctus were always very loud, and the Creed wandered into as many moods as articles. The ladies took turns at the harmonium. There was an imposing marble tablet with cherubs mourning the memory of Count Rotti's father on the south wall. One way and another the church depended on these two families for years. Then—I suppose there must have been some trouble, perhaps a display of English statesmanship; at any rate there descended on Wollondoola a plague of Irish, not biddable and humble, though quarrelsome Irish, such as the servants were, but a set of powerful blue-jowled fellows—gombeen men, the retainers called them; not gentry, but mighty intent on soon being reckoned as such. They came as settlers, publicans, storekeepers; their relations crowded to them and hung on; all were pious; and they had unnumbered children apiece, just as well able to genuflect and shift the missal from Epistle side to Gospel as the children of the Corazon and Borrigo grandees. With astuteness they seized upon their common faith to inflict themselves socially upon the grandees, who were civil, as charity required, but no more; on which Con Toohey, who had bought out the previous licensee of the White Horse, where on Sundays both families were wont to dine, one day took the offensive in a manner difficult to disregard.

It was the custom of both gentlemen, the Count and the Marquis, to settle by cheque after Benediction for their Sunday hospitality enjoyed at the hotel. The cheque is an Australian habit, and does not necessarily imply social standing as in England, or Rothschild millions, as in France. Still the total of their payments through the year was not negligible. The two families mustered between them seventeen children, and this number to be fed, with four grown-ups—the servants brought cold meat and tea, which they were supposed to consume in the waggonettes—amounted to something over a couple of pounds a Sunday. What was the astonishment of the two noblemen to find Con Toohey repulsing their money, oozing friendliness over his bar counter on the evening of one Easter Day.

"Ah now, what's this?" said Mr. Toohey, sweeping the cheques away with a grand gesture. "There's no call to be paying down yer good money for the few fleabites of food yerselves and yer relations take——" Hills of hard, hot mutton, avalanching blancmanges, potatoes massed like boulders: these were the fleabites. "No, no. I take it unkind. What's a dinner and toothful of drink between Catholics?"

There was no way to prevent Mr. Toohey conferring this obligation. If they pressed him with their cheques he was at liberty to strike an attitude

and tear these up. For once it might pass, but both gentlemen were pretty shrewd, and suspected that next Sunday would be the same, and the Sunday after that, until the Tooheys had accumulated a debt of benevolence which would have, somehow, to be wiped off socially. Gloomily and stiffly they wrung Mr. Toohey's damp hand, and went out to their wives, who instantly pounced upon the manœuvre's significance, and were aghast.

"Never!" Laura declared. "That terrible blowsy woman—those children with their terrible accent!" She nursed the English of her own offspring as though it had been some sensitive plant. "Gustave, it can't be."

Mrs. Rotti said the same. Religion was all very well, and no doubt the Tooheys were excellent people, but manners and breeding, not piety and excellence, were the qualifications for a drawing-room. She suggested that next Sunday's food should be taken in the form of a bush-picnic after Mass; this would allow time for the matter to be thought over, and a plan of action concerted. She also suggested—having been in her time a great lady, to whom the resentment of inferiors was quite unimportant—that there was no need to continue to frequent the White Horse at all.

"Are there not in the town," asked she, "other places?"

There were; but they were kept, as the gentlemen knew, by Thomas Bannigan, cousin to the blowsy Mrs. Toohey, and by Lawrence Conor, brother-in-law to the intolerable Con. The *mot d'ordre* would have been passed. At these hostelries, which were, besides, of inferior standing and patronized by the lowest orders, the same tactics would be tried, the same benefits heaped. There seemed, both parties mused, driving home in the twilight, no alternatives other than the distasteful ones of battle or capitulation.

VI

No doubt about it, the assailants had planned well. They had that first law of the Church to help them, the obligation of attendance at Sunday Mass. A similar assault undertaken by Anglicans would have been met by the assailed parties abstaining for a while from the comforts of religion; but the unhappy Boissys and Rottis could not, under pain of mortal sin, so abstain. They had no choice between affronting the Tooheys and doing violence to their own niceness, and to affront the Tooheys meant slapping the face of the whole town, which was filled with their relatives as a nest with hornets. There was doubt and difficulty whichever way the afflicted families looked.

I have no wish to present this incident as a problem in snobbishness. It is not how I see it, and I do not believe that the fear of what other people would think, which is the snob's terror, entered into this business at all. The situation goes a little deeper, and the clue to it is Laura's exclamation concerning the children's voices. In the middle of wild country, with no railway as yet, and Sydney a five days' journey by coach, these people had made of their houses little oases of civilization. They had certain refinements in their way of living, come by with difficulty and preciously maintained; ways of speech, of eating, small civilities alien to this raw unsettled place. It was not easy to keep up a standard of manners in surroundings which made existence of any kind something of a struggle; and it needed no great prescience to foretell what the result of an incursion of Tooheys would be. Something of the bloom of that refinement, which, rightly or wrongly, these families prized, must rub off in intercourse with people of other standards. This was what the grown-ups of both families felt without being able to put it into acceptable words. The problem, thus lifted about the petty, becomes material for a full-dress argument; whether, for instance, refinement is worth preserving, or desirable at all in the wilderness; whether its effect upon character is such that it is worth defending at the risk of losing goodwill; finally, whether kind hearts and coronets can ever meet without the latter tumbling. There is something more than snobbery here.

VII

A respite, however, reached the grandees before next Sunday. The priest, riding home late at night through newly cleared ground, pitched over his horse's shoulder as it pecked at a stump, and was found with his neck broken. The grandees had been fond of the priest, but it is possible that their grief had some tinge of relief in it. Father Morgan from Bathurst left his own flock, and came out to bury his brother in Christ; the whole community stood by the grave. Gustave-Félicité attended in evening dress with medals, a cynosure, and to the irreverent a mock. (He in turn despised their attire, which, beyond a crape weeper or two, showed no sense of the occasion. "In grey—like kangaroos," was his description of these free-and-easy mourners.) A vast feast followed, offered by the White Horse, whose womenfolk had been slaving at it since dawn. The Count and the Marquis could not in decency refuse to attend, but their appetites for once might very suitably have been described in terms of fleabites and toothfuls, and they departed early, earnestly conferring until the track forked, leading to their

several homes. Before they quitted each other it was agreed that a letter should be written to the Bishop at Sydney.

They were good at intrigues, the one by nationality, the other by upbringing. Corsicans have little else to do, while there was never a Bourbon court without its mining and countermining, its scurryings up and down back-stairs. It was very evident to both what the Tooheys' next move would be. Maynooth was educating their kinsmen fast and competently, hardly an Irish family that could not boast its priest; and these enthusiastic and patriotic young men were coming out in biennial batches, agog to missionize. No doubt about it, the clan Toohey had one of their number somewhere among the shiploads, a weapon ready to their hand. They would ask him of an unsuspecting Bishop, and there would be junketings to meet "me cousin, Father Moriarty," and the hospitality debt would go on mounting skyward. So the only thing for it was a letter to his Lordship, regretting very sincerely the passing of bluff North-Country Father Fielding, and asking, very tactfully, for the appointment of someone as like him as possible. The Bishop had stayed, during his last visitation, at Corazon; he read French, and had complimented Laura upon the good taste and comfort of her house. He would understand and all would be well.

Off went the letter, and up the hearts of the magnificos. They endured with no misgivings a three weeks' silence, which seemed to them to imply that the Bishop was making his selection with care. During these weeks there was no Mass, and they had no occasion to drive into the town; they were not, therefore, aware that the coach which carried their mail also bore Con Toohey, his best clothes stowed in a carpet-bag of brightest Axminster, to Sydney. Their first warning of the march that had been stolen upon them was a prim note, wherein a small cross preceded the apostrophe, thus:—

"†Dear Sir,"

It said that his lordship was more than sorry to learn of the loss the parish had sustained, and more than glad that the late priest's services had been so truly appreciated. It added that such men were rare, and difficult indeed to replace, but that his Lordship, who was at present overlaid with work, would do his best to provide a successor "in every way acceptable." This was all very well as far as it went, but there was a sting in the tail of the letter; nothing much; nothing more than the neat signature, "Your obedient servant in J.C., Michael Joseph Quin."

It was ominous, that Irish name; it put the grandees in a stew. But the suspense did not last. One week more, and a plump figure in black was

descending from a shaggy yet raw-boned horse at the Corazon gate. (Mr. Boissy, that eccentric, possessed a gate, the only one in a land of sliprails.) One look at the plump figure was enough; its upper lip was the length of a shoe-horn, its chin and eyes were a West of Ireland blue, and when it spoke the genteel a's and i's of Maynooth lifted up and down in a West of Ireland sing-song. The Reverend James Sheehy was flesh and blood proof of the triumph of the Tooheys over grandeur and disdain.

Not that the young man himself was offensively assured. He was at the other extreme of servility and compliment, not always well-judged; as in his remark upon the eldest aunt, who cherished an interesting pallor, and the belief that she was not long for this world—"Madam Boissy, your darter's a very powerful young woman." But this humility and willingness to please were in themselves bad omens for his behaviour when he should find himself fast in the grip of his kinsmen. (For kin he was to the Tooheys, it came out with naïve pride in the first ten minutes of conversation; and the Michael Joseph Quin of the Bishop's letter was, as might have been expected, a relative too.) Seeing him so young, and so entirely ignorant of the part he was to play, Gustave-Félicité dropped a hint or two; as that he and his family were very quiet people with no great taste for company, and no great leisure to be visited.

"We are here in the wilds. All must be occupied. I myself"—a gesture of the hand that defied the priest's eye to comment upon its lack of callouses—"I myself see to the well-being of all."

They kept the little priest at Corazon that night, and passed him on to Borrigo next morning. Borrigo, taking its tone from the note of introduction which he bore, showed itself as calm and retiring as its neighbour. (Borrigo, that gave its name to the most famous of the colony's picnic race-meetings; a house whose hospitality never ceased!) It was no easy matter to key down this household, all practical jokers of repute, to whom a fledgling priest such as the Reverend James Sheehy was a gift from heaven; but it was somehow contrived, the boys bore themselves meekly, the girls forsook their rendezvous above the stables where euchre and illicit reading were indulged; and the little priest jogged away on his unkempt horse with a very warm feeling of admiration at his heart for two truly Christian families. Next Sunday, having done what they could, the grandees set off in their waggonettes for Mass.

When the sermon began, after the reading of the First Gospel, it could be plainly seen that the poor man's mind was in a twitter of indecision, divided

between what he had been told and what he had seen for himself. The text itself was an appeal:—

“ ‘When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?’ Words taken from the eighth psalm of David. My dear brethren in Jesus Christ——”

The Tooheys, Learys, Considines and Conors sat impassively listening to their nominee’s exhortation, which came to this: that in a grand new country such as Australia where every man had his chance, where nature filled the air with sweet scents and gold was for the picking up, the little strifes of men were out of harmony with God’s glorious plan. Everywhere under the canopy of heaven it was the duty of Christians to be neighbourly; but if they were not, what did it matter, anyway? “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers——” When the Reverend James finally wound up his contradictions and turned to the altar again for the Creed there were a stern eye or two among his clan. James had got his head turned. James must be screwed round again, and up to the mark, and kept there. At the end of Mass, when the congregation streamed out, awaited by itching dogs and twitching horses, there was a short colloquy:

“It is good-day, Father, and au revoir. We meet again at Benediction?”

Voice of Con Toohey, intervening: “Before then, before then, Mr. Boissy. No later than dinner-time you’ll be enconterin’ his reverence once more. Sure, you’re not forgettin’ the word I said a week or two agone? Ten children—what’s ten? If you’d a family as long as’d stretch a furlong, the Horse would be able for ye, aha! The Horse’d beat ye to it!”

“I regret—to-day we make a picnic to One-Tree Hill. Father Sheehy, my felicitations. Mr. Toohey”—a bow—“all my regrets.”

“A picnic, is it?” sourly from Mr. Toohey. “Cold meat, and warm butter, and the bull-dog ants over all. This is no day to be draggin’ women and children up hills——”

And indeed the heat was stunning. The whole landscape had paled under it; trees, grass, sky were colourless; only the dancing distances were blue. But the grandees would not enter into argument concerning their plans. Into the waggonettes, rigged up with fringed awnings of holland, they piled their gasping families; the flies rose with the first lift of the horses’ quarters, and followed, a restless escort; dogs took up position in the shade of the vehicles

for their four-mile run; and off went the grandees, leaving bitterness behind them.

There were no more invitations after that day. Next Sunday's sermon kept clear of social controversy, and moved on safer ground among the inter-relationships of the Trinity. There were greetings as usual afterwards, and wary civilities, but it did appear that the clan had taken the hint, and that tension would cease. Two Sundays later the grandees lunched at the White Horse in the ordinary way, and cheques were accepted as usual.

VIII

It was a treacherous lull. The first intimation that a tempest was preparing reached Gustave-Félicité in the form of a letter, informing him that a meeting of parishioners had decided that the present church was too small to house the congregation—this was true—and that a resolution had been passed, and the hat sent round. In short, the clan Toohey proposed to rebuild the church, and one A. MacRory was prepared to contract for it. The letter regretted that Mr. Boissy had been unable to attend the meeting, and thought that he would be glad to know the decision to which "the majority of the parishioners" had come.

Rebuild! Gustave-Félicité had seen the first stones of the present chapel laid. It was an honest little building of stone, roofed with mellow shingles, cool inside and plain, with narrow windows and an altar of cedar, uncarved. The only splendours were the vestments, and the Rotti tablet on the south wall, whose blazon was painted in bright heraldic colours, gules and or. It might have been the private chapel of some devout family; it had dignity, and freedom from the more theatrical appeals to devotion, simpering statuary and the like. Now, all this was to be changed, unless something were very speedily done.

A boy rode over with a letter to Borrigo, encountering upon the way a Borrigo lad bound for Corazon on a similar errand. Though both notes reflected an equal horror, the alarm and despondency of Count Rotti had better cause; for the parishioners in their letter to him had gone into greater detail, informing him that the south wall was the one which must come down to make room; they would thank him, therefore, to remove the tablet to his father's memory and pay for the removal together with storage pending re-erection, since every penny of church money "would be required for other expenses."

“Touch not a cat but (without) a glove,” runs the motto of some canny Scottish family. For “cat” read “Corsican,” and this motto might well have served as warning to the Irish who chose, in this petty but infuriating manner, to avenge the insult of a drawing-room closed to them. “You won’t have our wives in your house? Then take your father out of our church,” said the Irish in effect. And “Sacrilege! Insolence!” exclaimed the grandees, hastening into their boots, ordering saddle-horses and spurs to ride in and reckon with the interlopers.

There was a stormy meeting in the little priest’s parlour, he, poor man, sitting terrified with his hands in his sleeves while the powers thundered above him. A. MacRory was there, and showed his contract. An underling from the Bank affirmed that the sum of four hundred pounds stood to the priest’s credit earmarked “Church Rebuilding Fund.” No halfpenny of this sum, it was pointed out, had been subscribed by the grandees.

“We had no opportunity——” began Mr. Boissy, but was swept aside by the more impetuous Corsican.

“Opportunity, no! Nor the wish, nor the will. I do not give to a project so hasty, so trumped up!”

It was pointed out that this was no sudden emergency. Sunday after Sunday families for whom there was no room had to kneel among the headstones.

“What do I care? Let them come in time.”

It was pointed out that those persons who had put their hands in their pockets were the ones best qualified to speak; that the south was the only wall that could come down without disturbing graves; and that the resolution had been quite lawfully passed by a majority and endorsed by the priest.

“I write to the Bishop!” declared the Corsican, unyielding.

The Bishop, they replied, had already been informed of the project to enlarge the church, and had expressed his unqualified approbation of their zeal.

In short, there was no doubt as to which side had the better of the argument. The grandees had nothing to urge, no reasonable objections to raise. Their pride was pricked, but this was no adequate reason for refusing to countenance a reform long overdue. The fact that the reform was being undertaken for a sub-motive of spite did nothing to make it less necessary. How cope with the Tooheys, how make clear to the Bishop that a church augmented to annoy was a church not worth having?

The grandees stamped out. The Tooheys smiled. The little priest, uncomfortably voicing a scruple or two, was talked down, and A. MacRory told to get on with the job. A letter was concocted before the meeting broke up, a kind of Parthian arrow, to inform the Count that the work of demolition would begin in three days' time, by which date the tablet must be removed or the contractor could not be answerable for damage. Mass during the weeks while the church was under repair would be held in the Social Room of the White Horse Hotel "by kind arrangement with Connellan Toohey, Esq."

This challenge reached Borrigo next day, and for six hours the Count was unapproachable even by his dogs. Towards evening, however, he calmed down, and spent a cheerful hour or two furbishing up firearms. He slept soundly, and early next morning set out, a mounted armoury, for Corazon, where the two gentlemen talked purposefully together, grimly laughing from time to time. Of the gist of their talk the family at Corazon gathered nothing. A very small child was flipped from the dining room for asking if the Count meant to fight bushrangers with all those pistols, but there were no other questions. The looks of both gentlemen were altogether too grim for enquiry, and next day, which was Sunday, the family drove into Wollondoola, poising feet without comment on squarish obstacles which they knew to be gun-cases, and other parcels, purpose and contents unknown.

Neither Count nor Marquis returned with the waggonettes after Benediction. They offered no explanation, it was not their way, but their dependants were given to understand that business matters of some urgency required their continued presence in the town. The families, depleted by the absence of sons at school, but making double the usual noise by reason of the absence of both senior parents, went home unsuspecting that history was about to be made.

IX

Morning broke, the red morning of the Antipodes, which warns rather than delights the shepherd, and means a cloudless day. The employees of A. MacRory took their time. They could have worked in fair comfort from five to eight, and again from five to eight at night, but such a division of the day occurred to none of these workers, who brought their notions of labour from that side of the world which is right way up.

They elected, therefore, as though they had been working in their native County Limerick, to assemble their tools and set about their preparations at

eight o'clock. The task of demolition was to begin at the roof. Ladders were sloped and wedged. But the first man going up with a pick, gave a start and exclaimed upon the name of God. The barrel of a rifle was against his legs, sticking out from one of the narrow loophole-like windows on the south wall, and a voice was uttering defiance in imperfect English.

"You will go away from here," said the voice. "It is an outrage. You have no right——" Then, with sudden vivid colloquialism, "Skip, bastard, skip!"

The man obeyed, sliding down the ladder, never touching the rungs with his feet. The man on the second ladder, receiving a similar command, disobeyed, scornfully laughing. There was a crack, a light puff of smoke; the scornful one clapped one hand under his armpit, and scuttled down, cursing. Both windows remained silent, tenanted by motionless gun-barrels; and the foreman of A. MacRory, examining his subordinate's hand, through whose palm a small-calibre bullet had torn its way, put the situation clearly in the fewest possible number of words.

"Boys," said the foreman, "by Cripes, this is no building contract, but a bloody siege we've signed on for!"

It was. They tried the door; it was barred and barricaded, and threats came through the keyhole. They scanned the eastern and other windows, but always through a neat hole in the glass a gun-barrel followed them. The priest came, exhorting the defenders to remember the sanctity which they were profaning with wickedness and pride. The defenders replied that since the Blessed Sacrament and the altar relics had been removed, and as moreover any blood spilt would be shed outside, they were untroubled by conscience. The police magistrate came and reasoned. The Mayor—a Considine—threatened the reading of the Riot Act and an appeal to force. A crowd of all denominations gathered, enthralled with this unhoped-for drama, and picnicked about the building. The defenders, presumably, picnicked within, for those parcels on which their children had been too well drilled to comment contained food, a sufficient store to last for weeks. No importunities, no reasoning, availed. Night found the tablet still in place, and the church inviolate.

X

Thus the strange boomerang-curve of Gustave-Félicité's fate brought him back to the point which he had last passed through unknowing. He was three months on the way towards conscious life when the blacks of Corazon rose; but something of that siege must have reached him through the quick

blood of Bella, his mother, and he had heard the story, of course, many a time from the survivors. Still I should be surprised if, while he waited at his loophole in a suspense half-comic, half-serious, any thought of the parallel came to his mind. He was a person who saw clearly only one idea at a time. This was his strength; he did not fritter it, as nowadays is the fashion, upon half a dozen loyalties. He did not perceive anything artistically shapely about the course of his life. Yellow Mary's cathedral, now under the sea, was one place, and St. Joseph's, Wollondoola, quite another. He saw himself as Count Rotti's second, avenging an insult in a way that barbarians could comprehend, and had no qualms beyond an occasional speculation as to when the wine would give out.

XI

But just as the besiegers in the cathedral had been saved by outside disaster, so—such is the curious rhythm which some men's fortunes keep—the defenders of St. Joseph's were saved from the overwhelming which must sooner or later have come by a happening which they did not provoke and could not have foreseen. The sun had gone down, and the greater part of the crowd departed to their homes. A couple of pickets remained, with instructions to watch for any sneaking out, in which case they were to go easy, and clip the gentlemen over the head with all due care; for the town was good-humoured still in spite of the bullet through the bricklayer's hand.

The pickets therefore were dozing, wrapped in blueys against the dew, when through the peace of the night came the racket of a galloping horse. Dust, the eternal red dust of Antipodean roads, muffled it somewhat, but the hoof-beats were urgent. They stopped at the churchyard rail, and a voice shouted:—

"Master! Mister Boissy, for God's sake are you there?"

The pickets leapt up, but the new arrival shouldered them aside and lowering his mouth to the keyhole of the church door bawled again through it:

"Mister Boissy, for God's sake!"

The answer came swiftly, suspiciously:

"Who is there? What trick is this?"

"It's George, sir. Come out, for God's sake, and get a horse and ride. Billy Durgan's at Corazon!"

“God Almighty!” from the startled pickets. “D’ye hear that now? Durgan, is it? How does it come ye’re alive to squeal on him?”

“Durgan!” A pause of horror within the church. “You cowardly ape, you escape, you leave my wife and children——”

The mounting rage in Gustave-Félicité’s voice died at the answer.

“Sir, you’ve got all the guns. I got in late from the boundary, and found them there. It was the best I could do. There’s not so much as a kid’s toy pistol left in the house!”

“Get on into the town!” Thus the pickets to each other, excitedly. “You, Andy, run on, knock up Bannigan, he’s got horses. Does the Police know? I’ll go that way myself——”

There was a thudding and a crashing, as of furniture being shifted, the grinding of a huge key in the church door; Gustave-Félicité and the Count came out at a run. The former, shifting his rifle to his left hand, leapt on the sweating horse and was away down the road. No one questioned or stayed him. The Count, George, and the pickets, taking to their heels, ran doggedly, blindly, townwards, towards the police station, horses, help.

To his other contradictions, Gustave-Félicité added the power to think while acting. His father’s imperiousness and impulsiveness were modified in him by his grandmother’s practicality, that characteristic so hardly acquired among the deceits and shifts of sea-captains’ wives. Thus while he galloped, mechanically keeping to the road, his mind was busy in the coolest way with strategies. It had been so thirty years ago, galloping at his general’s command on the heights above Algiers, combining gallantry with common-sense, and avoiding the humiliation of ambushes which had befallen certain of his more dashing compeers. He mentally disposed his forces as the gaunt trees went by, starting with an appreciation of the character of Billy Durgan, as far as this could be gleaned from previous exploits. He was not one of your bushrangers of character, a Robin Hood of the New World. He had none of the imaginative courage of the Kellys. No robbing of gold-coaches, no tackling of armed escorts for Billy. He never attempted these grand coups of bushranging, realizing, perhaps, that he had no head for them. His forays were a sinister mixture of petty thieving and brutality. There was one story in particular of a servant shot dead for refusing to give up a copper signet-ring. He preyed as a rule upon outlying stations; this was the first time he had come near to civilization as represented by the township of Wollondoola, and Gustave-Félicité drew the conclusion that he and his gang were growing, not more enterprising, but more hungry; as wolves will draw

near to villages in winter. Durgan and his gang—there were two satellites only, one a black man—had probably had a hard day's riding; their bolt-hole was supposed to be somewhere in the Coonamar ranges, forty miles off. There was food and a cellar at Corazon. They would make a night of it, probably, Billy and his lieutenant, leaving the black on guard. They would sit swilling the Margaux—no, the cognac; Margaux had not sting enough for bush palates; would drink themselves sick and silly, with Laura and the children and servants tied up as like as not, all in the same room to prevent accidents; Billy keeping a drunken eye on them, with his gun on the table in front of him. Gustave-Félicité felt a violent spurt of anger, and dug his heels into the horse's heaving sides. Then the anger subsided, was thrust away to make room for calculation.

They would sit in the dining-room, that was pretty sure; it was nearest the approach to the cellar. Harry the black, with a rifle, would be stationed outside on the verandah, commanding the main way to the house, whence he could hear in the night silence the sound of pursuers' hoofs. Would they give him a bottle for company? No; Durgan had crude sense enough to know that a black with a bottle inside him was about as much use as a black with a bullet through him. He would have his drink next day when they got home with the loot.

Gustave-Félicité checked his sobbing horse at the white skeleton of a gate that barred the track to Corazon. The house was a mile and a half away yet. It was a question whether or no the sound of dust-muffled hoofs had reached that attentive ear on the verandah. He turned his face to discover the direction of the faint, hot breeze. It blew from the north-west, out of the central desert; he was to leeward of the watcher. So far, good. He hitched the horse to a young tree, climbed the fence, and began a detour which should bring him to the back of the house. His watch, consulted by moonlight, gave the hour as eleven. They had been in possession of Corazon four hours. Midnight was probably the moment of departure; they would be half-way to Coonamar by break of day. He began to walk at a good pace, keeping as far as he could in shadow. The blackfellow's sight was good for a mile or more at night.

He walked quickly, trying over plans of attack. Kill the black fellow first; but at sound of the shot, what might drunken Durgan do? Blaze off at random, perhaps into the crowd of children and servants. No, no shooting; useless. Bare hands, then. But how approach unheard a creature with wild-cat senses, alert for danger? How about entering the house by the kitchen

way, through the courtyard? The dogs, damn them, would give tongue. Well, and why not?

Gustave-Félicité went forward more lightly; he had found his plan.

XII

He reached the vine-planted slope behind the house, and slipped in and out among the shadows of the deserted men's quarters. He was careful to step lightly, and at first no sound greeted him. Then, surprisingly, wafted round from the drawing-room, came the thin gaiety of a schottische, played on the piano. He knew that the performer was his wife; she alone of the family could compass the difficulties of that particular dance, and she had a pretty facility, a kind of bird-like quality in her music that was unmistakable. He thought for a moment, hearing that accustomed tune, that George had lied, that the whole alarm had been a ruse; but almost at once the piano began to spell out a different story. The rhythm faltered, died away in a jangle of false notes, then was taken up again at speed, as a horse breaks into a canter, touched with the spur. The noisy dance went through, jerkily, to its end; ceased; was succeeded by something else, a polka or mazurka, played with the same inequality of touch and time. Gustave-Félicité, clenching his hand, could very well picture what was going on. Billy Durgan, in an armchair with a bottle near him, was giving orders:

"Come on, step lively, missus. Not often me and my mate gets the chance of a musical evenin'. Excuse our shirt-sleeves. Go on, put a bit of life in it, d'ye hear?"

But again the anger died down, to be out of calculation's way. They were in the drawing-room, whose long windows opened on to the verandah's western side. The watcher would be near those windows. He remembered the piano's fascination for occasional blacks of the neighbouring tribe that came begging to the house. It was an even chance that the watcher would be at that end of the verandah, looking in at the mysterious box that laughed and sang when a woman's fingers tickled it.

Gustave-Félicité slipped out of his shadow and presented himself to the view of old Nigger, the yard dog. Nigger, who had been moaning to the tune, broke off his lament, and began a cheerful greeting, bouncing up and down on his forepaws. His bark set other dogs off; in twenty seconds there was a small uproar, drowning the sound of the piano entirely. Gustave-Félicité, having made his calculation, acted instantly in the assumption that it was correct. He ran to the east side of the verandah, and saw, as he had

expected, the watcher drop noiselessly down off the western side, going by the shortest route to investigate the cause of the din. Gustave-Félicité crept to the window, from which light was streaming.

Laura was at the piano. Her wide shoulders—she had grown heavy in the twenty years since Sydney—shook with sobs, while her hands scuttered ceaselessly up and down the keys, jerking out those dances cheerful to the soul of Billy Durgan. The girls, white-faced, sat together on the sofa, the eldest with the youngest's head on her lap. The servants, two men with their hands tied, and three women, huddled where they could on the floor. Billy himself in an armchair beat time with the butt of his pistol on the table, at which sat his mate, methodically stowing spoons and forks away in a wallet.

Gustave-Félicité took this in at a glance, and it may be said that his first sentiment was not of indignation, but purest thankfulness that none of his household was in the line of fire. Billy Durgan's head was neatly outlined against the famous brevet of Auguste-Anne de Mortemar, which hung, framed and glazed, upon the wall, and the great seal showed like a gout of blood, just below his chin.

Instantly upon the shot there were screams; the piano stopped at a discord, and there was a thin jingle of silver falling as the second bushranger plunged for his gun. Another shot, and the second bushranger doubled up with a ludicrous expression of surprise and lay quiet. Laura, turning from the piano, gave one look at her husband, then caught up the eight-year-old youngest and ran with her from the room, holding a corner of her shawl between the child's eyes and the blood on the floor. Gustave-Félicité, remembering the watcher, wasted no time in words, but loaded his gun again and went cautiously on to the verandah. A sound from the back of the house told him what he needed to know; Harry the Black, having heard the shots, was showing discretion, making off for the ranges on his ready-saddled horse.

But against the sound of these hoofs another beat, stronger, more confused, was coming up against the wind. It grew to a commotion, with shouting, and three times the crack of a gun. Gustave-Félicité, peering out across the moonlit paddocks, saw a troop of horsemen halted; while he watched they moved, and came leathering towards him, leaving behind them a dark blot on the silvery grass and a riderless horse galloping madly away from it.

Con Toohey's was the first voice of the rescuing party to make itself heard.

“We got ’um, Mr. Boissy, we got the blackfella. Now where’s that dirty rogue, Billy?”

“Dead,” said Gustave-Félicité, grimly calm; then, changing tone, “But what’s this? You’re hurt——”

“Ah, what’s a taste of shot in the shoulder? So ye got Billy, did ye, all on yer lone? There’s men had statues put up to ’em for less. Well, well,” as they stepped through the window, and came in sight of the bodies, “here’s two of the devil’s own, surely. Let none of us be plaguin’ Almighty God for the souls of the likes of them.”

XIII

Such was the entry of Con Toohey into that drawing-room which twelve hours before had seemed remote as Paradise and as angrily guarded. His shoulder was bound up, and he was constrained, with civilities and honour, to lie upon the sofa, while the other men disposed the dead decently, and the servants, too overwrought to sleep, handed round “Poquareau,” laced with cognac, upon trays. Together in the friendliest manner Count Rotti and his persecutors sipped and spoke, as though A. MacRory and the siege had belonged to some other world. The matter of the tablet was not touched upon, but that night completed the moral victory of the defenders. It was left undisturbed, and remains to this day, a dignified reminder of times more spacious, amid St. Josephs in red, St. Anthonys in brown, and Stations of the Cross with all sacred personages arrayed like the tiger-lilies of the field. The only traces of the siege were, until twenty years ago, certain small squares of plain glass at the bottom of each window, which replaced those broken to let the gun-barrels through. Now all the windows are like story-books; and the most glaring of all, a St. Patrick in emerald green trampling snakes, is dedicated by his sorrowing descendants to the memory of Connellan Toohey, Esq.

CHAPTER VII

> Whether a Lion be also afraid of a Cock, were very easie in some places to make triall.
>
> —*Vulgar Errors.*

I

Time, what with children, and churches, and wool-clips, was passing on. Gold-rushes came and went. The Chinese labourers had purchased their ornamental coffins and returned to await, with the tranquillity of the just, that moment when they might put on the incorruption of lacquer. The six girls of the family departed in pairs to the sanctuary of a renowned convent school, where they came in for a certain amount of teasing owing to the tiny coronets with which their spoons and forks were engraved. One of the elders was discovered to have a vocation for the religious life—and in justice to the nuns it must be said that such fancies, which all girls pass through, were discouraged most purposefully by them; this aunt, however, had a soul made to the Dominican measure, and I cannot think of her in any garb other than the white habit.

Her parents attempted to distract her. There were dances, jaunts to Sydney even, and a spate of new dresses. The aunt, who was adorably pretty, smiled, and laced herself as tightly as her neighbours, and danced to whatever tune her relations chose to pipe. But there came a day when, borrowing the fare from a brother-in-law, she ran away to Christ. Her father made no sign, but regretted her, for she was almost the best-looking of the brood.

A wedding or two thinned the family down about this time. Young neighbouring squires, young visiting soldiers were eternally about the place, scorned by my father and uncles for languishing, envied for their whiskers and dress, and the assurance of their baritones as they sang duets. The Boissy boys, who had occurred in a crop towards the end of the family, were learning at King's School the casual manners and intolerance of regulation which marks the Australian born to this day, even while he wears, as they did, a uniform designed by the Duke of Wellington. They spoke—poor Laura!—in the lagging slipshod fashion which reassured their contemporaries, and guaranteed them against assault; an English accent was apt, in that school, to be driven out with pitchforks, never to return. They

could ride; they knew how to tackle a bush fire, how to do rudimentary cooking, how to muster sheep. These were things they cared for, and learnt automatically with intent to use, while the classics dropped off them with the dust of school. All four regarded reading of any kind as a toil which should be left to such cranks as enjoyed it; and beyond mathematics and football, they saw school as a meaningless tyranny with no end or purpose, which poisoned certain springs of the human mind for ever. They possessed, too, the suspicious Australian temperament, which always looks a gift horse in the mouth on principle. Nothing showed in them of either of the two western countries whence they drew their blood. They had neither English ruddiness, nor French swiftness, English tolerance nor French curiosity. They were lanky, and long-faced, and sallow, and sullen, with gleams of attractiveness and no dearth of brains. They quarrelled a good deal, between themselves, but were linked close as steel. Art was folly to them, and land a passion. The eldest, my father, Jacques-Marie, was just nineteen in the year when Bismarck juggled with the Ems telegram, and France under the spell of Empire challenged Germany to war.

II

That was a bad time for Gustave-Félicité. He had no faith in any of the Napoleons, least of all in that impassive yet theatrical adventurer, third of the name. To fight the Prussians was all very well; they were ancient enemies, and a trifle swollen-headed by reason of their victories over the Austrians and Danes; the French bayonets would lance that pride for them. But—and here came the torment—how would these bayonets be led? Who were these Marshals, MacMahon, Bazaine? And had their pinchbeck Emperor any of the eagle's luck sticking to him?

It is strange how underneath his Republicanism, Royalism, Imperialism, a Frenchman's loyalty is always to France. Here was this elderly man, forty years absent from his country, which had treated him, to say the least of it, cavalierly, stealing his property, stigmatising his name. He owed France nothing, not even the hospitality of her soil at birth, but the thought of that soil being trodden down in battle by men of another blood set his whole soul on fire. For years now he had had no communication with any of his relations; friends had died or were forgotten; deliberately he had kept aloof, not even seeing a French book, or following in the "Revue des Deux Mondes" the trend of thought. All he knew was what his Australian papers told him, and these, while they paid the war the compliment of headlines as a European event, took no great interest in the upshot. Why should they? Both countries were buyers of wool; war or no war, they would continue to

buy wool. But whether the guns sounded and the regiments swayed this side or that of the imaginary line known as a frontier was to Australians a matter of indifference altogether.

"Take the strain!" is the command given before the tug-of-war actually starts. Gustave-Félicité took with all his pride, bracing himself against the soil of his new allegiance. He became more silent, possibly more withdrawn; but noticeably he aged. It must have been pitiful to watch him during those months, while the war dwindled down from headlines to paragraphs, and soon fell away out of the news altogether. In the ironic heat of an early New South Wales summer his imagination endured the horrors of frozen cities and armies, the earth so bound with cold that it could not be opened even to make graves. From July to September he lived in thought the nightmare of suffering and betrayal, constant withdrawal checked by bloody gallant stands that make the story of the first months of the Franco-German war.

Probably he tortured himself more cruelly than there was any need for. Life seems to have gone on throughout France, save where the armies were actually operating, without any yielding to despair. Indeed the curious thing, reading the letters of the time, is to see how to the end the French were buoyed up by rumour and hope. Their minds had acquired the habit of victory, and they parted with it hardly. There were their little soldiers, the same little fellows who had trotted over all the roads of Europe, and into all the kings' palaces not so long ago, just as numerous, and wearing trousers of the authentic red; how should they not be victorious? Something would happen; France could not lose. French people talked and wrote like this while the Prussians drew round Paris.

III

Gustave-Félicité was feared by all his family, but by the sons most. They felt for him that curious antagonism which thrusts between the generations when the father's resentment at being displaced meets the young man's consciousness that the world moves on. The old prohibitions had gone as the family grew up, but the habit of awe remained; I do not believe that any one of the boys ever deliberately addressed his father unless he were spoken to first, and as the days crawled on between battle and battle these casual daily exchanges became more rare.

It was a shock then for Jack, riding home late in the cool of the night of December 1st, to discover, when he came in after putting up the horse, his father seated in his room. The old man sat with his eyes on the door waiting

for his son, and to the startled boy it seemed as if those eyes belonged to a person he did not know. They were fixed, and heavily shadowed, and the expression did not change to welcome him. Nor did his father move. He said at once, speaking deliberately, in French:

“My son, we have something of importance to decide.”

Jack answered, in his loosely-articulated English:

“Why, what’s up, Papa?”

His father frowned, but for once did not reprove slang. He had other things to say.

“We are falling back. The river will hold these fellows, not for long. Still, it may give us time to get the men together. Men, more men! That is our affair. The good God must send a leader.”

Jack, honestly bewildered, vaguely pictured a raid by blacks. But there were none within a hundred miles. What was this river?

“The army of the Loire,” said Gustave-Félicité, answering his thought, “that this personage, this Gambetta, is forming. I know nothing of him; a revolutionary, by all accounts. But if he can lead, *tant pis*, he must be followed. France has had to lean on many a queer stick in her time.”

Now Jack had his drift, but was none the less mystified. Who cared? What the hell interest was it, anyway? He said, however:

“That’s right. Look, hadn’t you better be getting off to bed? It’s pretty late.”

His father put the interruption aside with one square white hand, and said, quite sanely, but fixing him with those unusual eyes:

“You are nineteen years of age. You can use a rifle. Is it necessary for me to indicate further your duty?”

Jack stared. When he had the meaning, he laughed. It was really very funny, this notion of going off to the other side of the world to put on a pair of red pants and bolster up a set of fool Frenchmen. Why, they were on the run, had been on the run from the start. You could lay out a regiment of them with a bag of pepper. He jumped as the old man spoke, a remembered ridiculous phrase that had taken on meaning:

“Say something!”

As in the old days when these words coming in the midst of a mouthful of pudding were the signal for an entire blankness of mind, so now. What was there to say? He couldn't tell the old man what he really thought of the Frenchies. Besides—besides, it was all too senseless. What, go off now; just when he's got rid of school, and that headmaster with hair like moss and sermons filled with cricketing metaphors about Christ always playing for his side; just when he was coming into his physical strength, and felt fit enough to push a bullock over; to go off and stop a dozen bullets from a German needle-gun! And what for? What on God's earth for?

His father was speaking.

"You can be ready by to-morrow's train. There is no need to pack, you may buy in Sydney what is necessary for the voyage. There will be time before the ship sails."

Here was a definite proposition, and Jack had to stand up to it, whether his father were, as he half thought, off his head or not.

"You mean you really want me to push off to France and fight?"

"I want?" A shrug. "Does it not seem to you a matter of duty?"

Jack came out plump with his scandalized refusal.

"No. It doesn't look one bit like that to me."

His father did not move, and his voice was oddly patient.

"You do not perhaps appreciate the position. Many do not, these newspapers are useless to give strategy. But I assure you the situation is most desperate."

"I know that. I dare say it is. But—God's truth, father, it's only France!"

With those three words all sense of proportion and justice fled from Gustave-Félicité. He ceased to remember that he had brought up his children as Australians, that he had never spoken to them of his own country, that all their interests, their whole life was in the soil that had adopted them. All these things, and the speaker's own relationship to him, he forgot. He struck with all his strength at the grinning brown face, knocking it backwards for a moment, and extinguishing the grin. Then his hands were caught and held in his son's; immediately, feeling the young man's greater strength and disdaining to pit his sixty-year-old muscles against it, he became quiet.

"Hold on, father; don't do that again," said Jack's voice angrily. Gustave-Félicité answered, biting out the words with a calm so

contemptuous that the young man let him go:

"All my excuses, sir. I was in the wrong. One does not soil one's hands with a coward. You are right to remind me."

"But, Christ—listen here, father." A half turn down the room. "Listen, why the hell should I go? I'm not funking it. Put me down in front of a couple of Squareheads in the front paddock here, and I'll thrash 'em both to-morrow if they need it. I'll fight anyone if there's a reason. I don't see the sense of this idea of yours, that's all. I was born out here, I've got to live out here, haven't I? Where's the sense?"

"I do not argue with you. This is a matter of sentiment and proper feeling, not for argument."

"I don't want to argue, I want to make you see——"

"That is enough."

But at the door the old man paused and turned.

"One more chance. I cannot believe that one of my name would shelter himself. It is my last word. Will you fight?"

"No," said Jack, unhesitating. "I won't. France is nothing to me and this war's a mess and I'm bloody well not going to be bluffed into it."

He stood slouched against the chest of drawers as he spoke, and the words came out with that ugly unfinished drawl from which his mother had guarded him all his childhood. He seemed to the old soldier, whose eye for a man had been trained in quicker, more vivid countries, the very picture of degenerate youth. Gustave-Félicité looked him up and down, once, then said with the same calm:

"You are free to choose. I am master in this house. You must leave it."

"All right. Glad to. Better hump a bluey on my own than sweat my soul out running away from Germans."

But his father had got beyond the state of mind when taunts had power.

"You will go to-night. From to-night you do not come here again, nor speak to your mother and sisters. Understand; it is finished for you here."

"Right."

"You may take half an hour to pack your clothes."

"No, thanks."

And just as he was, in old breeches and a shirt, hatless, coatless, disdaining even to pick up his watch and the silver which while he talked he had emptied from his pockets to the dressing-table, Jacques-Marie swaggered out past his father.

Gustave-Félicité did not gaze after his son, nor take any further steps to make sure that he had left the place; so far he trusted the boy's pride. But in the morning, when at breakfast his wife commented:

"No Jack! That boy grows wilder every day. Regularity at meals is one of the truest marks of a gentleman——"

Gustave-Félicité interposed:

"Jack will not return."

"Gustave! Not——?"

"He is not dead. But he lacks other marks of the gentleman besides promptness. He will not return here. I forbid communication."

"But, Gustave, where's he gone?"

"I do not know."

IV

He had, in fact, and most naturally, gone to Borrigo and told the whole story there. Count Rotti was dead, but the eldest boy, Bert (Umberto), after conferring with Ben (Bentivoglio, the next in age), and deciding privately that old Boissy must be going mad, offered him a job about the place—"just till your old dad comes round," they said. Jack laughed, knowing better.

"He won't come round," said Jack.

But his presence at Borrigo, working out on the run, was a scandal, and news of it spread, together with garbled versions of the cause of his flight. His father had turned him out of the house for saying the French couldn't fight. He had been horse-whipped by his father for giving two Germans a job splitting rails. No, it was some kind of immorality, really too terrible. The rumours grew, and became more absurd as they spread wider, until old Madam Rotti was of opinion that this nonsense had gone on long enough. Besides, one of her girls showed signs of being interested in the unlucky Jack, was grown indeed quite fatuous, and of course there could be no question of anything if Jack were really, as the rumours said, cut out of his father's will. Old friends or no, that was a disaster not to be borne, and

which should not occur for want of a little energy directed in the right quarter to prevent it.

Madam Rotti had out her landau, with her coachman in livery, and donning a hat with a fly-veil very similar to those worn by her horses, set off across the fifteen miles of bush track that lay between Borrigo and Corazon. She drove, regarding the ragged gum-trees, the endless grey border of post and rail fence, with an eye that lacked its usual bird's quickness. She was busy with the future. Of course, it was difficult to marry the girls out here in the bush; one had to find Catholics, and while these abounded, unfortunately they were all of the Toohey and Bannigan class, quite insufferable in the house except to cook and hand food. Trips to Sydney were costly. No, on the whole it was better to put all one's tact into playing peacemaker to the Boissys; to patch up the quarrel if possible, and see that Jack was given an interest in the station on his twenty-first birthday. The other boys did not matter, they would be several years yet coming along to marriageableness; one could put in a word there when the time came. If the quarrel were over money, she would have her work cut out, she told herself; the French, thought Madam Rotti, fanning herself, were always so mercenary, even the best-born of them. Now, in Corsica, money mattered nothing. Nobody had any. It took its proper place. Of course, one must be practical, but that was quite another thing.

So, musing, manipulating her ridiculous parasol to protect the fringes of her shawl, which already showed signs, after only two months' wear, of fading, Madam Rotti was driven along, through the ford at Gullagalong, past a boundary rider's deserted shanty. She remembered how Mr. Boissy, summoned post-haste to this spot to soothe the last moments of an employee who had brewed and swallowed a decoction of fly-papers, had addressed the writhing suicide without sympathy, thus:

"You are a bad man! You 'ave attempted to take your life."

A stare, and a turn on the heel. "I will 'ave you appre'ended."

Dear me, if he had genuine cause for quarrel with Jack! He was implacable. There would be nothing for it but that trip to Sydney.

Resolutely, when the landau drew up at the steps of Corazon, Madam Rotti dismounted. Her eye, withdrawn from inward contemplation and restored to its powers of observing, had leisure to note that the verandah, which ran round three sides of the house, was altogether deserted. Unusual, this; for as a rule the long chairs were tenanted, sewing and books littered the clean cedar boards where the feminine part of the family, immune from

mosquitoes, carried on a perpetual out-of-door parliament, or talkery. Madam Rotti, a trifle worried lest they should all be out on some expedition and she have wasted her time, gave the bell a second savage tweak, and entered the hall through the open front door, calling, as she thumped forward on the stick she did not need:

"Madam! Louise, Sophie! Is anyone here?"

She was a woman who conducted her own life *sans* ceremony; and accordingly, as no answer came either to her tweak or her calling, she turned the handle of the first door on the right, which she knew led to the drawing-room.

"As well sit down, at any rate," thought Madam Rotti, "and be comfortable, even if they have all been struck deaf."

The room was pleasant, and deserted. Its bell, which she rang in a kind of supplementary summons, tinkled pitifully in the distant kitchen, and in vain. Madam Rotti, who had acquired a good working philosophy during her quarter-century of exile, seated herself at a frame whereon was stretched a chair seat in *petit-point*, from which one or other of the Muses looked out with starting eyes, and began to stitch. The clock under glass on the mantelpiece struck once; half-past twelve, and Madam Rotti had breakfasted at eight or a little before. She stitched on, resolving at one or thereabouts to raid the larder.

She was saved, however, from this breach of behaviour by the sound of wheels and hoofs; many wheels, many hoofs, coming up the drive. She went on to the verandah, parasol up, and beheld a cortège; the waggonette, a sulky or two, a couple of men on horses, approaching at a pace by no means brisk. She could see that in the waggonette Mrs. Boissy was holding a handkerchief to her eyes, while the girls appeared to be passing a bottle of smelling salts from hand to hand. A chill feeling overcame her. Could the old gentleman—so her upright seventy years regarded his heavy sixty-five—have gone off in a fit? He was nowhere to be seen. Yet the demeanour of the girls, which had, despite the smelling salts, some twinge of gaiety, seemed to give this conjecture the lie.

The waggonette drew up. Mrs. Boissy descended, cumbersomely, and looking up, saw her neighbour. The heavy silk skirt surged up the steps, and Laura, five foot eight, fell upon the shoulder of her neighbour, a slender five foot two, with the cry:

“My kindest friend, how did you know? How could you guess that I should need someone?”

And the large Laura wept anew. This was all that twenty-three years of marriage had done for her. The girl who attempted to pass off her bridegroom with the bribe of a bonnet, the moody girl of whom her father was afraid, could never have thought of needing a shoulder to weep on. But she had been thoroughly tamed and talked into womanliness, with the result that she could be overcome now at a few moments’ notice, and had arrived at such expertness in sensibility that tears and voluntary unconsciousness were both at her command. Marriage had made of her no more than the shadow of a woman, having been for so long obliged to admire, believe, and do things which failed to interest her; a shadow cast by her husband’s stronger personality. And now——

“But, my dear,” said Madam Rotti, patting her shoulder with the hand that still held the parasol, “I have heard nothing, I assure you. I know nothing. No, no, my pet”—as Laura attempted speech—“one of the girls shall tell me. Louise, you!”

“Papa’s gone,” said the youngest girl, thus exhorted, wide-eyed.

“Gone? Where gone?”

“Sydney, by the morning train. We’ve all spent the night in town to say good-bye. Servants and all.”

An elder sister pushed this evidence aside, and communicated the true cause with some gusto, aided by a sniff at the salts.

“Papa’s going back to France,” said she, “to fight the Germans. Only think, he’s taken his guns.”

“At his age!” wailed Laura, gaining voice. She was in an armchair by now, being fanned. “The cold will kill him. And he’s so venturesome, so impulsive. He’ll never come back——”

“And Jack?” asked Madam Rotti, still with her eye to the main chance.

“Jack’s cut off. There’s to be a manager put in, some stranger.”

“Ah!” said Madam Rotti, swiftly reversing her tactics, and compressing her plan to a single sentence—So! This means more for the younger sons, we must wait. “Your poor Jack is safe with us—or elsewhere. He is a fine worker. Such do not starve. Now, my dear friend, if I may suggest, you shall lie down, and take a little tea, and I will bathe your eyes.”

“I don’t want tea,” responded Laura, sobbing, but moving as bidden towards the door. “I couldn’t face a cup of tea.” Pause. “Perhaps a glass of Madeira——”

“Quickly, girls, a glass of Madeira for your mother. Where are the keys? Hurry.”

A girl adroitly detached the bunch from her mother’s châtelaine with an ease that betrayed long and subtle practice, and vanished into the dining-room. Her mother’s voice followed her:

“Not the good wine, darling. Papa would not wish that. The bottle that was opened for Sophie’s cold——”

Then, with a burst of grief that was genuine, for it was a realization of how badly the years of marriage had cheated her, and how little of herself was left to carry on:

“But what does it all matter? He’ll never come back.”

V

Nor did he.

While he was on the sea, wasting time in the doldrums, more time at the mercy of strong contrary winds, things were happening in France that rendered all his impatience, together with his whole impulsive departure, tragically void. The Orleans’ campaign, after a few clashes that cost men and settled nothing, failed for lack of generalship. There was Faidherbe, of course; but he was a mere junior amid that body for which the appropriate collective noun would have been a jealousy of marshals. Bourbaki ran his troops into a trap at Pontarlier, and shot himself—not dead; as ever, his conception and execution did not keep step, and the gesture ended with a flesh wound. Gambetta with his umbrella and *haut-de-forme*—what did he know of battles? Enough to muster and equip the troops somehow, to feed them, to get them into the field in numbers which at the beginning of January exceeded those of the invaders by some fifty thousand men; but, tragically, not enough to manœuvre them. Or so the marshals said, marching the levies he raised for them here and there in the snow, never combining—what, one army in the field support another? The wrong marshal might get the credit—never seeing the four hundred miles of front as a whole. The German armies swung always forward, little by little, like the movement of a scythe. Francs-tireurs harried them, civilians passively resisted, a terribly severe winter season came upon them in their trenches; they moved inevitably on, bringing up by train from Germany the food they could not

plunder, never short of shells, never for one moment in doubt of victory. The great battle of St. Quentin was the last effort of France to avert disaster; it failed, and she lay with the spine of her defences broken. On January 28th, as Gustave-Félicité was dawdling in his four-master round the seething Cape, armistice was signed.

VI

His ship arrived at Bordeaux at the beginning of March. The war was over, humiliating terms of peace were being added up into a treaty; two hundred millions in gold, and an army of occupation to be supported until they were paid. German troops were everywhere. France, like a woman in hysteria, was drumming her heels on the ground and shrieking that it was everyone else's fault. It was just the bad short period of disorder which preceded stern effort, the sort of thing to be expected of a country unaccustomed to defeat; but it shocked Gustave-Félicité, and that which disturbed him most of all was the fact that he was too late. It was the politicians' moment, now that the soldiers had failed, and politics had changed since 1830. Then there were still great names serving the state, Polignac, de Broglie, his own distant cousin, the Due de Mortemar. Now a horde of nonentities, without money to preserve them from corruption, or tradition to keep them loyal, were negotiating on behalf of France, complacently making jobs and names for themselves out of her downfall.

He went to the Ministry of War to offer his services; repeated letters procured him an interview with an indifferent young man in varnished boots, who heard him with politeness, and at the end of the recital pointed out that there was no longer a war in progress. Gustave-Félicité questioned, uncomprehending:

"Is it your opinion that the country will swallow this peace that is preparing?"

"Why not, monsieur? The country is tired of war."

"But not of dishonour?"

The young man made a helpless gesture.

"I repeat, monsieur; is the country prepared to tolerate submission to these upstarts? Prepared to be bled? Will there be no resistance made?"

"Not, at any rate," delicately replied the young man, "by the Ministry of War. We have been beaten, unfortunately, in the field. We must make what terms we can. And if I may give my advice, M. le Marquis, it would be to

suggest that fire-eating is definitely a harmful attitude at this moment, when every endeavour should be made to conciliate."

Gustave-Félicité, very white, took up his hat and gloves.

"I demand to see the Minister in person. He cannot be aware of the sentiments of his representative."

"On the contrary. The sentiments are officially recommended in a minute signed by him."

"Good God! A man of your age, tamely resigning himself and his country to servitude!"

The young man smiled.

"The word glory has been much trumpeted during the past six months; months, monsieur, during which you were on the other side of the world. We have seen where it leads."

"Am I to understand that my offer of service is refused?"

"The Minister regrets that it would be contrary to the understanding with the Prussian Government to enrol volunteers, however distinguished, during the present armistice."

And he bowed, eyeing his varnished boots with approval as he did so. The old man said, fury overcoming him:

"A War Office run by civilians! I no longer am astonished at the *débâcle* ——"

"Monsieur," said the young man, very pale, "I fought at Gravelotte. Modern war is something more than an affair of sabres and gold braid. Permit me to close this interview."

Gustave-Félicité went out with no further word, bewildered and angry, into the street. How Paris had changed in those forty years since the revolution of July! Difficult, in this city of wide boulevards, to imagine such another revolution; no tangling of troops in narrow streets, no bottle-necked alleys to delay them. It had become a town defended by amenities against attack from within, for the new broad ways made easier traffic and afforded magnificent vistas, and the citizens, after a little natural grumbling, were proud of the Napoleonic achievement. Only a few revolutionaries and a few antiquaries mourned.

Sitting in the unaltered gardens of the Tuileries to watch his countrymen pass by, he was astonished at their levity. The citizens talked of stocks and shares, of the weather, of women. German uniforms shouldered along the paths unchallenged, hardly noticed. The children stared with admiration after the handsome figure of a German officer of lancers, strolling with youthful assurance through this conquered garden. Two young men seated themselves on Gustave-Félicité's bench. He listened, still with his eyes on the officer, who had halted beside a pretty nursemaid.

"These war taxes," said one, "I shall not pay, I for one."

"They'll make you, my friend," said the other. "Thank God, I have no money, no nice little business to be bled. I am not a voter; I escape the privilege of contributing."

"I do not say that I enjoy defeat," went on the first, "but looked at without prejudice, there may be money in it for the individual. One can pay too dear for glory."

"Ah, and for brioches too!" said the other, laughing. "Confess, the siege filled your pockets nicely!"

"Naturally, food becomes dearer. People expect that. It does not do, if one is in trade, to cheat expectation."

"No matter who else one cheats!"

"Perfectly. Glory! You can't dine off it; at least, not at my restaurant."

Gustave-Félicité got up from the seat, and in his somewhat ludicrous clothes—he had held for forty years to the fashions in vogue when he quitted France—addressed the two young men. They did not rise, but sat looking up at him, their legs sprawled out, hands in pockets, now and then winking.

"Gentlemen," said Gustave-Félicité, "the tone of your talk surprises me. Do you in your hearts find that"—he indicated the lancer—"palatable?"

The two young men, having decided that this old personage must be one of those comic aristos so familiar in farces, grinned up at him, and the first, the restaurant-keeper, answered:

"His money is as good as another's."

"Money! Money," Gustave-Félicité repeated, "is that all you consider?"

"Look, monsieur," interposed the second young man, "we are young, both of us. Were we consulted about the war? No. Who will have to pay for

this war? We shall. Not the generals. Not the politicians in top-hats. We, the workers, the young men, we have to pay for it. We have nothing to say to the old men. They made the war; we fought it. Who has the best right to talk?"

"The old men——"

"You, monsieur, and others like you; no offence, no blame to you. You get something out of war, and don't risk your skin; ribbons and dignities, win or lose. But it's all at our expense; we get nothing, not so much as a thank you. When they give medals for cooking soup, or telling the truth, maybe we'll get a look in."

"Do you say your leaders are cowards?"

"I say," said the young man, sneering, "that since they never go into danger, there's no way of telling whether they are cowards or not."

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Gustave-Félicité, removing his hat, "I am glad to have your opinion of your elders. I hope to prove to you that it is unjustified."

And with that he walked away in the German officer's direction. The lieutenant was speaking to the nursemaid, while the boy in her charge fingered his sabre. The two young men, giggling and nudging each other, saw the elderly madman approach, and speak to the officer, who looked haughtily at the broad stooped figure so oddly dressed, and gave a short answer which they could not overhear. The old man then spoke to the nursemaid, and quite gently took the little boy's hands. They heard what he said to the child.

"Little boy, you must not touch that sword. It has your countrymen's blood on it."

The officer's face was difficult to read. His bearing was insolent, but he was a man of breeding; and while he knew the old man's insult to be deliberate, he had self-control not to resent it. One could not pick a quarrel with an opinionated grandfather of this description, said his expression; it was more honourable to ignore the challenge than to accept it. He therefore said nothing, but bowed stiffly, pretending not to understand, and said in German:

"It is quite safe, the child will not cut himself."

And with a final lazy glance in the direction of the nursemaid, now, in terror, hurrying away, he turned to resume his stroll. But a hand at his elbow checked him.

“Do you speak French, lieutenant?”

The officer studied the white face and burning eyes, and shook his head.

“You do not? Fortunately, there is a language which every man understands.”

And on that Gustave-Félicité struck the officer full on the mouth, as not so long ago he had struck his own son. The lieutenant swore, and carried his hand to his sword-hilt, sucking in the blood from his cut lip. A gendarme was approaching, the two young men had left their seat, and, forgetting their laughter, were running up in anticipation of some kind of immediate massacre. The lieutenant in ten seconds had hold of himself once more, and stanching the blood with his spotless glove said to his assailant in good French:

“Perhaps monsieur will favour me with his card?”

Gustave-Félicité took out his pocket-book and handed the rectangle of pasteboard without the formality of a bow. The officer, accepting it, wrinkled his brows.

“Corazon?” said he, “Wollondoola?” He pronounced it oddly. “Is this sufficient for my friends to find you, monsieur?”

Gustave-Félicité took it again, and drawing a line through the address, scribbled the name of his hotel.

“Albrecht von Zeuss,” said the officer, clicking his heels, “of the 21st Uhlans. My friends will not fail you.”

“If they will be so good as to call in the morning, between nine and twelve, my friends will receive them.”

“Au revoir, monsieur.”

“Au revoir, lieutenant.”

VIII

But as he walked away, Gustave-Félicité was wondering what the devil he should do. It was not the prospect of the fight that worried him, but the question of fighting *en règle*. Friends were necessary. A man could no more arrange his own duel with propriety than he could arrange his own marriage. And where were friends to be found? His mind ranged over the names of officers, brothers in arms of the campaign of Algiers, and of relatives not too distant who might be expected to help in an affair of honour. But how to

trace them? So helpless and forlorn was he in this vast new Paris that he even considered approaching again the young man in varnished boots, that unsoldierly ex-soldier; but a memory of his execrable principles, his acceptance of defeat at the bidding of a War Office minute, drove that possibility away. "Corazon, Wollondoola," said his card, with truth. He belonged there now, although he could never think of it as home. This Paris, changed beyond recognition, this France defeated and humbled, meant home to him, though they treated him as a stranger. It was as if the lost heir should turn up at his inherited castle, after forty years in the wilds, to find the windows broken, and the caretaker dead, and nobody in the village who remembered.

It was time to eat. He turned into the nearest restaurant, a tidy, tiny place called "Au Bonheur de Vivre." It was empty, save for two young soldiers, privates in baggy red breeches, eating soup. They looked at him, but without displaying the amusement to which he was growing accustomed; and when they spoke, though it was only some triviality, some murmur from the corridors of the Opera, the voices were of his own class. He finished his cutlet—how he would have loved to set this cook's ingenuity to work upon the prime meat that was the Australian staple!—and was served with a slice of Brie cheese, oozing fatness, cool on its platter of reeds. With the coffee that followed came decision. He got up and spoke to the two soldiers. They rose immediately, slightly bowed, and heard his first sentences with grave consideration.

"Gentlemen," said Gustave-Félicité, "you both wear uniform. Will you allow me to ask your help in a matter of honour?"

They asked him, very civilly, to be seated. They did not, like the young men upon the bench in the Tuileries, instantly conclude from his clothes that he was mad. Possibly each had a father or great-uncle just like him at home. They took cards from some inner pocket of their blue ill-fitting capotes and presented themselves; Bretons both, and gentlemen, one a cadet of a famous house.

They heard his further request in silence; at the end nodded to each other and agreed. They were on leave from their unit; the thing could be managed. They would wait next morning at his hotel for the German officer's friends. He, as the affronted person, would have choice of weapons. In case it should be pistols, would M. le Marquis care to employ the afternoon in a little practice shooting? After a long voyage the eye was apt to get a trifle out. They were at leisure, and could escort him.

To have the comfort of their society he agreed, and in a kind of saloon devoted to such displays astonished them both by his quickness with the weapon. They put him early to bed with cheerful good-byes, and promises to attend in the morning; he thanked them, and lay long awake, not from any fear of the issue of the quarrel, but plagued with memories, half-dreams. The scenes that came unbidden before his closed eyes were not French; one and all they were pictures of Australia, colourless plains, trees grey as lichen, unbelievable clouds of white birds with yellow crests halting in the front paddock on some pilgrimage north. His children moved in none of the scenes. It was the country always, brown or springing, or else tragic with forty miles of bush going up in flame. Thirty years of it! The place was in his bones. He longed for its warmth, and the great distances held in by eternally unfolding ranges. Yet he would not have given his blood, nor a snap of his fingers to defend it. Strange loyalty! that took no account of benefits received, but would give life for a thankless syllable, six letters of the alphabet; the name of France.

IX

His instructions had been explicit; neither apology, nor compromise. The two Bretons understood him, and did not trouble him with the proposal of the lieutenant's seconds that the matter should close upon a written recognition that the blow had been dealt "as the result of a *malentendu* due to a difference in language." The lieutenant's seconds, one very spick-and-span captain, one subaltern who remained voiceless throughout the interview, seemed uncomfortable about the whole affair, whether from a consideration of the disparity in age between the principals, or by reason of the moderation which their own War Office required them to show while the terms of peace were negotiating. They, with their excellent tailoring, valeting, burnishing, and physique, contrasted oddly with the Frenchmen, whose regulation coats and boots gave their figures a uniform and unsoldierly clumsiness.

The conversation lasted ten minutes, at the end of which time the lancers clicked and bent, and departed to their horses which stamped outside, attended by orderlies. The Frenchmen went upstairs, to knock on their principal's door.

Gustave-Félicité was breakfasting. Ah, the good rolls of Paris, the bad but seductive coffee of Paris! He had forgotten his Australian longings of the night before, and was back in France in spirit as in body, with his rolls before him, the din of a familiar street outside the window, and the prospect

of putting in a blow for his country before twenty-four hours were over. He waved the young men to chairs, rang for more coffee, and listened, while he contentedly spread his butter, to what they came to tell him.

It was soon told. Foils, at eight-thirty next morning, in the Bois de Boulogne. Gustave-Félicité nodded, and complimented them on their talent for negotiation. But they were a trifle crestfallen, having hoped for pistols. Foils were quite another thing, a young man's weapon; with foils it was not only a question of eye, but of quick movement and supple muscles. They looked at their principal's heavy shoulders, the deliberate way he sipped his coffee from a spoon, and had doubts, which their unfailing gravity and courtesy covered. However, they had accepted responsibility, and were in no way inclined to shirk it. They took their duties seriously; and on the fresh coffee arriving the elder of the two, with apologies but firmness, tested its strength, and added more hot milk to the cup. Coffee, he explained, was very well as a stimulant—after an affair; before, no. Might he implore M. le Marquis to forgo its solace for the rest of the day? Its effect upon the nerves was—his fluttering hands exemplified most strikingly its effect upon the nerves.

Gustave-Félicité smiled and agreed. Unsmiling, they mapped out his day. Before lunch, a little work with the foils; afterwards, tranquillity, but not alone; a café, a club, somewhere with movement; early to bed. He agreed to it all, and thought with sudden anger of the lanky uncommunicative Jack; men of this type, precise, courageous and civil, should have been his sons.

X

Next morning was misty still at half-past eight, but beyond lending a certain reluctance to the thought of standing in shirt-sleeves this was of no importance. It was not like a duel with pistols, when a thirty-foot veil of mist was enough to balk any man's aim. Perhaps, after all, thought the seconds, while before starting out they plied their man with tea—an English beverage reputed to cheer without unduly exciting—perhaps it was as well the Germans had selected foils. A bullet was a chancier thing than a prick with the point, did more damage and was less governable. The lieutenant, if he were any sort of a swordsman, would have no difficulty in satisfying honour without going to extremes.

From this it may be seen that they had no great confidence in their principal's powers, as these had been displayed the previous morning in a regimental *salle d'armes*. He had the wrist still, and the brain to conceive an

attack; half, but only half, the necessary qualities for this form of fighting. The maître had praised, and touched only when opportunities were too patent to be ignored; but to the young men afterwards, dropping his voice, he had remarked:

"Your grandfather needs a new mainspring, but the case is all right." (*Le coffre est solide.*)

The case was indeed in good condition. Gustave-Félicité had slept a reasonable time, untroubled by dreams of wide spaces, and with that queer unimaginativeness which pursued him through life, and drove him to oddities that he could not perceive were odd, he was not in the least apprehensive of the issue of his morning's quarrel. Deep in him was the thought, native to all nationalities, that by mere virtue of his Frenchness he was a match for any two foreigners. Besides, he had the supporting consciousness of making a gesture.

He looked about him as the carriage drove briskly along the new boulevards, not as his relatives had looked from tumbrils in '93, with avidity and despair, but with genuine interest and some disapproval; no tremors, no sudden stabbing thought—"It may be for the last time." The young men were impressed, and began to conceive fresh hopes, built on this steadiness. The talk was argumentative—they approved the Napoleonic town-planning—and almost gay. Then one young man turned with an exclamation, and tapped the coachman's back. They had arrived.

It was a patch of ground sheltered from questions by a grove of trees; far from paths, and in a kind of hollow, but level enough to serve the purpose of a *piste*. The Germans were there already, marching up and down, their cloaks caught close about them; the lieutenant, his seconds, and a bearded man, the doctor. Bows were exchanged; then followed a departure from formality. The captain came up to the little group of Frenchmen, and addressing himself to Gustave-Félicité in person, repeating his offer in terms which went to the farthest bounds of conciliation. Lieutenant von Zeuss was still willing to regard the blow as having been delivered under a misapprehension; an expression of regret would be accepted, if it were understood that the insult had been a personal one, and not directed at the uniform he had the honour to wear.

"Since you address your request to me, sir," Gustave-Félicité answered, "I will speak plainly. My quarrel is not with the lieutenant; he is a gentleman, I have no doubt, and knows how to conduct himself. But the

uniform he wears is a challenge and an insult to every Frenchman. Make this clear to him. I have nothing further to say."

And he began to unbutton his coat.

The captain, wearing an expression for which any southerner would have used his shoulders, a shrug translated into terms of features, went back to his countrymen to report the result of his mission. The lieutenant received the statement with a brusque nod, and began likewise to strip. He was an elegant young man, with a girlish waist, who moved in his field-boots as easily as if they had been dancing pumps. The cases of foils were opened, the blades measured. Each combatant selected his weapon, and the officer began at once to make his whistle through the air in a series of cavalry slashes. Gustave-Félicité bent his double between his hands to prove the temper, tested the point against his palm. The seconds, after treading the ground to discover any inequalities, placed their men. Light favoured neither, there was no sun to be considered, nothing to wait for.

They stood facing each other, an unlikely pair of fighters. The lieutenant had the spring and slenderness of the foil in his hand, and his face, marred by the look of insolence to which it had been trained, seemed very young. Gustave-Félicité in his shirt-sleeves looked older, his shoulders more rounded, than when the tight stock and coat held him upright. Feet together, heads turned sideways, they went through the salute, the lieutenant with a flourish, his opponent with a minimum of display, much as he was wont to make the sign of the Cross; the sketch of a symbolic movement. They lowered the hilts from their lips. The German captain, standing a few paces off, dropped his sabre with the abrupt command: "*En garde!*"

On those words, in a flash, the characters of the opposed two changed. The top-heavy old man went forward with no single warning tap of the blade in a lunge from which the younger's guard alone could not protect him; he had to leap back in no very academic manner, and even then his forearm was touching his chest as he turned the point aside. He gave another foot, seeking room; another lunge came as he backed, catching him off his balance, so that the riposte came late and was easily taken. The attack was furious and incessant, but the young man kept his head and his temper, watched grimly, and without false pride continued to give ground.

In a series of forward lunges, and brief automaton-like withdrawals, they traversed some fifteen feet of grass. The fighting had lasted three minutes already, at a pace which had allowed no respite to lungs or muscles. Both were breathless; Gustave-Félicité, unknown to himself, groaned as he drove

his point forward. The lieutenant was seeing opportunities now, as the thrusts grew wilder, leaving the heart uncovered; but he had hold of himself still, and until he could wound an arm or a shoulder, deal some scratch that would end the affair decently and without danger, he would not strike.

Four minutes, and still the attack persisted. They were nearly at the end of the *piste*, and a few yards further on the ground sloped downwards sharply to a kind of ditch. The lieutenant, his eyes fast to his opponent's blade, did not know how near he was to this drop; but the seconds saw, and Gustave-Félicité saw. Another two yards, and that steady left foot, retiring, would slip; the balance would be lost for a second, long enough to kill. Sobbing and straining he forced his body and mind to endurance, to the repeated agony of lunge and recovery. The blades slithered and flicked; back drew that left foot, six inches at a time, towards disaster. Again, again; nearer. Ah God, what——?

The seconds saw the old man recover from his lunge; stand for an instant, then turn in his opponent's direction with a kind of slow helpless motion, and fall upon the point still held on guard. It pierced his throat. Immediately doctor and seconds came running; they propped him up, and the doctor with infinite precaution drew out the point. A little gush of blood followed, not the jet that a cut artery releases; there was no other movement, and the open eyes were already blind. The doctor fingered a wrist, laid his ear to the heart, and spoke a few grave German words to the lieutenant who knelt in the dew, his opponent's head lying back upon his knee, while the blood thickly and slowly soaked his elegant breeches. The arrogance was gone from his face, leaving only a boyish trouble as he looked up at the two Frenchmen, translating the doctor's speech:

"The doctor says, a rupture of the heart, and not my sword. God be thanked, gentlemen, not my sword!"

CHAPTER VIII

> —the swiftest animal conjoined with that heavy body, implying that common moral, Festina lente; and that celerity should alwaies be contempered with cunctation.
>
> —*Vulgar Errors.*

I

The Wollondoola Penny Post, that organ which supplied the district for a radius of twenty miles with its food for thought, came out with a couple of columns, black-edged and crossed at the corners, on the occasion of Gustave-Félicité's death. "Our respected fellow townsman," the editor's eulogy ended, "whose well-known family homestead is thus plunged into mourning, was ever to the fore in charitable schemes, and with his late co-religionist Count Rotti was largely instrumental in preserving intact the old historic R.C. chapel, at one time threatened by vandals with demolition. His services to the town were only equalled by the bonhomie, to use a word culled from his native language, of his demeanour to those who had the good fortune to be numbered among his friends. Both will be missed in this good town, which prides itself that worthy citizens of no matter which nationality or faith will always find the welcome here to which their merits entitle them. The dastardly deed robs a widow and seven unmarried children of their protector and main support."

Thus the editor, a non-Catholic for once, who could not resist the dig at the Tooheys about the chapel, or the opportunity, now that Gustave-Félicité was safely dead, of hinting at intimacy with the remote grandee. Actually, they had never exchanged ten words, and the sole communication from Corazon which had reached the editorial office was a protest against the wording of an advertisement in the Personal and Lost and Found column. "I, the undersigned, hereby offer 2/- reward for the name of the scabby thief who stole my prize pansies," ran the advertisement, evidently sent in at white-heat instantly after the unhappy event; and Mr. Boissy, scandalized, had emerged from his thunderclouds to shake a threat or two at the editor, and to require from him a promise that in future the blue pencil would be more ruthlessly employed. Assurance had been given and there the matter ended. It is doubtful if the despot even knew the editor by sight.

Still, to some extent the editor was justified. His final sentence, the stock one with which every obituary notice was concluded, happened in this case to be nothing more nor less than the truth. Gustave-Félicité, ridiculously clad, inexpert in all that the colony regarded as the arts of life; a man who never drank whisky, rarely spoke, and took no pains with his inferiors, had in fact been his wife and family's main support, ruling his own domain with the sure hand of a Napoleon. All had depended upon that sombre and terrifying figure. Laura, as his departure discovered, had now no existence of her own; confronted with the ordering of a meal without her husband's taste as the standard, she was helpless as a newly-married chit of seventeen. The girls, who, what with the nuns at school and their father at home, had been like so many springs running underground, suddenly leapt into the open and became fountains, cascades, any free and merry simile that suggests itself.

Having taken their formal plunge into mourning they came out radiant six months later, leaving Laura still submerged in crape, and set about marrying in earnest. No need to cock their caps now at Catholics only. (Gustave-Félicité had been adamant on the mixed marriage question.) The vista of suitors widened, choice was free and might range, unfettered by considerations of faith or money, over the whole field of delightful detrimentals. The remaining Boissy girls, to the number of three, became in the course of one week of picnic races the most enchanting and accomplished flirts for a hundred miles round. Laura remonstrated, but her grip was flabby, a mittened grip incapable of holding the three huntresses back from their prey. Eighteen months after his death they were all married, with pomp and by bishops, to ne'er-do-weels. Their eldest brother gave them away, dressed up in ceremonial clothes, and feeling a fool.

It was the reappearance of Jacques-Marie, after a family row of vast dimensions that had surged up round him, and even eddied to the threshold of the law courts. For his father's will, drawn up by that eminent firm Geraldine and Fitzgerald of Sydney the day before he sailed for France, had been quite explicit. It divided the property, by this time worth a considerable sum, between Laura and nine of her children, with various safeguards in the way of trustees to preserve the female inheritors from being robbed in any but a legal manner; Jacques-Marie, the testator explained, having forfeited his share by conduct unbecoming a person of his antecedents. "I leave him nothing but my name, and this, if he has any respect for my wishes, he will change." That was in the original draft of the will, and the eminent firm had a day's work to get it into legal form, stripped of commas and pruned down to impersonality. They did it, though, and excluded him duly so that no

claim could lie, while retaining with some skill the sting in the sentence's tail.

"Regrettable! Regrettable!" said Mr. Geraldine, Grandfather Geraldine who threw ill-conceived dishes out of windows, and had an air of being quite willing to do the same to disrespectful sons. "Not one penny—those were your father's words to me; or rather I believe he employed the French expression, sou. Not one sou. I am merely his agent in this matter; I am obliged to see that the provisions of his will are carried out. I may be—I am—deeply grieved that any young man should be left in this position after twenty years of luxury; but I can do nothing. That will"—he tapped the table proudly—"is unassailable in any court."

"I wasn't going to fight it," Jack mumbled, "I didn't come here for that."

"Very wise," said Mr. Geraldine, nodding brusquely, "I could not have advised you in conscience to do any such thing."

But for all that he was a little disappointed; he had a certain human curiosity to know what the offence had been. Gustave-Félicité had given no details. Laura had never been told. The whole business was a mystery, probably rich with naughtiness, very tempting and thought-provoking.

"May I then," continued Mr. Geraldine, "enquire what it is that you have come for?"

"I came to say I'm not going to change my name," blurted Jack, and stood up. "And I won't get out of the country either. I've done nothing I'm ashamed of. The old man had this bee in his bonnet——"

"Yes?" said Mr. Geraldine, almost eagerly, for it looked as though the true story were coming at last; but instantly sank back into sternness. "Are you insinuating that your father at the time of making his will was not compos mentis?"

Jack looked at him stubbornly.

"I'm not saying anything against my father. His money's his own, he can do what he likes with it. I'm only saying he didn't see things straight."

"Didn't see with your eyes, I suppose, is what you mean to infer."

"No, that's right. I don't go round looking for trouble. He did. And he found it, too."

"Your father has been dead a bare three months, Mr. Boissy. It should not be necessary for me to remind you of that."

“All right, all right, I know he’s dead, and I’m sorry in a way. They’ll muck up Corazon, the way that manager’s running it.”

The manager was Mr. Geraldine’s nominee, and a relation; a young man with half a line to himself in the “Irish Landed Gentry”; not a very illuminating half-line, merely the statement to which everyone living and dead is entitled, that he had been born in a certain year. Still it was something; it set him up above the usual currency ruck; and the fact that he was related to the Geraldines removed him still further from criticism.

“What is this?” enquired Mr. Geraldine, purpling and shouting suddenly. “Are you aware, sir, that the administration of the estate is in my hands? The responsibility of advising your mother, poor lady, in her troubles? I’ll thank you to bring your accusations to a point, and then—and then, Mr. Boissy, we shall see if the law of slander holds.”

Jacques-Marie gazed uncomprehending on this turkey-cock rage, and answered, in his up-country sing-song:

“The manager’s a new chum. He can’t be expected to know. He gave a fancy price for those last two rams, and one of the chaps was telling me he reckons they’re in for a go of scab if they don’t look out. I’m not saying anything against him. I’ve never seen him. I suppose he’s got to learn.”

“You had better be careful,” said Mr. Geraldine, unappeased. “My time’s of value. If you have nothing to say beyond irreverent comments on your father, and vilification of a man unknown to you, we had better put an end to this interview.”

“All right,” Jacques-Marie agreed, moving towards the door, “I only wanted to say I’ll see you and the old man and the family in hell before I change my name.”

He said it without emphasis or theatricality, in a conversational tone; and followed it up with the question:

“How’s your daughter Sheila? She all right?”

This was a blow in the dark to her father. How had this idle and most probably immoral cub contrived ever to approach within a hundred yards of her? With something of a pang he remembered those infernal picnic races, where chaperonage was notoriously ineffectual, and where the cub had been much in evidence, winning some cup or other on some undistinguished animal. He remembered to have observed his daughter wearing a new brooch. It was a trumpery thing, and it had not occurred to him to ask where she had got it, but now in a flash he knew. It was in the form of a whip, with

the thong looped up in a kind of bow, and it had made its first appearance after her return, otherwise demure, from Borrigo. He drew breath to answer the young man.

“My daughter is in excellent health——”

“Good,” replied the young man, without noticing the tone. “You might tell her I’ll be looking in.”

This was too much.

“I shall tell her nothing of the kind. But I’ll tell you something else, my friend. My house is not open, and my daughter does not associate with anyone whom—upon whom a stigma rests.”

“I told you,” said the young man, astonished and sullen, “I’d done nothing——”

“I have your father’s word to the contrary. Am I to suppose that your father, a just man if ever there was one, would have cut you out of his will unless he had been made aware of something to your discredit?”

“Oh, hell,” responded the youth wearily, “think what you bloody well like.”

And with that left the room before further lightnings could scorch him.

II

But it was a young man in a rage, for all the weariness, who turned down Hunter Street from the offices of Geraldine and Fitzgerald. He had not said all, or indeed anything that he had intended to say; the fact was that Mr. Geraldine had infuriated him from the start by treating him as though he were a criminal, and as though he had come to cadge, so that he had begun with defiance and wound up with insult. What hurt most was the infernal clause about changing his name. By a nice irony, the same quality in Gustave-Félicité that made him cling to France, the country to which he owed nothing, kept his son’s teeth clenched in this matter of the name he bore, which he mispronounced and at whose traditions he mocked, but which for all that was part of himself.

It was an April morning; early autumn. The pleasant chill in the air cooled his temper a little, but certain facts remained in the back of his mind; as for instance that he owned exactly fifteen pounds in the world, and—a catastrophe on top of this—that he was in love. Not with the Rotti girl, who still languished, despite a good practical scolding from her mother on the

terms of the will being made public; it never occurred to him to look at her, whom he had known from long frocks to short, and down to long again. But that vision from Sydney who had driven over with the Rouncevells from Walee, had the kind of figure and face that nineteen can hang a passion on. The thought of her watching the race had made him bucket an astonished filly along to victory at long odds, to the fury of Bert Rotti, the owner, who had laid heavily against his entry, while the only begetter of the performance sat in a tent with her back turned calmly having tea.

It was the pretty custom of those country races to give jewellery as prizes, one masculine and one feminine trinket for distribution, and there were always eyes alert to see where these last would fall. As in Spain the matador's supreme compliment is a casket containing the ears of his most recent bull, a privilege scrambled and even paid for by ladies, so at Borrigo picnic meeting these brooches and bracelets were eyed and coveted. Young men declared their intentions by means of them. They saved endless embarrassment by their tender implications to those who could never have got up courage enough to say the actual words. The cowards and the undecided gave them to sisters. They were straws showing which way inclinations blew.

And Shiela Geraldine had accepted the ridiculous gold whip in the form of a brooch which the amazing and unpopular win of Prophetess (out of Crystal by Jeremiah) had earned for that animal's rider. Shiela Geraldine, with her blue eyes and black lashes, was something to dream about at nights, and to hide, to hide deep away down in his mind, not to have her named or touched or fingered lightly, even in thought. He was not aware that by being thus in love he was breaking a tradition, the safe Mortemar practice of marrying in one swoop and then disregarding. The thing had hold of him, as after-events showed, pulling him into trouble and out again, this way and that about the world for long before he got hold of her; and even after they came together she continued to matter to him in a fashion at which his father and grandfather both would have stared.

Meanwhile he was not yet twenty, a youth disinherited, with nothing to offer life in exchange for a living; with his heart set on a girl, and an insolent injunction to the goddess's father warm upon his lips. The solitary prospect which contained a gleam of satisfaction was that of seeing the Sydney Cup run that afternoon. He was to meet Bert in the bar of the principal hotel and they were driving to Randwick together, independent of the Rotti family, which, with daughters and admirers and female friends, already overflowed a couple of brakes. He had a pretty good idea that in addition to seeing the

Sydney Cup he might get a glimpse of Shiela; even, might have the joy of putting on money for her, another Australian opportunity for gallantry, and, from the feminine point of view, gold-digging. A chorus from a forgotten comic opera, *Floradora*, gives the strategy very exactly:—

> "It's tact, tact,
> Take it for a fact.
> The race is run—you cannot see
> The horse that you have backed.
> Then you say (*esspressivo*), 'What have you done?
> I said to back the horse that won!'
> You can do a lot of betting—if you've tact!"

This, however, was not the subject of Jacques-Marie Boissy's meditation as he walked down Hunter Street. He was exceedingly simple. He took social events, and most other events as they came, without prying below the surface towards uncomfortable generalities. Races, for him, partook of the order of nature, and were divided by the seasons into spring and autumn handicaps, as the farmer's year was divided into spring and autumn sowing by the same forces. That they provided the chance of girls and young men meeting was something to be grateful for, but secondary. The horse, despite fashion's attempt to steal the ground from under its feet, was still, in Australia, supreme.

III

He found Bert without difficulty in the bar of the "Southern Cross." He was not easy to miss in any gathering; for though an Australian upbringing had conferred upon him the untidy slurred speech, subduing all personality in the voice, it had not been able to vanquish his Southern partiality for flamboyancy in clothes and bearing. His costume as a racehorse owner was exciting the derision and secret envy of all other frequenters of the bar, and his bearing matched it. No one in the world could stand drinks with such superb freedom as Bert; no one spat with such accuracy into the ornamental copper spittoons, or was so ready as Bert for a row. He had the unselfconsciousness of his father's people, which the British-born can so rarely achieve, and the retiring Jack was a trifle ashamed of greeting him in his glory. He was, however, instantly hauled into the picture, dealt a noggin of champagne and advised to look more cheerful.

"What's up with you, Jacko, my lad?" demanded the ebullient Bert from his throne upon the bar counter, where he had made for himself a kind of shrine composed of empty champagne bottles and pot-plants. "Let your face

snap back into the well-known smile. You're going to win to-day. So'm I. We're all going to win to-day on Mermaid. Come on, drink up, diggers! Mermaid! And may the sharks never get at her tail!"

The rest of the attendance clamorously drank, save for one man, who to judge from his appearance had breakfasted on whisky. He was in the slow, obstinate, and quarrelsome stage of drink, when a word will rouse what two chuckers-out and a bag over the head may hardly subdue. It should be pointed out in passing that Bert and his boon companions were not in the least drunk. It was eleven o'clock only, and they had scarcely got going. But the whiskified man was definitely drunk, and said as much, with pride.

"I been in this bar," said the man, "since it's opened. I got more drink in me than any two of you chaps, so I got a right to speak. That's to say, if there's any justice. But is there? That's what I ask."

"Out with it, old cock," said Bert, while his circle paused and turned, grinning, "What's the world done to you?"

"Skiting about winning," continued the whiskified man, fixing him with an uncertain eye, "Talking about sharks like you were God Almighty. How do you know what's going to win? Just because you got a fancy tie——"

"Well, what's your tip?" said the good-natured Bert. "Come on, we're all pals here. Let's have the stable secret, and here's your very good health."

"Not much," said the whiskified man, with a cunning shake of the head. "Not me. I may be shickered, but when you talk about sharks, who might you be meaning? That's what I sh'd like to know. That's what I want cleared up."

"Have a drink," said Bert, perceiving that the argument would never get further. He held out a glass. "It's my shout."

But the whiskified man had risen, not without complications apparently caused by a bulging floor, and at the second attempt dashed the outstretched glass from his hand.

"My name's Sharkey," said he. "Now what you got to say? I pay for my drink, and I got a right to talk. You got no right to say I'm after any bloody mare. It's a lie, see? I'm going to take that fancy tie off you——"

And with a lurch, which surprisingly enough happened to be in the right direction, he pushed a heavy fist at the chin of Bert, who, taken unawares, fell crashing backwards amid a cascade of bottles into the limbo behind the bar counter. They were used to crashes in the bar of the "Southern Cross,"

and had evolved a special technique to deal with them. In less than a minute two brawny men in singlets and cauliflower ears had appeared, and with a vast impartiality removed what appeared to be the storm-centre of the row. On this occasion the storm-centre comprised a group of two—the whiskified man, blindly fighting, and Mr. Jacques-Marie Boissy, who was doing what he could to restrain him. It was unfair, but the men in singlets were not accustomed to waste time discriminating; it was their job to purge the bar, and they did it with such an enthusiastic display of force that both combatants landed sprawling on the kerb. The man so inopportunely named Sharkey lay fulminating in the gutter, then settled down, first removing from his nose, which even in his condition was offended by it, a piece of deliquescent fish. Mr. Jacques-Marie Boissy, to whom this incident came as the climax of a vile morning, rose cursing, and fumbling at his collar, which had burst from its stud. He was perfectly guiltless in the matter, as in that other for which Mr. Geraldine had lectured him; but life, in awarding stripes or stars, pays no attention whatever to whether or no these have been earned. It is not surprising, therefore, that the double *ff* of this ignominy was not by any means the climax of his day's crescendo. As he stood, red-faced, hair on end, dusty, and with his collar gaping wide, a vehicle rolled down George Street, past him, crammed with toilettes and driven by George Blakiston, wearing his hat at the angle which is the Blakiston hallmark, and would sufficiently identify one of the family encountered by chance among Eskimos. By George's side sat—Ah, no! prayed Jacques-Marie suddenly to our Lady Help of Christians, don't let it be her! But it was Shiela Geraldine after all.

She had not seen him, was looking the other way towards a shop-window. But there was that professional funny man, George, jogging her elbow, calling her to look at the spectacle of Jacques-Marie Boissy standing in the street by the side of an evident drunkard, and bearing signs of having been chucked out, at eleven o'clock in the morning, from the none-too-particular bar of the "Southern Cross" hotel.

The boy turned away, one hand holding the ends of his collar together. Whether she saw him or not he did not want to know, but trust George Blakiston to make a good story of it. God damn the world!

At this point, out came Bert with various companions to the rescue. They seized and dusted him, condoling. One rushed into a nearby hosier's and bought him a stud. They picked up the man named Sharkey, and deposited him in a handcart for the moment deserted by its custodian, full of malodorous refuse from the streets. They overwhelmed, by sheer numbers

and goodwill, the determination of Jack not to go to the races, not to tidy himself, not to live; and the end of it was that in five minutes they were most of them seated in or on a couple of dogcarts, and making good time out towards the course.

IV

Jack, with all the sensitiveness of nineteen years, would have preferred to mix with the plebs in the paddock or the Leger, to take no risk of being seen by the girl who had observed him dishevelled on the kerb; but with Bert and his companions in charge there was no hope of this. All were members, all wore enamel badges and had entrée to the stand, and Jack was helplessly swept in on the wave of their exuberance.

It was the first time he had seen the Cup run, and the thought of it, and the gaiety of the crowd, drove his miseries and injustices out of his head for a time. He could not be natural, for all that. He imagined that people were looking at him, wondering what he was doing there with the black band on his sleeve, pointing him out to each other as the Boissy boy that had come a cropper over his father's will. In fact, nobody knew him, or cared in the least about him. The laughing girls had better marks for their teasing than a lanky youth with dust-coloured hair, wearing an everyday grey suit—"like a Kangaroo."

The first race he would not bet on. He knew none of the horses, and the weights and jockeys' names told him little. Bert, of course, with an immensely knowing air, had given him a tip, and offered him a good-sized note to bet with. (No one but Bert could have done that without offence.) Jack refused it. He would bet with his own money, he said; only the one plunge, on the Cup. He went strolling away, hands in pockets, and ten minutes afterwards moodily heard the roar that justified Bert's omniscience. His selection had got home by a neck at a longish price. It was, friendship apart, a bitter consideration that Bert, who had money to burn, had probably made another couple of hundred pounds during those few ticks of the clock.

"Mr. Boissy!" said a voice behind him.

He swung about awkwardly, snatched off his hat, and stood with it in his hands. Shiela Geraldine was there with, as he instantly and blackly noted, George Blakiston at her elbow. She held out a hand, though; he dropped his hat, and took it, flushing. Had she not seen? Or didn't she care? Unaware, George answered both questions.

“Hullo, Jack, my lad! Starting early, weren’t you? Who was your pal on the pavement?”

Shiela Geraldine struck in, without a smile for this badinage:

“Mr. Jack, will you take me along to get something to eat? I’m hungry, and it’s rather cold.”

“But,” interposed the astounded George, “you just said you wouldn’t touch anything.”

“Not anything,” said Shiela, with one glance from under her perched ridiculous bonnet, “only some things.”

And she slipped a hand through the crape-bound arm. George took it well, with his family grin, and a cock of the hat and the words:

“Jack, my lad, you’ve got all the luck to-day.”

He sauntered off. Jack, in a state of exultation which overwhelmed even his shyness, even his sense of hopeless unworthiness, saw, holding the lace at her neck, the trumpery loop of the Borrigo brooch. He stopped, stammered:

“You’re wearing it——”

Shiela Geraldine did not ask what he meant. She merely nodded in the most matter-of-fact way, and answered briskly:

“Of course I am. It’s a most useful little brooch. Now, shall we ask the Rouncevells to give us something to eat?”

She was only eighteen, but grown-up to a degree that the simple Jack would probably never attain. She was pretty and delicate as a hyacinth, and he moved beside her coltishly. They made not an ill-looking pair, and she introduced him with confidence.

But the bad luck of it! Mrs. Rouncevell was a neighbour, in the Australian manner, forty miles off, of Corazon. She knew all about the trouble, that is to say, she had heard the various versions of his disgrace and accepted the most interesting, the one about knocking his old father down over some kitchen drab or other. She knew that the family had broken with him, but family ties were themselves thicker than water, and to be respected. Now here was this young fellow, with a bit of crape on his arm, true, but quite narrow, turning up at the races, and tagging after Shiela Geraldine while his mother and sisters remained in decent inky seclusion in the country.

She was uncivil to him, therefore; gently and deliberately rude. She said, with a glance at his arm:

"And how's your dear mother? But I suppose you can hardly give me any information. Poor Laura, how much she has had to bear!"

And again, a little later:

"We had been hoping to have your sister Louise with us for Race Week, but naturally it was impossible, in the circumstances. We quite understood. It wouldn't have done at all, so soon after——"

Strangely enough, so strong was the delirium of Shiela's presence, that these shafts actually went harmlessly by him. He who had, half an hour before, been alert to observe any look or tone that was an insult, was quite unaware that in Mrs. Rouncevell's phrases there was anything to resent. He just had no time for her. Shiela was accepting food from him, sending him on little errands—she felt the incivility quickly enough, and had him out of range in an instant—and his whole self was concerned with her, what she said and ate and looked and wore. His devotion was as conspicuous as to older eyes it was a trifle absurd. He was unaware of eccentricity. Her kindness had lifted him to an unselfconsciousness equal in its way to Bert's; he was intent, and remote; passionately alive, yet sensitive to one touch only. Perhaps never again in his life did he give himself to the emotion of pure happiness as for that one hour on that day.

It could not last. Mrs. Geraldine, magnificent and most dragonly, was bearing down, carrying Shiela away. The girl nodded and left him with a smiling:

"We'll meet again, Mr. Jack."

But even the dazzled Jack could read her mother's aspect, for which the word threatening was hardly adequate; mournfully he drifted out among the crowds again, put his money on Mermaid, and without elation saw her win. He had a glimpse of Bert, triumphantly slapping backs right and left; another thousand or so the race had put in Bert's pocket. He gathered his own winnings, a respectable sum, sixty pounds, and told himself not to be a mug, not to have any more bets. Hang on to the sixty! It's a start; it's a start, he kept telling himself, building castles with it, buying a colt with it cheap and winning the Melbourne Cup, spending it all on a brooch, something really worthy of her, for Shiela. It was while he was having this last dream that he suddenly saw her again. She was on the arm of a young man who by his demeanour and general faultlessness could only have been one of the

A.D.C.'s from Government House; one of those functionaries which a later flippant journal always referred to as "gent-helps." There was Shiela on the gent-help's arm, her mother near by, beaming approval, and quite evidently on guard to fend off interrupters of this very desirable stroll. But the dauntless Shiela found a smile for Jack, and with a tiny pressure on his arm brought her companion's long stiff steps to a halt. She introduced the two, formally, with a pretty beckoning gesture.

"Mr. Boissy, Captain Ponsonby mustn't go far from his duty. Will you do something for me?"

"Shiela," said Mrs. Geraldine, "we are keeping His Excellency waiting."

"Oh, we mustn't do that," answered her daughter, with a charming alacrity, "so I'll only say two words. Will you back Neck and Crop for me?"

She held out a little purse to Jack, who at first backed away from it.

"Neck and Crop!" said he, "but he's no good. He hasn't a chance——"

"Well, I don't know," she answered, demurely, "I believe he has."

And she touched, as if by accident, the gold hunting-crop that held the lace at her neck.

"Really, really!" said Mrs. Geraldine impatiently, giving her parasol an angry twirl, "Shiela, you are not to bet. How can you be so unladylike? And on your way to His Excellency's box, too!"

She swept her daughter away, with a great rustle; but the little netted purse remained in Jack Boissy's hands, and Shiela's lips, as she turned to look at him over her shoulder, formed unmistakably the words;

"Neck and Crop!"

Transported but anxious, he looked into the purse. It held five sovereigns. Did she mean him to bet with it all? Then he must win for her. Jacques-Marie went seriously about the business. He found Bert, and required his advice as to the next race.

"Jacko, my lad," said Bert, pontifically waving a cigar, "you've come to the right man. Tomahawk's the horse; can't lose. Mathematically impossible for Tomahawk to lose. Money on, but the books have to defend themselves. It's a certainty, and I'm backing it."

This seemed to imply that enough had been said; but still Jack Boissy was not sure. Money on; risk five pounds perhaps to win three; nothing

spectacular in that. He quitted Bert's prosperous aura, and went to the paddock to look the horses over.

There some eight or nine of them were being led about, temperamental as opera singers, and showing it in their various ways. Some held their noses in the air haughtily as duchesses; others swallowed the ground with fierceness and rage as of old in that conversation between Job and the Almighty. Others again danced and sidled as though, in the manner recommended by ancient books on horse-coping, their pranks had been stimulated by the administration of a live eel. Tomahawk, the favourite, was one of these latter; a nervous big horse, already, to Jack's shrewd eye, starting to sweat under his shiny coat, but the only one that looked like a winner. Eureka did not, nor Sweet Alice; nor did the unfortunate Neck and Crop, a hatrack of a brute all bones, with a narrow obstinate head. None of the contents of the netted purse should be laid for one instant on him, Jack determined, and gave his attention to the others as they went by.

Number 7 set him staring. It presented a south-east view of two immense hindquarters, such as may be seen without inconvenience by anyone guiding a plough; these sagged sideways after the true bush-fashion, but now and again a great muscle in them leapt up to dislodge a colony of flies. Those hindquarters caught Jack's eye, that eye for a horse which is born, and comes expensive to acquire. He looked at his programme. "Pickaxe, br. gelding, age 5 years, jockey McNair." The owner was Oswald Walker, who had a station on the Riverina, entered a horse for sport now and then in a profitless, larky kind of way, and ran straight.

"Old Ozzy's moke," said Bert Rotti's voice in Jack's ear. "Dug him up somewhere, part payment for a bad debt; now he's running him for a bet. That's the yarn. Have you cast your eye over Tomahawk?"

The huge horse, Ozzy's moke, had moved a step or two, presenting himself from another angle. Jack's glance went up and down his drowsing great limbs, and the more he looked the better he liked him. True, his feet were ungainly, but the bone above was big in proportion, and the hocks were let down like a greyhound's. His shoulders started back like a couple of hillsides. Quality showed in the skin, fine as a mouse's, and in the ears, drooping now but narrow and sharp. As Jack looked and reckoned up the horse, the jockey, McNair, approached, and got up; a longish, thin man, tall for a jockey, looking half asleep even in the saddle, where he balanced with the typical up-country slouch. He wore no spurs, and carried no whip. "Pickaxe, jockey McNair." It was the first appearance in print of a partnership still legendary on the Australian Turf.

Jack waited to see the horses in motion as they went down to the start. Eight of them broke from a walk with swishing tails, and fashionable curvettings. Pickaxe's rider, driving unarmed heels into his mount's ribs, roused him from lethargy and set off at a canter at the tail of the procession. One look at that reaching lazy stride, and Jack had turned, and was making for the Ring.

V

"Pickaxe to win."

"Hundreds," said the bookmaker's clerk, scribbling out the ticket. His principal took up his professional chant in a voice like a brazen cracked gong.

"—four to two, Tomahawk. I'll take, I'll take four to two Tomahawk. Three to one Sweet Alice, twelve to one Holy Michael, a hundred to one the field. One hundred to one the field!" Then with a deep gasp, *da capo*: "Four to two Tomahawk——"

Jack sauntered to the rail, his six foot two looking easily over most shoulders, and critically watched his horse. Voices about him commented:

"Tomahawk's all right, I tell yer. That's O'Leary up on 'im."

"I wouldn't give a bad 'arf dollar for his chance. Not without the rest of the field comes down with the gripes 'arf way."

"Wot yer know abart it? 'Ad it from the stable?"

"Stable's not backin' 'im, I know that much."

"Go on! That's a bloody lie. Wot'll yer bet?"

"I'm not betting."

"Wot yer come to the races for, then? 'Ealth?"

But this enquiry went unanswered, perhaps unheard in the yell which followed the drop of the flag.

The start—it was a long race, over two miles—was about a furlong down from the Ring. They came past the stand for the first time with a bay, Sweet Alice, making the pace, Tomahawk after her, and the rest of the field in a jumble of dust and colour and moving limbs behind. For a while they kept this formation; then, on the far side of the course Jack saw the mare die away, to leave the favourite and Eureka fighting for lead. Tomahawk had the best of it; by the time they had passed the three-quarter post, he was out in

front, with a couple of lengths in hand. He was a good horse, no doubt of that, and his rider was clever; he had started fifth from the rails, now he was on them, and riding all he knew for a lead that should defeat all challenge. Experts about Jack were of opinion that there was only one horse in the race. It seemed like it, even to him.

But when next they came by, it became evident that the race was nothing like over. Pickaxe, going easily, came shouldering out of the ruck into second place, and stayed there. The experts commented, surprised:

"Cripes, look at that! He'll never 'old it."

But he did hold it; not only held it, but drew away from the rest of the field, and worried O'Leary, well out in front, with the rhythm of his ponderous gallop. O'Leary had ridden, as his orders were, to give Tomahawk a lead at the start, and go on to win. Tomahawk was a good horse, but he had his temper; he resented being bustled by other horses, and he resented being chased. O'Leary, who knew him, knew too that he was doing his best; but he gave him a couple of belts for luck, and urged him for the extra ounce that was not in him. The horse spurted gamely, but he could not hold the pace; and still his jockey could hear that unshakable gallop coming up on his quarter.

They were three furlongs, no more from home. Tomahawk kept his two lengths lead, but his stride was shortening, and O'Leary knew it. Two lengths, and three furlongs to go. It should have been enough to win, with a horse of that quality. But the gallop behind was unnerving. Who the hell could that challenger be?

The Irishman turned his head swiftly for an instant, the slightest movement, the briefest shifting of balance, but enough to throw out the stride of a tiring horse. Tomahawk changed feet, and swerved out from the rails.

That left a gap. Instantly, as it showed, Pickaxe with a sideways lurch and dive was into it, his jockey sitting quiet and low. Jack's heart quickened, recognising the spurt and swerve of the stock horse meeting the charge of a scrub bull; and the crowd, of which some knew riding when they saw it, others thought they had witnessed a foul, and the greater part had money on Tomahawk, let out a sudden roar between a boo and a cheer. Two furlongs to go; and Pickaxe's head was level with the favourite's girth, and Pickaxe's rider held the vital position by the rails.

O'Leary's wooden little mouth opened to a blasphemy or two; his horsemanship had to accept the bitter knowledge that only a horse fresher than his own could have compassed that swerve. But he was up to all the tricks, and had one or two still in his red and gold sleeve. He tried to pull Tomahawk across so as to drive the brown into the rails. Pickaxe, however, had been used in his wilds to the trick of shouldering bullocks out of a spinning herd, and his ponderous shoulders dealt the favourite a buffet that for the second time broke his stride. As Tomahawk faltered, Pickaxe drew level on the inside. With that the Celt's hysterical rage, the fury that will cut off its own nose any day gladly to spite its face, came on O'Leary. He had orders to win, and the horse to do it, the race in his pocket but for this slab-sided bastard on the brown——

Jack saw the whip come up, and strike inwards, once, twice, across the brown's eyes. Pickaxe threw up his head, swerved blindly into the rails and crashed through them, falling like the side of a house, in a cloud of dust and splintered wood.

The yell that followed was an ugly thing to listen to. Half the crowd had money on Tomahawk one way or other, and every member of it knew the penalty for what O'Leary had done; disqualification, and the horse unplaced. O'Leary knew it too. He rode his finish grimly, turning with a lift of his long lip to note which of the other runners he had presented with a race. At the head of the following bunch, blown, blundering, but game, came the hatrack. "Neck and Crop wins!" Beyond the runners and the rails he could see Pickaxe already on his feet again, standing quietly, nosing his rider, who was not yet moving. Said O'Leary, pulling in his horse, to Neck and Crop's chocolate, pink cap, grinning self-consciously at the thought of himself and his mount in such distinguished company:

"The books won't go broke this race, any bloody way!"

No, the books would not. They had smiles under their binoculars as they watched the numbers go up. Five, two, eleven; Neck and Crop winner, Fargo and Thistledown second and third; outsiders all, at prices ranging from 30 to 100 to 1. Half the money on the course had been on Tomahawk, unplaced, the rest divided between Sweet Alice and a horse who had got kicked at the start and finished last, Holy Michael. No, the books would not go broke this time.

Jack Boissy, feeling a little sick, turned away from the rail. He approached the nearest bookmaker, gazing about in that idleness after a race which is the paradise of his tribe, and means an unpopular win.

“What price were you giving Neck and Crop?”

The bookie, called down thus abruptly from an Elysium of non-payment, looked at the questioner without benevolence, and answered sharply:

“Got yer ticket, haven’t yer? Price is on the ticket.”

Jack laughed without amusement.

“I didn’t back him. I was only asking.”

Benevolence returned.

“ ‘undred to one you could ’ave ’ad,” said the bookie with a smack of the lips. “That’s what I was offerin’, and no takers. No takers,” he repeated dreamily.

“Starting price?” Jack persisted.

The bookmaker nodded; then, confidentially leaning forward:

“But you don’t want to go followin’ that ’orse. I’m not after your dibs,” said the bookmaker ineffably, “or anyone’s. That ’orse’s out of place on a race-track. They ought to keep ’im in the kitchen to air the baby’s belly-bands on.”

Jack laughed unwillingly, and wandered back towards the stand, turning things over in his mind. He owed Shiela Geraldine five hundred pounds, that was the short and long of it; and he had in hand just seventy-five pounds with which to meet the debt. Borrow? Bert was the only man he knew well enough with cash to spare; just the one person it was impossible to ask. Bert would hand over the money without looking, without counting, and never ask for it again. For that very reason, no.

There was only one thing for it, to tell Shiela the truth. He winced from that cut at his vanity. Go up to her among the Excellencies, with that whiskered Captain standing by, and say straight out, “I’ve lost you five hundred pounds.” He couldn’t do it. In one of the too-fleeting moments of intuition that come to boys in love, he realized what it was that would hurt her; not the loss of the money, but the throwing aside, so carelessly, of the sentiment; that pretty gesture, touching the brooch at her neck, the little play on words which both of them understood, and no one else. He could stand the racket, find the money, steal it if need be, and pay her; what he couldn’t face was the thought of telling her he’d let the meaning of her words go by, to show off his own knowledge of horseflesh.

He shouldered his way through the crowd towards the gate. People stared at the gloomy young eccentric leaving before the last race, but he saw no one he knew. Hands in pockets, he tramped back along the road to Sydney with the sort of desolation in his soul that only the very young can know.

VI

Nine o'clock that night found him sitting in a bar down by the Quay, his problem still unsolved. There was a dance on board one of the warships lying off Garden Island, and the music came in gusts, capriciously, in between the churning of paddle-wheels, and the bumping of swing doors. The bar was full of men, cheerful on the whole, for it had been, the 3.45 apart, a punter's day. Their faces and eternally lifting elbows were reflected in enormous mirrors with which the Dago proprietor had sought to turn his customers' thoughts to food. There were, painted on the mirrors, shellfish in most appetising variety, piles of oysters, lobsters cooked to a grenadier red, crabs, winkles; all these leavened with an occasional fantasy in the way of foaming bottles, or, in a remote corner, a seductive tangle of little octopuses. But the Dago's dream had come to nothing, though the best fish in the world came into the nearby market daily, and his wife had skill in the preparation of bouillabaisse. These Australians would not take food seriously; it interfered, they seemed to think, with the business of drinking; they would not even sit to consume it, nor attempt in their cups the least variety. Angelo, after a single year's experiment, had sighed, and sold his chairs and tables, his stock of wines. He dispensed whisky now, to men who preferred to mop it up standing, and his wife was losing her hand at a fish stew. Only in one corner of his bar two small tables remained of his first joyous conception, and over these a St. Francis in plaster presided, high up on a bracket; while the most superb of all the lobsters, a kind of crustacean drum-major, beckoned below with one curved claw.

In this corner, with what was contemptuously termed a soft drink before him, sat Jacques-Marie Boissy, sullenly and soberly thinking, while about him the voices got rowdier, and someone had started an electric piano going. One brave spirit attempted to lift Mrs. Angelo over the counter to dance with him, an ambitious feat, for she was a solid though shapely fourteen stone. The attempt but not the deed confounded him. Mrs. Angelo slid down from the counter angrily wiping her skirt, and at his next drink gave the temerarious one short measure. Without warning a personage in tight check clothes, who had slipped stealthily in through the bumping doors, ascended one of the chairs, and began to preach.

“Brothers,” he implored, “will you ’earken to my message? It concerns each and every one of you here to-night——”

They spared a moment from the consumption of whisky to stare at the figure on the chair, which bore all the outward and visible signs of being a bookie. His face was the authentic royal shade, his clothes were clamorous, a horseshoe secured his tie, and across his stomach was slung a wallet.

“Gents,” this figure went on, “you all know me. What, don’t know me? I bet I’ve took money off yer many a time. Alf Hogan’s my name, and I been a sinner like yerselves, layin’ the odds on four-footed snares, and spendin’ my children’s money in ’alls of gilded sin——”

A clamour arose, and a movement started whose purpose seemed to be to demolish Mr. Hogan; but he dominated the racket with his voice, trained in that loud school, the ring, and checked the movement with an upraised hand which had all the authority of his previous calling.

“ ’ark to me, I say. I’m not ’ere to reproach. I don’t bear no whip nor yet scourge. I’m ’ere to-night, brothers all, to make restitution!”

The onslaught was arrested. The human contents of the bar gaped at this magical vision of a bookie gone off his rocker. They pressed round, but not inimically. Mr. Hogan put both hands in his wallet, as though to pull out and scatter a shower of notes and gold.

“But first, brothers, ’ow about a song of Zion?”

The response was unfavourable. Mr. Hogan sighed, and proceeded with rising fervour:

“Only a sinner, brothers. Only old Alf Hogan. But ’e comes to lay odds on the Love-race. Christ’s the favourite, brothers, Satan’s nowhere. One, there’s only one in it for the Salvation Stakes. ’Ere’s my tip, brothers, straight from the owner’s mouth! Put your shirts on Jesus Christ! Look, I got my book ready; the last book Alf Hogan’ll ever make!”

A Bible appeared from the wallet, and was brandished aloft. An exasperated and threatening chorus arose.

“What’s that you say?” Mr. Hogan appeared to lend an ear, “You don’t get me right, brothers. I’m not offer’n you money. I’m givin’ you something better’n money. I’m offerin’ golden crowns and mansions in your Father’s house more glorious than what you’ll see round Rose Bay. You can’t lose on Christ——”

A shower of tracts rose from the wallet and fluttered down; some impatient hand up-ended Mr. Hogan's chair, and the appeal was lost in a yell and a wooden sound as Mr. Hogan himself, held by many willing hands like a battering-ram, opened the swing doors with his head. When the tumult and the shouting had died, Jack Boissy perceived, seated opposite to him, his whiskified acquaintance of the "Southern Cross" bar. He was neither more nor less drunk than in the morning; he appeared to be able to balance on the tight-rope of whisky with nicety, avoiding total unconsciousness on the one hand, and entire sobriety on the other, in the most enviable way. His glaucous eye fell upon Jack, and gleamed.

"I see you," he stated, "you're the beggar that was backin' Mermaid. I been to the races too."

And he touched, with a knowing look, the bulging breast-pocket of his coat. Jack had nothing to say to him.

"Ah, you don' believe me," mourned the whiskified man. "Not good enough for you. *I* don' go round in a fancy tie. But I got my rights like anyone else, and wot I say is, my money's as good as any beggar's. Better! If I 'ad a tie like that, I'd know where to stick it——"

With this defiance he slapped down the contents of the pocket. Jack saw old envelopes, newspaper clippings, and among them notes, notes, notes; fifty pound notes, twenties, at least three hundreds. There must have been close on a thousand pounds doubled up there on the table, soaking up sops, and speckled with crumbs of tobacco. A desperate thought went through his mind, and he looked swiftly towards the door, to see if the way were clear. But men blocked it, dozens of them in clotted groups. No good; and anyway—he came back with sudden attention to what his acquaintance was saying.

"Think a lot of yerself, don't yer? But can't hold licker. Tha's wha's matter with you young coves. Chucked out for bein' disorderly—tk, tk!" The whiskified man clucked his scandal at this behaviour; then, without modulation, from the minor to a brisker key: " 'ow about a hand o' euchre?"

Jack Boissy, after a short calculation into which entered his own debt, his acquaintance's degree of drink, and the approximate sum of the notes on the table, answered with a lazy:

"Don't mind if I do."

"Tha's right," said the man, approvingly. "Not too proud to play a 'and with old Ted Sharkey. Come on, it's my shout, what's yours?"

"Soda," said Jack, briefly.

“A bloody blue-ribboner,” commented old Ted, dolefully. “Tk, tk. You think I’m an easy mark, tha’s wot it is,” he went on with an unexpected gleam of shrewdness in his glazed eyes, “you think you c’n take me down while I’m drunk. You got ter learn.”

On that ominous note he gathered his riches carefully and thrust them into seclusion; then, after a perilous tacking voyage to the bar he returned with a bottle and a new pack, which he stripped and shuffled with surprising deftness.

They cut for deal, sitting facing each other. Jack’s back was to the room; above and behind Ted Sharkey’s head the mirror leaned, its lobster’s claw upraised in pathetic parody of St. Francis’ benediction. Brother lobster took up and obscured the whole of that corner of the mirror; but in the other half Jacques-Marie saw very clearly, just opposite his own eyes, impossible to avoid, Ted Sharkey’s forearm and the hand holding five cards, whose identities were reflected, framed in a trail of painted seaweed. He caught his breath.

“Tha’s the soda,” came his adversary’s voice; and as he brought his eyes downwards, with a start: “makes yer feel that way. Never no peace with soda; always belchin’. Un’ealthy bloody stuff.”

“I’m all right,” said Jacques-Marie, taking hold of himself, and settling down squarely in his chair. He gave one steady glance into the mirror at the reflected card-faces, and said:

“Pass.”

Euchre is a game not entirely dependent on any one element; luck, skill and bluff hold about equal places; but an opponent who sees the opposing hand can call any bluff, and, while his knowledge cannot affect the fall of the cards, it lends a sureness to his finesses and confidence to his general play. Nine games give the rubber. They marked with two of the stripped cards apiece, uncovering one of the pips for each win. There was a side-bet of a sovereign on each game; on the rubber, twenty. Jack held average cards but made the most of them. Impudently he ordered up the right bower into a hand which he saw to be otherwise destitute, took it with the joker, made the last trick and flicked his marking cards to show the ninth pip.

“Double or quits!” said old Ted, detaching a careless twenty from his jumble of notes, and stowing two others in safety under the whisky bottle, “you needn’t think you got me broke. What you want’s some good ’olesome spirit. No wonder you got ’iccupses——”

The new game began, and went its way. The two supplementary twenties were shoved over, another cut, another deal, while about them voices roared with an aimless but growing potency, and the automatic piano roused from time to time uncertain shufflings and thuds. There was no single breath, now, of the violins out by Garden Island; eternally the swing doors clumped, there were jungle-sounds of laughter, and an occasional amused but protesting bellow as some of the weaker vessels were overcome by that sudden and copious sickness which lies ambushed for drinkers.

In their corner, under the patronage of St. Francis and his little brother of the sea, Jacques-Marie Boissy de Mortemar of no fixed abode and Edward Sharkey, late of Bungaroo, continued their tourney. There was now a little ridge of red along Jack's cheekbones. He had won his five hundred with fifteen to spare, and still the boozed old fool hung on, and wouldn't take his licking, but perpetually re-started the game, and lost, and boasted, and took another deal. The etiquette which hedges the winner prevented Jack from rising and escaping with his spoils. He had to give the man his chance of revenge if he wanted it. At last came a respite.

Old Ted's whisky had began to run low. He still used the bottle as paperweight for the notes he betted with, and still, by some strange provision of nature, he retained enough command of his wits to know a right from a left bower, and play with judgment, even with skill. But the whisky, cheated of its empire over his intelligence, was getting its own back on his limbs. His hands were unwieldy; they fumbled the cards, and spilt from the glass, and finally knocked the whisky bottle clean over. Old Ted gave a curse, and attempted to stand up. But the treacherous legs had, half an hour before, and without warning, changed masters, so that they now owned whisky for their lord, and not old Ted. He swore at them with the tongue that many a time had lifted a bullock-team out of trouble. Vainly he wrestled with them in spirit. His legs, for the moment, had had enough of old Ted, and they sagged beneath him, while he looked astonished and hurt at their disloyalty, and lamented his bad luck, puddling the lost dram on the floor with one rebellious foot.

" 'Sall wrong," whimpered old Ted, "I carn get on 'thout my licker. I gotta right to my licker while I c'n pay for it. You think you got me beat. Tha's where you're wrong. I c'n take on two of yer. I c'n take on ten. But I gotta 'ave my licker. I tell you, 'swife and children to me. Poor old Ted's in'cent kids—all tricklin' away——"

He broke down and wept at the thought which this pretty image of the bottled family roused in his mind, lying across the table on top of the cards,

and feebly scratching his head with one hand that happened to be under it.

It was just too much for Jack. His code differed from his grandfather's in many respects, but there may have been times, in Paris before his exile, when Auguste-Anne had torn up I.O.U.s scrawled by a card-player in his cups. Jack Boissy had learned up-country that drunks were fair game only for the pub-keeper; during that period of bliss known as knocking down the cheque, their fellows might not swindle, and must defend them while consciousness lasted. Yet here was Jack Boissy cheating a poor devil out of five hundred and fifteen pounds by the dirty trick of a mirror and the dirtier one of keeping sober. Even for his own vanity's sake he could not do it.

He stood up suddenly, with an ease that mocked the struggles of old Ted, and distracted that unfortunate from his grief for the imaginary family quite lost.

"Here," said Jack, and threw down the bundle of notes. "Next time, don't play with a looking-glass behind you."

He went towards the door without another word, or another glance at his adversary. But when his hand was actually on the slatted wood, he turned. Old Ted was slewed round on the table, looking owlishly up at the lobster in the glass, who held a minatory claw as if exhorting him to take warning; the wad of money lay on the table, and as Jack looked a hand slid over it, a skilled predatory hand, that, making no sound and courting no attention, magicked the notes away for ever from old Ted. Jack hesitated; then slapped the door open with the flat of his hand and went out. It was not part of the code to start a rough-house with professional toughs in defence of a boozer who was not a friend.

And so the money which might have bought Shiela Geraldine some lovely trifle for her neck, and established Jacques-Marie Boissy in her favour, and saved his family a year's anxiety, gave a professional pickpocket a month's high living, and then dribbled back to its original donors, the bookmakers. All this was nothing to Jack. He was on the high seas before the pickpocket had got through half his windfall, and Shiela Geraldine had a letter to cry over when the lights were out. He told the truth, and hurt them both vilely; but as things turned out no harm was done, and their final happiness was built upon a surer foundation than the discomfiture of Edward Sharkey, late of Bungaroo.

CHAPTER IX

—where the Devil, like an insolent champion, beholds with pride the spoyles and Trophies of his victory in Adam.

—*Religio Medici.*

I

The ship on which Jack Boissy left Australia was a small rusty steamer that had seen most of the world, and changed owners often. She had played nearly all the rôles in a ship's repertoire: cargo, passenger in the pilgrim traffic, troop-ship, and even—involuntarily, and owing to her pilot being drunk at the time—lightship, wedged on a Java sand bank. She had carried some curious merchandise in her day, from guns to "years of labour," the New Hebridean synonym for Kanaka slaves. And now she was tramping back again round the Horn, perhaps to Europe, perhaps no farther than Montevideo, with a cargo, presumably, since she lay low in the water, and three passengers: Mr. Jacques-Marie Boissy, a dead-beat Englishman with lungs called Dawlish, and an unknown quantity, an ageless, square, expressionless man whose name was Rudd.

Jacques-Marie had paid forty of his sixty pounds for the passage to South America. There was no special reason why he should go there except that no other boat was leaving Sydney Harbour that week; and he wanted, for all his boast to Grandfather Geraldine, to get clear of the country. He had some notion, not ill-founded, that it was impossible to lose yourself in Australia. There were too few people, and they all knew each other's business, or thought they did; and he had made a fool of himself, and lost the chance of Sheila. He was better out of the way of the whole crowd, he thought, and South America was a place where they ran cattle and sheep, and there were mines; a place not too different from Australia, that yet promised a chance.

He paid his forty pounds, and celebrated his twentieth birthday at sea, in the cabin of the S.S. *Alberta* (named for the Prince Consort, which has its ironic aspect when some of her rôles are considered) and in the company of Messrs. Rudd and Dawlish, his fellow-passengers. He got on with them well enough, though Dawlish wrote poetry, and caused acute discomfort by reciting it aloud on starry nights when he was tanked up. Rudd was another proposition. He had little to say, which was in his favour, but he kept to

himself, which was less good. And he had a way of looking, a stare with the hint of a smile behind it, that made Jack feel disagreeably immature when it fixed him. There was no clue to his origin, either in voice or clothes, or predilections. He was just Mr. Rudd with a poker face, no Christian name, no yarns to swap, and an unfailing appetite.

He puzzled Jack Boissy, who let him alone. But the Englishman he exasperated. Dawlish, nervously excitable, dancing marionette-like on the invisible strings of his disease, was for ever talking at him, and baiting him, and getting no change. After a fortnight at sea, meals became monologues, exhibitions of offensiveness, with Dawlish scampering and waving red rags of temper, Rudd eating and answering only with that stare. This would be the kind of thing:

"My Christ, what do they make this soup of? Slop-rags?" A pause; then, to Rudd, "It don't seem to turn your stomach." Rudd would tilt his plate, and finish his soup. "Used to it, I dare say. They make soup out of offal where you come from, don't they? Silence gives consent. I thought so. Use offal a lot where you come from, don't they? Export it, eh? Funny to pay its carriage at passenger rates. Doesn't that look funny to you, Boissy? They send tripes First Saloon where Rudd comes from. Extravagant beggars, aren't they, over there? Oh, hell, have you both swallowed your tongues?"

And Jack Boissy would mumble a "Chuck it!" and Mr. Rudd would send his glance about the table imperturbably and help himself languidly to bread, with which to wipe up and eat the last dregs of the offending soup.

There were no books on board, except a copy of Sailing Regulations, a Common Prayer belonging to the captain and used only for burials at sea, and the unreadable volumes of poetry from which Dawlish was always spouting. There was nothing to do, except sit on deck of a morning with a rifle and pot sea-birds when these were encountered. The captain was a personage without sociability. The mates were unapproachable, the one on account of extreme religion which caused any conversation with him to end in a burst of Old Testament metaphors, the other by reason of his post of dog's-body which left him no leisure at all. There was no distraction for the restless mind of Dawlish save this eternal questioning of his enigma. He was sick, and knew it, and hated his sickness. Mr. Rudd's inalterable appetite and health were a perpetual challenge and sore.

"I'm going to find out about that fellow Rudd," he told Jack time and again, but beyond questioning the captain, who informed him that his nose was too long, and prodding with barbed comments at meals, he never

seemed to get any further. This aimless sparring and irritation persisted through the three weeks while they were out of sight of land.

Then, one evening, the night before they were due to arrive in Valparaiso Harbour, there was a change in the attitude of both men. Dawlish was as malicious, but less angry. He taunted with the satisfied spitefulness of the cat with a mouse safe between her paws. And the impassivity of Rudd was like a curtain drawn over secret activity. Tired as he was Jack Boissy observed it, and growled in his heart that he'd be glad to be quit of this ship and the endless silly scrapping that went on. Scrapping in a more definite sense interested him; he had that afternoon taken on a forecastle hand, a Swede of about his own weight, who had knocked him sideways after a very respectable amount of give and take. He bore the Swede no ill-will, even while a split lip made eating a delicate business. He could make the best of physical discomfort. It was the infernal atmosphere that Dawlish and his suspicions created which he hated, and was aware of, as an animal or a child knows when things are not right in the house. To come in to it after a grand afternoon of sun, and a half-hour's set-to in the cool, made him sick. He glowered, and ate in a hurry, eager to be outside again, away from them, while Dawlish flicked at the impassive enemy.

"Going ashore to-morrow, Mr. Rudd? You ought to. They say this is a dead-and-alive town; wants waking up. Don't do the señoritas out of a treat; they like a change sometimes. You'd be as good as a funeral to 'em."

And again:

"Well, I'm going ashore. I'll tell the news. They'll send a brass band to meet you, I shouldn't wonder. And a brief note from the President asking you as a favour to sleep with his wife. Well, we can't complain. We've had three weeks of your society, and I'm sure we're both better men for it. If you should decide to stay on shore and not rejoin the ship we'd keep our tears to ourselves."

Then to Jack, in a droll recitative:

"—While he lies like a soldier taking his rest,
With the Dago girls around him."

Jack answered, his temper coming to the surface:

"Chuck it, Dawlish! Have you got to be funny?"

"Oh, no," Dawlish assured him, "I don't get paid for it. It amuses me, that's all, to try and get a rise out of Mr. Rudd. Mr. Ruddy Rudd. What a name, what a hell of a soubriquet! Wouldn't think he was one of these

romantic coves, would you? Not with a name like that. Not to look at either. Doesn't make you think of treasure, does it? Makes me think of tripes—look out, blast you, what d'you think you're doing?"

For the large man had put out a hand across the narrow table and taken firm hold of Dawlish's wrist, which he twisted in a knowledgeable way so as to cause sharp discomfort. The Englishman rose, on his first astonished yelp of pain, and Mr. Rudd rose too, looming, to say with no change of expression:

"You'd better sit quiet. I'm going to have it off you."

"Have what? Boissy, give a shout, get someone, the beggar's gone mad ——"

"Sit still," returned Mr. Rudd, coming round the table-end.

Dawlish gave a loud scream:

"Help! There's murder——"

At that Mr. Rudd drew back his free arm, and a short jab with all his side muscles behind it caught Dawlish on the jaw. His head went sideways with a click of the teeth and lolled. Jack Boissy started forward.

"Keep your distance," said this unfamiliar Mr. Rudd grimly. "He's got something of mine, and I want it back. He's not hurt to speak of. You keep out of this."

Jack halted, and stood, in two minds whether to go and leave the pair to settle their own difference; then the pitiful senseless face made its appeal, not vainly. He dropped his hands, and watched, with some notion of seeing fair play. Mr. Rudd made no objection. He was going through the other man's pockets with the same slow method that he went through his meals, missing nothing, taking everything in order. A little pile of objects grew on the table, whose plates and cutlery had been pushed aside; a few coins, a small edition of "Don Juan"; a mother-of-pearl penknife, a pious medal. Papers were many and scrupulously searched. Drafts for sonnets, half-scribbled letters, one or two unpleasant drawings, dubious advertisements clipped from newspapers; none of these satisfied Mr. Rudd, whose methodical hands unfolded and put away every morsel of paper with equal care.

It became evident at last that there was nothing in the pockets. Rudd stood away from the unconscious figure; released from his hold it toppled over sideways to the floor with a horrible abandon that turned Jack Boissy

white, and even seemed to disturb the searcher a little. He knelt, and put a thumb to Dawlish's eyelid, rolling it up; then, with a quick forward movement, brought his ear down to the open mouth. For a moment he remained thus, quite motionless, and Jack too was still. A tinkle came from the knives and spoons that lay heaped together as the ship rolled down and up in a trough of a wave. Mr. Rudd's voice said briefly:

"Give me the vinegar."

There was a cruet on the table. Jack picked out the vinegar bottle, and came towards the group on the floor. Rudd took it from him, lifted the head of the tumbled Dawlish, and poured half the contents into his open mouth. There was no attempt at a cough or a swallow. The liquid trickled from the corners of the lips, and ran out in a little stream as, abruptly, he laid the head down. Rudd rose from his knees, and in his methodical way restored the bottle to its place in the cruet. He said nothing, and betrayed no concern; only said, as if musing:

"Now, what the hell can the little swine have done with it?"

Jack, aged twenty, could not take it so calmly. He stammered:

"But he's dead, isn't he?, Dawlish?"

"Oh, he's dead," Mr. Rudd agreed, as though this were but one more aggravation of his offences. "Well, I'll have to look through his stuff."

And he made for the door. But Jack Boissy was before him, feeling sick and horribly puzzled, unsure of himself yet knowing that something must be done.

"No, you don't," said Jacques-Marie. "You're staying here till somebody comes."

Mr. Rudd regarded him with that juvenating stare, saying nothing.

"I'm sending for the captain," went on Jacques-Marie; his hand reached sideways for the steward's bell; "and you're sitting here till he comes."

"What's the idea?" enquired Mr. Rudd, with a suspicion of mockery.

"That's what I'm trying to get at. Looks to me like murder."

"You think so, do you?" Mr. Rudd laughed, without amenity. "Well, send for your captain."

And he seated himself in the chair from which Dawlish's body had fallen.

The steward came with his tray, bustling in as if this were the usual nightly summons to clear the table. He saw the doubled-up figure by Rudd's feet, and halted, not much put about, for it was known that Dawlish drank, and the face was turned from him. It was Rudd, and not Jacques-Marie, who gave the order:

"Ask the captain to come here as soon as convenient."

Jack, angry at the fellow's calm, cut across this deliberate speech with:

"Tell him there's a man been killed."

The steward cast one glance at the body, and one at the unchanging face of Mr. Rudd; hesitated, and fled. Rudd crossed his legs, and leaning over the table, cut himself a slice from the Dutch cheese, which he ate slowly and with enjoyment, while Jack Boissy, cast for the sympathetic part but with no idea how to make the most of it, and feeling inexplicably a fool, stood by the door with his hands hanging at his sides.

It was a full five minutes until the captain came, minutes which Mr. Rudd passed at his ease, eating, and after the slice was finished, preparing with loving care a cigar. It was Jack who was nervous; Jack who had to keep a hand on himself to stick to his programme, not to do a bolt and leave Rudd and the captain to settle the whole ominous business between them. The coward in him, that most plausible denizen of every soul, was putting the facts in a very common-sense way.

"You didn't like Dawlish," said the coward, like a reasonable uncle, "now did you? He asked for trouble. He's been at Rudd the whole voyage. You can't blame Rudd. Besides, it was an accident, you know that. Rudd didn't mean to lay him out, he was only after something that had been stolen. You keep out of this. It's none of your business, anyway. Let Rudd settle it. He did it, it's his look-out."

But to this adviser something in his blood was answering, obstinately and unreasoning:

"Murder! That's what it was, and I saw it happen, and I've got to see it through."

But when at last the captain came, it was Mr. Rudd with a gesture of his cigar, who took the floor.

"Been a little accident here, captain," said he, almost affably. "Poor Dawlish. I've done what I could, but the poor chap's gone."

Jack clamoured, his voice sounding very high:

“It was murder, Captain Jensen. He was murdered sitting in that chair ——”

“Now, now,” said Rudd soothingly, as to a child; then to the captain, bending to finger the leaden wrist, “Don’t listen to him, captain. He don’t know what he’s talking about.”

“I know murder when I see it.”

“That’s all right,” Mr. Rudd soothed, “you’ve seen a hell of a lot, we know. What you want to do now is shut your mouth.”

“He’s done for,” said the captain, heavily rising, and gazed at Rudd as though waiting his cue. These two large and middle-aged men might have been alone in the cabin for all the notice they took of Jack, with his flushed cheekbones and the Australian lethargy gone. His nonentity enraged him. He caught the captain’s arm roughly.

“You’re the law on this ship, aren’t you? Here’s a man killed sitting at your table. What are you going to do about it?”

“He’s going to forget it, if you give him the chance,” said Mr. Rudd. “These things will happen, captain. A couple of youngsters skylarking. There won’t be any questions if we all keep our traps shut.”

“Are you saying,” Jack Boissy choked, “I did it?”

“I’m saying it was an accident,” returned Mr. Rudd steadily, “and Captain Jensen’s taking my word for it. You won’t find trouble if you don’t go looking for it.”

“He did it!” Jack’s voice insisted, raging, but dwindling. “Took a swing at Dawlish, and broke his neck, not ten minutes ago, and I’m witness to it in any court you like——”

It was their silence that made him pause, and which gave him suddenly the ugly knowledge that they were in league. Only for an instant, yet he had in that instant a vast acreage of time in which to survey his own position if they were in league, and to hear the coward’s voice sounding its warning. But he went on, defying them:

“You can’t shut my mouth. I’ll give information when I get ashore to-morrow. You needn’t think you’ll get away with it. What sort of ship is this, anyway? Who’s the owner? He’ll have something to say.”

At that, for the first time in their acquaintance, Rudd laughed.

“I’m the owner,” said he.

The two large men stood looking at Jack Boissy, and despite their stillness, he had a very vivid sense of danger. He carried no weapon, there was no room for fists. He was near the door and he sprang for it, keeping an eye on the two quiet figures. They made no attempt to stop him. They merely watched, exchanging a smile.

And there was Jack Boissy in the narrow lobby, bolting down it like a rabbit, tearing open the door, running his hardest down the gently pitching deck towards his cabin, which lay aft. He reached it and stood, while the consciousness of his own youngness and folly and futility flowed over him. No one was following. No one had threatened him. What the hell was he doing, running away?

He dropped on to his bunk, and sat with his hands dangling between his knees, trying to think things out. A man was dead. Rudd had killed him. Rudd owned the ship and the captain, and the whole caboodle. It was Rudd's word against his, if he made trouble.

At that, in a kind of panic, he was up, looking about the tiny room for means of safety, something to barricade or wedge the door; a weapon. But there was nothing movable, except his own trunk, and nothing that resembled a weapon but his stock-whip with its twelve-foot thong; the cabin space was about ten foot by seven. It occurred to him that Dawlish might have possessed some kind of gun; then he remembered that Rudd would probably be coming to search his cabin. He had spoken of looking for his lost valuable—what could it be? Papers, evidently—among the dead man's things. All the same, Jack shifted his trunk from the door and undid the bolt, and listened. There were three cabins in the deck-house aft; Dawlish's, his own, and an airless cubby-hole used by the steward for his stores. Rudd slept forrard with the officers, a fact which had had no significance till now.

There was no sound, save the creaking and straining of the ship as she pitched forward through the long gentle waves perpetually rolling to meet her. Jacques-Marie stepped into the alley-way, and taking the lamp from its gimbal went towards the dead man's door.

It was unlocked; there were no such refinements as keys on the ramshackle *Alberta*. He looked in upon sluttish untidiness, and wrinkled his nose at the sourish stuffy smell, perceiving at once that there were only two places for exploration, a portmanteau under the bunk and the usual locker. Both gaped, displaying dirty wrinkled shirts and handkerchiefs, some of these latter splotched with blood. He hated to put his hands among the things, but the devil was driving, and pulling out the portmanteau he started

to fossick. His fingers touched leather more than once, but leather of the wrong shape to hold firearms; there was a good pair of field-glasses, and an oval case that might have held a daguerreotype, and apart from clothes that was all. The locker was as unhelpful. He had a notion that Dawlish might have kept his gun under his pillow, and searched there; nothing. It was impossible that a weakling of that sort should take himself to foreign parts without any means of protection. He began to look wildly, in silly places, on the floor under the bunk, beneath the mattress——

There at last his fingers closed on something. He pulled out a pocket book, or rather a wallet, stuffed and bulging with papers. No use to him! And he was about to thrust it back into its hiding place when the idea came that these were what Dawlish, in his spiteful folly, had stolen from Rudd. He could imagine pretty well when it had happened; just at the time when the boxing was going on, when the whole ship's company, Rudd included, were gathered to enjoy the cool and watch the sport. Dawlish could have gone unseen then to the officer's quarters, and played whatever silly trick he liked, the dirty little bastard! Jack felt a sudden rage against him, for monkeying with a man like Rudd, and getting the perfectly innocent Jack into the hell of a mess, where he didn't know what to do, or how he stood. Anyway, if the wallet belonged to Rudd it had better go back to him. As for Dawlish, where could you find a bloodier fool than the man who pokes his nose into danger with no means of taking care of himself? Tongue like a woman's and muscles to match, and not even a gun! Looked at all round, there was excuse and to spare for Rudd.

He put the wallet in his pocket, took up the lamp again, and went out, not troubling to try to clear up the mess he had made. One bell struck, and was echoed forrard. Half-past eight, and no sign of the avenging Rudd, and no unusual sound; the hiss of parting sea along the plates, and in the fo'c'sle an asthmatic concertina wailing out music-hall tunes at the pace of a hymn. These he heard in the alley-way as he stood replacing the lamp, the noises of every night; nothing sinister, no departure from routine on account of the sudden and violent death of a man. He went back into his own cabin, this time not bolting the door.

Nothing was happening as it should. Events ought to have come fast after that murderous blow; instead, there reigned a tranquillity as of Sunday afternoons in Wollondoola, and he, who had had nothing to do with the incident, was the only one disturbed. He could not see his way. To sit barricaded in his cabin till the ship reached port was a tame solution. To go back and confront Rudd and the captain after his dramatic exit, fleeing like

the wicked where no man pursued—that, too, seemed an anticlimax. Bewildered, he began to doubt if that scene at the table had ever happened at all.

But the wallet was there, heavy in his pocket, and it might be as well, he decided, to find out whom it belonged to. It had a lock, but was unfastened; it was clumsy and shapeless with papers. He pulled out one thick one at random, unfolded and held it up to the light under which he stood.

It was a map; and a map, that was the strange part of it, that he knew like the palm of his hand. Looking down at that familiar map he had another moment's doubt of the reality of his immediate world. There was the scroll held by cherubs in the top right-hand corner, showing the inscription in French which announced that the map had been personally surveyed and calculated upon the meridian of Paris by one Delavigne, engineer and geographer to the King. There was the pair of dolphins gracefully spouting, and the rounded ship tacking into the principal bay. The date was the same, 1786; and the whole represented, again according to the scroll, the very loyal isle of Santisimo Corazon, part of the dominions of Louis XVI, that most Christian King.

Jack Boissy had seen this map every day of his life, since he was of an age to notice anything. It hung framed in the hall, attractive to small boys on account of the dolphins and the spitting competitions that contemplation of them always provoked. His father, grimly silent about France, would talk of the island; had, on occasion, taken down the map, and traced the heights with a finger, and told the story of the siege in the cathedral. Jack could have found his way about that island blindfolded. It had, in addition to its dramatic history, the charm of treasure lost, and the romance of glories not destroyed but waiting discovery. It had been one of his daydreams, going back to win that waiting treasure. And now here was the map in Rudd's wallet.

Not quite the same, though. As he looked, he perceived that here and there, neatly scribbled in ink upon the fine surface of the paper, were figures, numbers. There was a map of the town inset in the bottom corner, and here the groups of figures were numerous. The site of the governor's palace was 27; some of the streets leading upwards bore two or three numbers which decreased as they climbed; the Bishop's residence was 19-20, the Cathedral Tower only 14½, the nave of the cathedral back again at 20, and the eastern end, beneath which lay the crypt, was numbered "approx. 23." He supposed it indifferently to be some surveyor's trick, and let it pass, while his mind played about with the coincidence of Rudd possessing such a map—if it

were Rudd's. He put it down, and tried another paper from the wallet; it was in Spanish, or some such tongue, but there was Rudd's name sticking out unmistakably, like a pink British face among a crowd of Dagoes, and Jack had a moment to grin, discovering that his Christian name was apparently Noah. Otherwise the paper told him nothing. He pried further into the wallet; then stiffened, listening, not turning his head. Solid and leisurely footsteps were approaching down the deck, and voices making no attempt at concealment; voices at their everyday pitch, and steps anything but stealthy. They were coming to try to bribe or bluff him; they had guns, most probably, by now. The door? No use, with the ventilator holes above it just the size for a gun-barrel. He must bluff too; and leaving the door wide, he sat down and began to unlace his boots.

The steps and voices neared. A hand wrestled unskilfully with the latch of the alley-way door. It was Rudd and Jensen with the steward, and they passed by his open cabin without so much as a glance at the youth whose word had power, in ordinary circumstances, to send at least one of them to death or Dartmoor. There he was, keyed up, waiting to be cajoled, and the principal miscreants ignored him completely. True, the steward, following last, thrust his head in sideways to say casually:

"I 'aven't forgot your water, sir, but I got somethin' on 'and jest now."

And passed on, following his superiors into Dawlish's cabin, leaving Jacques-Marie Boissy playing half-heartedly with his laces, crestfallen, like a child whose "watch me!" has been greeted with the grown-up damper —"Not now, dear, I'm busy."

But there were one or two things in his ancestry that would not permit him to take the hint, and sit quiet. There was his father's tendency to obey impulse, his grandfather's gift for the grandiose and spectacular. Neither of these could ever resist the temptation to make an ace if their hands held one, even though strategy counselled letting it go. Jacques-Marie rapidly clicked the bootlaces back into their eyelets, felt for the wallet in his pocket, and made for Dawlish's door. Standing there, at the unready slouch that had so infuriated his father, he said in that father's very voice, holding out the wallet:

"You're looking for this, I believe."

Rudd and the captain regarded him. They were not searching. They were just standing about, while the steward sat on his haunches and crammed clothing into the portmanteau. Jack Boissy, with his gesture, had made no

sensation. Rudd took the wallet; it was the captain who turned, and most surprisingly rated him:

"Where'd you get that?" demanded the captain. "You been in here looking round, hey? Don't you know dis cabin's got to be sealed up? All his things got to be packed up and sealed? I got to see dis young man's relatives gets his things. How'm I to do it if dere's outsiders nosing round, and picking up what dey fancy?"

"It's Mr. Rudd's wallet," answered the astounded Jack, sullen at this scolding from an accomplice after the fact of murder.

"How d'you know that? You been looking in it, hey?"

"I looked to see whose it was."

Jack's presence of mind, shaken by the attack, deserted him. He could not think of a lie, and would not admit that he had taken it from the cabin in which he had, there was no denying it, no business to be. But Rudd saved him the trouble of an answer. He had been exploring the wallet, and now said without emphasis:

"I see you kept the map. Better hand it over."

Silently Jack produced the folded paper from his pocket. Mr. Rudd said, with his stare:

"Did you take a look at it?"

Jack nodded indifferently, and to show that he thought nothing of it added:

"It's all-same one we've got at home. My old grand-dad governed the show."

This time he made his sensation. He could feel, although no movement or glance out of the ordinary did they let slip, that both were watching him, and that he had given them a shock.

"Oh, he did?" said Mr. Rudd at last. "Then you know all about it. What was his name?"

"Mortemar."

"That's not your name, is it?"

Rudd's tone was offensive, and the boy grew angry.

"If you think I'm a liar, why don't you say so?"

Mr. Rudd took no offence, but pondered, while the captain lit the stump of a cigar which he took from his trouser pocket. Then he said abruptly to the steward, still busy on the floor:

"Clear out."

The steward departed with a promptness that revealed the kind of discipline Mr. Rudd kept. Mr. Jacques-Marie Boissy, out of bravado, remained. He neither liked the situation nor knew what to make of it, but he was not going to run from these two men again; and he slouched against the door-post, the picture of indolence, while his mind added up his chances of leaving the cabin alive. Mr. Rudd seated himself on Dawlish's bunk, looking at his watch as he did so. It was close on nine.

"Look here, young Boissy," began Mr. Rudd, "or Mortemar, or whatever your name is; you think I'm out after you on account of what happened"—he jerked a thumb—"forrard. Don't you?"

Jack Boissy held his tongue.

"You think you've got the bend on me. You think I've got to find a way to keep you quiet. What I ask is, why the hell should I?"

He paused.

"Authorities, that's what you said. Report to the authorities. I'd like to see you. How much money've you got? Not fifty goblins to rattle together. Yes, I'd certainly like to see you talk to the Dago police. They'd have you in the calaboose for giving false information, and there you'd rot. I've got the police greased; they know whom to listen to. I'm not going to the trouble of knocking you on the head. I don't need to. So you don't need to take exercise keeping out of my way."

He grinned, an unpleasant expression which recalled to Jack the shame of that panic flight from the saloon. He would have liked to take a jab at Rudd's head as he sat there on the bunk where Dawlish had lain coughing during so many nights. He answered, though, as casually as he could:

"That's all right. You don't want to be scared of me."

Mr. Rudd took this insolence in good part.

"Now you're talking sense. I like a chap that knows when he's beaten. Then he can start again, see? Listen to me. You're going ashore to-morrow, aren't you?"

Jack nodded.

“Got a job waiting?” He held up a hand. “Now, now, let me finish. What were you thinking of trying for?”

“Job up-country,” said Jack, briefly, resentful of this catechism, and suspicious lest Rudd should try to put a spoke in his wheel. He could not rid himself of the notion that all this talk of greasing the police was bluff. He was too young to realize the truth when he heard it. So he jerked out his non-committal answer and waited.

“Any relations in S.A.?” Rudd went on. “Any pull? What’s taking you there?”

“My business,” Jack answered, mumbling but insolent.

“Speak the lingo?” Rudd persisted.

Jack was silent.

“I’ll tell you what’ll happen to you,” said Rudd, crossing one leg over the other knee, and rocking easily back and forth. “You got no money to speak of, and no job waiting, and you can’t talk Spanish no more than I can preach a sermon. You’ll never get up-country. The first woman you go with’ll take your money off you, and you’ll get a job on the waterside shifting hides at forty cents a day. Why, Christ help you, haven’t you seen it yourself in Sydney? Pommies coming out to make their fortunes. Ah; and how far do they get? Darlinghurst gaol if they’re lucky, and the harbour if they’re not. I tell you, I seen a thing or two fished out by the water police ——”

“What are you getting at?” said Jack, interrupting, more bewildered than ever. “It’s not your look-out what happens to me.”

“I’m making you an offer,” answered Mr. Rudd slowly, nursing his knee. “I’ve taken a fancy to you, young Boissy.”

“I’ll hold my tongue all right,” contemptuously Jack took him up. “I’ve told you so once.”

Mr. Rudd stared.

“Still harping on that, are you? Forget it, you’d better, the way we’re going to. I’m asking you, do you want to come in on a good thing?”

“Depends. What do you call a good thing?”

For answer Mr. Rudd tapped the folded map which he still held.

“Just a little prospecting. Getting our hands on what’s nobody’s money. What ’ud you say to a little salvage work in Corazon?”

He pronounced it Spanish-fashion, the *z* softened to *th*; Jack took a second to understand him, then, amazed, blurted out:

“But it’s half a mile underwater!”

“Nothing like,” said Mr. Rudd complacently. “And there’s stuff there. Well, what d’you say?”

The thing that surprised Jack almost more than this suggestion was Captain Jensen’s face. It looked, first astounded, then thunderous; and its eyes ranged from Rudd to the boy as if they thought the former had gone suddenly mad. Jack half-shared the captain’s opinion. He saw no reason, except treachery, why the offer should be made. Rudd was biding his time. Rudd wanted to get him into remote waters, and finish him in a manner which would lead to no enquiries. But he had baited the hook well, better than he could have known. Rudd was speaking, deliberately, in his reasonable style, giving out the most unconvincing stuff.

“You see, in a manner of talking, you got a right to a look-in on this, Grandfather, you said; governor, eh? There must be a lot there that’s yours, by rights. You’re the long-lost heir, so to speak. Looks to me like you had a kind of a legal right to go and look for it; if you’ve got any papers, that is; proofs of identity they call them in France. No? Well, never mind. They’re easy to come by. We can make it look good to these Dagoes, anyway.”

That barometer, the captain’s face, changed during the course of these words from stormy to fair; changed slowly, and lifted at last almost to a grin of appreciation. Jack saw, but could make nothing of the whole business. For the second time he failed to realize that the artist Rudd was playing that supreme card of all liars, that joker, the truth. He was all astray, vaguely aware that somehow or other his manhood was on trial, ashamed to take what seemed the prudent course, suspicious of a trap, and tempted. Said Rudd, again in an uneventful voice:

“Well, it’s you to call. I’m giving you the chance. Get off to-morrow if you want to sweat your tripes out for Dagoes; I won’t interfere. I’m only saying it’s a pity. You’ll starve, or you’ll live on women; that’s the way they all do there. You’ll save your skin, maybe, or maybe you won’t. Anyway, there’s dirtier things than murder. Well, take your choice. I’m not interfering.”

“You needn’t go on talking,” Jack Boissy heard himself saying, above the clamour of his protesting and bustling thoughts “I’m on.”

Rudd nodded, as though he had foreseen it all along, and offered the hand which an hour before had knocked Dawlish’s life out. Jack took it, and the captain’s after it. There was a moment’s silence; then Rudd, rising and kicking the portmanteau, said:

“We’ve got to get this stuff put away. Where’s the steward?”

II

Later that night Jack woke, disturbed by the cessation of the creaking and plashing which accompany a ship’s motion. He sat up and stared out of his port; the stars kept their places. There were footsteps on deck, voices, and at the end of a very few minutes a considerable splash, which was the body of Arnold Dawlish being committed to the deep. He had full sea honours, a flag sewn round him—a yellow quarantine flag it was, the only spare in the signals locker—and the service read over him with almost professional unction by the mate, from the captain’s Book of Common Prayer. After the splash came clangs from the engine-room, and those stars framed in the square of Jack’s porthole began once more their swaying stately dance.

III

The *Alberta* trailed slowly up South America’s eastern coast, depositing and accepting the oddest variety of cargoes; phosphates, coal, forty grand pianos, and finally a collection of animals for the Zoo at Rio. The *Alberta*, honest tramp, would carry anything consigners cared to pay freight on, asking no questions. She was, however, conspicuously virtuous during the whole of this trip; the busy Customs Officers found nothing in her holds—perhaps to their disappointment—which called for comment or for palm-oil. She might always have been a worthy god-child of Albert the Good.

She quitted Rio, however, riding high in the water, and turned her blunt nose north, and then nor’-west; and it was during these ten days’ steaming that Rudd returned for the first time to the business of the bargain between him and his passenger. He said one night, cutting a cigar after supper:

“Now, Boissy, see here. We’ve got to get going. Have you got any papers to prove who you are? Letters, ticket of leave——”

Jack angrily rejected this last jocosity. And no, he hadn’t any letters.

“Think,” commanded Mr. Rudd. “Mean to say you’ve got nothing, not a single bit of paper with your name on?”

Jack had nothing; except—he laughed shortly—an old prayer-book with his name written in full in his father’s hand. Mr. Rudd was interested. Jack was sent off, a trifle shamefaced, to his cabin to fetch the book. It was a small pious toy, bound in blue morocco, and entitled in gold—“Key of Heaven.” On the fly-leaf was written in French—Gustave-Félicité mistrusted his own English—“For my eldest son, Jacques-Marie Boissy de Mortemar, on the occasion of his first Communion.” The date followed, and then a flourish which underlined and enriched his signature.

“So you’re a Roman,” said Mr. Rudd, running the leaves past his thumb. “That’s a hell of a funny church to belong to. I’ve seen a lot of these priests, one way and another. They had a shot at converting me once.” He turned his palm, to show a round white scar. “There’s their mark.”

“You’re a liar,” said Jack instantly. “There’s nothing of that sort goes on now.”

“All right,” returned Rudd placably, but with his hint of a smile. “I’ll hang on to this, anyway.” The “Key of Heaven” went into his pocket. “Now see here.”

And Mr. Rudd began to outline a plan.

It appeared that treasure-hunting was not the simple sport it was made out to be. You had to get permission to dive. Whom from? Well, that was the point. These swallowed-up islands—two others went down with Corazon—by rights belonged to France. But France had, some time in the ’forties, traded the remaining islands of that group, which grew nothing, and were pestilential to whites, with the mainland Republic of San Miguel for a mining concession. The Republic, which somehow or other had become possessed of a gunboat, gave itself airs, referred to these islands as colonial possessions, and indefatigably patrolled their waters at a wheezy five knots, keeping up a dog-in-the-manger guard over the sunken territories as well as those which remained above water. The Republican stalwarts themselves never attempted anything in the way of salvage, any more than they attempted to work their mainland tin-mines. They contented themselves with taking money off enthusiastic foreigners, trusting to their climate and their gunboat—Espada de San Miguel, the Sword of Michael—to do the rest. It would cost, said Mr. Rudd, forty or fifty pounds to grease the right palms in Arcangel, the port and prime town; and you might just as well chuck fifty pounds into the sea.

“They give you a document,” said Mr. Rudd sourly, “all over ribbons and seals. They’re liberal with sealing wax, Dagoes are. All right. Off you go and start diving. Along comes this gunboat bogaring[2] round. ‘What’s all this?’ says the brass-bound Admiral commanding, ‘Señores, the flag of San Miguel waves over these waters.’ You bring out your document, and the Admiral plaits up a few of the ribbons so he can read it. Then he says, ‘Caballeros, this was granted by the President before last. All his concessions are null and void.’ That means another fifty or more, and the first lot goes down the drain.”

This revenue-producing scheme Mr. Rudd was prepared to double-cross. He proposed to make straight for the island and get to work, while the gunboat took up, in Arcangel harbour those duties laid down for the Miguelan navy during the Feast of the Assumption; letting off fireworks, sustaining a Christmas-tree outburst of bunting, and contributing a contingent in full uniform to the religious processions. Law and order, said Rudd, were all very well in places where they’d got the idea. But San Miguel had no notion at all of either. The only language San Miguel understood was poker and prayers.

“They swindled me before,” said Mr. Rudd, “trying to go honest. Now they’ve got to look out. I’m going to start operations, and not a cent goes into their greasy pockets, without I get the worth of it. They don’t know I’m here, and I’m not what you might call confiding in them. I tell you all this straight, so you’ll know what you’re in for. It’s not legal, but what the hell good’s the law?”

Jack Boissy would have been the absolute fool he was not, if he had not immediately perceived in the aroma of this proposition an ancient and fish-like smell.

But what was he to do? He had remained on this furtive little ship when he might have gone free of her, and he was committed to whatever her commander and his associates proposed. He had already swallowed murder; it was a little late to jib at piracy. He accepted Mr. Rudd’s explanation, therefore, with a casual-seeming nod and asked no further questions—not even what Rudd intended to do with the prayer-book, that improbable content of his pocket.

This acquiescence and apparent gullibility, together with his silence and continual slight sullenness, presented a problem for Messrs. Rudd and Jensen, who disputed over it of nights in the captain’s state-room, certain papers on the lamp-lit table between them. It was a question whether it were

any use going on with these papers, which involved a certain amount of judicious transposing of words, together with some actual forgery. The captain would not have it that anyone could be such a fool. He felt, in fact, exactly as Jack did to Rudd's proposition that there must be something dirty and dangerous behind it all. Rudd, however, going on with his deliberate work at the papers, said:

"You don't want to worry, Jensen. You don't know these young cornstalks. They know it all, and they'll tell you so. They've never been outside their own five-by-ten country, but nobody can show them anything. Why, a kid of six running the Liverpool streets knows more. It's out to learn, anyway. So don't go fancying Mr. Bloody-Marie Boissy's watching anything. His level's picking ticks off sheep."

The breathless July days went past, and they slid over the Equator in the night, without any of that Neptune mummery so picturesque to passengers of liners. The officers and crew of the *Alberta* had been from one hemisphere to the other too often to care about playing the goat in honour of an imaginary line. It was on the morning of August the first that the engine slowed down, and the ship lay quiet on water that looked not so blue as deep water should. The reading at midday gave their position—not quite a satisfactory one. *Alberta* coughed and snuffled, and crawled a mile or so westwards, while in the bows a man was busy with the lead. The water changed colour; it was blue no longer. It had the exquisite hue, emerald without the emerald's shrillness, of sea seen from a cliff; and as the linesman called depths that grew less and less, colour drained from the water until it was the clouded green of a peeled grape. Then at last the pant of the engines ceased, and the huge rusty anchor was let go that had sat all the voyage cocked on the *Alberta's* blunt bows like a fly on some plebeian nose. Corazon was under her keel.

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[2] Spanish; to sail round for the purpose of surveying.

IV

The slow wave that had drowned forty thousand breathing men and women, and the locust trees centuries old, smashing them out of existence and all likeness to imaginable things, had fallen with less power upon Corazon's stone. Under the restless water Five Wounds Bay kept its half-moon shape, though the fort with its guns had crumbled. But then the fort

had been built only for show; it was part of the governor's trappings, like his prodigious cocked hat. The palace, too, had been rent asunder by that terrific impact of the wave, and dissolved to a little dust that muddied the water for a while. A diver walking along the sea floor of crisp ridged sand would have passed unknowing over that fraction of the world's space where Gustave-Félicité had been born, and his mother mimicked her own crowning. No trace remained of the wall over which the blacks had swarmed in revolt; and as for the blacks' own hovels, their wattle and daub had been smashed back instantly into the element from which they came. There were fish playing and weeds yielding lazily to the water's sway over the market-place, so coloured once with country fruits, and fowls tied in bunches, and the gay scraps of stuff round black women's heads.

But the Church, after her usual custom, had built to withstand catastrophe. There still stuck up out of the sand a square of masonry, all that remained of the cathedral tower. It had been grim, but in sixty years had suffered a sea change. Weed climbed and covered it like ivy; sea-plants that were half fish grew over it, star-shaped jellies whose fringes waved in the drifts of current that served this water landscape for wind. In the old days on feasts the loopholes had displayed flags, tawdry even with sun on them against the stone; but in its new existence the tower was like a monument to all the vanities, no inch of it that was not glowing or fluttering, while fishes, red and silver, silver and brown, sailed in fairy fleets through the only loophole left.

At the tower's foot, under tons of sand, a few boards and a few bones lay hidden, with some crusted iron hinges still keeping the curves of their foliated sprays. That was where the sacristy had been: and strangely enough, among the ruined things that the sand buried, one jewel was lying intact, a monstrance. The diver's foot, stumbling, might have found it. It could have returned, just as it was, to stand at the top of a flight of altar candles, with the harlequin sunlight of cathedrals slanting down to it, and incense drifting up. There it lay, perfect even to the round of thick crystal that protected the Host, the sands over it carved to other shapes with each year's storms, itself unchanging, witnessing in darkness the glory and furies of God.

V

It became evident from the way in which the crew set about matters that diving was an accepted part of the ship's repertoire. There were pearl banks north of Australia, forbidden, of course, and protected, which might have explained the *Alberta's* demure presence in Sydney Harbour at the moment

when Jack Boissy was wanting a ship; demureness as of a cat purring beneath an empty bird-cage. And the safe in the captain's room was sizeable, and of the very latest model. Yes, undoubtedly diving was nothing out of the crew's way. Jack hung about watching while they got out the dresses and apparatus; weighted boots, copper helmet like the head of some insect hugely magnified. There were grapnels too. All this stuff, it was evident to his inland and ignorant Cornstalk eye, was up-to-date and good. The eye, too, was less ignorant than might have been supposed, for his daydreams had turned, as is its way with boys, to a practical interest in diving methods and outfits. Jack knew something of what Siebe and other great firms had been doing, and this looked like the very latest for underwater. It all fitted in admirably with the captain's safe, and made Mr. Rudd somehow more remote and inexplicable than ever, with his tales that took nobody in, his impassive and ceaseless lying, his methodical conduct of a fantastic expedition. For Jack's mind could not rid itself of its earlier conception of pirates, that they should drink and make shift, with everything hugger-mugger, and a ship's company for ever on the verge of mutiny.

Another matter puzzled him too. He had kept quiet about it, but he remembered pretty accurately the depths in fathoms which were what the figures on the map stood for; and the cathedral and palace, places where treasure might supposedly be, were both of them more than twenty fathoms down. Where the *Alberta* lay, the depths could not have been more than five fathoms. The bottom was visible when no breeze ruffled the waves, populous with fish, and blotched with dark masses of weed and rock. He put his problem to the heads of the expedition as they sat over their midday meal on deck.

"Taken a look at that map of yours lately?"

Rudd and the captain turned their eyes on him.

"Because it looks to me as if you'd got yourselves bushed."

"How's that?" from Rudd. "This is the place, all right. We've about struck it plumb."

"Depends what you're after," said Jack with his drawl.

"God's truth, what you think? Pickin' flowers?" angrily broke in Jensen.

"After?" Rudd replied, with a glance at the captain. "Well, the church stuff, say."

"So you said. You won't find it up on top of the Dos du Loup."

“On top of the ridge? Who says we’re on the ridge?”

“You’re nowhere near the town, anyway. I’ve been listening to the depths. This is the top of the range behind the town; there’s never been any people here——”

It was the very spot where Yellow Mary had been hidden in her cavern, and whence the heretic army had set out, some thousands of singing women and men, to threaten, and burn, and die in a cataclysm.

“——so I don’t see, myself, what you expect to find. The place to look for church stuff’s the cathedral, I should have thought; and that’s miles south.”

“You think so, do you?” said Mr. Rudd equably. “Well, maybe you’re right.”

He would not argue any more; apparently he agreed; but after dinner the *Alberta* did not at once up anchor and away to the south. Jack found his suggestion entirely disregarded. He knew himself to be right, and what seemed sheer obstinate refusal even to investigate his point made him savage.

He stayed down in the waist of the ship with the crew, even took his meal there, only to be hailed by the infernal Rudd from the rail above:

“Boissy, something of yours. Catch!”

And the “Key of Heaven” was tossed down to him, among grinning sailors.

“Read it careful,” continued Mr. Rudd, “and if there’s a prayer for fine weather in it you can put it up in your spare time. We’ll let you have a couple of candles out of store.”

But although the sky was cloudless—August is one of the few peaceful months the Gulf of Mexico enjoys—there was no descent upon Corazon next day. Instead, a blasphemous crew tugged one of the life-boats about all the afternoon here and there over the water’s surface that struck back the sun’s heat as a mirror does, with as little apparent purpose as the zig-zagging of a water-beetle. Mr. Rudd sat in the stern in a gigantic Panama hat, and checked off the linesman’s depths on his chart. After five hours of it he returned to the *Alberta* in a temper as sour as the crew’s, and in possession of a jumble of figures of which it seemed he could make nothing. There was a conference that night over the table in the captain’s room.

“I don’t care what you say,” said the captain, “de position’s all right. De position what dis old —— gives.” And he nodded contemptuously at the name of Delavigne, engineer-geographer Royal. “We’re plumb over de place now, where it was. Who’s to say dere’s been nothing happened since? Sea floor in dese parts is always up to tricks.”

“Another ’quake,” said Rudd, pondering. “Might be. Anyway I’ll send down Reilly for a look-see to-morrow. We can’t afford time to go lousing about any more with the lead.”

“Dat young chap Boissy’s bustin’ himself to go down,” said the captain shrewdly, after a pause. “We let him, eh? One day.”

“No reason why not,” indifferently Rudd agreed. “If he’s game.”

“And pull him up a bit quick?” persisted Jensen. “He don’t look all so strong as dat. Quick up out of t’irty fathoms——”

“Ah, shake your intellects, Jen. What have we got him on board for? Why didn’t I give him my boot in the seat of his pants at Rio? We want him for the calaboose in Arcangel, don’t we? All right, then.”

The captain frowned.

“You’re one of those,” Rudd went on easily, “that always wants to be doing something. Get things done for you, that’s my motto. Sit tight, and let the fools do the running about. There’s no need for a man that knows the ropes ever to stir a finger.”

“Maybe,” returned the captain, “but dat young feller with his long face, and his look like he own de ship, it makes me spit blood havin’ him round.”

“You got to put up with it,” Rudd told him bluntly; then, grinning, “besides, who owns the ship if he don’t? Got a right, hasn’t he, to look that way?”

“I don’t like it,” the captain answered obstinately, scowling. “I got a notion maybe you’re being too bloody clever.”

Rudd waved him to silence with his cigar, and laughed without sound.

“These Dagoes don’t care,” said he, “they’ll get their money, won’t they? And a foreigner to put in quod. That’ll keep ’em busy awhile.”

“Suppose they remember the cut of your jib?” went on the captain.

“Five years ago,” Rudd reminded him. “Why, bless your bowels, there’s a new pack of officials by now. They kill ’em off every year or two. If I

can’t bluff them, with two funnels when they’re looking for one, and a clean face where they’re looking for a beard, I’ll deserve shooting. Your feet are cold, that’s your trouble.”

“And you’re too cocky,” said the captain. “You got de priests after you dis time, and dat’s bad in any country.”

“What, d’you think the gunboat’s cruising round with a crew of bishops? Stand yourself a drink, Jensen. Don’t you know I’m always right?”

That was the end of the talk. Next day, envied by Jack, a diver went down into the gently wrinkling water and roved about on the bottom for an hour. While he was under, there was a scare on the bridge. Somebody noticed smoke, then smokestacks, appearing over the horizon, and in another twenty minutes Rudd, with his glasses steadied on the rail, could make out the lines of a man-of-war. He did not summon the diver, nor make any other sort of bustle, but kept the glasses fixed a while longer; and at last with a sort of sigh, turned away.

“A Yank. Carry on.”

She came near, a spruce-looking vessel, lured by the sight of a ship immobile in these unfrequented waters. In a little while the signal flickered across to them:

“U.S.S. *McClintock*-are-you-in-need-of-assistance?”

“Answer ’em civil. It’s not their waters, but it pays,” Rudd directed; and the dog’s-body spelt back a message:

“*Alberta*-Rio-to-New-Orleans-engaged-salvage-operations-no-need-assistance-but-would-appreciate-newspapers.”

U.S.S. *McClintock* twinkled a good-bye, and veered off, throwing over a good-sized bundle wrapped in waterproof which slowly drifted towards them and proved to contain old magazines, liberally seasoned with tracts. Having worked off this joke, *McClintock* raced away full tilt, like a boy that has rung a door bell for fun, and soon was lost, going west.

That unsuspicious passing of the man-of-war was another thing that stung Jack’s mind to activity. Wasn’t the U.S.A. boss in these waters as in her own? Wasn’t there some doctrine or other giving her a right to shove her oar in wherever she found anything that looked fishy? Wasn’t this treasure-spot known and protected, like the pearl banks north of Queensland? Rudd said you had to have a licence to dive there. Why hadn’t anyone asked for

that licence? Was it legal to dive, or wasn't it? If it was, and the warship's indifference made it look that way, where was the point of Rudd's yarn?

In the morning he had something else to think about. Somewhere about four *Alberta* began to get up steam; by eight the anchor was once more in the bows, and two hours later they were moving, prowling at two knots, while a grapnel and line, swung well out on a derrick not to foul the screw, trailed over the sea-bottom. Backwards and forwards they crept all day, crossing and re-crossing the ridge that in M. Delavigne's map was called the Dos du Loup. Not one of the journeys was more than a mile long. At the end of each the grapnel was hauled up and examined, with no apparent result. At night they anchored again, but kept up steam, and in the morning the same performance was repeated, nosing back and forth like a dog quartering the ground for a fallen bird. Rudd would not explain. He only stared, making Jack feel young and angry, then took up his glasses again to look westwards. He was forever eyeing that horizon. He remained placid while the ship, under the beat of the sun, seemed to throb and quiver like a live creature; and Jack, rifle on knees, keeping a look-out for sharks, felt tempted half-a-dozen times a morning to ruffle his calm with a shot.

VI

It must have been somewhere about five o'clock that the grapnel, when for the twentieth time they hauled it in, came heavy. The mate shouted the news; and in an instant Rudd had dropped his glasses and quitted his chair to stare down over the ship's side. Something was coming up through the water, scaring a shoal of striped blue-and-silver fish. It was not the usual mess of weed which had fooled them before. It was a thick wire hawser, crusted with shell, rich with the coloured soft growths of the sea, which, lay underwater, died in the air to mere clots of jelly. The hawser was got aboard, and half a dozen of the crew hauled at it; but the weight was too great, and the crust of razor-edged shells made it impossible to handle. Time was wasted while they rigged a winch; and when finally one end was lugged up, it proved to be fast to nothing but a small anchor. Mr. Rudd, however, merely nodded at this, and called a halt in the most cold-blooded way for food, while Jack, tormented with curiosity but damned if he would question, kept up his pose of indifference and scorn.

After an hour's rest the toil at the winch was resumed. Yard by yard the hawser was drawn in. There must have been nearly a hundred fathoms of it coiled before another shout sent Mr. Rudd to look down over the ship's side. He stared, nodding, at the dark mass coming up foot by foot through water

coloured like a muscatel. It was a solid brass-bound sea chest, studded with shells, ragged with weed, and the devil of a weight to haul on board. The captain, perpetually gloomy, opined that if they didn't go mighty easy they'd have the bottom dropping out of her after all this time underwater. Rudd, his temper snapping at last within sight of success, told the captain that if it did he could bloody well go down after it.

But the chest held, bottom and all, and by nightfall it was on deck, intact, with the sea-creatures on it dying, melting away into water again. There was a consultation, and orders for rollers. Trundled on these, they got the massive thing forrard to the captain's quarters. It lay in the sleeping cabin, taking up all the space between his bunk and table, oozing salt water, and beginning to smell. The hands that had manœuvred it pattered off cheerfully to get their share in the issue of whisky which Rudd had ordered; and there were left to gaze at it that personage himself, Captain Jensen, and Mr. Jacques-Marie Boissy, who was awaiting an explanation.

He was deceived. Mr. Rudd, having lit a cigar, surveyed him coldly with the question:

"And what d'you think you're doing here?"

Jack was startled, but did not change his position, lounging against the side of the door.

"Having a look."

"Get out," said Rudd, briefly, brutally, "you're not wanted." Then, as the astonished boy did not move: "Who owns this ship?"

Jack moved, but forward; Rudd's jaw took an ugly line. Jack produced a cigar from his own pocket, and actually filched the box of matches from under Rudd's left hand.

"Anyhow," said he, "you might give us a light."

And he got his cigar going before he strolled to the door and out. Rudd grinned, looking after him.

"There's times I like that kid," said he. "He's seen me kill a man, too."

"Well, we got it," the captain grunted, dismissing Jack, and indicating the chest with a kick. "What's next?"

"Steam up," Rudd answered, "we don't want to hang about here. That Yankee ship may have got talking."

“She was going to Arcangel, likely,” the captain nodded, “dey send a boat or two for dat fool fiesta. God done up in fireworks. An’ dey call it a religion——”

“Give the orders now,” said Rudd coolly, “and let religion alone. You’re no judge of it.”

Outside on the deck, well out of range of the captain’s port-holes, very quiet and furious, Jack Boissy leaned against the rail and watched little waves break in light against the ship’s side. He had all kinds of wild thoughts, notably the idea of bailing up both men with the rifle they had contemptuously lent him for sharks. He was aware at last that the whole Corazon tale was a lie. This chest was what they had been after, that had been planted so carefully in shallow water nowhere near the lost town. But why, and why for the twentieth time, had they dragged him into the show, only to kick him out at this last minute, and allow him no share?

He looked up from the waves to the stars, and his eyes intercepted, just above horizon level, moving lights in the west; a ship, head on, coming towards them. He watched idly while the lights drew near. Nobody else seemed to have observed them. He supposed from the noise forrard that the whisky ration after a hard day was taking up general attention. As for him, if the blazing boat came on and rammed them amidships he’d rather jump to the sharks than give Rudd and Jensen warning. He watched, and the green light went out as the oncoming vessel altered her course. By the look of it she was now a mile away, no more. Lazily he watched her draw closer, and guessed at her length and lines through the darkness.

Then a light stabbed his eyes. He put up his hands against it, backing, but it held him and the whole of the *Alberta’s* decks and superstructure in its glare. Noise stopped in the fo’c’sle, and Rudd and Jensen came tumbling out of the captain’s cabin. Another, smaller light, began to wink at them.

“Now who the hell,” mused Mr. Rudd, “has been teaching these monkeys to work a searchlight?”

The smaller light continued to wink threats in Spanish.

“Vengo á bordo,” it said without apology, and added a brief sentence containing the word “interrogacion.” The captain swore. Rudd shrugged. Still nobody took the least notice of Mr. Jacques-Marie Boissy.

“Bluff ’em,” said Rudd, “if we can. They’re too close to miss, even with a Dago on the sights.” And then at last, to Jack: “Stand by. You’re in on this.”

“Not me,” said Jack Boissy, turning away. “Not much, Mr. Noah Rudd. I’m telling what I know.”

“And that’s a hell of a lot,” Rudd mocked. “You talk the lingo, don’t you? Oh, you’ll have plenty news for them.”

The *Espada* had lowered a boat, which now came beating its way with short brisk tugs of the oars down the path of light her searchlight made for it. Eight sailors rowed and there were three figures in the stern sheets. A voice commented, astounded, as they drew near:

“They’re bringing a woman aboard!”

A yell of laughter greeted this, with three cheers for the don’s kindly thought; but the captain, peering, drew back from the rail suddenly.

“I tole you,” said he to Rudd in the flat tones of righteous despair, “I tole you what’d happen once you get de priests after you.”

“Ah, shut your mouth,” said Rudd. “They can’t know who we are. What’ve you done with that stuff in the cabin?”

But his voice had an edge to it, and was hurried, as though the beats of his heart were running faster.

“What dey bring de black crow aboard for?” the captain demanded.

Rudd jerked his chin.

“They have priests in on everything. Can’t unbutton their pants without there’s a priest handy and some holy water. What did you do with the stuff?”

“What could I do with it?” bitterly the captain enquired, “half a ton it weighs. I locked de door, dat’s all I could do.”

“Go and unlock it,” said Rudd, his eyes fixed on the approaching boat.

“You’re mad! I got to ask dem in my chart-room, don’t I? Dey see t’rough de door——”

“Pull the curtain across,” Rudd commanded, “don’t I tell you we’ve got to bluff? If that door’s locked, they’ll ask for it opened, bet your life. And talking of open, get out some drinks.”

The boat was alongside now. A rope ladder was dropped, and up came the three from the stern-sheets, one gold-and-white personage with medals and a beard, another with more white and rather less gold, and a bunchy figure, bald-headed, in black skirts. Four of the sailors followed them up, and remained on guard at the top of the ladder, handling their rifles with

careless ease. The captain, red-faced, achieved some kind of a salute to greet his guests, and a stumbling word or two in Spanish concerning the honour done to his ship. The senior personage acknowledged this with a bow, and turned to give perfectly audible instructions to his subordinate.

“You, *teniente*,” said the personage, “will remain here in view of the *Espada* while I accompany the señor captain. Do not let the look-out lose sight of you, even for a moment. Were he to do so, that might be very unfortunate.”

The lieutenant saluted in a breezy fashion with his drawn sword, and the little procession of Jensen, Rudd, admiral and priest moved forward to the chart-room. It went by Jack Boissy, standing back against the rail, and Rudd as he passed hooked his arm into the boy’s. Jack made no response at all. Hands in pockets he stood glowering while Rudd presented him—so much he knew from hearing his full name rolled out, and cursed himself for ever letting Rudd see it, written on the fly-leaf of the “Key of Heaven.” He was used to the “Marie” arousing mirth; in Australia he had kept it dark, as a shame. These Dagoes, however, heard it with courtesy, and the priest asked:

“Is the señor a Christian?”

A Catholic he meant, and so Rudd translated. Jack answered the priest direct:

“Yes, father.”

“Very good, my son,” returned the priest in admirable English. “You have been, perhaps, to a Jesuit school? But we delay his Excellency——”

And with an inclination of the head he beckoned Jack to accompany him. Rudd fell in behind the pair; and as he turned in the searchlight’s flare Jack had time to see that Rudd was somehow horribly disconcerted. Devilment suggested, with some plausibility, that what Rudd disliked was having a second interpreter about. He had counted on Jack being dumb without him, on turning Jack’s answers and statements any way he pleased; using Jack, in fact, as a ventriloquist’s puppet, to say, unknowing, what Rudd wanted said. Jack suddenly perceived it, read it all in just one glance Rudd let fall on Don Cristobal, the priest, and after that he would not have been out of the fun for worlds.

They entered the chart-room, on whose table stood drinks and glasses. The door into the cabin beyond was open, and a red curtain bulged and blew casually in the draught. Through the chart-room windows on the port side the stream of the searchlight poured, white and fierce as from a moon on

fire. The visitors sat, and accepted, but did not touch, a glass of brandy apiece. The priest took up that position recommended by the founder of his Order as being best for recollection, knees together, hands tucked into his none too wide black sleeves, bird-like dark eyes lowered. The admiral addressed Captain Jensen:

"Señor, I should tell you that the object of this visit is first of all to inspect your papers."

They were produced without delay, openly, from the safe.

"Secondly, to enquire what you are doing here in Miguelan waters."

The captain hesitated. Rudd, with a glance at Jack which did not escape the hidden eyes of the priest, but talking in his usual unemphatic style, began an explanation in Spanish.

The fact was—no sense in trying to conceal it—they had come up from Sydney on an idea suggested by his young friend; some notion of salvaging and exploring in the lost town of Corazon. Young Mr. Boissy was directly descended from the last governor of the island. He had plenty of money, his father—*hacendado opulentisimo*—being lately dead. It was a very natural thing to turn his thoughts to this sunken patrimony of his family. The ship's papers would show her chartered in his name.

"Ah, yes," said the personage, with civil acquiescence. The swinging lamp discovered his white uniform to be stained, his gold tarnished. His face had the typical clay-colour of the New World Spaniard, his hands were untended. His manners and language, however, were those of courts, grave and delicate.

"I am of course familiar with the señor's name," said he, with an inclination towards Jack, "it has its part in history. Distinguished, indeed! It would be of interest to hear his story. Does the señor speak Castilian?"

He addressed Jack, who looked blank. The priest translated before Rudd could answer.

"Not a word," said Jack; then to the priest: "I don't know what all that patter was about. My name's Mortemar all right. My father was born on the island."

"You were not aware, perhaps, that this group of islands, together with all rights in them, are now the property of the Miguelan Republic?"

"He told me so," Jack admitted, with a jerk of the head towards Rudd.

“You’re not drinking,” Rudd reproached the strangers, with a geniality in which Jack’s ear could detect no strain. “Is there something else I could get you? Coffee?”

Both shook their heads and took up their glasses with polite readiness; but still they did not drink.

“He told you so,” the priest repeated. His attention remained as it were withdrawn, but his words were direct to Jack. “Does that gentleman, then, know these waters? He has been here before, perhaps?”

“Not me,” said Rudd bluffly. “Pearl-diving’s my line. South seas.”

“Will you be kind enough to tell us——” the priest began, addressing Jack. Rudd caught him up.

“I’ll answer any questions. Mr. Boissy’s not so well up on the business side.”

“He is, however, in charge of the expedition?” put in the priest smoothly.

“Yes, he is. That’s right,” from Jensen.

“His money, his idea. A pilgrimage, eh? To the soil of his fathers?”

“That’s so,” Rudd answered squarely, and met Jack Boissy’s eye without a flicker. “Yes, it’s his show; ship and all. It was an old map gave him the idea.”

“I see,” said the priest, dropping his eyes; and translated the whole interchange to lisping Castilian for the officer’s benefit. It took a minute or two. When the priest had done both were silent, looking at the ill-assorted trio of treasure-hunters; Jensen, red and meaty; Rudd, any age, imperturbable; Jack Boissy, the stripling, obviously bewildered, nominally their commander. Jack himself was seeing his own position with extreme clearness. He was, as usual, in the thick of trouble which was none of his making; drawn into it—astute Mr. Rudd—and snared by the truth. For they were over Corazon, and it was illegal to dive over Corazon, exactly as he had said; only, they were diving for a different treasure. Here was the incident of Dawlish’s death over again. Rudd had done the killing; but if Jack had lifted his voice ashore, there would have been some convincing false oaths and Jack in the calaboose. Rudd had planned this diving raid; but there were all the papers neatly forged, to attest that the villain of the piece was Jack; was the lanky, sulky, penniless boy of twenty, standing with his hands in his pockets, and wondering if the truth he could tell had one chance in fifty of being believed.

For to deny that the venture was his in face of those forged charters; would that look like truth, or sheer silly panic? To say that his name was Mortemar, but that he had come to South America to work with his hands; to say that his port of disembarking was Rio, but he had not got off there—why not? Because these two hard-bitten gentry, Jensen and Rudd, had offered to share their gains with him. One of them a murderer, and he knew it, but had stayed within his reach. For what reason? Hoping to get a chance at the treasure. But you gave them no money, you say; what inducement had they to give you a chance of it? They're desperadoes, you say; one a murderer. What use could you be to them?

That was how the truth would sound; in just that way would it be badgered about, and turned inside out and endways. No good telling it. His shoulders hunched upwards in his father's shrug, and he shut his mouth, contemplating savagely the hell of a mess he was in, the habit of hells of a mess that pursued him through life.

The priest was speaking. He had put his untouched glass of brandy back on the table, and was asking in the low voice recommended by the founder of his Order—"all loud tones should be reserved for the praises and petitioning of God"—what success they had had with their diving.

"Nothing much, so far," Rudd answered calmly. "We've got the best tackle, too. But tackle's not everything."

"No," the priest agreed. "So you find nothing?"

His eyes were still downcast, solely concerned with the floor, and the floor, as it happened, presented at that moment the interesting study of a palimpsest. Recent events were recorded on it on top of events less recent. There were bare patches on the carpet, holes, cigar ash and the crumbs and litter of the day; nothing very remarkable to the casual eye. But the priest's eye, which was anything but casual, perceived, half on the carpet and half on the boards, a squarish wet stain as if some large wet box had been up-ended. Salt water dries slowly. At the edge of the carpet, trodden in, was a fragment of transparent gelatinous stuff; deep-sea weed. The priest, keeping his lids still low, perused the interesting story of the floor while the clay-coloured admiral spoke.

"We accept your word, señores, that you have found nothing; that is to say, as private individuals we accept it. As functionaries, however, it is our duty to search. The individual apologises for the functionary."

“No objection,” Rudd stated with a wide gesture that included the open state-room door, “everything’s open and above-board.”

The priest had discovered something else. About six feet away from the square wet patch was another; and on the edge of the door post was a new tear in the paint, a rusty tear as if some heavy jagged scrap of old iron had caught in going through. He tried to peer beyond the door, but the restlessly swinging curtain baffled his eyes. Still, he had seen a good deal. There was one thing more to look for, and he transferred his gaze to Mr. Rudd’s hand, extended in blamelessness, inviting search. Just for a second this hand, carelessly thrown wide, exposed its lit palm to the priest’s lifted eyes. Don Cristobal looked, and closed them once more, settling down into his chair with a contented cat-like motion, and nodding once or twice.

“It is police-work,” the admiral was saying, “an unpleasant duty. Moreover, we miss the fiesta——”

“Ah,” said Rudd, bluffly interested, “I’ve heard of that. I’d like to see that. Girls dressed up as saints, don’t they have? and all the soldiers out in their spit and polish.”

“And all the prisoners, too,” deliberately said the priest in English, “walk in procession. Have you heard of that also, Mr. Rudd?”

“Prisoners?” Rudd repeated as if puzzled; and slowly smiled. “That’s a funny notion.”

“Yes, it is funny,” the priest agreed. He went on tranquilly, while the admiral watched Rudd’s face, and Jensen’s eyes flickered. “They burn the prisoners’ hands on the afternoon of that day with a hot iron, quite round, like a red ring. Gaol marriage, they call it. It leaves a mark.” He spoke, never lifting his eyes. Mr. Rudd’s left hand, palm down now on the table, did not so much as twitch. Jack, standing well back out of the lamplight, saw that Jensen’s florid face was almost grey; but he poured himself another drink carelessly enough. Through the porthole the white ray of the searchlight was held steadily, pinning *Alberta* to her place in the waters, silhouetting the figure of the lieutenant with the sword, whose disappearance, even for a moment, would have such very unfortunate consequences.

“You are interested in our little country,” went on the priest humbly; “it is not very civilised, no. Very far away. Miguelans do not leave their country. But the Church—the Church travels the world over.”

There was a little silence, broken by Mr. Rudd. He rose, and said with his intimidating smile:

"I don't want to hustle you, gentlemen, but if you're going to make a search, hadn't we better be getting on?"

"No hurry," said the admiral, in Spanish, gazing out of the porthole at that waiting silhouette and the bayonets beside it.

"No hurry," said the priest, very gentle. "We have been waiting five years this pleasure, Mr. Rudd."

Now it was out; and for all the priest's gentleness, the air of the state-room seemed to thicken and grow cold when he said that, as if a breath had come out of some dungeon, whose door was opening to admit silent figures in hoods.

"I tole you," broke from Jensen, almost weeping, "I tole you what to look for wid de bloody Church on your track!"

"Where is the treasure of San Ildefonso, Mr. Rudd?" asked the priest, as he might have enquired for a lost umbrella, "that treasure you dropped so cleverly in the shallows when the *Espada* pursued you, five years ago?"

Rudd did not answer. He sat with his head forward on his chest, outwardly motionless, inwardly questing. Jack knew from his own old fear how the mind was darting this way and that. A weapon? A way out? Any chance if I go overboard? Not a hope, with that light. God blast these priests with their spy service! This means a wall and a bullet——

"You don't answer, Mr. Rudd?" the priest insisted. Then, rising suddenly, thrust the red curtain of the state-room aside with his left hand, and stood looking in.

Ten things happened in as many following seconds. Rudd's motionless fist darted forward among the bottles, seized one, and standing, brought it down on the priest's head as he stooped in the doorway. The admiral shouted in Spanish, and there was a clatter as his sword came rasping out of its sheath. Jack Boissy fell on Rudd from behind, catching him below the knees in a football tackle. They crashed down together, and Jack felt the jagged neck of the bottle tear daggerwise down his scalp. The priest, blood blinding him, moaned and blinked. Outside the white figure of the lieutenant leapt away out of the searchlight's eye. Almost immediately there was a thud, a whine and the *Alberta* shook as a shell burst on her, amidships. The admiral might be aboard, but the Sword of St. Michael was taking no chances; more admirals could be made any day with a strip of gold braid.

“Sink her quick, and let’s be in time for the fiesta,” said the gun’s crew of the *Espada*, making pretty practice, until someone in authority recalled to them the fact that Father Cristobal was on board; then they spat, from no lack of reverence, but to get the taste of cordite out of their mouths, and desisted. Towards morning they took the remains of the *Alberta* in tow, after transferring their captives and the recovered chest, and set off westwards at the best speed of wheezy engines, not to be late for the feast of La Benigna, that kind lady, the Virgin of the Assumption.

VII

The Assumption was San Miguel’s day out. It represented the very peak of the year in Arcangel, which, however, as became a Catholic country, was well provided with holidays of obligation. This feast was nothing so stern. It was a holiday of choice, of abundance, of good weather; a festival, carnival, spree, of the very first rank. It may seem a little surprising that Miguelans should not have chosen Michaelmas, the day of their country’s patron, for rejoicing; but that spare armoured figure somehow did not lend itself to sprees. It is always easier for Southerners to make a fuss over a woman, and the Virgin Triumphant, dressed in her best and presumably in a mood to appreciate fireworks, took very naturally the chief of their homage.

Jack Boissy had never, in a life of twenty years spent among people who dreaded to differ from their fellows, believed that there could exist such fantasy, such colour as these Miguelans spread out unthinking before the feet of Her Benignity, Mother of God. No family, for that one day, kept its gaiety, its riches, or its songs to itself. The street which straggled down from the cathedral, much as the main street of Corazon must have done, dripped with colour. Damask, wine-coloured, that had been brought two centuries ago from Spain, hung from one window; a superb carpet from another; the vista showed lengths of yellow satin, flags and scraps of ribbon, banners with pious ejaculations embroidered down their length. Some of the sills were banked with flowers, cool pads on which girls leaned their elbows, and with which, after the procession had passed, they did battle; the poorer people displayed paper roses, and fought with staves of sugar cane. This was a feast of all the joys, fighting included.

There were doings in the cathedral, of course, from earliest morning. People were in and out, ant-like, getting the business of the day over, the necessary Mass heard, and then hurrying home to their best clothes. High Mass was grand, with the clergy in gold and silver, and the Archbishop putting his jewelled mitre off and on, while above them a full choir raged in

Latin. But High Mass was only a preliminary to the glorious hour of the Paseo, which translated may stand for Our Lady's stroll.

They went in a body to escort her, gold priests, silver deacons, and the Archbishop under an umbrella of brocade. They put on, amid singing, her ceremonial out-of-doors dress, and mounted her in a silver chair, carried by men dressed and masked in scarlet. Then out she went, smiling, through the great west door on to the steps above the plaza, and the fun began.

First came the dance of the Kings of the Earth, doing homage. These were ten feet high, enormous crowned masks capering and bowing to the rhythm of drums. They fought with each other for her favour with lath swords gilded, and it was curious to hear the yells of defiance or pain proceeding from carved mouths, smiling, and shaped like wooden O's. When the kings had finished, there was an interlude of music; it ended in a blare of brass instruments, and through the ranks of nodding crowns leaped Satan, in armour with a dragon's head, challenging St. Michael. Another fight, real enough, this one; both were bleeding before the saint had his victory, and snatched off the dragon-head to lay at the Virgin's feet.

The women were next to do their share. Forty of them, in brilliant shawls, with white mantillas draped over their combs, curtseyed to Our Lady, and began a dance, in which hands and heels did all the gesturing; their heads, and bodies from the waist, remained motionless, to keep the mantillas in prescribed and decent folds. These were the virtuous women, renowned as such through the town; the others, who might have made a better show of dancing, watched critically, not without envy, while the righteous, getting some fun out of their virtue for once, tapped and postured under the Archbishop's eye.

When they had done, it was time for a meal and the siesta. La Benigna, who for this one day shared every action of the citizens, was offered some incense and a few candles, and carried to a cool shrine outside the episcopal palace to rest through the three hours' heat.

At half-past four, all the Kings of the Earth, among whom might have been identified David the Singer, Alexander the Great, and King Og of Bashan, the land of bulls, formed up in a friendly procession with Satan and the Saint, and followed by the ladies—separated, though, from the men by a blue banner eight foot by six—made their way to the shrine and bore off their patroness to the chief diversion of the day, a bull-fight. The Archbishop blessed her from his balcony and let her go, like an indulgent father glad to see his favourite daughter have a little gaiety; and relieved of his presence,

which imposed a certain formality upon the crowd, the population of Arcangel set off happily with their Madonna to show her a slice of life before she went back to the year's labour of pleading lost causes before her Son.

The bull-ring was brilliant with striped awnings; and when the crowd had seethed into it two men who held the cushion monopoly began to hurl their wares, covered in red and yellow leather, to all parts of the circle, shouting and snapping up with agility the copper coins that fell beside them into the sand. The president's box was hung with green and white, and at the very front of it sat La Benigna in her silver chair, visible to the whole multitude, smiling approval under her high silver crown.

There was no long wait. At the half-hour after five the president dropped his handkerchief, and the double gates under his box swung back to let in the fighters' assistants, dressed in a dozen colours, but all with white stockings. They marched gravely, keeping step. Last, as was the custom, should have come the matador, dressed in yellow, and walking alone; but here the peculiar temperament and custom of the Miguelans were revealed. True, there was a figure in yellow, with gold fringes dripping off his shoulders, and a sword borne in front of him by an underling; but he, it could clearly be seen, was secured by chains to the soldiers who walked beside him, and his bearing was anything but gallant. He stumbled forward, jerked up now and then by the chains, to be greeted with a sudden ominous yell, the sound which anticipates blood, and the name of "corredor"—runner. "Courage, the runner! Show sport, man! Hat off to Our Lady—not he, he's a heretic. Good; he'll fight, then. Pick up your feet, corredor!"

But the corredor did take off his hat and throw it down, revealing a familiar face, very white, but not pitiable. He was game. The gesture with the hat was a defiance. And when they handed him, with mock ceremony, his sword made of a frail sliver of wood, he snapped it in two, and stood square, with folded arms, to face the gate at the other end, now opening to let in his enemy.

The bull rushed immediately into the arena, and halted, pawing. He was not like the little bulls of Andalusia, upon which all the resources of civilization are bent to keep them wild. This was a big beast from the pampas, savage with his few days of captivity, whom the people hailed delightedly by the title of "majador," the kneader, thus affording some clue to the expected issue of the fight.

It began much in the usual way, men on foot with lances goading the beast, men on horseback planting darts about his shoulders. They did this very prettily, so that the darts, which had paper streamers, stood in a semi-circle out from his shoulders like a high laced collar, and they manœuvred their horses neatly so as to afford a good target for his horns. All the time they were protecting the man in the matador's dress, for it would have spoiled sport to have the bull get near him too soon. Horses gave the bull no trouble; one he tossed clean off its feet with one of his horns under its belly, and a scythe-like motion of his head ripped it as it fell. The riders scuttled off each time rapidly, and climbed footholes in the wall, monkey-like, out of the ring, until there remained to face the tiring bull only two men on foot, and the motionless "runner." These, who carried darts of a special kind, gave pleasure by their daring. They combined an attack, approaching the bull from the side; when he turned on one the other planted his dart; about turn, and in a flash the second dart was driven in, both on his rump. There was applause as the men ran, kissing their hands, towards safety, and a frenzy of noise as the darts began to splutter and crack; their butts were fireworks, that had been deftly lit the instant before they were planted.

Now the ring held only the bull and the last man, the "runner" in yellow, with the traditional red cloth for sole defence. Yells from the packed circles bade him dodge, or show a turn of speed, as the bull came at him, head down, goaded to madness. He stood paralysed until he was almost between its horns; then with a ludicrous sideways hop seemed to come to his senses, and began to run, to run wildly, zig-zagging like a hare, never looking round, but making for the footholes in the ring's twelve-foot wall. He found one such place, gasping, and clambered. A laughing picador standing at the top shoved him off and down with the butt-end of his lance, so that he fell just at the fore-feet of the bull. The brute did not trouble to lower its horns for an enemy already off his balance, scrambling on all fours in the sand. It bellowed, and began to trample. He screamed, but the audience was shouting praise of the bull, calling on it by name—"Give it to him, majador! Flatten him out, majador!"—singing, clapping; nobody heard or cared. The bull left him breath only for that one screech. In sixty seconds it had kneaded him out of all human likeness and all human energy, and the execution for sacrilege had gone its spectacular Miguelan way. La Benigna, throned in the president's box, smiled approval. The diversions in her honour, including four more bulls despatched, and fifteen prisoners burned in the hand, continued until nightfall.

VIII

Having thus finished off Mr. Rudd, the Miguelans bore no malice. They commandeered the *Alberta*, with some notion of starting a merchant navy, and imprisoned her captain and crew in a casual kind of way, so that these were perpetually to be met with, drifting about the town on parole. But, with a great parade of honesty, they handed over to Jack Boissy the entire safe from the captain's cabin, gay with ribbons and sealing wax, which showed that its privacy had been respected. This they did, partly on the strength of the forged ship's papers, which represented him most clearly to be the owner, and partly on account of the "Key of Heaven," discovered, during the search which followed the cannonade, in one of his pockets. He had, moreover, gone to the rescue of Father Cristobal during the mêlée on the ship and got his head split open with a fragment of the identical sacrilegious bottle that had downed the priest. The Miguelans were not a vindictive people, and they had had their fun, an execution such as had not come their way for a hundred years or more; they, and the Church, were content. The treasure had been recovered—and a magnificent one it was; the jewelled copes had suffered, sodden embroideries had let slip their sewn pearls; but all the wealth was there—and after that object-lesson in the bull-ring on August 15th further larceny was unlikely. Sacrilege of the kind Mr. Rudd had successfully committed was in any case rare; guarded by the prestige of the sanctity, the Church kept its treasures in rickety cupboards with no thought of danger. Rudd, a person without reverence, had walked in one night to the church of San Ildefonso, whose doors were never closed, and walked out again laden. It was the simplest imaginable robbery, conducted by the light of the sanctuary lamp.

He had allies, of course, on the tramp ship then in Arcangel harbour, and was able to flee that same night. Pursued by the *Espada*, and veiled in a haze of dirty smoke, they had let the treasure go overboard into the shallows of Corazon. The *Espada* overtook, searched, and found nothing. Her commander brought Mr. Rudd back to Arcangel, where he was accused of spitting while a religious procession went by, and burnt in the hand to see if he would talk. But it was a fortune at stake. He held his tongue, and money passed, and after a while they let him go. The Church, however, wide-flung, always before him wherever he went, succeeded in keeping an eye on Mr. Rudd, a malevolent eye. He would have been astonished and made nervous to learn of the letters that had passed concerning him between men with shaved chins and white dog-collars, men with shovel hats and chins rather darker, bearded men in shirts with great black beads clinking as they walked. The Church, trustee and vicegerent of Christ, took her duties seriously, and freely used the powers bestowed by her charter to trace and watch and finish

Mr. Rudd, Christ's thief. And so he ended, an unpleasant pulp, under the reddened hoofs of the first Assumption Day bull.

It was made clear to Jack Boissy that however innocent, and however historically connected he might be, there must be no question of any further diving over the lost town. The fact was, that the Miguelans, having without great effort arrived at possession of a complete modern diving outfit, were minded to try for the reputed treasure themselves. They were polite to Jack, they were sympathetic almost to tears; but as a Minister of Marine explained to him—patent leather boots, and a miniature zoo of decorations hanging at his collar; the Fleece, the Elephant, and a Miguelan honour, the Serpent—it was unbecoming that the Republic's colonial possessions should be regarded in the light of a lottery. Jacques-Marie thought secretly of the Australian gold-rushes, and the general British impression that the Antipodes was a Tom Tiddler's ground, and could not see the Minister's point. But he had sense enough to acquiesce. They had the ship and the stuff; and as for him, the safe contained, one way and another, a respectable though illicit fortune. He went home round the Horn, arriving in Australia in time to give away his sisters to their chosen ne'er-do-weels, and to see a six-year-old horse, The Quack, win the Melbourne Cup of 1872 in three minutes thirty-nine seconds.

CHAPTER X

> There is surely a nearer apprehension of anything that delights us in our dreames than in our waked senses.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

He married Shiela, of course. He was no longer penniless, and people had forgotten, and there had been other scandals since—notably that exploit of the Malachis, a resourceful couple whose burgled but heavily insured silver was revealed by untimely floods in their herbaceous border. Jack came back to Australia, and was just the eldest Boissy boy again, one of that family so highly respected, whose second daughter, Marie-Madeleine, had acquired an Honourable in the course of Race Week; an aide-de-camp, this, quite without money, and almost without intelligence to come in out of the rain, but a social asset of the highest.

A year had passed since Gustave-Félicité's death; it seemed no time, and all time. Jack could hardly imagine the same world and period containing the Miguelans, with their lazy unashamed enjoyment of the things of the sun—colour, cruelty, lust—and the Australians, a cold-blooded race under the tropic's burning-glass, self-conscious, distrustful of beauty, gamblers and the world's most unsatisfactory lovers. He had learnt a bit, had Jack, in that year. That eighth part of his being, Auguste-Anne's legacy, which King's School and the custom of the country had sealed up; that capacity for the enjoyment of splendour, passion and gaiety, the passing of twelve months had done something to set free. At any rate he found himself stating his case to Shiela Geraldine without stumbling or bathos; even, he waited his moment, catching her after a dance, standing in one of the wide windows of the Lamberts' house, and looking out on harbour water, and the ferrying lights. The Jack of eighteen seventy-one would have blurted out something shamefaced, a clumsy phrase like—"I suppose you know I'm gone on you." The Jack who had sailed over broken palaces and seen men die spoke stumbling, it is true, into Shiela Geraldine's hair, but he got out something rather better than that in the way of a declaration; must have, or my mother, the most incurable romantic, with the Irish heart that wavers to the spoken word, would never have sworn her freedom away.

I know very little of her. She died when I was born, and old photographs tell only half the truth of looks, showing as they do line without colour. She had peat-black hair, the kind that turns brown rather than blue in sunlight, and the very brightest blue eyes that ever were known. She was always reading, and neglected her clothes, and was shiftless and charming. When she spoke her voice had a tilt to it; not a brogue exactly, but an unexpected way of placing the emphasis, so that the words, nothing much in themselves, took the listener by surprise and started him laughing.

All this I learned from grandmother Boissy, Laura the impulsive, tamed by children but with a spark in her still. She had loved Shiela during the three years that she was her daughter, and had treasured all kinds of little things belonging to her, as if she knew that such a marriage and such friendship were too good to last. I have read pathetic letters that passed between them before I was born. Both had some kind of presentiment of trouble. The younger woman's gaiety hides it better, but it comes out clear in a letter from Laura such as this:

"Do not trouble yourself with too much stitching"—Shiela as a needlewoman! She could girth a horse well enough, but she once complained that a thimble made her finger feel blind—"For my own part, I could not endure the sight of the Layette before my children arrived! I could not tell why. You are not feeling well, that is not to be wondered at. But cheer up, and have confidence in the protection of La Sainte Vierge, and all will go smoothly, please God. Now, would you wear one of 'Our Lady's belts'? It is truly miraculous, their efficacy in accouchements. If you have faith and would like one, I could get it for you, I think. I have known most wonderful results from wearing them. Marie-Céleste would not be without hers for the world, I know."

And Marie-Céleste had already had five, so this was a valuable tribute. I do not know if the belt was ever procured; probably not, for Shiela was apt to be a little impatient of small pieties, such as had come to be the breath of Laura's life. At any rate, it gets no further mention in the letters, which come to an abrupt end in January '75, the month I was born.

II

There is nothing much to be said or remembered of the average child's life. It was fun at the time to run wild, to ride the pony, Pickaxe, to invent and exploit uncouth means of gambling in company with Ern and Bert, the stable-boys. But none of this comes to much in the telling. Australian children know it all—the panic flight at the sight of visitors' dust down by

One Tree Gate, and games played in the thin shade of gum trees that hardly can temper the sun's heat. There were alarms with snakes and bull-dog ants at picnics, and the occasional distant magnificent frenzy of bush fires. I remember the heat of the wind blowing off the lit ranges—Wollondoola itself was almost treeless, so there was no great danger—and how one of these flare-ups arriving on top of a morning's religious instruction from Laura gave me a succession of nightmares about hell, which recur even now, night after night, when there has been any shock or trouble. As for games, these were elementary, and played alone, after the trouble with Ern and the spinning jenny.

This last had nothing to do with cotton. It was a round of cardboard divided into slices, cakewise; each slice differently coloured, and scrawled in pencil with the name of a racehorse. The pointer, a thin sliver of wood, swung on a nail driven through the centre of the circle. You laid your bet in matches, and the holder of the bank gave the sliver a flick with his thumb, as in playing marbles; it spun, and rested, and you had won or lost. It was an artless way of gambling, at least as far as I was concerned, though I now believe that the flick of Ern's thumb was nicely graduated, and could bring the sliver to rest pretty well where it liked; you could not lose much at it, matches, my sole currency, being about a farthing the box and stolen from the store cupboard at that. And I learnt a good deal more from it and Ern about life than five years of a convent school ever taught me. But the show was given away by a pious and scandalized cook, and my education closed.

Laura had the scolding of Ern, and did it badly, having dwindled into quite a gentle old lady by 1887. She was well primed by a supporting aunt, and had all the prestige that silver hair, and a very awful armchair like a red plush throne, could give; and for the first two minutes she did succeed, no doubt of that, in aweing Ern. The actual question of leading me astray could not really be disputed by Ern, unless he had said, which was the truth, that I was far more of a gambler than he. He was sacked, and another boy, expert at euchre, was engaged in his stead. My education continued.

It was after the row with Ern's successor, and the discovery of a pack of cards in my bed, that I was sent to school. And here the memories become a little different in quality. I had been leading the life of an ordinary bush small boy. My accomplishments were a boy's. I could ride, handle a rifle or take a hand at cards, garden a little, plait leather thongs, and at a pinch kill a hen. If I did not actually wear trousers, I had a trousered attitude to life; did not much mind cruelty, and had no patience with anything that seemed finicking and pretence. I had Shiela's fingers, blind and stumbling at

needlework, deft at other kinds of making, the carpentering and knotting and rigging that come into nearly all solitary children's games. I had made my First Communion, savage and shy in a tight white dress and a veil which idiot custom compelled me to wear all day—at Christmas too, blistering weather. I wore it, scowling amid the congratulations, and had satisfaction only in feeling the starch at neck and armpits of my dress yield to sweat. They told me, all the relatives with their presents of little lace-edged holy pictures, and medals of the Immaculate Conception, and rosaries in carved nutshells, that I should remember that day all my life; so I have, but not as they intended. The big fact—and a big fact it was to me; Laura had grounded me well—was obscured, and turned out of miracle into boredom by the little scraps of piety that dangled all over it. I did not question the main idea; I wanted to be quiet, not shown off both before and after like a horse with its mane and tail done up with ribbons in the Agricultural Show. But even First Communion was nothing to school.

School was a constant infuriating decking and doing up with ribbons. School was a-jingle with rosaries and medals on top, while scapulars and Sacred Heart badges had it all their own way among the underclothing. There were little pits of prayer here, there and everywhere during the day, into which you were constantly falling. The Angelus was all very well, that I was used to three times a day; but there were prayers before the start of each class, prayers encompassed all meals and recreation, and as we ran at our mild games past the nun in charge we could hear the big rosary clicking in her pocket. French nuns too, they were, with French notions of what it was desirable for girls to learn, and of what it was entirely out of the question that girls should ever even suspect. They had the curious mixture of shrewdness and childishness that is not rare in people who go very little into the world, but are on their mettle when they do. They kept open eyes so far as we were concerned, every look and word were known, and they had no quixotry about trusting to our honour. School was shy of the trousered attitude, deplored and did not know what to make of it. School was the apotheosis of the skirt, that hampering, hiding, cumbrous yet draughty article of dress. They shook their coifed heads over me in genuine distress, those poor nuns; they scorched their fingers snatching me from the burning; they really did with all their hearts sorrow over my crudeness and intolerance of grace. I never thought to quote to them a remark of the chaplain, Father Macarthy, who, meeting me unexpectedly one day in the garden, put a large red finger under my chin and said:

"So there ye are. Well, ye're not what I'd call a good gerrl, Clotilde Boissy; not a good gerrl at all. But I'll say this at any rate: ye don't have

scruples. Ye can thank God for that, and so can I."

"And so can I"—that tells a tale. He was a big red-faced priest, the sort of man that in Limerick, where he was born, might be after the hounds as often as he could borrow a horse; and there he was in Sydney, listening to the peccadilloes of a hundred and forty-two women a week.

"I have been uncharitable in thought three times since last confession, father. I was distracted during my preparation for Holy Communion. Twice this week I was deceitful; I didn't wear the chemise we have for the bath, I wet it and hung it over the side so that Mother Angela thought I'd used it, but I hadn't. That was acting a lie, wasn't it, father?"

Oh, poor Father Macarthy! For I believe, with all the supervision, and the filling up of odd moments with prayer, and the really hard work of teaching and learning, that this was about the best any of us, nuns or girls, could do in the way of sins. And this was what he had to listen to every Friday and Saturday, a hundred and forty-two times over, with nothing to spice it but a little occasional gluttony on feast-days, and the privilege of wearing the most exquisite vestments I have ever seen at morning Mass and Sunday benediction. His vocation had clapped him into skirts as mercilessly as the nuns clapped me; but if ever there was a trousered individual it was the Reverend Hugh Macarthy, and the school must have been to him something very like Purgatory.

I too missed my trousers. There were beauties here and there; the chapel itself, for instance, whose carved stalls had come with the exiled nuns from France, and the ceremonies, which, for all our colourless voices piping Pergolesi, had their own age-old dignity, and kept the stateliness and terror of a Passion Play. Then the school was built upon a point of the harbour, wild in those days with scrub; it faced west across a five-mile stretch of water to the northern shore, and the sides, repeated in that five-mile mirror, were something that even memory can hardly make more splendid. There were nights when the horizon went green, and from it sprang narrow scarlet clouds that seemed to leap up and cover the whole sky like a flight of flamingoes. There were golden sunsets that dreamed and stayed. And there were nights, real nights with a moon; but our dormitories, all of them, faced away from that too searching, too awakening beauty.

III

Once a week, for an hour, I got back to the cheerful Ernishness of the years before school. Among those invaluable lessons of the hay-loft had

been the handling of such musical instruments as the bush afforded; ocarina, penny whistle, mouth-organ, I fingered and made friends with them all. Most of these were Bert's property, and I was scolded for using them, still damp and warm from Bert's breath. They were impounded, hidden, found again, and surreptitiously blown. It was not pure obstinacy; I really enjoyed finding my way about the things; discovering how the penny whistle leaps an anguished octave when you blow hard, and the mouth-organ yields quite different notes to the indrawn or outgoing breath.

Somehow this interest of mine must have soaked its way through my father's preoccupation. (He was managing Corazon at the time for Laura, and was back in favour.) He bought a real flute for me. I took it back for my second term at school, ecstatic but dumb; a flute's fingering does not jump to the eye, and until you have the trick of the embouchure it is difficult to make it emit any sound at all. The nuns were dubious, but allowed me to keep it. Somehow Father Macarthy got wind—for in the convent every tiny incident was an event, and news of it spread about rather more rapidly than the news of a decisive battle could do outside—and by the greatest luck in the world, had a protégé who could teach; a protégé down and out, but skilled, and answered for by the Reverend Hugh.

But for this, I cannot think that I should have been allowed the use of the instrument, faintly pagan as the sound of it was; much less actual lessons in the parlour, under the very noses of the last three Popes. But there it was; dead against all probability, and once a week, on Wednesday, I learned from Mr. Potts.

I rank him, looking back, with Ern as an instructor. He could play, no doubt of that, but when I had got past my awe at his artistry I found him a man and brother, the kind of person I had been used to. His moustache protruded, his hair was a ginger cockscomb, and his eyes eternally started and glared in what seemed defiance; he always looked as though he were planning a quarrel. His clothes were pitifully shabby, and he drank. Of this last I was perfectly well aware, as any bush child would be; a breath such as Mr. Potts' was something so customary that it never occurred to me to remark on it. Fortunately; for the nuns would have been in agonies, and have tackled Mr. Potts, or, worse, tried to wean him from his failing, and in any case the lessons would have gone by the board. I supposed that they knew, for they were quickly on to the sins that came within their scope; but they never spotted the first thing about Mr. Potts' weakness, and left us in peace to coo and toot through our Wednesday hour.

As I said, he could play. He talked of some great orchestra in England, and then, with no modulation to soften the transition, of Samoa. I asked no questions. I had seen men sacked for soaking in my time. But I liked hearing of the islands, and used to ask questions enough about them. This was the sort of talk to which the three Popes listened with uplifted forefingers:

"No, no, miss, it's the double-tonguing for the scale—tootle—tootle—tootle—too! Easy like."

"I hate E flat. My little finger's too short for the G sharp key."

"Well now, let me see. So it is. Well, that's very awkward. It's the same way with some of the island girls."

"Did you teach any of them the flute, Mr. Potts?"

"Not the flute, exactly, no. But I was speakin' of the fingers. Would you believe it, some of them up in Tonga, they cut off a joint to please their idols. Did you ever hear such a thing?"

"What for?"

"Well, now, that's a mystery. They bite 'em off, same as we do terriers' tails. Tutuanima, they call it. It's just one of their notions; don't do no good that I can see. But of course you'd hardly call them civilized up there. No. Now, take this slow movement of the Kuhlau duet——"

"What other funny things do they do, Mr. Potts?"

"Do? Why, there's no tricks they're not up to. They dance very funny; sticking themselves out——" Mr. Potts would sketch a step, and the Popes, their eyes irrevocably fixed on him by the lithographer, must have quailed —"and then stamping, and clapping. That's the war dance. There's others"—the Popes had a bad moment, but Mr. Potts recollected in time —"well, I don't remember what you might call the details of them. Now, try that E flat scale just once more, single-tonguing if it comes easier. That's the way, that's more like. Now I come in on the half-beat."

He said, too, that he had known Father Damien in the islands. I was agog, for we had had a sermon from a visiting priest about this latter-day saint. How would such a man look, and walk? I could not make any picture but one that I knew to be absurd, of a personage in a halo. Questions, however, seemed rather to bother Mr. Potts, and I believe that he had invented the acquaintance as a kind of pass-key into presbyteries.

"What did he look like? Well now, that's not at all easy to say. An ordinary kind of"—hesitation; what was the word? Man, saint, gentleman?

No, not this last—“an ordinary-looking customer. Strong, though; my word! Had to be, to have stood it.”

“What are lepers like, Mr. Potts?”

This I asked with shrinking. The sound of the lepers’ bell, and the stories of their squints in church, had taken my imagination, and got into my dreams. I saw them silver-faced, featureless, and their limbs dropping off like lizards’ tails. But Mr. Potts, with a description which might have given another child the horrors, eased me and my night’s rest.

“Well, of course, they look very strange. People don’t like to see them about, it’s not to be wondered at. It’s the people haven’t got it seem to mind more than they do themselves. I’ve seen leper girls dancing before now, laughing as well as they were able, with what’s it these white flowers are called in their hair.”

“Are they all white?”

“Well, no, it’s more the brown people, savages, that take it. Of course they’re very uncleanly, very careless in their ways; more so than the whites.”

“But their faces—aren’t their faces all silvery, like goldfish go sometimes?”

“No; no, I wouldn’t say that. Their faces get knobbly, as you might say, and reddish. Not like sores; more as if the faces were growing.”

The things that can give comfort! I did not mind these knobs in the least; they delivered me from the silvery blanknesses that used to stalk through my sleep, and wake me sweating. And my respect for Father Damien dwindled, partly from the thought that anyone so everyday as Mr. Potts had known him, and partly because the disease he gave his life to tend had become so much less dreadful to the imagination. I thought—for everyone has their visions of becoming a saint—that I would not mind volunteering for duty at Molokai myself.

Meanwhile in between these slices of gossip, breaths from warm pastures to the chill uplands of school, I did succeed somehow in learning the flute. I even played a capriccio, fingers and lips trembling, eyes and mind blank with terror, at the concert attended by the Archbishop, who afterwards said to Reverend Mother that he doubted its being a suitable instrument for girls, and suggested as an alternative the harp. I suppose he did not like to see drops of moisture fall from the open end, and I could hardly halt in the mad scramble of the capriccio to tell him that it was not spit, as he must have thought, but only what Mr. Potts called “the

condensing of the atmosphere.” (Mr. Potts had given much thought to this matter, which he considered gave the lie to the true elegance of the flute; but warm breath against a cold metal tube will turn to water and escape. There is nothing to be done.)

I learnt, besides, a good deal from the nuns. Only two of the class mistresses spoke English, and these came respectively from Cork and Ballinadoon. The others were any nationality you please, from the gentle crippled portress, a German, to the Reverend Mother herself, who was French. We got sidelights on the history of our Empire which we resented at the time, or discounted; battles took on different aspects, even Waterloo itself, which, though it was reluctantly admitted to have been lost by the French, was as certainly not won by the English. And there were two gaudy breath-taking half-hours in the week labelled, dully enough, Church History. The Popes, it seemed, were always benevolent, humble, servants of the servants of God; if they battled to extend their dominions it was that the rule of God might be extended. Certain proud and princely English legends were destroyed by the Spanish nuns who taught this subject; Queen Elizabeth dwindled, and Drake sank back into the pirate he was. As for the French Revolution, no good could be expected to come of it, since it began by persecuting the Church, and Napoleon, who imprisoned the Holy Father, came irrevocably to a bad end. Once I mentioned Voltaire, whose innocent rhyme about the snake that bit Jean Fréron I had somehow picked up at home among the fragments of French that perpetually were bandied about. A hush fell, and I was told never to mention again the name of religion’s enemy. Since at least half the authors of France tended, whether deliberately or no, to weaken faith or undermine morals our acquaintance with them was the merest nodding one. As for English literature, its pre-Reformation poets were, unhappily, improper, while after that unlucky event the writers, though less gross, grew more wrong-headed. I think that but for the books at home I should have grown up with the notion that poetry in England began with Crashaw and ended with Francis Thompson. (Shakespeare, very luckily, was *hors concours*, no more to be criticised than the Bible, though they must have realized that in places he was almost as lewd.)

They passed, somehow, these five years. I can typify their odd mixture of dignity, discipline, and absurdity by a picture.

Imagine a long and shining corridor, chequered with strong light that dances, reflected from the water; the walls a faint lavender-blue, hung with prints from Raphael. Down this corridor come two nuns, lay sisters, in black with blue stockings, which their skirts are kilted to show. They advance with

the oddest motion, rather as if they were mounted on wheels, long striding steps. But their feet are grotesque, swathed and huddled in bandages to look twice their own size. Coming close, you can see that there is beeswax thick on the cloths, and that they skate and slide up and down for the sole purpose of polishing the floor. Their eyes are downcast, their hands busy with knitting or prayers. From the waist up they might have stepped out of Raphael, from the knees down out of a pantomime, as they slide in and out of the squares of eddying sunlight, and dip to Reverend Mother as she passes.

IV

Five years; and how much of the trousered attitude was left by that time? Only what Mr. Potts and the holidays between them could keep alive; and this had to submit, not only to the pious trampling of the nuns, but to those physical storms and commotions that blow up along the horizons of the half-grown girl, generally with as little warning as hurricanes among the Antilles. Hard to go striding carelessly about snapping your fingers at life, impatient of uncertainty, when from day to day you cannot count on your body's fitness; when its dreadful yet rhythmic caprices sway body and mind together, and compel a certain amount of care, a necessary minimum of fuss. Hard to keep your head above the billows of skirts closing in. Hard to justify your own conviction of the trousered attitude being the best, against the voice of your period, your relatives, and your education. Hardest of all to withstand a grandmother determined in the tenderest yet most unarguable way to give a motherless girl a good time.

For this is what Laura did. Bless her, she was seventy, and she had seen nothing whatever of the world for something like forty years, save when she entertained a visiting Bishop and his chaplains at Corazon. There was Aunt Marie-Céleste with her flock of girls, ready, as she said, to chaperone me, and give me every chance, but Laura would have none of it. Like the nuns, she was shrewd when she had real occasion to put her mind to worldly matters, and she may have had some idea that Marie-Céleste's generosity would not extend to sharing out any young men who hopped on to the twigs limed for them by her brood. She put all remonstrance gently aside. We were to go to Sydney and stay at the "Farmers and Graziers" in style. (This hotel, which had been the "Southern Cross's" respectable rival, had swung down the scale in twenty years to a raffishness beyond compare. Laura would not believe this when told, and her plans revolved round the "Farmers and Graziers" like spokes about a hub.) When Jack, to daunt her, drew a long face about money, she turned on him with the announcement that she had

been saving up for this day for eighteen years, and flourished the astonishing secret total of her number two account with the Bank of Commerce. Really she had saved, in ways which troubled nobody, in economies that nobody observed, close on a thousand pounds, which she proposed, with an equanimity which seemed mad, to blow in a couple of months' high living. One and all, from every point of view, the relations went at her; it would give me extravagant ideas, it would cause jealousy, it would create a false impression in Sydney, it could not be kept up. Laura tackled them all with the first touch of spirit she had shown for years, and routed them, muttering, and tapping their heads. For they could not reconcile this extravagant project with the carefulness she had exercised all her married life, and which was mockingly known as "marsimony" among them. Laura was as intent upon knocking down her cheque as any shearer to whom a pub meant Paradise. The parish priest, called in at last in despair, could not move her. He had pointed out how much good she could do with the money, and Laura whipped round on him with:

"Who says I'm not doing good with it? I am not proposing, father, to introduce Clotilde into bar-rooms and billiard saloons. I am giving her the chance to make friends with young people of her own station in life."

The priest coughed and suggested, as an alternative to bar-rooms, the poor.

"I don't need to tell you, father," replied Laura grimly, "who it was in Holy Writ had that identical notion."

His Reverence, thus directly compared to Judas, could hardly keep up his attitude of protest. He gave in, as my father did, as Marie-Céleste and Marie-Josephine and Felicitas-Anne and the rest of the aunts did. I was to have my time in Sydney, and I might think myself lucky, they said, and they hoped I was properly grateful and nice to Grand'mère, taking all this trouble for my sake.

Not one of them suspected how entirely I was on their side. The thought of Sydney appalled me; dances where all would be strangers, elaborate clothes, terrifying dinner-parties, perhaps, where one would have to talk! It is the measure of my despair that I, who had fled from the convent, when the hour of release struck, like a possum from a burning tree, should have thought very seriously of fleeing back there as a postulant to escape the threatened horrors of society. I put that aside though, touched by Laura's fluttering happiness in her plan; it would have been cheating a child of its party not to go with her. I soothed, and pretended to share her impatience,

smiling all the time a little wryly at the back of my mind, and feeling at least fifty years older than she was. I believe youth condescends to age in this way more often than age ever dreams.

Together we set off for Sydney with an ark-sized trunk apiece and empty dress-baskets to be filled with the latest that town could offer, and arrived three weeks before the autumn race meeting, 1894.

V

Just as I thought, it was nightmare. The new elegant clothes were boned as pertinaciously as garfish; my hair would not take the fashionable shape, nor would my hips. I had a big waist. Do what the dressmakers would, and pay what Laura might, I had no *chic*. It may be thought that, with a mind in trousers, I should have had no hankering after *chic*. True, I despised it; but so addled is the female mind, I envied it when I saw it in others; passionately wanted to look as well as they did, and was ashamed to take their trouble. For then as now, every woman who might write her name at Government House gave a good half of her time to clothes, their fitting, their making, their wearing. It is a pastime no more undignified than the hunt for first editions; it calls for as exact a knowledge and a skill which is not wholly of the purse. For the book-collector has only to acquire a rarity to be envied, but the expert in dress has to present her capture for public criticism, and in a sense be judged by it. She must bring her face and figure somehow into the scheme of the artist twelve thousand miles off who made and has forgotten his creation; she must read what his mind was, and do her half share in the work of art. Success is thankless, failure humiliating. The well-dressed woman is poised on the swaying fashion as on a tight-rope, with derision awaiting her if she makes a false step. Women have made careers, lost friends, committed adultery or murder to the dictation of their clothes; besides keeping ships afloat, and looms busy, and trappers alert, and thimbles on ten million fingers. No sane person can dismiss as trivial the science of dress.

But I was a savage, with a twenty-eight-inch waist and no conversation, amid the eighteen-inches and the rippling prattle of Sydney's young things. No aide-de-camp would look at me, still less any spruce and jolly flag-lieutenant. I hated them all impartially, dreaded the thought of marriage which lay behind this dressing up, these parties; feared to be noticed above all things, and resented not being noticed, perhaps, even more. There were scenes—not with Laura, but with some of the cousins, who all wore the right things, and tried to be kind. What could they do with a sulky-browed

girl who, invited to play tennis, disappeared half-way through the afternoon and was found huddled in some remote bedroom with a book? The cousin who did thus discover me, Georgette, was the one I detested most. Her tact was unfailing, she never looked hot or cold or anything but the exact temperature for comfort, she had a nice mind and perfect clothes. She greeted me with good cheer:

"Here you are! How lucky I found you. They've all been looking everywhere. Do come down and make up a four with Commander Royce and Uncle Arthur."

"They'll get on all right without me."

"Oh, but Clo, they won't——"

"Well, anyhow they're playing singles now, because I saw them."

"Yes, but—aren't you feeling quite well?"

I was not, as it happened, but I could not stomach sympathy from Georgette. So I answered gruffly:

"I'm all right, thanks."

"But we want you to join in things. We like having you with us."

"Oh, don't talk bunkum, Georgette. Let me alone."

That got past even her manners.

"Well, I must say! Of course we're cousins, and all that, and mother says we've got to be nice to you; but you don't make it easy, really, do you? It's nothing to me if you choose to creep up here with some old book or other. It looks rather peculiar, that's all. Everyone's noticed."

"Let them."

"That's all very well, and it's mother's house of course, not mine, but I do think it's rather silly and—and insulting to walk right away from all her guests and creep up here——"

"Oh Lord! Well, all right, I'll creep home."

But this was not what she wanted.

"You can't go away like that without rhyme or reason. We'll have to make some excuse for you."

"I'll leave a note on the pin-cushion."

With gravity, very much the elder woman of the world, Georgette stood and began to reprove me.

"Mother's sorry for you, we all are——"

"Why?"

"Well, having no mother and everything. But I do think——"

"I didn't ask to be patronized, and I can't play tennis, and those people don't want me. If I can't stay in peace I'm going home."

I got off the bed and beat down my crumpled linen skirts to some semblance of neatness. My hair was astray, I skewered it up with pins, and dragged on my hat, not looking in the mirror.

"But your racket's down on the court! And your shoes!"

I told her what to do with them, employing one of the stable-boy's phrases. She stared, and as the impropriety sank in, turned, for the first and only time in my acquaintance with her, a dull ugly scarlet. She went without one word out of the room.

After this there was a letter to Laura from the aunt:

> "Dearest Mama,—
>
> "I am sorry to be obliged to write on rather a delicate matter. As you know, I always thought it rather an ill-judged step to bring Clotilde into quite such prominence, and to spoil her with the kind of good time and expensive clothes none of her cousins, none of my girls certainly, could ever afford. I am not criticising your kindness in any way, or making comparisons, but I don't think you quite realize that Clotilde is not the sort of girl to make the best use of such advantages. She makes no attempt to meet one half-way, and indeed sometimes is actually rude when spoken to. She made use of an expression to Georgette which I shall not repeat, but which it would pain you to know any girl of eighteen could bring herself to use.
>
> "I have no wish to make mischief or to stand in the child's way, but in view of what has happened you must not be surprised that I do not ask her to the house as before. I have to think of my own girls, as I am sure you will quite see.
>
> "Roby writes from Colombo—says they are having perfect weather for their trip. Such luck, isn't it?

"With love, dearest Mama, your affectionate daughter,

"JOSEPHINE."

Laura was puzzled by this letter; she showed it to me, and asked what I had said to Georgette. I mumbled, and told her not to worry, I was sick of Aunt Josephine anyway. Laura with her odd mixture of shrewdness and guilelessness took the letter away, thought it over, and came to the conclusion that Josephine was jealous for her own daughters. She assumed that I had been too much of a success. (In the same way nobody had been able to persuade her that the "Farmers and Graziers" was not a perfectly proper place to stay. It swarmed with professional ladies, it was rowdy at night, there were drunks in the lounge; but anything out of the way she accepted as mere modernity, and supposed that in other hotels, the people were just as noisy and highly-scented.) So, in spite of that past incident of Ern and his dismissal, she assumed that there were still a good many words I had not heard, and facts of which I was not aware, and that possibly I had repeated some ordure in ignorance. Josephine, she concluded mildly, was making a fuss about nothing, protecting her girls from unfair competition, and did not blame her. She knew that of all ticklish jobs getting daughters off your hands was the most uneasy. She therefore answered the letter with a civil note, her smooth sentences gliding over thin ice with some skill.

"MY DEAREST CHILD,—

"I have received your letter, which I believe to have been written in haste—was it not? And I am able to see your point of view most clearly. In a large family it is sometimes difficult for all the members to be the best of friends, so many different characters and interests must clash now and then, and dull indeed should we be did they not. I quite understand your anxiety for your girls, but they are so pretty and well brought up—a sugarplum for you, dear!—that I believe you need have no fears, and that they will all before long be happy wives.

"Clo goes to stay to-morrow with the Alloways, I believe it will do her good to be quiet for a little after so much gaiety.

"My fond love to Frederick and the children.

"Your ever affectionate,
"MAMA."

And that, she supposed, was the end of the incident.

Families, however—this she ought certainly to have known—possess a system of intercommunication whose speed might be envied by those savages who spread rumour tediously by means of drum-taps and smoke. It took about twenty-four hours to get round the half-dozen households that I had been rude to Georgette, and in what exact way I had been rude. Upper lips were drawn down, there were grave conclaves among the elders and giggling among the young, and the family fiery cross was handed round.

The declaration of war was made on my return to Sydney after a week at the Alloways', during which I had been perfectly happy. They had a pleasant informal house at Port Hacking, with half a mile of rock frontage on which oysters grew, and several boats all leaky at the seams. There were two boys not yet old enough to be shy themselves or to make me self-conscious. I borrowed one of their jerseys and an old tweed skirt of their mother's—my new town wardrobe included nothing wearable in less than a grandstand—and had a happy time alternately fishing for mullet and baling the boat with jam tins. I caught a skate, an immense flat fish whose unwieldy struggles, like the flapping of a sail in a gale, nearly had the whole boatload of us over. I got a fish hook in my thumb, whose point had to be pushed through and out before the barb could be filed off to release me, and earned genuine respect from the boys for making no fuss. Nobody changed at night into furbelows. Nobody was out for blood, trying to marry or to escape marriage. It was a perfect week.

I came back from it calmed, and swearing to do my best for Gran, to lace in my stays till they gored my sides, to smirk with agreeable folly, to do my clothes justice. Short of marrying a young man if one were actually caught—this would have alarmed and disconcerted me as much as hauling up the skate—I was determined to make Gran's autumn a success.

But the resolution, excellent as it was, got no chance. I came back to our rooms at the "Farmers and Graziers"—whose manager and staff valued Gran and her aureole of respectability in a most pathetic manner, and plied her with attention from morning till night—to find her with a trifle of a flush on her cheek bones and a flutter in her manner. Even I, blindly self-intent as was natural at my age, saw that something had happened. I could only ask if she felt all right, and when she replied that nothing was wrong with her health I was reduced to watching her silently, and catching now and again her restless eye. Before I went to bed I could see her mustering her courage to ask me something, but when the question came out it was only in this form:

"And what are your plans for to-morrow, dear child?"

I ran through my little list, tea here, dinner there, the morning devoted to trying-on, that ritual where the priestess approaches the victim on her knees before she bares the blade.

"A new dress?" repeated Gran, her nervousness now very evident. "And what dress is that?"

"The bridesmaid's dress for Cora's wedding. All the six of us are to go to David Jones' to-morrow so that they can get us looking alike."

"Yes," said Gran, poor darling, "the dress—well, I don't believe you need bother about it at all. You don't want it."

But still I could not get what she was trying to tell me.

"No, I don't want it one bit, and it'll be no use afterwards. Brown lace—who ever heard of wearing brown lace? But Cora'll be in a rage if I don't turn up with the others——"

"The fact is, my dear child," said Gran with sudden courage, "I have decided that it will be as well if you do not act as your cousin's bridesmaid." Then, in a great hurry, "You may have a new dress for the wedding, of course, and we must go together to choose something really suitable for a present. It will not do to seem piqued——"

Just the one word too much. "Piqued" told me the whole story; that Cora, or perhaps Cora's mother, Marie-Céleste, had objected to me as bridesmaid; had said plainly that I was not wanted. I must say that for the first moment I felt a little sick. It is one thing to quarrel with a relative in private, another to receive a public snub. I said nothing, but felt my face going scarlet, as if Cora's fat little hand had boxed my cheeks. What angered me was the snub from Cora, a little bitch if ever there was one, who had secured her guileless lieutenant R.N. by letting him go as far as he would and then coming over coy. I understood her manœuvres thoroughly, and should have felt unwashed if I had lent myself to any of them. Yet there she was, bending down from the driven snow of her official pedestal to administer this flick to me, and worse, to Gran. I said, raging:

"I won't go to her stinking wedding at all."

And began to walk up and down. I could see that this was only the beginning of the trouble, and that I should accumulate snubs if we stayed. I swung round at the end of my march and begged Gran to let us go home.

"I'm not cut out for this sort of thing, darling, really. Let's clear out and leave them all and save the rest of the money and buy a racehorse with it."

But Gran was on her elderly dignity. She did not give in at the first shots exchanged. One did not show a wound. There was much that had to be ignored in life. Next morning she told me to put on my smartest hat and out we went then and there to Grant's in Hunter Street and spent thirty-five pounds on some magnificent silver candlesticks. No need to give the address where they were to be sent. The shopman said, smiling:

"I suppose these'll be for your granddaughter, Mrs. Boissy? That's right, we've been sending along a lot of stuff out to Double Bay. Nothing to touch these, though, yet, in the way of plate. There's a nice string of pearls her dad's giving her. I could show you if you liked."

And he did, and Gran admired, and I kept with difficulty from making the sort of remarks I wanted to make; and then one of the partners came out, and shook hands with Gran, and had a joke or two about weddings and expressed a polite hope concerning me.

"I don't doubt," said the partner cheerfully, with a meaning glance, "you'll be coming in again before long, Mrs. Boissy. These granddaughters—they keep us on the move. Keep our stock on the move, too. That's right."

And everybody laughed in a friendly manner before we made our exit. Gran was silent on the way home; but an hour later at lunch she observed, out of the blue:

"Did you hear what the man said? He said there had been nothing in the way of silver to touch our present."

"Wasted on Cora," I muttered.

"No, dearest child, I won't have you speak like that. Our Lord never remembered an injury. He always forgave."

"Yes, and look how He annoyed everyone."

Gran was shocked, and asked if I would like the nuns to hear me talking in such a way. All the same, she had given that present in no Christian spirit, and I knew it, and let her lecture me, secure in the knowledge.

Such was the first exchange in the duel. On the whole we gave as good as we got; the present cancelled the snub. But other attacks left less opening for riposte. Talk, for instance, is elusive as it is dangerous; you cannot catch talk on your blade. And talk there was, started by the relations, though these would have denied the fact if it had been put to them bluntly. They did not want a quarrel with Gran, who for aught they knew might have another thousand pounds or so up her sleeve. They therefore embroiled me in the

most delicate way with outsiders, while seeming to defend. I began to be left out of things.

I have often wondered what exactly they said, deprived by my known savagery of temperament from the only really deadly charge, immorality, which then as now had reference to one commandment only. I was *farouche* with men, and civilization had not in the ’nineties—in Australia, at any rate—sufficiently advanced to make this characteristic the basis of another charge, more devastating still. Indeed, it is odd to reflect upon the peccadilloes that could, tongued about in those days, pretty well ruin a girl’s life, and instructive to compare these with present-day tolerance. Though men still may not cheat at cards, it is difficult to think of any taste which a woman may not indulge and still keep her acquaintances.

But to return to the family, and their insufferable championship. It was Aunt Marie-Céleste, flushed with the triumph of having an eldest daughter on her honeymoon, who plagued us most. She would call at the “Farmers and Graziers” and sweep me off for a shopping expedition. My protests were disregarded with a magnificent generosity, draped over pin-pricks.

“Now, my dear Clo, I won’t have this. You must be seen about, my dear child. This sensitiveness is ridiculous.”

“I’m not sensitive.”

“Just as well,” responded Aunt Marie-Céleste, lightly but grimly. Then with the swiftest transition possible: “Put on your hat and come out and we’ll spend some money. That’s the best tonic of all when you’ve got plenty. Tell her she must come, Grand’mère.”

Gran knew I was being baited, but it was difficult to interfere. The head and oldest member of a family, especially if her purse is her own, lives in the position of one walking armed through a jungle. True, if one tiger comes too near it may be dropped with a bullet; but will not its mate and its cubs, instantly and vengefully, take up the trail? Gran, who had by her adoption of me fired one warning shot, as it were, into the air, held her fire now; but her tigers were alert, though only the monkeys, looking down on it all and chattering as they swung by their tails, gave any notion that attacks were being meditated or made.

Then something happened which set all the wild beasts leaping out of ambush.

VI

At that time in Sydney, as now in the United States, there was among the idler women a taste for culture, which found its expression in attending lectures. Lectures, then as now, were easier and more sociable than books. The work was done when one had put on good clothes and clean kid gloves, and ordered the tea; one could then sit, in comfortable chairs and for not too long a time, and let the lecturer do the thinking. Culture seeped in and out of expensively hung ears several times a month. Hostesses amiably rivalled each other in oyster sandwiches and the latest from England in the way of frocks, magazines, accents. The only trouble was that there was a tiresome lack of genuine lions. The hostesses could make a sow's ear serve the purpose of a silk purse nine times out of ten; visiting actors were a great stand-by; still, no genuine resounding Name ever seemed to be found on the P. & O. or Orient lists. There was one exception, a professor of really world-wide eminence for whom they all lay in wait; but on an impulse he got off the ship at Adelaide and went into the desert, mounted on a camel, to study what was left of the blacks, and was next heard of at Broome in Western Australia, where there were no hostesses of any kind. All this must explain the furore caused by the sudden actual presence among us in Sydney of no less a personage than Martina Fields.

She had come out, it appeared, by Messageries, which was the reason for her appearing full-blown without notice. She was really a celebrity. Her plays were on every drawing-room table; her books, strong but never shocking, had afforded relief to hard-pressed conversationalists at every dinner for months. She was a lecturer of renown, photographed regally but badly, was friendly and yet—how strange, with the immense publicity of her life!—a little shy. Finally, and this was what had protected her from seekers for a while, she was travelling under her own name of Gloria Jebb. Everyone cultured had been aware that "Martina Fields" was no more than a pen name, such as it has always been the fashion for literary women to take; none of them, not the best-informed, knew what it replaced, and even had they scanned—as sometimes, in hope of a Count, they did—the passenger list of the Messageries Maritimes, Gloria Jebb would have told them nothing.

How the truth about her came out nobody ever knew. Certainly one of my aunts was the first to hear it, at the Library when she asked for Martina Fields' latest, and the assistant, with starting eyes, informed her that Miss Fields herself had been in that morning.

"Martina Fields here!" returned the aunt, incredulously, and a perfect stranger at her elbow, who had overheard, broke into the Australian lower

class ejaculation of disbelief, “Go on!”

But the assistant was sure. The lady had let drop something about her last book—“Oh, it’s got here already! Borkman’s have been quick!” And the *Sketch* just out from home had a photograph of her that was the spit; and so on. To clinch the whole matter, she had taken out a subscription, and written down her name and address. There it was, Gloria Jebb, Hotel Australia, in the identical large cavorting hand that sprawled “Martina Fields” in gold across the bindings of that celebrity’s books.

“Well!” said the aunt, impressed.

“Cripes!” commented the commoner at her elbow, and they parted, their minds having communed in one instant’s emotion of pleasurable shock.

In about forty-eight hours every hostess, educational society, girls’ school, and university was laying siege to Miss Fields at the Hotel Australia. People introduced themselves as she sat at meals, having tipped the head waiter largely to discover her table. People wrote; some sent telegrams; and Mr. Dudden, Sydney’s sole concert agent and impresario, wiped the eyes of all the hostesses by securing Miss Fields for a series of lectures at the new Victoria Hall. In vain did that distinguished lady protest that she was resting, vegetating, trying to lie a little fallow for the good of her next year’s book. Mr. Dudden was not going to be put off by such excuses as these.

“It’s temperament,” said Mr. Dudden, knowingly, to cronies in the Australia’s winter garden, “they’re all alike. Artistic temperament, that’s the trouble; they all think they’ve got to have it, or if they haven’t got it by nature they put up a bluff. I’ve seen Melba in tears, believe me or not. Shouting her head off and all for what, do you think? Port instead of sherry in her egg-flip. You’ve got to manage ’em.”

“That’s right,” agreed the cronies, “it’s on you again, George. You don’t land a winner every day.”

But he had landed one this time. Martina Fields, dressed in a kind of large classic manner in robes that trailed and folded and lacked utterly all the Gothic gimcrackery of bones and lace that afflicted her audiences, drew crowds ever larger to the Victoria Hall. She read remarkably well; her excerpts from her own plays were the most popular of the performances, magnificent stuff in the Elizabethan idiom with the drive of her personality behind it. She hypnotised, or rather, she stunned Sydney. It was the mixture of thunderbolt and Newfoundland puppy that fetched us all, the blend of

Olympus and the nursery. And like the rest of Sydney I too was stunned, hypnotised, and fetched.

I suppose she knew the symptoms; one of her novels told the story of a girl's unhappy headlong falling in love with an older woman, that woman's mismanagement of the situation and its tragic end. As for me, I did not know in the least. I went to each lecture with the impatience of a tryst. Once I sent a little bunch of flowers—boronia it was, with the lemony smell that is not sickly, like the sweeter scents. At last, as was inevitable, I met her in somebody's drawing-room, and the trouble really began.

She was kind and handsome; no trumpet-tones, but a classical façade in private. She asked me if I read much. Longing to show off, but surrounded by the cultured and so not daring to boast, I said no. An officious relation volunteered the fact that I lived in the bush. Miss Fields nodded sympathetically. She believed in silence, she said, and the healing solitude of wide plains. "Something great will come out of that loneliness some day."

She looked at me as she spoke, and smiled. It meant nothing; but ambitions I had never dreamed of came rolling up in my throat and stifled all speech. The interview drifted away, over a bridge of oyster sandwiches, to a discussion on cooking which left me cold. I went out into the garden by myself, to turn over in my memory the talk with the goddess, and to blush till I struck my own cheek at the thought that my contribution had been the one word, and that mumbled: "No."

When I came in she had gone. She never stayed long at parties, or talked literature when she was at them; was announced by her own name, and hardly differed, save for her skilled voice and a pair of most compelling eyes, from the mere thoughtful rabble. I overheard an aunt discussing her with the hostess.

"My dear Ada, that's all very well. But what's her age? Thirty-five? With her looks, that's too young to be staying about in hotels all over the world by herself."

"My dear," protested Mrs. Clibbon, "she has to earn her living, poor thing. Like an actress."

"Not quite. One doesn't expect much of actresses. But Miss Fields—you heard the bishop yourself—Miss Fields is a moral force. A moral force in the Australia's winter garden!"

"Just the place it's needed, one would think," replied Mrs. Clibbon, who was shrewd.

That talk, however, was going on in every drawing-room. I, who went about very little, heard it twice myself. The Hotel Australia as headquarters was a tactical mistake. It had not quite the raffishness of the "Farmers and Graziers," or of the now deliquescent "Southern Cross," but it was, in its dingy way, gay. Odds and ends frequented it; layers of odds, ends of fortunes. It was the last place, one would imagine, in which a Moral Force would feel at home.

No doubt some of the gossip found its way round to Miss Fields who kept her ears open always, and her eye unwinkingly fixed on the main chance. She was celebrated, the talkers admitted; she was an artist of rare quality, at once flamboyant and discreet; and she appeared to be moneyed. But was she, was she respectable? In those days, for such intimate entertainments as hers—she read in all the richer drawing-rooms—entertainments to which schoolgirls were taken in flocks, respectability really was necessary. Opera singers and actresses, kept to their stages, were not socially sought. Martina Fields was sought; and how awful for the leaders to discover that their search had been, all unknowing, for one of the socially lost!

Miss Fields, with her sensitive actress's knowledge of the feel of a "house," changed quarters, and displayed considerable art in her choice. She moved from the palms and capacious copper spittoons of the Hotel Australia to a boarding-house kept by the esteemed widow of a judge, on a hill looking down towards the blue of Elizabeth Bay, and known to all Sydney as "47." This address, in both senses of the word, saved her. Mrs. Lambert's flair for character was known all over Sydney. She was slightly psychic, with a vague greenish eye contradicted by a business-like pug nose, and she tested the auras of her guests before admitting them on equal terms to her home. In this, she had the help of her Guide, a personage of accurate business instincts who always gave her warnings when the auras were not of the right hue. Her chief aim at "47," she said, was a sympathetic atmosphere.

"My guests are all so good about it. They say to me, 'Mrs. Lambert, how do you do it? 47 is always such an oasis of peace.' And I always say, 'It's not my doing, you should thank the Guide.' "

And sure enough, those whom the Guide rejected always got into the less desirable newspapers, or hurriedly left the country steerage. But the Guide had no hesitation about accepting Martina Fields. Her interesting aura drew an exclamation from Mrs. Lambert the first moment they touched hands; it was blue shot with green, and twice the usual size.

"Miss Fields," exclaimed Mrs. Lambert, impressively pausing, "You are an old soul!"

No mere bodily age would have procured for Miss Fields the distinguished consideration that was accorded as its due to her experienced soul. She was given that rare privilege, a private sitting-room, was cosseted before and after her lectures, and seven weeks after landing in Sydney was fully established as a citizen of credit and renown.

VII

How the idea came to me I cannot imagine, except that I was now quite foolishly in love with Martina Fields, and driven by this emotion into foreign countries of behaviour. Gran still fought her losing battle for me, and perhaps saw the unhappiness, but with her invincible faith in the therapeutic value of movement and gaiety she put all her energies into procuring me these, instead of asking the one or two questions that would have helped. I began to make fantastic plans in my head, as human creatures in love always do, for seizing the dear object; dragging it from beneath horses' hoofs—Martina Fields weighed three stone more than I did—sucking poison out of a snakebite, riding all night through scrub to fetch a doctor. But these fantasies could not satisfy for long: it was contact I wanted. I put my head to contriving something workaday; and the result was Miss Clotilde Boissy clinking and slinking up William Street hill one morning in an immoral hansom alone, towards the shrine above Elizabeth Bay.

Martina Fields was in, writing in her famous private sitting-room. I would almost have backed out of the door when I saw how she was engaged, but she dropped her pencil at once, and came forward with the friendliest smile.

"Miss Boissy, isn't it? How good of you to come! Will you have some tea? You see, I'm adopting Australian habits. Tea at all hours."

And she rang the bell. Without waiting for the tea, or even for her to turn round towards me again, I said desperately:

"Miss Fields, do you want a secretary?"

She halted an instant with her back to me. When she turned her face was blankly expressionless, and yet behind the eyes I was conscious of thoughts racing. I went on talking in a rush, now that I had got the worst over:

"You've got such a lot of writing to do. Look at all those letters. I could answer them if you'd tell me what to say. I could keep accounts for you; I

think I could. I'd do anything."

She maintained her silence. She was never one of those women who do their thinking aloud. At last she said:

"What does your family think of this suggestion?"

I had to confess that they knew nothing about it, not even Gran.

"How old are you? May I ask?"

I had to confess to eighteen. She shook her head.

"I'm afraid your relatives wouldn't think it at all suitable."

But she said nothing of her own attitude. The blindness of love runs in patches; it sees the means to its own end pretty clearly, and I had the wit to notice that she had left her own opinion out of it so far.

"But if they'd let me, would you?"

"I can't discuss such a plan before it's been approved."

"But you do want help, don't you?"

The table, even the floor of the neat room was littered. She looked at it ruefully, making no answer save an oblique one:

"I don't expect to remain in Australia very long."

That was like a blow on my heart. She must have seen some change in my face, for she put out a hand as if to take mine; but the tea came in at that moment, and she transformed the movement very naturally to clear a space among papers for the tray.

When the maid had left I said miserably, longing to know the worst:

"Where will you go, then?"

She answered, as though it were not yet settled:

"China, I dare say. How do you prefer your tea?"

China! I knew very well the family would never let me go after her there. I had to seize the moment, this short unknown period of time between now and her departure. I said, as reasonably and steadily as my heartbeats allowed:

"Please will you listen? Please will you let me come and help? Gran would let me if you asked her. She loves your books. She's such a dear."

"If I ask her?"

“Yes, if you wrote and said I could be useful to you. I wouldn’t want—to be paid. Just till you go away. That wouldn’t hurt, would it, for me to come just till you go?”

Martina Fields, smiling over her tea-cup, said:

“You’re an impetuous child.” And then: “We’ll see.”

VIII

The alarms and excursions that ensued read like the annals of some fair-sized campaign; a campaign which, starting as an exploring party, should turn half-way to a punitive expedition, and simmer at last to an armistice. Move one: Martina Fields wrote a most deferential letter to Gran putting my case. Gran, who enjoyed the revered Miss Fields as a lecturer, but was hurt, I suppose, by my obvious longing to be with her, wrote, without telling me, a civil but very distant note of refusal. This was move two. Move three was with Miss Fields, who wrote to me, saying that after my grandmother’s decision there was nothing more to be said, and she hoped I would forget the project—“which I do not mind admitting I found tempting.” With this letter in my hand I confronted Gran, and struck to hurt, with all the barbarity of the very young. She had no right to answer for me, she had no authority over me, I would never forgive her interference or her going behind my back to thwart me. She gave me the pathetic answers of the old, recalling benefits, protesting that I was not yet old enough to know what was for my own happiness or good. I fought her with Gustave-Félicité’s methods, blank denials, refusals to discuss, and an ultimatum. She called in the family, and the succeeding moves were too rapid and too complex to be numbered.

I expected from the family nothing but censure or obstruction. With unbounded astonishment I saw them now range themselves on my side. Aunt Marie-Céleste thought it an excellent thing for a girl to have occupation. Aunt Josephine hoped much from the influence of Miss Fields. Even the Aunt in her Convent—who kept up with the latest news after the mysterious fashion of aborigines—wrote to Gran that it was God’s Will children should run out from under the wing when they were old enough, and how great would be the triumph if through constant Catholic companionship such a splendid woman as Martina Fields could be brought into His arms.

It is a question who was more taken aback, Gran or I. Neither of us, at the time, could find any reason for the family unanimity; I believe now that at the back of all their minds was the idea of getting me away from Gran,

and giving other and worthier nieces a chance at her benevolence. Miss Fields, so far as I was concerned, remained mute, but she kept an eye on the situation from her vantage hill; for when all the relations had had their say, and Gran had been induced to look at the matter from my point of view and theirs, came another note from her. It ignored the point at issue, and asked with delightful diffidence if Gran would bring me to a reading of a new short play. "It is a very slight affair, but if I may try it out on a small audience, perhaps I shall see my way to make it better. Will you lend me the help of your presence and criticism?"

This was a very handsome headstone raised over the hatchet. Gran was offered a chance, with no hint of its being a chance, to go back on her decision. In the same spirit that she had sent those superlative candlesticks to Cora, Gran now wrote in her fine shaky hand:

> "My Dear Miss Fields,
>
> "I am more than pleased on my own and my grand-daughter's behalf to accept your delightful invitation. I disclaim however all forms of criticism, and propose to devote myself wholly to the enjoyment which any new work from your pen is bound to afford.
>
> "Yours most truly,
>
> "LAURA BOISSY."

Next came the reading. Mrs. Lambert, tactfully clearing out all her other guests for the afternoon, was able to give up the public drawing-room of "47" to Miss Fields and her friends. About forty people, I suppose, were there, men and women in about equal proportions, the cream of Sydney's wealth and intelligence and wardrobe. Martina was in a dress of gold-coloured velvet and her more magnificent manners. She came forward to take Gran's hand like a reigning princess greeting a queen-dowager, and nodded to me with the kindest reassuring look. She had contrived an imaginative tea, at which for the first time Sydney met the more exotic kind of sandwich; I remember particularly asparagus-tips rolled up in brown bread. She ate nothing, excusing herself on account of her voice. I who watched her every movement, noticed a little nervous cough from time to time, and once, when I came very close, that the hand which proffered a freshly poured cup shook very slightly. It was her boast—or at least, for she never boasted, her declaration—that she never suffered from stage-fright. I had a moment's dread lest she might be ill, but her eyes were clear and her colour high.

When the tea-cups were put down, Martina gathered up a manuscript, and approached a gilt enormity ascribed by Mrs. Lambert to the reign of Louis Quinze, which had been set a little apart, in the bow of the window. Her unfailing theatre sense installed her there, with the full spread of harbour and sky crimsoning behind her, and her own eagle profile outlined against the dying light, a very model for the Tragic Muse.

But the play! Like Gran, where Martina was concerned I disclaimed all powers of criticism; but this blank verse incident—it was the last interview between Essex and Elizabeth the Queen—had in it, even for my ears, none of the usual Martina quality. It was bare where she was luscious; its rhythm was an uninspired clip-clop; and though the subject was into her hands, there was hardly a turn of phrase that recalled her. She read it superbly, her voice lent the characters their only life, and the light in the bay outside failed as the passions themselves dwindled down. Applause was enthusiastic, and her virtuosity certainly deserved it. The play, however, does not appear among her published works.

The result of that afternoon reading was the final capitulation of Gran. Poor Gran, she had done so much for me; but love has to be offered under certain very special forms for youth to perceive it. She never did things by halves. She had yielded completely to Gustave-Félicité, and made on the whole quite a good thing of marriage with him. She knew when she was up against a brick wall, which is more than can be said for most women, and she knew, by this time, better than to expect gratitude for kindnesses given unasked. She interviewed Miss Fields and Mrs. Lambert in turn, kissed me, and went back to Corazon, leaving me installed, miraculously, as secretary to the goddess, who had come nobly out of tests not usually applied to goddesses with her respectability unscathed.

And there was Miss Martina Fields upon Society's very apex, with the aura of Mrs. Lambert cast about her, and the sanction of Mrs. Lambert's Guide, and one of the Boissys, that large estimable clan, in waiting.

IX

This position, long battled for, endured one curious fortnight only. I was utterly happy during that time, busy answering letters that came from all sorts of countries, some from China, some from the Americas; none—at least during that fortnight—from England. The letters all referred to her work. People in Shanghai and Valparaiso begged her to send them her books, signed, if possible. Some wanted copies of her first novel, *Ladies' Chain*, others said that they were collecting plays, and would be prepared to

pay all postage and expenses if only Miss Fields could despatch, say, three copies of her *Arabella Stuart*. There seemed to be reading circles in some of these towns which gave a good deal of attention to her writing, and eagerly awaited anything new she might send them. It was all most interesting, and gave me for the first time some idea of how wide-flung might be the net of the best seller. Sometimes there would be a note signed by me, regretting she could not send all the copies asked for; I was indignant at the really inconsiderate requests of the book-collectors.

"Why can't they buy them for themselves?" I once asked her.

"How mean people are! Why should you have to go to all this trouble?"

She answered gravely that English books in those remote parts were hard to obtain. "It doesn't do, as you'll find out when you begin to write, to snub one's public. Enthusiasm demands some response. An artist's reputation rests on his work; but his sales depend, to some slight extent, on personality."

However, no actual wrapping up of books was done. She spoke to Mr. Mackenzie, the bookseller in George Street, and gave him the addresses, so that he might dispatch direct. Her mornings were a good deal taken up with such interviews, to which she jingled off in a hansom, leaving me with the letters. There was little copying of her own stuff to do. An article for a Sydney weekly on Shakespeare, that made, even to my worshipper's eye, rather poor reading; a few notes for a travel book; these were all I saw of her own work during those days. But she was, she said, deliberately refraining, refusing to put forth the best of her brain.

"An artist should not be forever on the treadmill. There must be periods of quiet, and brooding, and just sheer dreaming. Then—give out with all your might what you have taken in."

She talked to me freely and charmingly enough. (Luckily I was too shy to display my devotion at all hours and so bore her.) All the same, there was no descent from the pedestal. Even our jokes were rather Delphic, the kind of stately banter pythonesses might have exchanged between turns at the tripod. No other human creature has ever inspired me with such genuine awe. I worked in rapture, and wished there had been more to do. Relatives said, seeing me in a front seat at lectures: "Well, of all the lucky girls! Just the very thing for you, using your intelligence instead of careering about. Perhaps Miss Fields may have some influence over you." And younger relatives breathed questions as to the kind of underclothing the goddess

wore. I snubbed them angrily; in any case I could not have told them. There had been no such descent from the pedestal as would inform me.

X

One morning, just as Martina was drawing on her gloves to go out, a note was handed in, stately on a salver, by Mrs. Lambert's valued parlourmaid. She looked away distastefully from it, as well she might. It was dirty, and ill-written; there came from it the smell of scented wood, sour smoke, and decay that I had sniffed once or twice in the Chinese quarter out by Redfern. Martina took it up, after one sharp hesitating look, in her elegant gloves, and read it without one muscle changing in her face. There was no answer, she told the maid, who departed. Then, instead of flinging it down into the paper-basket, she took a match from the mantelpiece and burnt it. The days were still warm, we had no fire in the grate; even, no fire was set. Martina, displaying neither haste nor disturbance, rang the bell and gave the order for a fire to be made. While the paper and the wood and the logs were arranging, she was quietly busy among the papers in two tin despatch-cases which I had never yet seen unlocked. The flames flared up palely through a patch of November sun. She fed documents to them very carefully, letters and more letters, using the tongs to put back odds and ends of paper on which a word had escaped the fire. I asked if I might help her. She said no, that they were personal letters which she had been intending for months to destroy. She moved as ever with great decision and neatness, but no haste, and her hands were firm. When the second box was half empty she turned to me, and for the first time I detected a look of bewilderment and strain.

"Has your grandmother gone back to the country?"

I stared.

"You know she has."

"But you have aunts here. Perhaps I ought to send you off now——"

She seemed to be weighing something.

"Listen, Clotilde. You're fond of me, aren't you?" I said bleakly, "Yes." "You love me, I think. Enough to tell lies for me?"

"Lies?"

She halted, gazing at me; then with a gesture almost of despair, turned again to the fire, saying:

"Better leave it alone. There's not the time to explain."

“What’s going to happen?”

“I don’t know, my child.”

“Are you going away?”

“That remains to be seen.”

“Oh, don’t be so hateful to me! Tell me, what is it?”

That was the moment at which the policemen came in. One appeared outside on the balcony at the instant two others entered by the door, without knocking. Martina thrust her last letter down among the flames, now burning dully, choked with ash, and stood facing the door. One of the men, who had a blue paper in his hand, addressed her brusquely:

“Name of Gloria Jebb, alias Fields?”

Martina made no answer. The policeman waited for none; he knew who she was well enough. He went on:

“I have a warrant for your arrest on the charge of procuring women for immoral purposes, and transporting them out of this country against their wills contrary to the Act of——” some king, some date or other. Then he cautioned her. She made one of her brief neat movements towards a drawer of the writing-table, and he caught her wrist roughly, saying:

“No, you don’t. No ructions. You come along quiet, you’d better.”

Martina gave him the calmest wondering look.

“But of course,” said she, and marched, paced, whatever word gives the impression of moving unhurried power, towards the door.

She was in custody, she was accused of that most unclean misdemeanour, white slaving, but there was hope yet, the papers were destroyed, her face and bearing were still her fortune. She went out of that insipid middle-class room as though she were going to a coronation. I watched silently, as though it had been Ellen Terry bringing down the curtain on some modern drama. It would have been indecent to break in, either with question or tears, upon the dignity of that performance.

Thus the prescience of Mrs. Lambert’s Guide was for once, it seemed, betrayed.

XI

That trial, or rather, that appearance before the magistrate, set all Sydney rocking. It was the most satisfying scandal since 1862, when Mrs. Julia Bentley wrote herself obscure anonymous letters, and was only quelled by a Parliamentary enquiry. To do Sydney justice, nearly everyone supposed that a ludicrous mistake had been made; that the accusation should be truth seemed almost too much to hope for. For days my relatives—Mr. Justice Llewellyn, newly raised to the Bench, Aunt Josephine's husband; Cousin Arthur Geraldine, that eminent solicitor—busied themselves pulling strings in vain. Not their eminence, nor my own youth, nor weighty assurances that I could be in no way involved, were able to save me an appearance in the witness-box. There was a good deal of manœuvring, after that, to have the whole affair investigated in camera. This too was disallowed. Wars and rumours of wars went unheeded while Sydney, from Bishopthorpe to Chinatown, babbled of Martina Fields.

She appeared before the magistrate, Mr. Beck, on June 7th, 1894, dressed very simply, without the dash of rouge she sometimes used, and looking stern. She might have been the headmistress of a famous school, or the figurehead of a religion. Looking at her, it was quite impossible to connect her with the heroine of the story told by the police.

They had been opening letters, following a hint given by the San Francisco police. They had been investigating addresses in Shanghai, addresses of book-lovers and autograph collectors in that town and others. They had, to their own satisfaction, worked out the code on which the letters were written. The title of one book, *Ladies' Chain*, they declared, referred to women of the age of twenty-one or over; the title of the play *Arabella Stuart*, referred to girls under this age. It was noted that only these two books, out of the eleven published in Martina Fields' name, appeared in the correspondence of the book-lovers.

In addition to this, Miss Fields had been observed paying frequent visits to the Chinese quarter on foot—what became of the hansom, I wondered?—and in particular to the shop of a Chinaman with the appropriate name of Ho Sin, who had long been suspected of being concerned with the unsavoury traffic. His letters too were couched in code, and written in a very bastard Chinese; they invariably concerned coffins, lacquered coffins, gilt-paper coffins, in which he did an actual trade. The police suspected that illicit merchandise was shipped in and out of the country in these roomy and decorated wooden oblongs.

This—the addresses, which were those of suspected houses, the tip from San Francisco, and the association with Ho Sin—made up the whole case

against Martina Fields. It was lamentably underrating her to attack thus ill-prepared, and I could see her lip draw curling up towards her nose as the incomplete and patchy evidence was heard. There was a remand, bail, a few days' breathing space. Then she loosed her thunders.

In the first place Mr. Mackenzie the bookseller was there to swear that he had, according to Miss Fields' instructions, dispatched the books as stated in her letters. He read a list of dates of dispatch, an account of postage, showed the receipted bill for books and plays punctually discharged by Miss Fields. In his opinion the two works in question were her best, her masterpieces, the ones—if he might venture—that posterity would know her by. It was natural that amateurs should ask for these, rather than for lesser known and possibly less mature works from her pen. He read a publisher's statement of the approximate circulation of these books as compared with the sales of the remaining nine, and so proved his point. He thought the police idea of a code far-fetched. The letters referred to books, and books had been sent.

Mr. Mackenzie was a Fields partisan to his last halfpenny; an enthusiast; nowadays, a fan. And he was Scotch, of a respectability almost appalling to contemplate in so warm a climate. He gave the police theory its first and most deadly knock. But there were others to come.

It was proved by Ho Sin, through an interpreter and a cloud of witnesses, that the purpose for which Miss Fields had visited his squalid house had been the purchase of jade. It was true that she had recently been wearing an exquisite rope of it, of the softest and most brilliant green. Her bank book was produced, showing a payment of £30 to Ho Sin. An expert, Mr. Grant himself, was produced to say that this was the value, approximately, of Miss Fields' jade rope, which would have cost rather more at his shop in Hunter Street. Miss Fields' bank book itself was a triumph of probity, no outgoings unexplained, and on the incoming side impressive sums from Mr. Dudden, and yet more imposing letters of credit from the most conservative of London banks. Then it was my turn.

They asked me what had been my occupation while with Miss Fields.

"Answering her letters for her, mostly. Invitations and so on."

In my mind, word for word, was Martina's appeal. But what was I to lie about, where was I to lie? Afraid of involving her and causing trouble by prevaricating in the dark, I told the direct truth, as far as I knew it.

Had I seen this letter before? One was handed to me, one of the answers to the admirers in Shanghai.

"Yes. I wrote it for Miss Fields. That's my handwriting."

Had Miss Fields been quite open about her correspondence?

"Yes. I saw all the letters, I think."

"Those she received?"

"Yes, and that were sent out. Everything was left about, open."

In that case, no doubt I had read those documents which she was burning when the police entered her room? No, I hadn't seen those. Had no idea of their contents? No. Why did I suppose she had burnt them? She had said she might be going away soon, and didn't want to travel with a lot of old papers. (No mention of that queer-smelling dirty letter that she had received; of the fire specially ordered; of her gloved hands, which she had not waited even to strip before she set about her task.)

Then a different sort of question. How did I come to be associated with Miss Fields?

"It was my own idea. I wanted to come as her secretary."

Ah! With my family's approval?

"Of course. They all thought it was a very good thing. Mr. Llewellyn, Uncle Frederick"—the uncle new balanced on the bench—"said that he thought it a very good thing to do."

One more question. During the time of my association with Miss Fields, had I ever had the least suspicion that she was not in fact the eminent and estimable woman she seemed?

"No. I haven't now. I think it's all some silly mistake."

So much for loyalty. And in fact I did think the accusation a most unlikely one. That there was something wrong, even my devotion was aware, but somehow not this. I could not accept the point of view of my relatives, that I might think myself lucky not to be voyaging half-way to Shanghai in a lacquer coffin. I believed, then as now, that her sole object in having me by her was to guarantee her respectability. To guarantee it—but against what? I had no notion; though her play, the short interlude whose nakedness she had lent the whole of her actress's talent to cover, should have told me something.

She was a great tactician; so much those two days before the magistrate made plain. She had an answer, and a good, a dignified answer, to every question or suggestion made by the police. An impartial onlooker who had listened to the case from its beginning might almost have seen how the scales of Justice trembled and gradually sank, weighed by impeccable witnesses, to the side which meant her victory. It was suspicion against fact, all the time, and the facts told stubbornly for Martina. That observer, reading his papers the morning after her second appearance, from the stately *Herald* to the briskly knowing *Jones' Weekly*, must have said to himself, if he were honest—"The police are making fools of themselves." But the police were obstinate, and would not accept defeat. They intimated that they had fresh evidence which they proposed to bring, and were somewhat impatiently granted another remand by Mr. Beck.

During the few days that elapsed Martina's discretion was perfect. Sympathisers invited her to meals; she refused gracefully and with tact. I saw her note to Mrs. Clibbon, in which she wrote that in the circumstances she would not wish to impose upon the loyalty of her friends. "A few days, I hope, will see the end of this whole misunderstanding. Then I shall feel free to accept again the kindness which has made Australia so dear to me." I was snatched at once from "47" to stay with Aunt Josephine while the accusers raged, and after my evidence I too had a little note, kind but proud.

"My dear Clotilde,

"I cannot express the regret I feel for having yielded to my own affection for you, and so unknowingly involved you, through your association with me, in this trouble. I blame myself for not standing firm; but what good does that do now? All will be well, and this odious charge will be disproved. Meanwhile you have had an ordeal which no child of eighteen should be obliged to endure. I feel that I must ask your forgiveness, and yet, who could have foreseen such an astonishing turn of Dame Fortune's wheel? I need not affirm to you, I believe, my entire innocence and ignorance of the appalling accusation. I am seeing no one, it is better; and so can thank you, dear child, only in this way for your staunchness to

"Your ever affectionate——"

And then the strong sprawling signature.

It was not a very spontaneous expression of emotion. Martina, assailed, wounded, kept her pedestal still. But it impressed my aunts, who showed it about their circle, declaring that it was not the letter of a guilty woman, a white slaver hand in glove with low Chinese.

Public opinion of the more educated sort was against the police. People began to remember scandals, stories of bribery which had crept into the papers a few months back. This was their method, said the wiseacres, of distracting public attention from their own misdoings, as the old school of politicians used to allay home discontent with a foreign war. Trumped up, the whole business, said the wiseacres, among whom were my own respected uncles and cousins, scattered here and there throughout the different branches of the law; trumped up, preposterous, bound to fail. After that second day, it did look like it.

XII

Then—but what could have possessed Martina, so careful, so far-seeing; she who, while she touched nothing that she did not adorn, always kept her fingers gloved? The police on that third day of the hearing in the magistrate's court, brought in evidence two flimsy pieces of printed paper; one a pakapu bet, the other a five-pound-note, together with the history of the last few hands through which it had passed. It had been stolen in the first place by a sneak-thief who was caught red-handed, from the pocket of a man left lying insensible in the wake of a gang-fight of larrikins down by the Quay. The victim was taken to Prince Alfred Hospital, where in the course of his delirium he let out a name, well enough known to the police, with other relevant matters. Detectives took notes, and departed to discover the personage indicated at his usual haunt, a public-house, where they asked a question or two.

"You heard Joe's in hospital," said the police; and when he nodded: "D'you know how he got there?"

"Search me," responded Mr. Nolan, the personage, sitting back with an easy manner.

"We'll do that all right," the police assured him; then, casually: "You'd better look out, Nolan. Joe's been talking."

"Let 'im talk," retorted Mr. Nolan contemptuously, "about all 'e's good for, the dirty little tyke."

But the ease of his pose was somewhat less assured.

“He says,” said the police, watching, “that you double-crossed him. He says you paid him his share, a fi’-pound-note, and then you stoushed him and took it back. He’s pretty wild, Nolan.”

“Wild!” repeated Mr. Nolan, mocking, “Yes, about as wild as Sunday morning in a coffee palace. You’re wasting your time listening to Joe. Joe works on ’is own, and a dirty lousy job ’e makes of it.”

“He knows a good bit about you,” said the police, and recited a few of the raving Joe’s indiscretions, while Mr. Nolan’s brow grew darker, and his solid figure slumped further down against the back of the chair.

“Well, that’s all a lie, see?” said he at last. “If Joe says he goes with my push he’s a liar. If he says I ever gave him five pounds he’s a bloody liar. I know what I’d do with a five-pound-note before I’d give it to Joe, the dirty this and that. Me and my push can earn our tucker off white men like white men. We don’t need to go muckin’ round with Chinks and wimmen’s earnings. We pay our tabs[3],” went on the virtuous Nolan, “when we want ’em, and tell ’em to get to hell out of it when we don’t. Joe’s bloody flash with ’is five-pound-note, as if I’d give ’im so much as the smell of the backside of one. He got that off Ho Sin for bringing a new girl in on Tuesday night, and if he says he didn’t you can tell Joe from me it’s one big bloody lie like what I said before.”

The police withdrew, to make further and more precise enquiries concerning Joe. They found at the place where he lived a young woman in possession, known to Lower George Street as Edie. She lay upon a large bed reading, and viewed their entry without too much concern for the déshabille in which they found her. She took the offensive at once, informed them that they had nothing on her, that she was a good girl nowadays. She supposed they were after Joe, and believe her or not, she neither knew where Joe was, nor bleeding well cared.

The police made civil answer. They weren’t after her, they said. Bygones could be bygones as far as they were concerned. They only wanted to ask a few questions.

She sat up and threw down her book with a thud at this, eyeing them suspiciously. Questions about what?

“Well, this new girl of Joe’s, for one thing. Where’d he get her from?”

“What new girl?” With ironic emphasis. “Joe’s like our cat, always bringing home some truck or other. I don’t strain my sight keeping an eye on Joe.”

For all that, she parried every question with dexterity. Hadn't seen him since Monday. A girl on Tuesday? News to her. Ho Sin? Never heard of him, till there was all this in the papers. Ever seen this—the five-pound-note—before? Not likely. She knew a man once who had one framed, but he was dead.

"You can have one like it for a keepsake if you'll give your memory a jog."

But her memory was bad, she declared, shocking. "I've got to tie a knot in my handkerchief to remember I'm a lady."

They gave up their questions and made search of the room, she couched meanwhile in the midst of the capacious bed, making suggestions, mocking them. When there was no longer any place unexplored, including the bed itself, from which they removed her, they prepared to go, sped by her brisk, "Time, gents!"

"If there's anything makes me mad," went on Joe's ex-support and present defender, flashing bright dark eyes on one of whose lids trembled a wink, "it's a lot of men in and out of my bedroom."

The police laughed, and one picked up her book, which had fallen face downwards on the floor and read the title: *Ladies' Chain*, by Martina Fields.

"Well, what of it?" Edie demanded, truculently. "All this talk in the papers, I wanted to see what she wrote about. It's a lot of slush. I can't see, myself, what all the fuss's for."

A detective fluttered the pages past his thumb and came upon a red printed pakapu paper, some of the characters dashed through with a black brush; a used paper, on which a bet had been made. He enquired:

"Where'd Joe get this?"

"How should I know? Ah Fee's most likely."

"When?"

"Last week."

"We shut up Ah Fee's school a fortnight ago."

"All right, well, I told you I didn't know."

"He got it at Ho Sin's, didn't he?"

She was mute.

“Don’t talk if you don’t want; we’re going up to Ho Sin’s now, and we’ll ask him.”

She laughed, a trifle discordantly.

“Fat lot you’ll get out of Ho Sin. Give me back that paper, you’ve gone and lost my place.”

“Oh no, Edie. We’re taking this. Get back to bed, there’s a good girl, and snatch forty winks while you can. How’s business?”

She made no answer, but looked sullenly still at the paper which one detective was folding away.

“Quite lost your voice, haven’t you?” the badinage went on. “Here——” a half-crown was pressed into her hand. “We’re off now. Buy yourself some conversation lollies.”

She threw the half-crown in the speaker’s face, and flounced over in bed. The detectives departed in search of an interpreter who could decipher the brush strokes, which might have been the ordinary obliterating scrawls, or might have been characters.

They were characters. They gave an address, right away from the Chinese quarter, down by the waterside. The police went in force, late that night, and after breaking down a door or two and knocking a head or so out of the way, they found one very young girl locked in a room, in a pitiful state of terror and distress. They gave her a day to recover, and then confronted her in Prince Alfred Hospital with the now lucid Joe. She identified him beyond any possibility of doubt. Joe, caught in a trap, began to whine. Others were in it as well as him. He wasn’t going to stand the racket while they got off. The police soothed and flattered, and calmed his fears until he began to talk. They listened with attention for half an hour, and then, with some repugnance patting Joe on the shoulder, went down Macquarie Street and by Hunter Street to Martin Place. Here they entered the offices of a bank, and obtained, after some argument with the shocked chief cashier, a note-number and a date.

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[3] Women.

XIII

Even with Joe's revelations and the damning evidence of the note, traced from the souteneur, via Ho Sin, direct to her possession; with all this, I believe Martina might have won through if she had kept her head. A doctor was heard afterwards saying that she must have been stiff with opium; he had noticed the pin-point pupils of her eyes. Perhaps she had, to loose the strain for a while, gone to some drug, which would be easily available to her through Ho Sin. At any rate, when the charge was thus dangerously near being proved, all at once she broke out, sans warning, into the ugliest and most vile clamour of words, with none of her careful delivery, none of her pauses and lifts and falls of phrase. Only her voice with its austere English accent remained; and the sound of it flinging filth, with drawing-room vowels to all the dirty words, shocked listeners more than the proved story of her misdeeds; seemed, indeed, better proof of these than the proofs themselves. She was committed for trial; and Sydney hostesses, having talked the scandal hollow, till there was no pith left in it, settled down to the honest yearly round of dancing and racing, glad to forget culture for a while.

But I did not hear what was her sentence. I was on the high seas two days after the police triumph, bundled off by the family out of harm's way. A Mrs. Trentham, Aunt Josephine's acquaintance, was sailing in the *Ostend*, and would chaperone me. Nobody in England need know that I had for fourteen days been secretary to a white slave organizer, while as far as Australia was concerned I was done for. Everyone knew; hardly anyone doubted that I had been aware of Martina Fields' sub-activities, and had deliberately lied in her favour. Sheer family pride kept the relations non-committal. They never questioned me, and I held my chin high. Even Gran, coming down from Wollondoola to say good-bye, clasping my fingers round a cheque as she kissed me, thought me indifferent or hard. Not one of them, thank God, had an inkling of the truth. It is humbling to be young, and in love, and deceived; but more bitter to discover that love is not stilled, goes on panting and thirsting even after disillusion. At least, with women it is so.

CHAPTER XI

> Mendicants observe, whereby they instantly discover a mercifull aspect.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

As far as Colombo the voyage was uneventful; smooth and airless save on those nights selected for dancing on deck; a monotony of sky and sea, and drowsy mornings in deck-chairs. It need hardly be said that as a witness in the notorious police-court charge I was an object of interest to every person on board from the captain down. They did not dare to question me openly; I was, after all, a young girl, in whose presence such matters as prostitution might not be mentioned. But they eyed me, and hung about my chair when Mrs. Trentham was below, and seemed always on the verge of indiscreet enquiries. That was during the first week, before my prickliness and one-word answers had warned them off; afterwards I was left alone in the big chair outside my own deck cabin, and not even plagued to toss bags on to numbers, or rings on to pegs.

This savagery worried Mrs. Trentham. I dare say the relations had asked her to try and get me "out of myself," and, to do her all justice, she tried. She was pretty, and dressed as I should have liked to dress. She had admirers all over the ship. Stewards ran for her, wool-buyers returning to Germany and France competed for her partnership at games; her stewardess mothered her. Conscientiously, as she acquired an admirer and found no great use for him herself, she handed him over, all unwilling, to me; I snapped at him, and read Shakespeare, or went to bed in the cabin, and the moths returned thankfully to their flame. There was the usual fancy dress ball at which she very naturally carried off first prize as a Basket of Grapes—so pretty she looked, in great plaited paper paniers full of cotton-wool balls with purple paper from the barber's shop twisted round them. I went, sourly, as a New Woman, in a pair of borrowed knickerbockers and somebody's eyeglass. This caused a certain stir, for the knickerbockers were recognised as the property of a certain Mr. Bascomb, whom everybody despised on account of his subservience to his wife. It was thought that this daring loan would get him into some sort of public trouble with her; but interest soon paled when

the wife revealed that she herself had lent them without reference to her husband, and thought them a most sensible dress.

We had eighteen hours at Colombo, coaling. All the older hands flitted from the ship the instant we arrived, before the little round baskets of coal dust began to run from hand to hand, up from the lighters beside us. Before we woke stewards came into the cabin and closed our ports; while we took our morning tea, black faces, jabbering, went by; throughout the ship was an atmosphere of haste, and heat, and infiltrating dirt.

But once on deck, stepping daintily, for the coal dust already lay thick—oh, the exquisite pale green of the water on which the lighters swayed and rowdy little native boats plied! Australia is a country without colour; the jackets and caps of jockeys, the skirts and parasols of women at Flemington or Randwick, the jackaranda in November, the distant hills; this is all, in the way of colour, that the old weary continent can do. It was my first heady draught of the clashing reds, the whites and piercing greens of dark-skinned people; of their eternal noise; and of the way palms lean on the wind like a woman towards her lover.

We were taken by Mrs. Trentham's adorers to the usual places; the two hotels; the shops; a rickshaw ride to Mount Lavinia when the evening grew cool. I might have enjoyed it all alone, but Lilian Trentham, with her faultless clothes, her resolute acceptance and conscientious carrying through of the task of civil zing and cheering me, made it impossible to yield to the romantic pull of the place. I dealt angrily with one of the swains who approached my hand on the terrace of the Galle Face after dinner; he was getting off the ship here, and could afford to try experiments. I hated being pawed by damp hairy hands and said so. Our parting, the official one under the discreet hotel lamps when it was time to return to the *Ostend*, lacked the hearty goodwill usual between people who are certain of never meeting again. Mrs. Trentham looked at me curiously, and I felt that there were things she would have liked to say; but she was older than my cousin Georgette, and kept silence, save for one genuinely weary sigh. I was too unfeminine for her; not that she much liked women. But at least I gave her no anxiety by flirting with the wrong people, those hothouse passions for third officers such as are the chaperone's bane. I ate, and read, and held my tongue, and at night was unhappy. But though we shared a cabin, she, like the relations, never suspected that.

II

At Colombo a number of new passengers got on, and were eyed suspiciously by the indigenous inhabitants of the ship, with their age-long knowledge of her and each other. The list showed that we had acquired two colonels, a captain, a plain Mr., three Mrs.'s—one with children—and a live lord. This last roused much interest, but was at first left alone, lest the suspicion of snobbishness should rest on those who approached him. He seemed not to notice his isolation, or not to care. He was a man of thirty, perhaps, with a soft moustache very unlike the colonel's up-and-out-standing bristles, a diffident way of walking, and a quick, nervous smile. His full name, as a forgotten Peerage in the ship's library discovered, was Theophilus Aubrey Combe-Martin, Viscount Todber, and he was the Earl of Frome's only son. When we all knew this, it did not get us much further. The inevitable Games Secretary approached with the heartiness which was his qualification for the post, received his due subscription and an explanation, delivered with a slight stutter, that Lord Todber wasn't playing games much just now, had to keep quiet, was sorry; jolly, these deck games—the explanation trailed off into his nervous smile. The Games Secretary, whose task it was to stimulate competition among his flock, keeping them all at each other's throats without mutiny or rest, was heard lamenting in the smoking-room this lack of public spirit.

"Feller can't play bull-board, doctor's orders; that's all my eye," said the Games Secretary; "why, a baby in arms can play bull-board. Or if he don't want to play, why doesn't the feller offer to serve on the committee? Or recite?" There was a concert blowing up towards us. "I can't stand a feller that only thinks of himself. Here we all are, and here we'll all stop for another three weeks unless the old ship goes down, ha, ha! We've all got to pull together, eh, Colonel?"

But the young man kept to himself very politely, and pleased himself; played no games, no instrument, and did not recite. This impassive determination, combined with a rather meagre physique, troubled our curiosity more than ever, and left it unsatisfied.

On the night of the concert dreadful things were due to happen. The decent napkins were ruthlessly torn from talents long hidden, ghosts of dead songs walked, and aged conjuring tricks came stumbling into the lamplight. Worse still, the Games Secretary, realizing that the ship as a whole lacked entertainers, promised a sing-song after the regular items in which all could voice the dear old melodies: Home, Sweet Home, Riding down from Bangor, the Swanee River. Mrs. Trentham was performing, of course; she had a little clear voice, and a pretty way with the piano at which she

sketched her own accompaniment, smiling out at her audience. In a panic one evening, I buried my flute in the washing bag; I would rather have thrown it overboard than have blown one note, or made for one instant the needful hideous flautist's face before those passengers. But nobody suspected me of a flute.

The ladies' saloon became a place of whispers, and awkward encounters for a day or two before the concert. Through the windows one saw earnest conferences over sheets of music; or the conjurer standing alone, wheedling and winking at an audience consisting solely of his wife, whose task was to keep watchful dispassionate eye on his sleeve. One could not sit there while the rehearsals went on. I dragged my chair down the deck to a corner near the smoking-room, where I should be out of earshot, and there, purely by chance, overheard a remarkable conversation between the two colonels about the mystery whom they called "young Todber."

"I must say this fellow Spink"—the Games Secretary—"he's a little too much of the bagman for my taste. Can't leave you alone. He's an insurance agent, isn't he?"

"Something of the sort, I believe. Quite. I take your point."

"Enthusiasm's all very well. What's that expression some Frenchman—Napoleon, wasn't it?—used to use; something about zeal. No zeal. Avoid zeal. Some such expression."

"Something of the kind. I agree. Confounded nuisance."

"Well, that's going rather far. It's something for the ladies to do. But this fellow—Spink, I mean—he's got no tact. I like a fellow to be keen on his job——"

"Absolutely."

"—but there's a difference between that and tact. He's been pestering young Todber, for instance. Well, you know, I can understand that young fellow wanting to keep out of the limelight. Eh? You've heard the story, of course."

"Something, I believe. Vague, you know. Doesn't do to trust all you hear."

"Nor all you see, eh? I don't like this fashion of powdering the ladies have taken up. Can't tell a good complexion from a poor one nowadays. What was I saying? Ah, yes. Well, now, I had it direct from Pindi. Old Hodgson, great pal of mine, commanding the Leatherbreeks now—you

know him, I daresay? He wrote me an account; and mind you, he was on the spot at the time.”

Then out came the story. Divorced from side-issues, such as old Hodgson’s wife’s remote connection with some relatives of the speaker whom he had never seen, the comparative costs of living in various parts of India, and the semi-miraculous speed of a pony he had once possessed but sold to a man whose name he could not remember, the facts were these.

Young Todber had been a subaltern in a regiment so crack that it could afford to be unpopular. It ignored its unpopularity, and went its way. A hearty commonplace regiment with which it chanced, by some oversight on the part of the Commander-in-Chief, to be brigaded, chose to bait the cracks. Two of these outcast officers, selected from among their brethren for cast-iron heads, contriving somehow to be in company with Todber and another high and mighty subaltern, by some ruse drank them both into complete insensibility under the table; then, propping them up, took razors and shaved the heads of both. Not wholly; the tormentors contented themselves with leaving two round pill-boxes of hair over the left ear of each, in mockery of the undress headgear worn by the regiment in more tolerant climates.

This was all very ridiculous, especially as the offending tufts had perforce to be shaved off next day, leaving two egg-like naked polls to corroborate the immediately bandied tale. Their Colonel, a man of resource, sent both young officers home on furlough for a period which should permit their hair to grow and the ludicrous incident to be forgotten. Before they left he sent for them and pointed out how very essential it was, for success in a military career, to have a head for wine. He said, that while it was not given to everyone to hold liquor, and no blame actually attached to their parents or upbringing for their weak heads, yet it was an unsoldierly thing to have said of a man. It had, moreover, exposed the regiment to ridicule, which was a far more deadly thing than being exposed to fire, and had earned them already an unamusing nickname. He did not suggest that they should exchange, or send in their papers, as was their own first desperate suggestion; but he did implore them while on leave to learn to subdue their stomachs to drink; and if he might give a hint, to go into training on port.

This was the sum of old Hodgson’s story, and while the two elderly gentlemen wagged their heads, I was sorry for Lord Todber. His hair, true, was unbecomingly short. He looked delicate, too; I wondered if old Hodgson had given his compeer the whole of the story, and if there were not some other reason for the young man’s solitude. I was interested, though not sentimentally, in my fellow-savage; there is something endearing and pitiful

to women about a man who has been made a public fool of, though no man cares to realize it.

III

On the evening of the concert I dressed decorously in finery, to avoid comment from Lilian Trentham, prettily nervous herself in white, with pearls. After dinner, when she was gathering admirers and a lace cape about her, and all the rest of the world was proceeding with stately haste to secure the most comfortable places in the music-room, I slipped away with a rug to the boat deck. No one was there; not a single after-dinner cigar glowed and faded along its length. With an unladylike hoist, learned in my trousered days, I scrambled on to the canvas cover of one of the boats, that supported me like a hammock. The day had been sunny; even the heavy dew that falls at sea had not yet made the canvas cold. I wrapped the rug round me, though, for the shoulders of the epoch were most spartanly bare, and lay there still, watching the masts sway across the sky and back with the curved rhythm of scythes through barley. It was not the sky I knew; we had come over the rim of the earth, and the northern patterns began to appear, unfamiliar groups of stars glowing less clear, as if through a veil. I looked for a while, then turned my head sideways to the canvas. Something of the full horror of growing up, the deadly fear of living, came over me. An unhappy age, those years from seventeen to twenty; an age at once unsure and too confident, lost in a world of new values wherein its own is not yet established; an age filled with the pleasures and terrors of hope.

I must have sobbed, I suppose, for in the unaccustomed luxury of solitude I had settled down to a really good cry; a cry unhampered by haste, or the dread of sympathy. The half-cry is as unsatisfactory as the stifled sneeze. I had sunk into these tears with abandon. Now a question startled me from a voice level with my face.

“I say,” said the voice, “who’s there? Is there anything wrong?”

I could not at once get hold of the tears, which were in full stream. I did not answer. The voice went on:

“Anything I can do? I say, please don’t cry.”

I sat up in my rug, and fought down the sobs sufficiently to say:

“I thought everyone’d be at the concert.”

“I’m not. Can’t stand those shows. Are you all right, really?”

“Yes, thank you.” With dignity: “I’m only being silly. It’s nothing.”

“Well, I don’t know. I should have thought it would take a lot to upset you. You always look——”

No one can resist this. I pursued his half-sentence with a question.

“Look what? You don’t know who I am.”

“Only by sight. Let’s take it I don’t if you’d rather.”

“It doesn’t matter. I hate concerts, too, and dances. I wish I didn’t, but I do.”

“Why wish you didn’t? They’re meant for amusement, aren’t they? And if they don’t amuse——”

He left the phrase on an intonation like a shrug.

“Yes, I know. That’s how I feel—but there’s not so very much else for girls to do.”

“No, I’ve thought that, often. It can’t be much fun, really, being a girl.” Then after a pause: “But it’s just as sickening to be a man—and out of things.”

We were talking in the darkness, as strangers talk sometimes to each other when the odds are against ever meeting again; in railway carriages, in foreign hotels. I said, thinking of the colonels and their gossip:

“There are lots of other jobs for men besides soldiering.”

“I suppose so.” A pause. “I don’t care about any other.”

“Why are you giving it up, then? Surely——” I hesitated. If the story were not true! But the colonel had had it from old Hodgson, who lived on the spot. “Surely that sort of silly joke oughtn’t to matter?”

“Joke?” His voice was blank.

I was a fool to have said it. Unhappy nineteen! I had shown that I pitied him, and no young man wants pity for a moment. He wants admiration, or at the very least disdain. I saw the gaffe too late, and stumbled on.

“Wasn’t there a joke? I’m sorry——”

“You’ve been hearing stories. What do they say?”

“Well——” I could hardly tell about the shaving, and the preliminary to the shaving, that table under which the schemers had drunk him. While I hesitated he went on quietly:

"It doesn't matter. The fact is, I've started having asthma. The doctors out here don't know how to deal with it. I'm going to try what the big fellows at home can do."

"You don't look like it," I said clumsily, trying not to show pity again, and blundering into callousness.

"No. It doesn't bother me much at sea."

Then there was silence, but a comfortable silence. During the talk each one of us had been putting out tendrils, delicate as those by which a convolvulus clings, and recognising something, each in the other, of ourselves. I believe that I came to know Theo as completely in those first ten minutes' talk as in the twenty years that followed. I was bitterly sorry for him, for the same reason that I pitied myself. My old trousered attitude had been taken from me by the developing weakness and strength of my body, that turned me willy-nilly into a woman. Theo had dreamed all his life of wars, he was keen, he was able, yet some freak of nerves and air-passages was bringing all this down to nothing, stranding him among fields not tented, but tilled. A country gentleman, and not even able to ride to hounds! Poor Theo——

Our first talk ended there. I shivered suddenly and he advised me to get down and walk a while. I said, still ungracious, though I liked him:

"No, thanks. In these stupid shoes, it's no fun."

"All right," said he, accepting the excuse. "Can you get down? Put your hand on my shoulder—that's it. Hope you're not really cold." Then, with the curious outspokenness of the shy: "Thanks for talking."

"I liked it," I said, halting awkwardly. "Good night."

"Good night."

IV

Next day we were at Aden, rosy and barren. Lilian Trentham had planned to do the things that are done; to see the Tanks, to see the mermaids, to buy baskets from the clamouring men in boats. An admirer had been allotted as my escort; all was in train. To the surprise and relief of everyone I refused to go.

"But," they said, half-heartedly, "we'll be coaling."

I did not mind.

“But Aden’s really interesting. You ought to see it, you know.”

I said I could see as much of it as I wanted from the deck.

“Perhaps you’ve got a headache?” someone enquired hopefully.

I said I had.

“Oh”—much relieved—“in that case I really think you ought to stay on board. I didn’t know you felt seedy, dear. Of course Aden’s wonderful, but there’s bound to be a glare. You’d much better keep quiet.”

When they had all gone ashore in a kind of wherry, with smaller boats full of basket and cigarette and amber merchants clinging to its sides like barnacles, and out-roaring each other like bookmakers, I turned round to find Lord Todber at my elbow.

“Not afraid of coal?” said he, smiling under his neat soft moustache.

“Not so afraid as I am of crowds.”

He coughed once or twice. A thick dark dust was over everything, drifting up towards us from the coolies’ baskets, swinging from hand to hand below us.

“Don’t stay here,” I said, and shook my skirt distastefully, “I’ve got a clean linen on; more fool me.”

We moved away together. There were no clean corners left in the ship, but here and there was an occasional cool one. We had, at lunch, the saloon to ourselves, except for the officers, and a drab Mrs. or so, slave to her family. He did not come to my table; that would have been too conspicuous a move. He sat in his usual place by the captain, and I in mine by the purser, and we disregarded each other with an agreeable sense of being able to afford to seem indifferent. Afterwards when I was having coffee in the music-room he ranged up beside me.

“Captain Oliffe says we shan’t get the bunkers full till midnight.”

“Oh! That’s a pity.” Then, as another aspect of the news came before me: “What about the others; the people ashore? They were all told to be back by seven without fail.”

“I suppose they’ll come back. Rather a sell for them, just as it’ll be getting cool.”

He hesitated, stirred his coffee, that he took without sugar, a number of times.

"Aden's garish by day. It's rather wonderful at night."

"You know it? No wonder you didn't care to go ashore."

"I should care to go—if you wanted to."

So closely did femininity hem me in, so smotheringly did twelve years' skirts billow about me, that without thinking an instant I said:

"Oh, but I couldn't."

He agreed at once.

"No, I suppose not."

And drank off his coffee without further argument. Ten ticks of the clock went by in silence; so long did it take the stifled me to fight its way up through the petticoats. Then I said:

"Yes, I can. I'd like to."

He looked pleased, but dubious.

"It won't get you into trouble with your chaperone?"

"She's gone off, hasn't she? And here we are, talking."

"Yes—it's rather different. Still, if you don't mind. I'd take all kinds of care of you."

And that was Theo all over. He could make a decision, and stick to it, anywhere on his own masculine ground. He was perfectly shrewd and could be firm; yet all through, from this, the very beginning of our relations, he left the decisions to me. Chivalry; I wonder just how many, or how few women, want chivalry when it actually comes their way?

We went ashore together, and returned at eleven to a row with Lilian Trentham. I had left a message for her; she had no cause to be anxious. But the moment I stepped into the cabin we shared she went for me without warning, cat-fashion; hump, hiss and strike.

"So you're back at last. I've no control over you, and I don't expect politeness. All the same, I'd like some sort of explanation."

I gave it, astonished; the impulse, the altered hour of departure.

"With a man you've never spoken to before! How should I know if he's a fit person—he's never had the civility to speak to me, he knows you're with me." This was the real grievance, and I perceived it. "I can't have this kind of behaviour, Clotilde."

I said gruffly, hating the quarrel:

"Sorry."

"Oh, no; that won't do. That's much too easy. You don't seem to see how it all reflects on me. It was stupid of me to take the responsibility—after everything, all the scandal and so on. I might have known—but at any rate you must understand that while you're in my charge you behave yourself. You must realize that I'm rather a different sort of woman from that other person."

I laughed at that; but softly. Both of us were speaking under our breath, for the ship was not moving yet, there were none of the usual noises of splashing and creaking to cover our talk from ears in neighbouring cabins. The laugh broke Lilian's temper completely.

"You think it's funny. Let me tell you that I don't. Let me tell you—I've tried to be kind because I love your Aunt Josie, but I never for one moment believed you knew nothing of what was going on. You're much too sharp for that, my dear! I don't care in the least, you can pick up your old habits again when I hand you over in England, but I'm not going to have people saying—connecting me with your disgusting friends and this awful story. Understand that, please." I began to say something. "Don't talk to me, I don't want to talk, I'm tired out."

She began to rub at her face with cream, vigorously, suddenly, like a kitten washing. I went to bed.

V

Next day Lilian Trentham began to talk about me. She had been a model of discretion at first concerning the scandal. Enquirers, who in decency could hardly question me, had got small change out of her; this I must grant. But I was not then a rival; I was an unattractive sullen girl, whom it was easy and admiration-provoking for a pretty woman to champion. Pretty women are almost always charming to their unsuccessful sisters. But I had committed the sin of sins by attracting notice in a quarter that had remained indifferent to charm, and this by some twist of feminine reasoning made it war between us; war, in which, as in love, all is fair. The colonels began to look at me sideways.

It was bad tactics on Lilian's part. Theo, it seemed, had always disliked her; she was too reminiscent of the women who had laughed over his discomfiture, up in the hills. He never came to stand by my chair when she occupied hers. He thought her, with her adorable clothes, and her jewels just

right, and her schooled voice, rather common. He appeared one afternoon from nowhere as I walked alone, doing my mile on the boat deck in rain—we were through the Canal by this time—and said:

"Who's that Mrs. Trentham you're with? No relation, is she?"

"Oh, no. A friend of my aunt's. Why?"

"She's—undependable, you know. Rather a talker, isn't she?"

"What have you been hearing?"

He had been hearing the story of my fortnight with Martina Fields, which had got round in full detail, imagined and true, to the smoking-room. I said, when he had repeated, with stumblings and excisions, the smoking-room version:

"That's all quite true." It was not worth while quarrelling with the encrusted lies.

"Mrs. Trentham has no business to tell it. One of the men said he had it direct from her."

(Old Hodgson again, this time in skirts, and lying with nods and becks in a cane chair.)

"I dare say she did. She knows all about it. Everyone does in Sydney."

"But to tell it to strangers!" His face was a fastidious mask of disgust.

"It doesn't matter. None of it was my fault. I don't really mind."

"She said you were most awfully fond of the woman. 'Ridiculously devoted,' that's what she said." I waited, with my teeth shut; but Theo went on gently: "That must have made it rotten for you; rotten hard to bear."

I stopped in my stride and walked away from him to the ship's side. He came after me. I put out an awkward hand to shoo him away.

"What is it?"

"I'm—I was going to cry. You'll think I'm always howling."

"I don't. I think you're uncommon brave. I'd like to wring Mrs. Trentham's neck."

I faced round; the tears had gone down, and I could look at him again without humiliation.

"You're the only person who's ever seen it that way. I did care. I felt—when she turned out to be like that, I wanted to die."

"I know. I know."

"And even now I think she's worth a hundred of Lilian Trentham. She was what they all said, I suppose. But she was kind to me."

"I'm sure she was. She must have been something out of the way for you to care for her."

"I didn't know what she was trying to do, honestly."

He laughed.

"You! Are you feeling fit again? Come on and we'll walk."

VI

Yes, most certainly Lilian's tactics had not been clever. She knew, and the whole ship knew, that Todber was really an unexceptional young man, with whom it was perfectly proper for any girl to walk and talk, and even go unchaperoned ashore. From her knowledge of men she ought to have realized that his particular type leaps at once to the defence of a girl assailed by second-hand slander. She fought better than she knew for my chance of ultimate elevation to a coronet. But her disapproval, which occasionally washed its hands of me, and at other times violently rebuked and interfered, made her intolerable to sleep and dress and share a room with.

The ship, as is not unusual at that time of year on that run, was only half-full. Monsoons drive over the Indian Ocean in August, the Red Sea is a valley of moist heat that experienced travellers avoid. There were cabins empty. I went, without consulting Lilian, to the purser's office and asked for one. He was reasonable. At six-thirty Lilian, coming in from the deck to dress for dinner, found stewards carrying away my trunks.

Then—then came the superlative, the supreme and almighty row. She followed like one of the Furies to my new quarters, and regardless of possible listeners made the scene she had been working up for a week. She was unhappy herself at the time; there had been letters at Port Said containing, I believe, the first mutterings of the divorce proceedings which later she was compelled—"for the boy's sake"—to take against her husband. There must have been some cause other than my independent behaviour to make her lash out as she did.

So this was the latest, was it? A cabin to myself. And why, might she ask? Where was the necessity?

I said quite bluntly that I didn't want to be with her.

No doubt. She was glad to know that I still could speak the truth. No doubt I wanted to be quite free of all supervision; but I must allow her to say that she did not want to be mixed up in any further scandals, and to have people talking behind her back and saying she had connived at it. Then, to the stewards who came panting along the passage with my trunk:

"Take that back, if you please, to number 34. There has been a mistake made."

"No, there hasn't," I said; "bring that trunk in here, please."

"Clotilde!"

But even she could not battle before the stewards, whose excellent detachment of bearing rebuked her. When they had gone she took up her theme again; and I saw for the first time two small white spots appear at the bridge of her nose. She was one of those people who pale at the extreme of anger, as I do. It was an ugly little scene that the glass above the wash-basin mirrored.

But I was not angry yet; only a trifle scared and rather triumphant. It did not occur to me that what she insinuated was the convenience of being alone in order to let a man come to my cabin at night. I thought her temper a trifle ridiculous, and supposed that by moving I had hurt her pride. Then she put it in words, which I remember very clearly. She said:

"You know what you're doing, I don't doubt. I suppose he's not the first by any means. I certainly don't want you in with me. Who knows what may be the matter with you?"

She turned to leave the cabin. I caught her by the arm, and swung her round with my left hand; she had not half my strength. I stared full in her face for a moment, while her eyelids flickered, and her nails tore at my fingers; then struck her as hard as I could across her open mouth. Blood came at once, almost as soon as her shriek. I heard steps, that had been passing the door, pause.

"Let me go, let me go," she was crying, with the drops running down her chin. "You're mad, you horrible girl!"

There was a tap at the door. She had quite lost her head by this time, and called to the unknown knocker:

"Oh, come in, help me, she's hurt me——"

It was Theo, of course, in the doorway. His cabin was opposite the one the purser had given me. This I had not known; thirty-four was on deck,

these downstairs alley-ways were unexplored territory to me. Lilian, however, had known; and really on the face of it her horror at what must have seemed open intrigue was legitimate. But now that the object of all her disapproval was there in person she did not tackle him. I suppose she suddenly became conscious, under a man's eye, of her hair in disorder, the oozing cut on her lip. With a sudden movement, snatching her handkerchief up to her mouth, she went out, pushing past him as he stood astonished, and left us alone.

"What's she been doing?" he asked, looking after her. "Is she quite mad?"

"Nothing," I said. "You'd better not be seen in here."

But he did not go, only stood rather awkwardly against the door.

"I heard some of it, you know."

"I changed my cabin. I couldn't stand her—night after night. She thought——"

"Yes. I heard. Look here——"

"What?"

"Be engaged to me, will you? That will stop all this."

"It won't. I hit her. She'll go to the captain, probably."

"I'll go to him first. Seriously, won't you? Just till we're off the ship. It'll save you some of the talk."

The curious thing about this proposal is that both of us took it in the spirit in which it was meant. I knew quite well that Theo was not in love with me, any more than I was in love with Theo. We liked each other, and this frenzy of righteousness and gossip angered us both. Much as I might have agreed to walk off indoor stuffiness by a tramp in the rain with him, I said:

"All right. But I don't care what any of them think or say. I won't go back to that cabin with her."

"No reason why you should. I'll shut them up. Let me arrange things."

"I hate having you dragged into it, though."

"Don't worry about me. Hullo, there's first bugle."

At dinner, half an hour later, I found a little note on my plate, and a vacant chair beside me, where as a rule Lilian sat. The note read:

“Dear Miss Boissy,—

“I shall be honoured if you will take a seat at my table to-night. I have just heard the news from the happy man, and it will give me great pleasure to announce it and drink to both your health and happiness.

“Yours sincerely,
“B. Oliffe,
“Commander.”

I stared at the note, growing scarlet; then looked across involuntarily to the captain’s table. He was standing, smiling and nodding towards me, indicating the empty seat on his right with his hand. A steward was arranging an ice-bucket near by, from whose mouth the gilt-wrapped head of a bottle protruded. I was in for it. I put down the napkin I had unfolded and walked across the whole length of the saloon to his side, while people turned in their chairs to watch, and hurrying stewards drew aside with their burdens of food. Theo, neat and quiet as ever, swung the chair round for me, saying comfortably:

“That’s right. I say, you do look well.”

Bravado had made me put on my best evening dress, one of Gran’s extravagances, a real Parisian dress of the palest yellow with puffed sleeves and a bertha of lace. I was excited; for once my hair had gone well. The captain looked at me with new attention, and I have always had, if people will only put me at my ease by admiring me, the Boissy aptness of phrase. Our table was vivacious. At the end of dinner the captain rose, holding a glass, and with some unction—he was a romantic captain married to a youngish wife—made the announcement, and asked the passengers to drink to our health. There was an instant’s deadly pause; sheer astonishment, probably; then Mr. Spink, with his gift for organization, pulled the situation out of the fire by starting up “Jolly Good Fellows” in much too high a key. The voices strained and cracked on the top notes, and broke into good-tempered laughter. There were calls for Theo. “Speech! Speech!”

He got up at once—I never knew him slow to a challenge—and the noise slackened. He said, steadily, pitching his rather reedy voice clear across the saloon:

"I must thank you for your good wishes. I am grateful to Captain Oliffe, and to all those on this ship who have shown kindness to me and to Miss Boissy. I can only say that I am very happy to be able to stand beside her here to-night. That's all, I think. Thank you."

It was a defiance. "Hands off!" I noticed the adroit way in which he made no reference whatever to me as his future wife, and yet stressed the partnership for defence. People clapped, and nobody appeared to notice anything in the least out of the way. Any person with an eye for the expression of emotion, any actress for example, would have found us out in an instant. We were far too unselfconscious for lovers.

Theo left the ship at Marseilles, while I finished the journey by sea. This was thought more than odd by the gossips of the ship, though they did not dare to be publicly arch with either of us. There was a strange little parting conversation.

"You'll get away from that person as soon as you can, won't you? Promise."

"Of course I will. Look after yourself. Let me know what the doctors say."

"Rather. I'll write often, if you don't mind."

"Of course I don't mind. And I'll tell you what happens to me."

"What about that plan of reading for Oxford?"

"I might try. Goodness, how cold it is up here!"

"We'll go down. I'm going ashore early. This is good-bye, then."

"Good-bye." A handshake. "And good luck. Ask me to the wedding, won't you?"

This last rather surprising sentence referred to a confidence Theo had made a few nights before. He was in love with a girl, whose full name he did not tell me, and whom he had not seen for two years. She was a Lady Diana Someone, so much I knew, very lovely, a sort of relation, and he believed he had a chance if only the doctors could do something to help his asthma. "Can't ask a girl to marry a crock." His plan was to see, first, what Harley Street said, and then, if the outlook for cure was a bad one, to hold his tongue and take his leave.

"But," I said, surprised at this masculine unimaginative view of love, "suppose she's terribly fond of you?"

He said, reddening, that he didn't suppose she was.

"But if she is? Oh, that's not fair!"

"Not fair to ask any girl to marry a crock," he reiterated.

I had the instinct against this reasoning, but not the arguments, and had to let it go; though what he told me of her sounded as though he had only to ask. The unknown and unconscious Lady Diana was pretty often the topic of our talk on the boat deck at night, to which Captain Oliffe despatched us after dinner—I ate now at his table—with a cheerful wink. The temporary nature of our engagement was so well understood by both of us that I do not believe either of us ever referred to it. It was so very evident to both, for all the easy sympathy between us, that we were not in love, not in any kind of danger from each other. A most unworldly young man, Viscount Todber. How many girls would let go after they had got their talons publicly fixed in an eligible?

He left the ship, with a good many other of the grander passengers, to go overland to England and so save time, and a day or two at sea. I was left with Lilian Trentham and our armed truce. She spoke to me in public still; but I stayed on in my separate cabin, and there had been room only for one newcomer at the captain's table. We kept our deck-chairs side by side, but somehow in the prowling feminine way contrived to lie in them at different times. Thus the decorum, the suavity which should exist between chaperone and protégée, was preserved to outward view. Privately we ignored each other until the last morning, when as we crept up London river I found her at my elbow, showing a face unsmiling but polite, and holding out a hand. She said, hardly touching my fingers:

"I hope you get on well. I shall say nothing, of course, of the various things that have happened. There's no need for anything to get back which would upset the family; either of the families."

I said nothing to this. It was not an apology, and I wanted an apology before I would make friends. She went on:

"I suppose you will cable the news about Lord Todber. It will take a load off their minds to think of you so well settled."

The tone of this was better, though still patronizing. I said:

"No, I'm not going to cable. It's not worth while."

She lost something of her smoothness of manner with her answer:

“My dear, most people who’d acquired a coronet after what you’ve been through would think it very well worth while.”

Then the steward came up with questions about hand-luggage, and that was the end of our reconciliation.

CHAPTER XII

> A close apprehension of the one, might perhaps afford a glimmering light and crepuscular glance of the other.
>
> —*Vulgar Errors.*

I

The first thing I saw in the London papers was the death of Theo's father. He had been a soldier, and a successful one; there were decorative letters after his name, ending with that brevet of personal courage, the D.S.O. I wrote to Theo, who answered soon:

> "King's Toller,
> "Wilts.
>
> "Thank you for writing. It was sudden, heart-failure. Much the best way to die, if you can't get put out in a cavalry charge as he would have liked. I'm pretty busy, there are a good many things to settle up, and I haven't seen any doctors yet. I feel better, though, in England. The country always suits me. Perhaps there may be no need for doctors at all. Hope so, anyhow. I'm coming to London on the 27th to see the lawyers. What chance is there of seeing you?
>
> "Yours ever,
> "T."

I saw him, most respectably, in the L-shaped drawing-room of Cousin Alice's house in Chester Square, a visit which raised that relative's opinion of me to almost intolerable heights; dashed, later, by rumours and counter-rumours among which it was hard to choose. For a fellow-passenger, an Australian, came to call, and supposed with laughing glances that I was busy about my trousseau.

"Trousseau?" repeated Cousin Alice, leaping in her chair. Then out came the story of the public betrothal on the ship. Cousin Alice, enraged at being kept in the dark, yet proud of my achievement, hardly knew which attitude to take; but whatever words she had decided on were stricken from her lips by my mumbled declaration:

"Oh, that's all off."

"Off! What can you mean, Clotilde? Lord Todber—Lord Frome, I should say, was here yesterday."

"It was off before that."

Cousin Alice was silent from sheer amazement. As for the Australian friend, her eyes were sparkling, already in imagination she was writing that sensational letter home.

"You mean to tell me a young man would deliberately call on a girl after he had broken his engagement with her?"

"Perhaps," said the friend with tact, but no real belief, "it was the other way round."

Cousin Alice could not, said her startled eyes, her open lips, conceive of any girl having the chance of a young rich earl and deliberately throwing it away. She began a catechism. Had I told my father? No, because nothing was going to happen. Then why had I permitted the public announcement on the ship, before anyone had been consulted? No reason; it was all a sort of joke. Cousin Alice could see a joke as well as anyone, but she must say Lord Frome might have shown a little more consideration than to make a young girl publicly conspicuous. My explanation that the whole thing was to save me bother was received with an evident grain of salt by both ladies. It was impossible to clear matters by any fuller account; that would have meant telling the quarrel with Lilian and the quarrel's cause. I left it at that, and they might make what they could of my attitude; the interpretation reached at last was, I think, that I had been jilted but was taking it well.

Theo, however, somewhat puzzled this theory by calling again some three weeks later. It was September, when he should have been shooting; he was up for a couple of days, the first moment he had been able to find for the doctors. The most prodigious of these was out of town, but the deputy-prodigy had made a few comfortable promises, and pooh-poohed the Indian man's prognosis; just a slight local irritation, he said, which would soon clear away. Theo was happy, and showed it. I liked him and showed it. Where, puzzled Cousin Alice, did the jilting come in?

When he had gone Cousin Alice turned on me silently, eyed me up and down, shook her head; then with the ejaculation: "Baffling! Utterly baffling!" ascended to her room to change. She would have been yet more unsettled in her mind if she had understood the true sense of certain words exchanged over the tea-table between Theo and me.

“I’m going down to stay with the Mintons to-morrow—Diana’s people.”

“Will she be there?”

“Hope so. It’s the deuce of a journey to make if she’s not.”

“You could write.”

“Too roundabout. I like things settled quickly. Always hated waiting with my pads on——”

“That so reminds me of my son,” said Cousin Alice. “He almost played cricket for Harrow. Or was it beagling? Pads came into it somehow, I know.”

And the talk wandered off to green ovals. But I had gathered what I wanted to know, and every day for the ten days following I looked at the Court Circular in *The Times*. I had forgotten Theo’s mourning, which would have made such an announcement, so soon, very unlikely, and it was by letter that at last I learned of his success.

> “My dear Clotilde,—
>
> “It’s all well with me. Diana is the kindest person I have ever known, except yourself. Of course it’s all conditional on the trouble not recurring”—she’ll see to that, I thought—“but there have been no signs so far. She wants to know you, I’ve talked about you a good deal”—oh, have you?—“and you must meet when she comes to London in November. I can’t say how I feel, I dare say you can imagine. Humphrey Galt says there’s no reason for me to send in my papers. India’s dust and dirt and so on was partly the trouble. When I think of it I’m ashamed of the way I sulked and bored you with my troubles on the ship. Never mind, we made friends over it and I shall always be grateful for that.
>
> “Yours ever,
>
> “T.”

There is no tracking the truth through the wild undergrowths of emotion. I was not in love with Theo; even now, when before sleeping the mind pulls to itself the things and people it desires, I went ranging after Martina. I was honestly glad to know Theo happy; but I disliked and suspected the Lady Diana, whom I had never seen, and grudged him to her. Perhaps it was the kind of jealousy a mother may have against her son’s wife. I wrote gently to him, though, and shocked Cousin Alice by deciding to begin to work.

Work meant an attempt on one of the Universities, Oxford for choice. It was too late to think of going up in the October term; the necessary exams were over, and in any case there was a standard set in Latin and mathematics which revealed pretty clearly certain gaps in the nuns' equipment. Our church Latin had ambled along easily, while the classics doubled this way and that like hares pursued by hounds. I had six months' work ahead of me. Cousin Alice, strange to say—my family were for ever doing the unexpected—rather encouraged me in this plan. It was against all her principles that women should come raiding over the border into the rich land of masculine activities. She had no patience with those whom she called "these dreadful blue-stockings." But a girl who had been jilted might choose any bolt-hole to hide her shame, and since good works were evidently not in my line, other works, those which rest unhandled in libraries, calf-bound, might be made to serve. She installed me at Oxford, in the house of a clergyman's widow known to the authorities as an "approved lady," for six weeks, while she went off on a series of visits to tomb-like country houses where people gardened and looked forward to the Wednesday *Punch*.

II

I have said that I had not forgotten Martina Fields. Theo, and the electric atmosphere of the ship, had put her into the background for a while, as a prudent hostess will hide away treasures before lending her house for a bazaar. At Oxford, working alone, with the approved and disapproving widow of the clergyman and her two mild daughters for company, I got into the habit of dreaming myself back with her again. She was the most arresting figure—character, looks, circumstances—that had ever come my way; her voice was a thing I had not heard equalled on the London stage. I varied the usual horse's-hoofs-rescue dream with another, in which I found the one piece of evidence that cleared her; or with the thought of her coming broken to me after serving her sentence, relying on my still living love for protection and comfort. I dwelt a good deal in these dreams and the works of Messrs. Hall and Knight and Cornelius Nepos, a strange blend. The clergyman's widow and daughters found me inscrutable.

Imagine then the shock when, casually opening the *Sketch* one day which one of the girls, greatly daring, had brought home for a peer at the fashions, I saw reproduced a drawing of Martina by a hand which may well have been Sargent's; which had, at any rate, caught the very pose of her, chin up, and the curve as I remembered it of her throat. I felt the colour leave my face, and for a moment my shocked eyes could not read the print underneath the drawing.

“A recent sketch of Miss Martina Fields, England’s foremost woman novelist and playwright, by——” I forgot who. “Miss Fields has just completed a play on an historical subject which Sir Lynn Lovelace hopes to stage in the course of the winter at Drury Lane.”

“What have you found?” enquired the elder daughter. “Oh, that darling picture! How I should love to see her, wouldn’t you? She must be wonderful. But Mamma won’t let us read her books because Papa always disapproved her departure from woman’s sphere.”

“Yes,” I said, wondering how I could escape. The blood was rushing back to my cheeks, my voice and hands were shaky.

“When she came here last month to lecture—just the week before you came, it was—Ellie and I both begged to go. ‘God’s Breath,’ the lecture was called; I’m sure it would have been perfectly sweet. But Mamma wouldn’t. So we didn’t. But I know she isn’t. Unwomanly, I mean.”

“No,” I said, and went without excuse out of the room. In my bedroom undisturbed I sat down before the mirror, head on fists, to think it out.

She was here, in England, and free. She must have proved her innocence at the trial. She must have left Australia at once, small blame to her, and come back to this place where she was known, where famous artists drew her, and famous managers acted her plays, and even little provincial fools did their weak best to hear her lecture. The face staring back at me from the glass became happy as I looked. I had hidden my hurt from the relatives so well that I had almost deceived my own self as to the pain. Now, when it ceased, I knew what I had suffered.

“You’ve got to see her,” I told the face in the glass, “somehow.”

The face, smiling back at me, promised with a nod that I should. Next day I wrote to her, care of the publishers. This was my letter, which began without apostrophe:

> “I’ve just seen the picture of you in the *Sketch*, and they told me you were here three weeks ago. That means you must have taken the ship after mine. I haven’t had any letters. Do please tell me what happened. I think I can guess; those stupid police got the worst of it. They had bribed that man, hadn’t they? I knew, I absolutely was certain that all that business of the £5 note was made up too. I came away terribly unhappy. My uncle, the judge, you know, said it meant at the least five years in gaol. I am sure it

was the police and Ho Sin engineered it all, and I hope they get what they deserve, five years or more for themselves.

“Is the play that they are staging at Drury Lane the ‘Elizabeth and Essex’ one you read to us that afternoon? I wonder if you have changed it at all since then?

“Please, I know you must be busy, but please find time for just a note, or half an hour to let me come and see you. Have you got another secretary yet?

“Your affectionate,
“CLOTILDE BOISSY.”

That went into the post, and was swallowed up in silence; a week’s silence; a fortnight’s silence. I grew gloomy again, and was sour with the daughters when they tried to lure me to their epicene gambols on a neighbour’s tennis court, used alternately for its rightful purpose, croquet, or badminton. I kept apart and communed with Cornelius Nepos, of whose sense, painfully dissected during those weeks, I retain no single word. I went, slinking guiltily, to church in the afternoons, and put up candles to all the sanctities the building afforded; St. Anthony for a friend lost, St. Joseph for peace, the Holy Souls for deliverance from the torment of hope deferred.

Then the message came, most un-Martina like, on a postcard, which I knew the girls had read and puzzled over before I came down to breakfast to discover it. There was the big angular hand; the address, written hastily, showed it—surely? a little changed. The card, on the other side, read as follows:

“Curiouser and curiouser! What can it all be about? Come and stay a day or two and talk, it is easier. Would next Friday, 29th, suit?

“M. F.

“P.S.—Bring sandshoes.”

“A card from someone?” asked the elder daughter, passing unwanted marmalade, and looking girlishly at the big writing. “What an interesting hand!”

“Marjorie!” her mother reproved. “One doesn’t make remarks on other people’s correspondence, child.”

The child of twenty-seven pouted.

“I only saw the address. Even the postman sees the address, Mamma.”

“You are incorrigible,” said her mother, who liked to think that her girls were vivacious and unruly. “I don’t know what Clotilde will think of you. Eat up your toast; there are all the flowers to do.”

“I believe Clotilde is leading a double life,” said the younger daughter. “She never tells us a thing.”

“Girls! Girls!”

“—Mysterious cards, and the other day she wrote a letter to an earl. I think she’s terribly deep.”

“Children! Take no notice of them, Clotilde.”

“I don’t,” I said, and tore the card into the smallest possible fragments, which I laid on my plate. It was not very civil, but then, neither were they, and so I sacrificed my precious card to snub them. This is the reason why I could take no very close look at the handwriting.

Friday the twenty-ninth was, by a piece of good fortune, the day in which I was to rejoin Cousin Alice in London. There was no necessity either for deception or defiance. I was escorted to the station, my luggage supervised, my ticket bought, all as though I had been a gambolling innocent clergyman’s daughter myself. There was, not an affectionate, but an untroubled farewell. Arrived at Paddington I stepped straight into a four-wheeler, thus dodging Cousin Alice’s maid sent to meet me, and with only a small handbag for luggage drove straight across London to Waterloo.

III

The sprawled address on the postcard had been “near Shakesbury.” I spent two hours in the train with my heart beating, my courage lifting and failing as I imagine a soldier’s may do, waiting for the attack. She had never talked to me of her life in England, never described her house or even the country about it, though her books were full of little pictures that gave it clearly. The postcard, scrawled though it was in a hasty caricature of her stately hand, read almost like a message from a stranger.

It was a slow train, but it arrived at Shakesbury at last. I was almost the only passenger to descend. A short man, arch-legged, a very groom, approached me at once to ask if I were for Rawdons. For Miss Fields’ house, I said. That was right. He took my modest bag and we went out together to a dog-cart.

Talk with him was easy, and I made it in self-defence, my pulse still drumming. We discussed horses, the age of the mare in the shafts, her progeny on-coming; the strain of the Dorset hills on beasts, that "didn't last not above 'arf of the time wot they would in the sheers." All the time we were weaving up steep hillsides, slowly tacking from right to left of the road, and as slowly coming, brake full on, down the corresponding declines. On either side of us, as the hedges permitted, were glimpses of scenery like paragraphs read aloud from her books. It cannot have been more than two miles, but it took half an hour, and felt like days, before we turned in off the main road to a lane that was more or less level, and rattled up it towards some stone roofs that showed behind the skirts of elms.

"Are we here?" I asked my groom.

"Nigh on," said he nodding, and shook the mare's reins to send her pacing home in style. I had a momentary terror lest with the excitement I should be sick. That passed, leaving me white-faced. We were at a tall white gate, and automatically I put out my hands for the reins while the groom got down to open it; that gave me something to do, and even when he climbed in again I held to them, and drove the hundred yards or so up to the house.

It was low, and grey, the kind of house that says "England" at first glance, and one approached it by way of a stone path bordered with the ragged splendour of autumn flowers. I put my hand to the bell, hidden by a branch of myrtle, but before I could ring it there were steps inside and a woman came to the open door.

We stared at each other for a moment. She was tall, with a pale face and black hair; Martina's face, almost, but less chiselled, more alive. It was a spontaneous eager face that I liked; and when she spoke, the voice was eager and spontaneous too.

"You've come, then? I hoped you would, I liked your letter and your name. Do come in, and sit down by the fire."

She had me by the arm, and was bringing me in to an ancient room with a vast fireplace, into which she tossed with her left hand thick darkish squares; peat, my first sight of it. While she capably mended and blew the fire she talked, still with that ease and acceptance of me as one who might be a friend.

"I was afraid you might be rather put off by the postcard. There isn't time, always, for the nice little graces. Do forgive it. Anyhow, you're here."

And she went on to enquire about tea; had I had some? Would I like some? I must have looked white, for in spite of my denial she rang the bell for it. Then, sitting down on one of the settles beside the fire, she beamed at me, and planting a solid white hand on each knee said:

“And now—I can’t wait, for I’m dying to know—what on earth was your letter all about?”

I said, awkwardly:

“I should have thought Miss Fields would have told you. Perhaps if she hasn’t, I oughtn’t.”

“Take it from me, Miss Fields doesn’t know a word about it,” said she, with a laugh; and then—“Why, goodness me, child, who do you think I am?”

I looked at her as she sat in the firelight, her nice face twinkling. I had a second’s vision of Martina reading her play, with all the red lights of heaven streaming down into the bay behind her, her profile dark against the glow, like a goddess’s. The two were alike, and yet——

“Her sister?” I said, with hesitation.

She laughed again.

“I told Rogers that sketch flattered me. Herself, Martina Fields’ self—that is, tuppence coloured. Penny plain, Gloria Jebb.”

Even by the firelight, for the lamps were not yet brought in, she saw something in my face that shocked her. She rose and came to me quickly.

“My dear, there’s some trouble, some muddle—don’t talk; drink your tea, and tell me afterwards.”

And she turned away, screening me from the servant bringing the tray.

I had just those few seconds to face and overcome a further revelation of ugly knowledge, another disillusion. For this Martina was the real one; no doubt of that was left in my mind from the moment she spoke. This safe kind woman in her solid and so English house could not, of the two, be the adventuress. My Martina was the counterfeit, and the cleverness of the forgery it was became apparent with every movement of the other. The physical likeness was there to be played upon; the gestures—I watched the square white hands dumbly—had been faithfully reproduced. But they were the platform gestures. My Martina had been built up from the platform personality, necessarily less easy, and so, herself, had never dared or known

how to be at ease. She spoke in private as this woman did in public, because the lecturer, the public woman, was the only model she had known. The cleverness, the meanness of the whole enormous fraud came upon me then, and brought me to heartbreak.

"Drink this up," said Miss Fields briskly, and turned towards me from the table with a glass. "No"—to the maid—"we won't have in the lights just yet."

She knew, of course, that I was upset though she did not look at me. Holding the glass she went on talking.

"Now you're not to say 'no' to this. I don't suppose your parents would approve of giving a young girl sherry. But it's comfortable stuff, and you can toss it down. Tea afterwards, if you like, in ladylike sips."

I swallowed it. She took the glass and with serpent-wisdom gave me something to do.

"That fire's sulking. Do look to it, and I'll tend my kettle."

I had command enough by now to say as I took up the bellows:

"But I haven't known you seven years."

"Oh, well," said she easily, "it's only post-dating the cheque a little."

And she watched without once interfering while I rebuilt the fire bush-fashion, giving it lots of air, the last thing a peat fire needs; it should be sheltered, and smoulder and glow. When I turned round I was ready for tea. We drank it, and she talked without vanity of her books, taking it for granted that my interest in her was because of them. I saw that she was not going to question me, and my heart grew quiet enough to let me marvel. For she was not like the books. They were unhappy and eloquent; discontented with their world; rich in poetry. She was calm and practical, lived orderly, and spoke as though this ridiculous orb were fun to live in. The other Martina was the books personified; she alarmed, and excited. This Martina had nothing of the Olympian about her.

But it was not till after dinner—an admirable meal, which she sauntered kitchenwards to help cook—that I let her have the story. She listened, and only at the description of the reading interrupted:

"What? Essex and the Queen? How on earth did she get hold of that?"

"I don't know. It's the——the sort of thing you might write about, you see."

“Sort of thing! I’ve done it. What was hers like?”

“Not very good. I remember I thought, colourless. Colourless for you, of course I meant.”

“Can you remember any of it?”

“It wasn’t the sort of stuff one remembers.”

She paused, looking into the fire. The anger I was waiting for did not come. But after all I had not yet told the worst.

“Her own, of course. Trying to keep the scene up, poor devil. The strain of it! How long did this go on?”

“Weeks; until the police came into it.”

She gazed, her eyebrows lifted, waiting to pounce down in laughter.

“Ah, the police. The police who bribed someone, and engineered something else. What were they after me for?”

Really it took some courage to answer. This was the year 1895, when, despite Yellow Books and such phenomena, a *jeune fille* backed by a convent upbringing still found certain subjects difficult of public discussion. Theo had heard the actual grubby facts from a man, and I had only to confirm. I hesitated now.

“Goodness!” said Miss Jebb, “it must have been bad. Quickly! I’m a moral influence, remember; I’ve got my public to think of. What did I really get up to in the Antipodes?”

I came out with it then, very timidly. When she had the sense of it, the eyebrows wavered comically, then dropped. Her eyes closed, her mouth opened, she held her knees and rocked, rocked in a gale of laughter. The moral influence, whose works contained, according to solemn computations made by reviewers, three authentic jokes and two others which might or might not have been intentional, sat hiccupping herself almost to hysteria at the idea of conniving with Chinese to export girls in lacquered coffins to their doom. So perplexed was I with my romantic devotion to the false Martina, and my relatives’ hushed voices, and the thunders of Australian public opinion, that it had never struck me as a funny situation. She said, when the fit was over, wiping her eyes:

“Do forgive me. It’s very serious of course, dreadfully serious I know, and I must speak to my solicitors, and my publishers and—and take steps. But all the same——”

She halted, and the laughter ebbed. The firelight showed gravity, and certain lines I had not noticed before on her face; good lines, but deep. All of a sudden I felt very young, inexperienced. Yet I had seen, perhaps, more of the world than she had, and lived through scenes as dramatic as any in her books.

"Miss Boissy, from the moment my first novel was published, I became what you behold; a respected authoress endowed with a kind of mission. Not my idea; I hate preaching, I never mean to preach, I think preaching unwarrantable; but somehow a moral judgment, a sort of dolefulness is always creeping in. Why? Goodness knows, for I'm not arrogant, I assure you, and you can see for yourself how ungloomy. But there it is. It's a doom—'trüben Sinnes ward mein Gesang!' You know your *Götterdämmerung*, I expect."

I shook my head, but asked for no translation. The meaning was clear enough. She went on, almost as if to herself:

"I lecture people, and they write afterwards to say they feel the better for it; I talk to schools, and the headmistress promises her charges they shall all grow up like me. They're quite right. I am unconquerably moral; moral in grain. In my heart, though I hope for the worst, I know that I should always try to do the right thing. I should never dare to break loose. Don't you see, after that—don't you see the perfectly enormous fun of having my fling by proxy?"

Well, I was eighteen still. I could not see it. I had been dealing, as eighteen does, in pedestals, marble, anything but flesh and blood. She really did shock me, kindness, laughter and all. She saw it at once, with the penetrating swiftness which was her gift, and said, grave once more:

"You mustn't mind. I've no doubt your Martina was a good deal more dignified—wasn't she? It needed that to carry the thing through. And you're thinking it's flippant of me to take it in this way. I'm not condoning what she did. It's one of the crimes that are really vile, that really stink in the nostrils. And you were hurt, too. But putting that aside, all the beastliness and cruelty, all the Ho Sin side of it, doesn't the courage and dash of the rest of it somehow get you? How I should like to meet her! My double; so much more like the official me than I am. How I should like to read her Brummagen play—perhaps that too was merely me, carried to some nonsensical power. Oneself—to see oneself! Oh, for the giftie! To play about with real people's lives and deaths and dangers! And fool them all, and laugh at them all; two scenes going at once, full tilt, like the last act of Aïda!

I'd give anything, almost——" She reined herself in. "Of course the other aspect horrifies me, but child, child!" She leant forward, took my shoulders, actually shook me to impose comprehension. "If the woman had any sense of humour—had she?"

"Perhaps, underneath."

"If she had, surely she had, what a gorgeous, what an imperial eagle of a lark!"

On that the clock struck, and she bundled me off unceremoniously to bed in a room with a floor that sank and lifted according to the caprice of its old timbers, and a scent of lavender. There were books everywhere, a posy of flowers in a blue bowl on the dressing-table, a chuckle of water outside.

"What's that?" I said, listening.

"The stream; our little river, the Bint. One walks up it by day. It's full of fish, but stony. That's really what I meant by sandshoes."

And with the usual hostess's questions and directions she swung out of the room, automatically ducking under the beam that threatened her tall head, and left me to sleep.

Strangely enough, I did so at once, with no thought for Cousin Alice, nieceless in London, or for the clergyman's widow upon whom telegrams making enquiry and moan would so soon be descending. Some time in the night the cover slipping off my bed woke me, and as I drowsily sought on the floor for it I became alive to another sound besides the rumour of the river. It came from across the narrow passage, from behind the door of the room I knew to be Miss Jebb's own. Sobbing, was it? I stayed a while, balanced on my elbow, holding my breath. Laughter? They sound alike across a passage-way. I lay down again, too clogged with sleep to be curious, and gave myself up again to the night.

IV

Next day came one of those coincidences which the novelist must enviously eye, and reluctantly reject. My hostess, after roaming with me round the wind-tattered garden for a few minutes after breakfast, disappeared to a room lined with books, and there remained till lunch. She had made the usual apologies, which I received with the usual protests, but her conscience as my entertainer was evidently not easy. At lunch she quaffed beer and talked, trying out on me an idea or two. I remember, just after the first course had been removed, this outburst, from a clear sky:

“But of *course* Ophelia must have been Hamlet’s mistress!”

And she went on in spate, with quotations, ten lines at a time, to prove that this was the situation, left over from an old play and obscured by prudish critics. I could not argue; Hamlet, as I remembered it, was a mine of quotations, and examiner’s traps for the insufficiently prepared. But she continued to work out the problem with zest, and an interest as though the entire court of Denmark lived in exile next door. When she saw that I could not keep up she left the topic with a backward glance or two that promised a good go at it at some future time, and shrank all at once to the hostess, as the fisherman’s jinn diminished to his imprisoning bottle.

“And what would you like to do?” said she, really concerned for my amusement. “There’s a Roman camp not far off. The camp is just green grass levelled. One could almost do a play there; however, nobody does. We might drive to see that.”

“Please don’t think about me. I’m perfectly happy——”

“Not a bit of it,” said she, interrupting herself. “I know what we’ll do, of course. There’s a stately home of England not far off. We’ll call.”

All the shelved responsibilities, all the dues of cousins, rose before me, threatening. I said weakly:

“But perhaps I oughtn’t—I mean, I’ve no business to stay and take up your time.”

“Absurd!” said Miss Jebb decisively. “Besides, I’ve wired your aunt, cousin, whatever she is.”

“But you don’t know the address!”

“Oxford, isn’t it? The place you first wrote from.”

“That isn’t Cousin Alice. That’s a clergyman’s widow.”

“She’ll send it on,” said Miss Jebb comfortably. “I said, ‘Clotilde with me——’ You don’t mind the Christian name, do you? ‘Clotilde with me, don’t worry, delighted have her!’ A shillingsworth. So much for Cousin Alice.”

I was aghast.

“She’ll have the police down here. What did you sign it?”

“Martina Fields. I thought she wouldn’t know my other name.”

“But she thinks Martina Fields is in gaol! In gaol in Australia!”

“Oh!” said Miss Jebb, checked. “Goodness!” She pondered, and solved it. “We’ll send another wire at once to say I’m not.”

And with that she swept the subject aside, and me from the table, and built up the fire till it roared, going on with her plan.

“The stately home is one of those lovely huddles only English people know how to make. They’re always compromising, and that’s why their houses are so liveable. A Latin, if he makes up his mind to a Palladian house, has it Palladian to the very water-closets, till you yearn for a beam to knock your head against, or a patchwork quilt. An Englishman never makes up more than half his mind. So you get classic façades, with Queen Bess and Anne in the background. That’s this place; a bowling-green Drake might have played on, cheek by jowl with sham ruins; marble halls, and upstairs the dressing-tables in muslin petticoats.”

“What is it called?” I asked, hardly heeding her, for the repercussions of that telegram were engaging my chief attention. The twitterings, the go and come of suspicion and horror and chill rage which those few words were going to set moving between Oxford and Chester Square! I made my question just for form, but the answer brought me to attention.

“King’s Toller. It’s an earl that lives in it, young but belted, just back from India. I’ve never met him, but his old father was my landlord. Frome is the name—his name.”

I suppose something, pleasure, interest, must have shown in my face, for Miss Jebb was on to me at once.

“Oho! This isn’t news to you?”

“It is, about King’s Toller being so near.”

“Just over the border. You know Master Frome, then? More than I do.”

I could not resist it.

“I was engaged to him once.”

“Lord! How did you lose him?” Suddenly twinkling; “I don’t believe you. It’s just a fisherman’s story.”

I told her the whole of it then, quite unselfconsciously as far as I remember. She laughed and said:

“You pair of babes in the would-be! It’s nice. Can I use it?”

I gave consent at once, a fact which should have cleared away all suspicion of any remaining attachment. It was decided we should call that day, that I might mourn over all I had missed. I did want to see Toller, his home, which must have done something towards the making of Theo. I was pulled up on this incline to sentiment by the consideration that it had also contributed something towards Theo's father, the late Major-General; who, while this most resounding female lived and chanted at his very gates, had not apparently thought it worth while to speak of the matter to his son. Theo had been as clearly deceived in the matter of the false Martina as I. It was a proof that in England Olympus and Parnassus stand far apart, quite out of each other's view, and are not trodden by the same explorers, though nowadays an expedition will sometimes make attempts on both.

V

The entrance to King's Toller had all the feudal accessories of iron gates, lodges and heraldic animals rampant upon stone. The drive up which our motherly mare went plodding was bordered by chestnut trees, blown about now and yellowing, but which must have been triumphant in the spring. Green spaces of parkland showed between their trunks, and for all the preposterous grandeur of the entrance the drive soon slipped into informality. I saw what Miss Jebb meant by the lovableness of compromise, imagining the castles of France, remembering engravings and photographs of the Loire pored over as a child; the geometrical gardens, the forests pierced with straight roads from their central clairières, the avenues laid by rule. There were cows browsing in this park, and even an old staid donkey that looked up as we went by him and down again with a shake of his ears. Cattle had eaten the leaves of the oaks within reach, so that their foliage appeared neatly clipped to the shape of trees in a sampler. The dells and thickets were friendly wildernesses, where a playing child might hide. Friendly, informal; those were the words for the park.

Then the chestnuts stood aside to show an open gravel space, immense, with a jet of water wavering out of a basin in its centre. From this led steps, with urns, to a terrace; and above the terrace ran the whole white length of the house. It had a portico like a young temple, with flat pillars; the windows on either side were marshalled like a company of soldiers, and to about the same number. Above each one a pediment curved, like a lifted eyebrow. Not a chimney showed. Gloria Jebb and I might have been touring, save for our irrelevant dog-cart, in Greece.

But the figures that answered the door bell were not Greek, though the chief of them had unshakable priestly dignity and a Platonic calm. The hall to which he ushered us was chill, with white and red marble in squares underfoot, and a life-size bronze or two gesturing. We went through the hall, under a magnificent door with a broken pediment, into a passage suddenly dark and narrow, panelled, with prints of outstretched horses on the walls; thence through another door, homely this time and almost as broad as it was high, into a room which, though it had an Augustan spaciousness, seemed little after the intimidations of the hall.

The first thing I saw was Theo by the fire, standing with a cup in his hand; he stared an instant, put the cup down quickly and came forward. Miss Jebb was the true caller, and his tenant, but it was I who introduced her, under her own name. I was in no mood for mystifications or explanations before the three other occupants of the room. Of these, one sat behind a tea-tray, which gave her calm handsomeness the most perfect setting. Artists neglect nowadays to give clues to their sitters, and accordingly no portraits are painted with a tea-tray in the foreground; yet from Lady Minton's manner with hers, a stranger might have deduced her character very convincingly. Lord Minton stood a little behind her; narrow head, big jaw, big nose, a baldness so impressive that it seemed to have been deliberately adopted, as in other times men made a bid for dignity by assuming wigs. As for the third person of the triangle, smiling up at us out of a huge winged chair, whose needlework framed her face in harpies and masks, I knew who she was even before Theo spoke her name: Lady Diana Hyde.

I had made a wrong picture of her, ludicrously wrong. But for that her godfathers and godmothers in her baptism were a little to blame. Diana! There was nothing of the huntress about her. A girl with a dove in her arms, watching with wide eyes the tall women stride by—that was more her measure. I did not love Theo, but I was jealous for him, and I watched her over my tea-cup pretty well all the time, while Lady Minton and Miss Jebb dipped into gardening together.

Theo, handing scones and cake, kept as wary an eye upon us. He felt, I suppose, that there was something a little odd about the relationship of the three of us, and I had some instinctive idea that he had not yet told Lady Diana of the public *fiançailles* on board the *Ostend*. They had known each other, he had said, since they were children; it surprised me therefore that she spoke to him timidly and with an occasional glance upwards towards her father. There was constraint, save at the table where Lady Minton purred and poured. It may have been the sense of this, a slight nervousness, that set

Theo coughing. The room was warm, there was no tobacco smoke in the air; one drift of wood-smoke came through the window, bringing the usual wonder that it should have such poignancy; its fragrance faded at once, but still Theo coughed distressingly, and Lady Diana turned her eyes away. I believe it was then I thought, “She doesn’t really care a pin for him.” She did say, however, to me:

“This is such a horrid time of year, I think.”

I picked it up.

“Yes, and of course coming from a warm country one feels it terribly at first.”

She said, looking at him:

“I suppose so.” Then, remembering; “Oh, of course, you’re an Australian, aren’t you? Theo told me.”

Not everything, I thought. A ponderous question from Lord Minton cut across our chatter.

“Great interest in horse-racing out there, I believe?” I admitted this, and he pursued, almost with animation: “They don’t import enough. Stock deteriorates. A new sire now and then isn’t enough to keep the breed of horses up to the mark. They’re short-sighted; pay a big price for stallions; but I always say, what’s the use of stallions without the mares?”

Lady Minton spared a glance and a word from her gardening disquisition, a word with the faintest disapproving upward twist:

“Edward?”

Lord Minton accepted the rebuke with absolute calm, but changed the tenor of his questions.

“Number of large estates out there, I understand? Taxation more moderate than here, I’m told? Great future, great outlet for our surplus population, don’t you think so?”

While I parried them, and tried not to remember my father’s comments on a recent batch of British immigrants, I could hear with the half of my mind Theo and Lady Diana talking.

“When are you seeing the doctor again?”

“Pretty soon.”

“It’s only a cold, though, isn’t it?”

“That’s all, of course. I shall be all right when we get back to India.”

“Oh, of course.”

Somehow I could judge things better by their voices alone. Hers was pretty, not a silly voice, but lifeless; and there was fear behind his assurance, and the laugh that followed. What was the matter, I wondered, while I dealt civilly as I could with questions of acreage, of preserving—yes, preserving rabbits; of the kangaroo as a beast to show sport. Something was wrong between the two of them, in spite of this family gathering, which I supposed was equal, privately, to my undiscovered announcement in the *Times*. Was the coughing, as he protested, only the result of a cold, or was it the old trouble returning, after a brief interval of peace, to make a fool of him? It had held off long enough to give him his Diana, and her what he had most dreaded to offer, a crock. The odd sense of constraint grew more marked, more uncomfortable; then from near the tea-tray came clear the voice of Gloria Jebb:

“But I ought to know something about salmon. My great-grandfather was a fishmonger.”

Lady Minton’s voice, staggered, taken in mid-wind by this; but polite:

“Really? Then of course, you would know. Most interesting. Edward, please ring.”

Startled, I caught the eye of Miss Jebb. Its glance ran placid over depths; she was perfectly well aware that her revelation had set the marble halls about her metaphorically rocking. This was my first glimpse of this characteristic which later I came to know well and which settled the course of my life for me. She was for ever letting loose metaphorical mice, and watching to see on which chair the victim would hop; it was one of the few but satisfying naughtinesses that her position allowed. In this case there was no immediate outward panic. The stately victim, smiling, endured the mouse, but who knew what indignities her stately petticoats hid? At our corner there was a brief outburst of talk, while the tea-tray was being carried away by a couple of able-bodied men; a deprivation to Lady Minton, since it gave the effect of removing her frame, and left her staring out of naked canvas in a rather alarming way. I did not like her smooth but weighty personality, or her husband’s obstinate head; and I was sorry for the little Lady Diana, who would certainly be very glad to get away from them into Theo’s kind hands.

Miss Jebb caught my eye as the spurt of chatter caused by her indiscretion died down, and rose. There were farewells, dubious, relieved, shy; and from Theo a few words as he went with us unceremoniously through his marble hall, to the door.

"I can't stand this weather."

"None of us can," said Miss Jebb, "from chrysanthemums down."

Theo went on, talking about himself, asking for reassurance in a way that was pathetic.

"I've got a Board in about a fortnight's time. I'll be all right for that, it's just this confounded time of year. They'll send me back, I hope; if they pass me!"

"Oh, they will! India again, I'm so glad. You'll be all right there."

He agreed. Neither of us referred to one thing, which must have come back to his memory instantly, as it did to mine; the letter written to me soon after his first interview with the medical sub-prodigy—"India was partly the trouble." Poor Theo! He looked frail among his muscular bronzes, and a belated cough or two caught his breath even as he was saying good-bye. I sat in silence, sorry for him, and wondering at the situation, the full five miles home.

VI

It was next morning that Miss Jebb said, suddenly popping out from her book-lined room like a cuckoo from a clock:

"Come in here a minute."

I came. Her table was littered like that table at "47" when I first called on the false Martina, but oddly enough I looked on it without awe. The same emotion, réchauffé too often, is not palatable. I had been awed and offered worship once for all; it made no difference that it had been at the wrong shrine. So I looked at the litter with a practical eye that saw the papers as mess rather than as burnt-out torches of inspiration. She read my attitude, and it seemed to please her.

"Look here; don't think me a very strange woman, not that I care if you do. How would you like to come and bottle-wash for me?"

That took the wind out of my sails. Her gesture at the muddle of papers showed clearly what the phrase "bottle-washing" meant.

"I don't know enough. I haven't even passed Responsions yet. What use could I be?"

"That's my affair, isn't it? I'll find uses for you."

She swelled into one of her lecturing attitudes, and I could see the other Martina shadowing her while she recited:

" 'Fehlst du, lass dich's nicht betrüben;
Denn der Mangel führt zum Lieben—'

"That's Goethe. It means, never mind about failure; failure leads to love. But if it does in your case," continued Miss Jebb with a gesture, and sudden comic lapse from the platform, "out you go!"

And she made a motion with her expressive hands like shooing hens. I saw her meaning there too. It was a comment on my own lack of emotion confronted with her sanctum, and her sacred scribbles on the floor. A secretary who adored would be, to a woman of her temperament, intolerable. Her uncanny quickness of apprehension told her she would be safe with me; and almost in so many words I confirmed the guess.

"I wouldn't make a nuisance of myself."

"I know, that's why I suggested it. You've been vaccinated. You won't get it again for a while."

"What about the rebound, aren't you afraid of that?"

"Not a bit, with an interested—and interesting—young man five miles off."

"Theo? He's not interested in me. He's going to marry the pretty girl who was there."

"Nonsense, they can't talk to each other." Her penetration had spied that, even across the tea-tray. "Which wouldn't matter, if only they looked at each other properly. But they don't."

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have said they were engaged——"

"Oh, I dare say they may be. The parents have talked her into it. Very few girls have spirit enough to say boo to a peer." And with that she pushed the whole subject aside and returned to her proposal. We talked of the length of my stay in England, of the probable mental condition of Cousin Alice, of my ludicrous hop, skip, jump from the frying-pan to the fire. It was agreed that I should go to-morrow to London, reassure Cousin Alice, explain that Rawdons was not a brothel, and—more assuaging still to cousinly tantrums

—that Theo lived next door; and collecting more luggage return in a day or two. No time was to be wasted; the new novel was languishing.

"And I don't exactly say, no followers," said Miss Jebb considering; "in fact I rather like the idea of one or two. I've never been able to think of having a secretary before, because they all wanted to devote their lives to me. You don't, thank Heaven. You don't really like me much." I protested. "If you did, you wouldn't be able to say so so glibly. Detached; that's what I want. Stand up to me if I overwork you. And if you find me telling you how to manage your own business, snub me."

"All right," I said, a trifle overwhelmed.

"And don't throw my namesake the gaol-bird up at me too often. When I'm undignified, and I often am, don't let me see you thinking, 'Ah, my Martina never did that.' Please! It would be like being married to a widower."

"No," I said, "I see that."

"What do you suppose she's doing at this moment?" said Miss Jebb after a pause, with a quick, childish curiosity. "Picking oakum?"

I reckoned up the difference in time, and shook my head.

"Asleep, more likely."

"Then leave her there," said she, almost with tenderness, "poor devil! Poor silly creature! Making up as me, trying on my personality—for fun!"

And there was no tenderness in those last two words. I did not know what to answer. She puzzled me more than any human being I had ever talked with; and which was the real Gloria Jebb, the brusque amusing woman, the sad writer, the enquirer into the domesticities of Elsinore, or the fishmonger's great-granddaughter, I had no remotest notion. But I intended to serve her. And I intended to keep my heart free from her. I intended to have no followers. And I intended to look in on Theo now and again.

VII

Cousin Alice was faced in London, and there was the inevitable scene. She received me in bed, and by her demeanour implied that it was my duplicity and thoughtlessness and bad taste in practical jokes which had sent her there. She was prostrate, she said. First the anxiety when I disappeared at the station; next, that horrible telegram in the very worst taste. She had written to my father, she said; the letter was ready for the post. "Give it to

me, Osborne.” The maid whom I had eluded brought the envelope from a leather writing-case, and it was opened, and the letter read aloud with a good deal of very just emphasis. Cousin Alice, after a recital of my misdeeds, asked to be relieved of the responsibility “which I rather too light-heartedly accepted. You will understand, dearest Jack, that this does not mean that I refuse to take any further interest in Clotilde. I shall always be delighted to see her, on the understanding that my house is not treated as a mere convenience and I am not caused worry by her really heartless impulsiveness.”

Cousin Alice could write a very good letter. She read with enjoyment, cocking an eye at me over the sheets, and making a dramatic pause for smelling salts somewhere about the middle. When she had done I got up—I had been sitting meekly by the bed—and said cheerfully:

“All right, Cousin Alice. I quite understand. In fact, I’d just been thinking the same thing myself.”

It is one thing to cast off a ne’er-do-well, and another to have the ne’er-do-well calmly acquiesce in disgrace, refusing to cling or to implore. Cousin Alice’s cheeks took on an angry, healthy glow.

“You have been thinking! And what have you been thinking, pray?”

She often used that expression, which stalked through her talk like a ghost among the live words.

“I mean, I’d thought of taking myself off your hands.”

And the whole story was told; the resurgence of Martina Fields under another guise, the eligibility of the job with her, Theo’s nearness. Cousin Alice listened without once calling for the smelling salts, and at the end, with her usual unexpectedness, smiled and tilted her cheek for me to kiss.

“I must make enquiries, of course. It sounds all very well—that is, it all sounds very strange and odd. However—no doubt I can rely on your common-sense. I shan’t send this letter. Fortunately it isn’t stamped.”

And so the scene ended, with a tranquillity for which I had Theo entirely to thank. Cousin Alice would not so kindly have viewed my pursuit of an independent career; but the pursuit of a young man found her metaphorically at the covert-side, making hunting noises, whooping me on.

VIII

Miss Jebb had been working during the few days I had been away. She greeted me with a wad of papers written apparently by a lunatic child, where the writing went across the page, and round it in an oblong, and athwart, and down the back in a series of loops; no *i* dotted, and no *t* crossed anywhere in the maze. She set me to read them aloud; a trial run, as she described it; when I had blundered about for a while she shut me up, with:

"What I really need for my writing is a clairvoyant."

And rang for some meal or other. Meals were always cropping up in that house. She disliked them in large doses, at fixed hours, and the result was a perpetuity of snacks. Over this—whatever it was, it included a glass of wine—she suddenly said:

"That's a love of an admirer of yours."

It was a different matter to joke about Theo with this shrewd observer. I felt the unwilling colour mount, and answered:

"Theo? I'm awfully glad you like him, but he's not my admirer."

"Isn't he, indeed? What brings him over here, then, on horseback, the moment after you'd gone? I've never seen the man here before, nor his father either. Landlord, nonsense! Landlords' visits are like angels'. I made the most of it, though. I took him out and showed him my gate falling down, and my gutters all choked, and asked him whose business it was. He said his, his undoubtedly, and shuffled about with one leg half-way up his horse, and then asked with a face all colours if I was expecting Miss Boissy back, and when? You may stand there and deny that he's your young man, but you can't deny that I've got a gate and two gutters out of him. If that isn't proof, carpenters never lived, and no man ever loved."

I said, giving respect and even mere civility the go-by:

"You're like that bore—what's his name? in Jane Austen. You don't deserve the compliment of rational opposition."

She burst into delighted laughter, and smote my knee approvingly.

"Robert Ferrars! 'My dear Courtland, said I, throwing them all into the fire——' that's it! Girl, you're a jewel!"

" 'And that, I fancy, will be the end of it,' " said I with intent, the tail of the quotation flashing back to me. She looked at me with her eyebrows cocked for an instant, then dropped them with:

“Amen. So be it. Now look here, there’s something I want you to do for me——”

I settled down to work while the spectator at the back of my mind marvelled. I would have bitten my tongue out before addressing the false Martina in such a manner. Perhaps, mused the spectator, you’d have found the other rather a strain, eh? You only had a fortnight of it, after all. Highfalutin, year in year out. I doubt if you’d have stood it. Friendship, that’s the comfortable line to stick to. I nodded agreement, and came back to the outer world, where Miss Jebb was singing softly to a tune of her own, while she sorted scribbled pages:

“All friendship is feigning,
All loving mere folly——”

She broke off to say:

“Just one other word about him—not chipping you. I told him who I was; stole your thunder. I never saw a young man’s mouth open so wide. You could have popped a hard-boiled egg in without his noticing. D’you know what he said about poor gaol-bird Martina?”

I kept silence.

“Well, I’ll tell you. He said: ‘She’s an adventuress, and a criminal and so on, but in a sense I feel grateful to her.’ I make no comment. Find *Measure for Measure*, will you? It’s in the top left-hand corner, unless I left it in the soap-dish last night.”

Confounded woman, with her too-keen eye, and her barbed guesses. It was no use arguing with her the truth as I knew it, since she had in her possession the undoubted fact that Theo and his fiancée were unhappy. I trembled for what she might do, and had even then an inkling, since become a certainty, that she preferred Gordian knots to ordinary ones, and thoroughly enjoyed a good slash as the way out of difficulties. However, I consoled myself, while I hunted for Shakespeare’s comedy among sponges, with the thought that it was less than likely that we should be seeing Theo thus informally again.

But next morning, the very next morning, a soft grey day that was for the uplands rather than the hollows, he turned up again on horseback in our valley, and not alone. Lady Diana was with him, perched on a great skyscraping horse, her gold hair tucked under a bowler, her habit a decorous black. Miss Jebb was, for the moment, aloof from literature. “I will not,” she had exclaimed at breakfast, “become a damned hack,” and forthwith had

gone into the garden, already half stripped for winter, and laboured herself damp and crimson preparing a bonfire on the cobbled path. I was at the back of the house going through the store cupboard, making lists, and so was unaware of guests until her voice hailed me; her voice with an infernal subdued mischief dancing in it.

“Clotilde, come along. Visitors!”

The voice ought to have warned me, but I was busy and unsuspecting. I patted my hair and went straight into the long book-room to find them there; Theo and Diana, both pink from riding, she looking curiously and timidly about her, he glum.

That was the strangest interlude. There were the two, looking like Caldecott drawings, most absurdly out of place in that littered workroom. There were not, in the ’nineties, quite so many mechanical accessories surrounding the writer, no typewriters, at least not in this case, no dictaphone, no thousand bright jackets of books for review. But the effect of the scattered manuscripts and reference books was even more picturesque, and gave a deeper impression of personal mental grapplings. These two in riding-dress seemed by heredity and upbringing to be insulated from such grapplings; but the even-handed Fates see to it that those who know where their next meal and next opinion are coming from shall be more particularly exposed to the assaults of the emotions. There was trouble here, unexpressed, and before ten minutes had passed we all of us knew it.

However, there was an attempt at talk. Miss Jebb, earthy, with soil adhering to her boot-heels and to her forehead where she had pushed back hair with her hand, monologued with admirable freedom and an occasional pleading glance at me. But they would not help, and I could not. Why had they come? We talked somehow; there was speech. It was not even about the weather, which had at least the charm of diversity. As we laboured and they took up each topic with apparent relief only to drop it a disappointing sentence later, I began to feel more acutely their plight. With my mind’s eye I saw these two noble kinsfolk wordlessly imploring aid, as a dog will limp up holding a paw. Each vague sentence and roaming glance confirmed it. They knew they were in a fix; they knew they were unhappy; and they were too English, too perplexed by the labels “Done” and “Not Done” to talk and find a way out. They would neither give in nor go. Like hurt animals they held up their paws, and dropped their ears, and gave an occasional little sharp yelp that told they were in pain. And the most pathetic thing of all was this forlorn-hope expedition to seek help outside their own world. An artist and a colonial were persons with whom their ordinary lives brought no

contact, though in an impersonal way they ordered books from the libraries like biscuits from grocers, and believed in the Empire.

I was despairing. They had stayed for an hour, it was nearing our time for lunch; my adventures in the store cupboard that morning had told me that unexpected visitors could hardly be fed without some ingenuity. Then on a sudden I saw, clouding Miss Jebb's round lively eye, the horridly pellucid stare which had preceded her enormity about the fishmonger. Before I could give warning or take cover myself she had come out with the following, innocently spoken in clear ringing tones:

"I do respect a man who can manage his love affairs. Properly conducted, they never ought to leave unpleasantness behind. Look at Casanova. Lord Frome, you conduct your tandem of fiancées beautifully."

There was silence for the moment, of sheer surprise. What an unforgivable thing to say, what a gaffe, what a clumsiness! This from the woman so alert to atmosphere, so sensitive, who had made a friend of me in five minutes by her complete understanding! I could hardly credit my ears, which even seemed to perceive, reluctantly, a kind of new commonness and harshness in her tones, as a rule so schooled and pleasant. I said in haste:

"She means all that business on the boat. I told her about it."

Why had I? What a fool! But who could have foreseen that she would so unscrupulously use the story as a bludgeon? She sailed past my intervention in the most ill-bred manner, to say, with a kind of dense professional eagerness:

"I thought it a charming story, and asked Clotilde if I might use it—for a book, you know. Much too good to be wasted on real life. I have her permission."

Lady Diana said, quietly, with an oddly contrasting little dignity:

"I don't think I know this, Theo, do I?"

He was beginning to say something, but Miss Jebb with her new imperviousness and practised voice rolled over him.

"Clotilde got into a mess. She was travelling alone, or with a person who was unsympathetic——"

"Unsympathetic!" from Theo. "An unspeakable woman."

"Oh, come," said Miss Jebb, "isn't that rather strong?"

"I don't think so," said Theo abruptly, "excuse me."

“It was a most unsavoury police-court case,” said Miss Jebb to Lady Diana, with the gloating air of one about to browse on garbage; “this woman, you see, who’d been impersonating me, was accused——” she broke off with a dreadful giggle. “Really, I hardly know how to say it.”

“No need to,” Theo interrupted. “The point is, Diana, Miss Boissy, through no fault of her own, got involved in an ugly kind of case. This odious woman, Mrs. Trentham, for spite I suppose, began to spread details of it through the ship. It’s a horrible story, there’s no need to say any more than that. And this person—in charge of Clotilde, you must remember; her chaperone—spread the story thick. Told it herself, in detail, to men. It was all round the smoking-room——”

He broke off, with an exclamation of disgust.

“Still,” said Miss Jebb, after an instant, very brightly, “Clotilde did knock her down.”

If ever a man had difficulty in remembering his manners to a woman and his hostess, Theo in that instant was that man.

“That’s quite untrue. Entirely untrue. I was present when the incident happened. I was in the cabin. There was nothing of the kind. What Clotilde did was more than justified by the disgusting way in which the woman spoke to her.”

“Oh,” said Miss Jebb, with a leer, “in the cabin, were you? Then you certainly should know. And the announcement of the engagement followed that night, I think?”

“Your first piece of correct information,” coldly said Theo.

“First lie, you mean,” Miss Jebb corrected him bluntly. “The engagement itself was a fake. But people believed it, you know.”

“We meant that they should.”

“And you meant them to write out to their friends and relations in Australia about it, I suppose? As of course they all did.”

Theo was silent, taken aback. Miss Jebb pursued her advantage.

“I don’t really see what good you imagined you were doing. You defend her from a lie which was palpably ridiculous by another lie which makes her look a fool. Forgive my frankness, won’t you?”

This was more than I could stand, and despite the warning from her eye, still lambent with a kind of horrid innocence, I put in my word.

"I agreed to it. What is all this fuss about? Of course I didn't write anything about it to my people."

"And of course all the passengers on the ship were equally discreet," Miss Jebb flashed at me. "You nonsensical pair!"

Theo disregarded her altogether. He looked harassed all of a sudden, and his voice when he spoke to Lady Diana had almost a passionate sound of pleading, as though he needed the reassurance of his own words.

"You see, don't you? Clotilde was in a wretched position; alone, with all this scandal dragging after her, this woman lying and gossiping. What else could I have done? She had to have some protection. I couldn't watch it," went on Theo, an enthusiast to hounds, "the whole lot of them yelping after her, and absolutely alone. You understand, don't you, Diana? There was no question of any——well, affection on either side. Just a sort of defensive alliance. That's all."

Lady Diana's face was an inexpressive one. It had beauty, but of a static kind, independent of expression; the beauty of lovely framework and exquisite skin. Possibly also Lady Minton had told her that too much movement brought wrinkles. At any rate it was quite unreadable now as she said:

"I wish I'd known."

"That would have been something to tell your mother," said Miss Jebb with a great breezy earthy laugh.

"Yes," said the Lady Diana in a very small voice, "it would. Oh, Theo, why didn't you tell me before?"

"But, my dear, Clotilde understood; it was none of it serious, not for a moment."

He went over to her. From this moment Miss Jebb and I dropped for a while clean out of the scene, as though we had stepped into some invisible wings to stand beside the prompter, and listen to the dénouement working itself out; the pair, released for a little time from the close Queen Anne houses of their upbringing, speaking freely. We became audience, with a touch of creation about us; we, by our demands and imagination, had made the play. So Theo made his protest, and followed it after a moment, dropping his voice, with:

"And you know I care."

She said gravely:

“Yes, I know.” Then, in the smallest wavering voice in the world: “But I don’t, you see. And if I’d known this, perhaps I needn’t——” needn’t have given in to my parents; I think that was how we all heard the sentence run on in our minds.

He stood away from her; his hand had been at her waist. I could not see his face, but I could tell from his voice how it looked.

“Diana, you mean you don’t want to go through with it?”

She nodded, turning away her face.

He went on, as if to himself: “I wouldn’t let myself think——it’s all right, my dear, thank God you’ve said it. But why did you, if—it didn’t mean anything?”

She answered, hanging her head:

“Father talked to me, the day after you wrote. I couldn’t tell him how I felt. He was happy about it, and he seemed to feel it was the right thing. Mother too. So then I couldn’t tell them—And I do so like you, Theo. I always have. I thought perhaps we could—sort of manage on that.”

She lifted her face.

“You know what Papa is. He hardly thinks there’s anyone good enough—and Mummy minds whether there’s any money or not. She minds that awfully. So I just couldn’t tell them there was someone else; somebody they’d think was poor.”

“Who is it?” Theo asked; but very gently.

She answered, in the relief of being able at last to talk, with schoolgirl directness.

“It’s Johnny Fouldes. But you see, he isn’t well-off; not what Mummy would call well-off. It would have meant such a fuss. I couldn’t face it, Theo; but I minded. I did mind.”

Her head drooped at last. Theo said, taking her hand most naturally in both of his:

“Why didn’t you tell me all this when I told you what the doctor said, two days ago?”

She almost flared at that, she who to look at was as brilliant, as yielding and as uninflammable as a square of gold brocade.

“Throw you over because they said you mightn’t get well! How could I? Isn’t that just the very reason I could never, never tell you, disappoint you, when you were in such trouble——”

Almost the same words that I had used on board the *Ostend*, when he divulged to me his quixotically practical plan of consulting Harley Street first. Women have to be learnt; the light of nature, man’s nature, goes very little way towards understanding them. The two had forgotten us, I think, as actors deep in their parts may forget their audience, and the prompter with the script in his corner. Eyes continue to be on them all the same. Miss Jebb watched and was alive to every instant of their talk, to each movement. They were the creatures of her stage, making the scene go; she was stirred by them as the dramatist sometimes may be caught by the reality of his own creation, but she still held the script, and was ready with the word if they needed it.

However, they were going on, with beautiful spontaneity. Theo said, still holding the girl’s hand:

“I’ll speak to your father for you. Don’t be afraid of him, he’s so fond of you. I’ll put it on the score of what Galt said. There needn’t be any fuss; there’s been no public announcement. How about Johnny? Does he know—the way you feel about things?”

“Yes, he knows. He was going away; he thought there couldn’t be anything, we’d only be miserable. He was going back to Ireland.”

“Shall I write to him? Tell him it’s all clear, apologize for riding him off? I’d never have done it if I’d known, you know.”

She made no answer to that, but I saw the shift of her mouth at the corners, and knew that the blue eyes were brimming; mine smarted, too. Generosity is always moving. Miss Jebb from her prompt corner saw the situation getting beyond a comedy, and without warning plunged into it with her new coarse-fibred gaiety.

“You’re a most useful man, finding fiancés for girls right and left. D’you know what the time is? After one o’clock. You must have lunch.”

“There’s nothing in the house,” I said, startled into truthfulness; “I’ve been through the stores this morning——”

“ ‘Take thy beak,’ ” retorted Miss Jebb, “ ‘from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!’ There is always food if one has imagination enough. Come and forage, won’t you?” This to Lady Diana, who came gratefully. “You others, go out to the fowl-house and look for eggs.”

Theo hesitated. The woman had goaded him, tricked him into telling something he had meant to keep dark; and her manner throughout had been brutal. She seemed to lack all gentleness, all decorum. He hesitated; and the obtuse gipsy in one instant saw why. She halted by him, repeating: “Eggs; one can’t make omelettes without breaking ’em, you know.”

It was a voice very different from the hearty clod-like tones she had been using for the last half-hour. He looked at her, astonished, and answered rather briefly:

“Thanks. It’s Diana that matters.”

“Among others,” said Miss Jebb with a certain dryness. “Run along, Clotilde.”

IX

That ought to have been the awkwardest moment of my life, alone with a man whose chance for happiness in love my indiscretion had broken. I was angry with Miss Jebb for divulging the story of the board-ship engagement; not merely letting it out by a slip of the tongue, but proclaiming it, making a whole intolerable high-pitched scene of it. But Miss Jebb knew her business, as did another woman novelist before her. “Their straightforward emotions left no room for the little zig-zags of embarrassment.” Theo and I walked out to the fowl-house without a single word exchanged, and sought for eggs, side by side; almost it was a relief to be together, having seen all the cards played, and to reckon gains and losses in silence. But at last something had to be said, and as usual it was the woman, always shouldering her burden of the first word and the last, who spoke.

“Theo, I’m most awfully sorry, all this happening. I told Miss Jebb just as a sort of joke. I didn’t dream she’d come out with it.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Then, correcting himself, “Well, it does matter; it was the best thing that could have happened. Straightened out the tangle for all of us.”

We were silent again, and a hen broke from hiding with a clatter and fled with long strides. He picked up her egg, and said, weighing it in his hand as though it had been gold:

“It’s for me to apologize. I didn’t see how that engagement on the ship would look to outsiders. It seemed such a natural thing to do.”

“Of course. Don’t think about it.”

But he persisted, troubled:

"Of course all those passengers would talk. A good many of them knew your people, didn't they? They'll have written. It will be horribly awkward for you. I ought to have seen that. I've been infernally selfish all along."

That I would not have, and I turned on him, the second woman to do so within half an hour, and for the same cause.

"As if you haven't had enough, with your father's death, and the doctors, and now this! What does it matter what a few fools say? I don't take any notice. Give me that egg and we'll go in."

In fact, Miss Jebb's voice was wailing from the kitchen window:

"Eggs! Pullet-sperm for my brewage! What are you doing out there?"

Theo gave me the egg and we turned towards the house. He unlatched the gate for me; I passed through, but he stayed a moment to stroke the cat, a monumental tabby that lay on the low wall, motionless and rounded as a cat in needlework. It blinked at him and acknowledged his efforts to please with a condescending rumble. He said now, not looking at me:

"Nice wall, old lady? D'you remember that black and white chap, that cat on the boat, Buchanan they called him?"

I did remember. It was a beast with the manners of a society beauty, petulant and froward from much fo'c'sle petting. It had been about, sauntering under our feet, that night he caught me in tears lying in the boat. I took my courage up once more.

"Theo, please. Just one thing. You don't think I had anything to do with what Miss Jebb said? I mean—playing for my own hand; intending to make trouble. I promise I didn't. She shocked me, saying it. I couldn't have dreamed she'd blurt it out."

He answered, still looking down at the cat, whose claws gripped and released, gripped and released, crushing the stone-crop:

"Of course not. I know you better than that."

"It's spoiled everything for you."

"Spoiled some things; saved others. I couldn't have made Di happy; I've known that almost from the first. Poor child!"

The cat ponderously rose, tired already of his attentions, and impatiently began to lick its shirt-front. He still lingered, watching it, and said at last:

“Can I come another time to see you? We haven’t got things tidy yet.”

“Come when you want, if you want.”

The shrill summons from the window now was orchestrated; spoon upon frying pan.

“Eggs!” Clang. “Eggs!” Clang, clang. “Eggs!” Fantasia, above which the voice continued to clamour. The cat jumped down.

“A most peculiar woman,” said Theo following it doorwards. “Extraordinary. Still, I’m grateful to her.”

“That’s what you said of the other Martina, the false one,” I answered unthinking.

“Did I?” said he, looking me fair in the face. “Well, you know, I meant it.”

We shook hands; then went together half-laughing, half awkwardly, into the warm-scented kitchen.

CHAPTER XIII

> There is surely a nearer apprehension of anything that delights us in our dreams than in our waked senses; for my awak'd judgment discontents me, ever whispering to me that I am from my friend.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

They departed pretty soon after lunch, under the narrowed approving eye of Morrell the groom-gardener, whose opinion was that his lordship, now he was home and to be married, should take on the pack. Miss Jebb said, in her usual robust tones, but absently:

"Nonsense, why should he start breaking his neck by way of settling down? Come along, Clotilde, please. These youngsters have wasted our morning."

And that was all she said about them. As for me, I would not tackle her concerning her extraordinary behaviour, since I could not be sure that it had been intentional. Looking back, the whole manœuvre seems evident; but eighteen is too wont to suppose that its elders are as bad actors as itself, or rather that its new-found wisdom is capable of seeing through them however well they may play. I should have known better, having been once bitterly taken in. Miss Jebb, however, had carried through her performance so admirably, remaining always just this side of the probable, that she puzzled me as completely as she shocked Theo. "A most extraordinary woman!" For she did not suddenly drop the scene with their departure. She sat down to work, but with plungings, and occasional loud irrelevancies, and her hair came down on to her shoulders, where, impatiently, she let it lie. She was apt to let a part get hold of her, and it may be that she was trying on for that day this make-up of rustic and boisterous complacency.

She kept me with nose to paper the rest of the afternoon. A lecture was in process of writing, to be given at a meeting of the Royal Society of Literature some time within the month; a lecture on, as it happened, the great actors. One passage stuck in my mind, a clue to her personality and to that of every actor who ever was born.

“Hamlet makes a comment just before the players are announced, which should have come two scenes later, in the very text of his famous advice to them. ‘I am but mad north-north-west.’ So should every player be; so the great ones are.

“It is easy to imagine Siddons holding the door of her dressing-room open, alert to the course of the play, as if it did truly concern her for life or death to know what was being planned upon the stage. This, says the worshipper, is your true artist, merged in the work of art. Not quite; not wholly. Be sure that when Siddons paced to the footlights in her turn part of her mind was enlisted as critic, offering comments while she played. ‘The king moves two steps unrehearsed; move to counter him, like a queen at chess. Wolsey drops the scene to-night; raise your own pitch, and you may pull him after you. That patch of audience is dull; at them full tilt!’ All this while she bows with Spanish Katherine’s angry humility, or drifts about the stage in madness, Queen of Scotland. The divine afflatus blows her this way and that, but from one point of the compass only; for the rest, she is alive to herself as no audience can ever be. Dying, desiring, she knows a hawk from a handsaw still. If she did not, Bedlam would be the place for her, not Drury Lane.”

II

There was a letter from Theo by next morning’s post. It lay at the top of a pile by my plate, and I knew the thick grey paper before I even saw the handwriting. Miss Jebb looked up very naturally as I entered and caught me eyeing it; caught me, the next instant, turning a silly scarlet, forehead, neck, and all. I felt the blush lifting, and inwardly swore a few stable-boy oaths, supposing that she was still in her yesterday’s mood, and might ride rough-shod or jeer. But she made no sign. I wanted to hide the letter and read it alone. There was no reason why I should not have done so. No moral obligation exists to compel the opening of all letters at the breakfast table. But because of the blush I dared not be secretive. Negligently, I opened Theo’s envelope first.

It was a disappointment; half a dozen lines only.

“Hope you’re all right. The Mintons are leaving to-day; I am afraid things will not be very easy for Diana for a while. I have written to Miss Jebb; she will tell you the plan. I do hope you’ll persuade her to leave her work just for that afternoon. I have apologised to her for inflicting our difficulties on her yesterday. This is just to say that I look forward to seeing you.”

“Lord Frome”—not “your young man,” thank heaven, this time—“I see you’ve a letter from him too. He wants us to go to his immense house for some sort of meal on Monday. But there’ll be too much to eat, and I must get my weight down.”

This was hardly the reason I had expected for refusing the invitation; and in fact, she did not intend to refuse it, as her next words showed.

“You can say when you answer that he’s only to give me cold meat and stewed apples, one of those nasty wholesome meals. He’s got a couple of Caxtons in his library, though he probably doesn’t know they’re there.”

No embarrassment. No apparent awareness that she ought to be hiding her head; that she had made life more difficult for the daughter of a peer, that she had cheated society of a match to its taste, and prevented some thousand pounds or so from circulating in the purchase of wedding presents.

“But the work?”

She replied with a curious intentness:

“Look here, Clotilde. I said you weren’t to put me on a pedestal. Work’s not to be deified either. Pedestals have their uses, very prosaic ones. Keep them to house necessary crockery, and don’t let any other aspect of life come near them.”

“Why do you bother with work, then? You take a lot of pains with it. You give up a lot. Why, if it’s no use?”

“I didn’t say that. It’s of prodigious use. It makes money; it takes up time.”

I stared.

“But you’re always saying you want thirty-six hours in the day!”

“So I do, so does anyone not a vegetable. The endless things I don’t know, that I’ve never tried! Life will be past and over before I’ve touched a tithe of them——”

I said grumbling, as if it had been her fault: “It’s only the days down here that seem to whizz by.”

She answered at once, her one flick of mischief that morning:

“ ‘With whom does time trot withal?’ ” And before I could place the question, which Rosalind answers with something about a maid and her

marriage, she was off, face calculating and grave again, to the still unsettled matter of the invitation for Monday.

"I can fit things in easily. Write and tell him we'll be pleased to come, and he's to order the dullest possible lunch."

I said, suspiciously, feeling that she was up to something:

"Why should I answer? He wrote to you."

"Dear," smoothly replied Miss Jebb, "I hate to remind you; but are, or aren't you, my secretary?"

I sent the note, splendidly impersonal.

"Dear Theo, Miss Jebb asks me to say that she will be delighted to come on Monday, and begs that the lunch may be simple, as she is keeping just now to a strict diet. She sends kind regards, and looks forward to seeing you again."

"What an idiotic missive," remarked Miss Jebb as she signed it. "Why don't you mention yourself, and why have you been so disgustingly officious as to give orders about the meal? Now I shall have to be virtuous."

"I did what I was told. I'm your secretary, as you were saying."

"Lor!" said Miss Jebb, ruefully, "One forgets the deadly dignity of the young. I'm sorry I trod on it."

We drove ahead with the work after that, full steam, as though the turning out of so many thousand words were the end of both our beings, that for which we had been born into the world, been nourished, and which having done we might die. The rough scheme of the lecture was completed, a few of the more purple passages written and polished. After dinner I had respite with a novel in the long chair in the living-room; but Miss Jebb went in to her book-room, just across the lobby, and I could hear her walking to and fro, to and fro, with her queer balanced tread, and after a time talking. That sound worried me; I could tell by the inflection of her voice that she was not reading aloud. It was a motion of sheer inquisitiveness that sent me to open the door and look in on her, and so bring her up short in mid-peroration.

She had a bundle of papers behind her back, standing by her writing-table, sideways to me. I caught her in the midst of a gesture, at the burgeoning of a smile; not her everyday smile, but a stage one. She was saying:

"—but you are not to take your idea of Garrick solely from Boswell, who was jealous of him, nor even from Hannah More, whom he flattered—" I made my entrance here; she nodded to me to sit down, and went unconcernedly on, making these unfamiliar gestures, talking too big for the room. It was the lecture, of course, and she was rehearsing it. From time to time she cast an eye on me, to learn her effect from my expression; from time to time broke off:

"That bit's supposed to be funny."

"I know. I only didn't laugh because I'd read it this morning."

"I see. But otherwise you'd have laughed?"

"Oh, yes."

She made a little note in the margin of her paper, a characteristic symbol which I afterwards learned meant, "Wait for laugh," and went on. Sometimes the questions were different, this, for instance:

"Do I sound as though I'm reading?"

"Yes. But you're going to read, aren't you?"

She cast a glance of disdain.

"Have you ever listened to a parson reading his sermon? Deadly! Of course I'll read, but the thing is to disguise it. Change the sentence round—let me see——"

And trying all ways, she got it into a form as rhythmic, but speakable; clean away from the literary sentence, which obliges a voice to certain monotonous ups and downs.

She went through the task once in this fashion, making little circles and crosses, which she employed in much the same way as the musical marks indicating crescendoes, pauses, and slurs; then went over it again, obeying her own notes and my reactions, smiling, gesturing, all, even the little hesitations, repeated according to plan; and the whole thing so natural, so growing out of her mind like a shapely tree from its soil, that I listened as though the thrice heard words had been new to me. It was in its way a finer piece of acting than any exhibition given by the false Martina, but this time I was standing in the wings, there was no mystery, and I was troubled by it.

"Do you always work out like that everything you do?"

"Pretty nearly," said she, flushed, and looking handsome. "Effects are made, not born. Did I do it well? Compliment me, take trouble with me,

don't look so disapproving. Was it—oh well, let's give the lowest common denominator. Was it all right?"

"You know it was."

"But I want to be told it was." And the large creature had her hands on my shoulders again, shaking compliments out of me as once she had shaken comprehension. "I want to be told it was phenomenal, that it was prodigious, that children yet unborn are going to lisp excerpts from this lecture at their incubator's knee, for I don't suppose they'll go on having mothers much longer. I want you to say it was all you could do not to burst with enthusiasm——"

I had to laugh at her ridiculous exuberance, and I got out some extravagant praise or other to quiet her and still the rocking of my shoulders. Her penetration, however, was not deceived.

"What's bothering you?"

"Nothing is."

"Rubbish. Is it——?"

But she did not finish the question, and I was saved a lie. It was not the thought of my relation to Theo that worried me, but the sense of our being played with, hurried about and ordered by another will. She never moved without motive, she was adroit, Theo was no match for her. Was she, with her detestable playwright's skill, playing for position, to have us neatly in each other's arms at the end of Act III? I could not endure this thought. It made me angrily turn and thump my pillow as I lay that night waking. I should have learned something of my own feelings from that revulsion of my soul at the thought of catching Theo by any kind of trickery. In vain is the net spread in the sight of the fowler; there is no joy in snaring, but only in the gay and willing yielding up of freedom. I raged against Miss Jebb that night, though I did not admit the reason; and distrust of her, and affection for her, persisted through my dreams.

III

Monday came, after two work-filled days. Miss Jebb had really laboured, exhausted herself to have these hours free; proofs were ready, article done. The visit to Toller was ours.

I can give no excuse for my next behaviour that is worth making. And yet, after all, I had been once most treacherously deceived. I was dealing with a woman older than myself, actress, artist, for ever giving out, for ever

withdrawing, unfathomable by my shallow experience. I was unhappy, wanting to be friends with her, forced to suspect her; wanting to see Theo, deadly afraid of making myself cheap. I would not march to Toller at her word of command. I had seen how poor Diana went through the hoop at her whipcrack, all unsuspecting. Pride of eighteen concealed from me that the whipcrack had forced timid Diana to fight for her chance of happiness.

Dog-cart and placid mare were at the door by twelve. Upstairs, in Miss Jebb's room and round about it a frenzy of departure reigned, above which her powerful voice could be heard imploring aid, wailing aloud as the buttonhook nipped her ankles. The whole household had gathered, as was its wont, to speed her. She loved fuss. Meanwhile I sat below in the book-room, copying something or other in a hand laboriously fair. A processional trampling warned me that she was descending. Rooms away I could hear her calling: "Clotilde! You must drive—where are you? I want to arrive looking regal. Where are you, Clotilde?"

I got up unhurried, to see her at the door. She had put on her best hat, plumed and silvered like a French hearse-horse, in which she looked, she had once said, like Hamlet's aunt. She called, mocking:

"Aristocratic nonchalance! Look at me, all of a plebeian twitter at having lunch with an earl." Then: "Where's your hat?"

I summoned my resolution, looked at her squarely, and said:

"I think I won't come, if you don't mind."

Was there a flicker of her eyes? Not one; and no catastrophic change of expression. I might have been a stranger declining sugar at tea-time. She said, however, her eyebrows just lifting a little:

"Oh, but what a pity! Are you sure?"

"Quite, thanks."

She put a cool hand to my forehead.

"All right, child?"

"Quite, thanks. Tell Theo I'm sorry."

She dropped her hand.

"Then I'll be off. Don't work, the Cryptic's not in a hurry. I'll tell Lord Frome you just couldn't manage——"

She turned away with a little friendly motion of the fingers, and I heard her saying on the steps:

"Get your hat, Morrell, I'll want you to drive me."

After that a pause. I did not stir. There would have been time to run upstairs and fetch my hat, time to shout, "Wait, I'm coming!" But I did not stir, and after a moment there came the sound of wheels and hoofs departing at Buttercup's unhurrying pace. That settled it, and sitting down to the table and the littered papers I bent my head and wrote steadily on, growing momently more shamed and conscious of my own folly. "Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide——" that quotation came in the essay I was copying. All very well; but how, at eighteen, to know which instinct to follow, whom to trust? And how look straight at a woman who was never the same for half an hour together? That was my angry argument which dwindled in a very few minutes to mere shame. I knew in my heart that if she did manage me she had nothing but friendliness for me. Theo too—he had character enough not to be driven. As for me, I had behaved like a sheer fool, and a rude fool. Now that I had shot my bolt of incivility, conscience and common-sense combined, over that equable essay, to give me hell. Another thought struck and stung. What, left alone to her unfettered devices, might the woman not say to Theo?

The sound of hoofs brought me to my feet with a suddenness that let the pen scatter its ink unheeded. I went to the door, ready, if by miracle it were the dog-cart returning, to ask pardon and to come. But expectation was cheated. It was the butcher's cart, driven by a knowing-looking boy at a great rate, and in some style. My eye for a horse, the one heritage I had from my father, liked the butcher's cob, and followed its progress with interest towards the back premises. I saw Tuesday's joint emerge without ceremony from the cart's bowels, heard a colloquy, or rather the last words of it, flung over the boy's shoulder as he remounted:

"—no time for talk, missus. Five mile to go for dinner."

Mrs. Morrell set up a cry of:

"Liver for Thursday, don't forget, and the cat's lights."

He nodded, and whipped up. As the cob broke from a walk to its first pace I was out in the very middle of the drive with my arms spread to halt them. The cob shied at me, and stopped, snorting. The boy looked down in wonder. I wasted no time with him.

"What way are you going?"

He gaped. I insisted.

"Are you going towards Toller?"

"Widdersham, more——"

"I'll give you half a crown to drop me at King's Toller." He muttered something about its being a mile out of the way. "I'll give you five shillings." He muttered something about his dinner. "I'll get you something to eat, now."

He could find nothing more to say, and I fled into the house, to the dining-room, found a biscuit box half-full of ginger nuts, tipped half a pint of sherry from a decanter into a glass, and going out handed them to the boy. He took the provender, mazed, and I fled back again, upstairs, to put on my best. It took no more than five minutes to dress, and I was down again, gloved, veiled. It was the very glass of autumn fashion that mounted beside the butcher's boy, now as spiritless as Balkis of Sheba after the showing of the wonders. But the half had not yet been told him.

"Get on," I said, perching beside him. "It's half-past twelve. What does your cob do to the hour?"

He did not know. He looked odd, half-sick; but he took up his whip, and laid the thong of it on the cob's neck, and we were off at a nice steady eight-mile trot along the road that turned north across the ascending downs.

I noticed soon that the style had departed from my escort's driving. We were this way and that over the road, as though it were hilly; but we had not yet come to the hills. We shaved a huckster's passing cart, and took off a stook of brooms that hung bunched from the tilt; passed on, still at a trot, without apology, while the huckster's boy got down, and angrily shook the brooms after us before re-hanging them. A whiff of my escort's breath came my way. Years spent among stable-boys enabled me to put my finger on his trouble, and my mind went off in fright to the decanter, one of three, all filled with yellow-brown liquid, sherry, madeira, whisky.

"You're drunk," I said abruptly to the boy, swaying now on his box like a romantic pianist playing Chopin. "Why didn't you tell me that was whisky I'd given you?"

He rolled and voiced something to the effect of its being a powerful fine drink. Then he began to sing, slowly and in a surprisingly good baritone, some hymn or other which my Catholic ear, tuned to Father Faber and the unknown Latinists, would not let me place. I remember only its triumphant refrain to which the cart swung and bounded:

“I am included!
I am included!
When the Lord said Whosoever,
He included me——”

“You flatter yourself,” I said grimly, and twitched the reins from his by this time nerveless hands. He acquiesced, made no fight for his supremacy on the box, seemed to welcome my interference as leaving him more time for song. But the whisky was putting forth its powers still, creeping over him stealthily, invading those centres of balance which are reputed to lie within the ears. The rail of his cart was quite inadequate to hold him. There was no room at our feet to stow him. All the while guiding the horse, I slipped one arm through his and held him tight against me, upright. He acquiesced in this too, and after a while ceased his singing, and drooped his head to my shoulder with a happy sigh.

So we progressed the necessary miles, his cob keeping up its excellent pace, commenting only with occasional laid-back ears on the unusual events succeeding each other on its Olympus, the box. The youth slept still, wide-mouthed, as we drove through the open lodge gates and past a horrified old lady in the cleanest imaginable apron, who even ran after us a little way, and then stood aghast to watch. I flicked the cob to a canter, and we came racing up the classic drive, threadbare now with approaching winter, sky showing through the netted trees, the cattle all huddled. Far away, at the end of a vista, I viewed the restless fountain, now with its plume blown sideways by the north-west wind. We rounded it, choosing the main way that led past it. No back door for us. We came spanking under the spray, and drew up at those leisured stately steps in a flurry of gravel, the butcher boy’s arm still firmly tucked in my own, his heavy head lolling under my chin.

Scandalised eyes had viewed us. As the hoofs ceased their rhythm temple attendants broke from the portico; not the High Priest himself, presumably at this hour serving the meal, but two underlings in livery, buff and blue. I suppose they had read the legend “Family Butcher,” and had sprung forth to admonish the clown who should thus bring shoulders of lamb and sweetbreads to the front door. But when they saw how the offending cart was conducted, by a lady dressed cap-à-pie for a visit, and looking, save for the slobbering form on her bosom, the very pineapple of politeness, doubt came upon them. I will now render this tribute to the admirable training in decorum given by their High Priest. They recognised me. They came forward with all the decent respectfulness of bearing due to a visitor. One soiled his hands with the bridle. The other, with only a

reverent—“Permit me, madam,” detached the butcher boy’s limpet-like hold, and held him aside, with one arm, crooking the other for me to touch descending. Neither smiled. Both were perfectly at their ease, perfectly adequate to the situation and took charge of it at once. I tried to match them.

“I’m a little late, I’m afraid.”

The footman replied unflinching:

“Luncheon is this moment served, madam.”

“Please see to the boy. He’s—not well.”

“Certainly, madam.” Then: “Shall you wish the cart to wait?”

At this calm acceptance of the vagaries of the gentry, the suggestion that possibly this was my ordinary mode of conveyance, and no doubt the most recent and modish way of getting about the country, I had all I could do not to let my dignity down. A memory assailed me of some character in Pickwick, young Lord Mutanhed who coursed about Bath in an imitation mail-cart, “Painted wed, with wed wheels,” and blowing a postman’s horn to bring all the villagers, “wushing out to see if he wasn’t the post.” Then why not, said the footman’s demeanour, an imitation Family Butcher’s equipage, with possibly sham legs of mutton in the boot? This young man in blue and buff would have served Lord Mutanhed, unsmiling. However, I waved the cart into Limbo.

We went through the vast hall, past the posturing demi-gods in bronze, and in to a room I had not seen before, a round-ended room with a portrait set over the fireplace, and a round-ended table at whose head sat Theo, with Miss Jebb, talking earnestly, on his right. There was no place set for me; it had been cleared. They were eating some sort of eggy first-course dish, from which they hardly looked up as I entered, so deep in talk were they. But the footman’s voice, announcing, brought both their heads round with a jerk.

“Miss Clotilde Boissy!”

Theo was up in an instant, looking so glad that I had a dreadful little pang of mixed feelings, a dozen savours in my mind at once, like a bouquet of herbs. How could I have been so childish a fool as to suppose that such a look could come at the bidding of Miss Jebb? She, as ever, had first word, and an honest amazement rang in it.

“Have you flown? Or ridden a cow bareback? How on earth, my dear child, did you get here?”

That made it easy for me; and while silver was set and glasses ranked at my right hand, I told the story of my preposterous drive. They laughed; I did not tell it badly. And neither of them asked the questions I did not want to answer, though they were behind everything we said. Why had I come? Why had I not come? I expected Miss Jebb to plunge into the matter in her usual fashion, but for once, just when we should all have been glad of a little openness, she was discreet as Penelope. The meal drew in commonplaces to its end.

After it was over began the most absurd game of follow-my-leader. Theo and I had made most of the running in what talk there was. Our very awkwardness showed that we mattered to each other, and I suppose she thought that thus engrossed we should yield ourselves an easy prey. She opened her campaign with the library. Might she see the Caxtons? But why should she bore us with them? We were not bibliophiles. Why didn't we take a turn in the garden? I insisted on seeing the Caxtons.

There they were, in a forlorn but lovely room all browns and golds of tooled leather, which smelt disused. She pounced upon them, turned the pages, looked knowledgeably at colophons; then, as if absently, mounted a ladder, which groaned its protest, and pulling out a volume some three feet high—concerned solely with some less interesting Early Father as I afterwards found—appeared to lose her whole soul in it, back turned, eyes riveted to its print. This was my cue, I supposed, to drift with Theo to the window-seat; but the temptation to worst her was more powerful than the prospect of a talk with him alone. She had teased me often enough. I stood, therefore, at the foot of the ladder, and selecting for myself a crusted volume of lesser eighteenth-century sermons, feigned to be equally enthralled.

"Fourthly, it may be serviceable in this issue to make clear (so far as Earthly intelligence may presume to interpret the Divine) the meaning and intent of these Precepts, upon which the greater part of our behaviour as Christians must be founded as on a Rock. The Israelites, a proud-stomached people"—I turned the page with assumed avidity to know what followed—"were, nevertheless, recipients to a degree not since, until this century and reign overbore the Divinity with their deserving, accorded, of the most bounteous favours from on high, scattered with the lavish hand of Omnipotence, and received, most shocking to tell! with Indifference and Sloth such as fire from Heaven might, with greater economy and justice, more equitably have rewarded."

Miss Jebb, up on her ladder, must have been reading and enduring sentences of about the same length and tortuousness. Theo, growing restless,

appealed to me.

“If Miss Jebb’s interested—suppose we come back for her? There’s my mother’s room I’d like you to see.”

“Oh, but I’m interested too,” I answered demurely, and read on about the Israelites; who, idolaters, fornicators, blasphemers and tempters of God as they were, did not, in my eighteenth-century divine’s opinion, come near Roman Catholics for wickedness. It occurred to me that possibly Theo did not know of my religion. I leaned towards him, my finger on one of the Right Reverend fulminations. He read, over my shoulder:

“But to speak plainly, and without fear of misconception; is it not most evident that the followers of the Scarlet Woman, of her that sitteth upon the Seven Hills, should themselves bear the imprint of the loathed Beast? And as the children resemble the mother, shall not these be participators in Whoredom? My brethren, t’were blasphemy and jesuitry to deny that which God through his Revelation hath so clearly and unmistakably set forth, namely that all idolaters and falsifiers of the Truth—over which they cast the veil of a learned tongue, yet not so learned as to be, by their scholars self-called, very grossly mishandled—are to be condemned eternally for the righteous satisfying of that Justice which we, but without fear, as His children, hebdomadally implore to be tempered with Mercy. By its fruits shall be known this wicked Tree; which are, firstly——”

But I could not be troubled to follow the divine any further; this was far enough for my purpose, and I said to Theo:

“Strong on Papists, isn’t he?”

“Who’s this?” He took the book from me, touching my hand, and turned to the gold-lettered back. “Old Henry de Winter; he ended up as a Bishop, somewhere in Wales. He was a relation.”

“I suppose you’re all godly Protestants?”

“I don’t know about godly. We’re Church of England—the usual thing.”

“I’m one of these,” I said, and sought the place, which he had lost, “one of the eternally condemned. Look at the Bishop”—his forbidding portrait was engraved in the front—“he’d like to burn me.”

Miss Jebb fidgeted above upon her ladder.

“Are you a Roman Catholic? Really?”

"Truly. I'm always putting up candles, and wearing scapulars, and praying for dead people, and having Masses said——"

"She's a liar, Lord Frome," came a passionate voice from the ladder, "she never goes to church, and as for saying a genuine prayer, even to an idol, she never does."

Theo laughed, meaning to let the subject drop, but I went at him again.

"What do you think? You agree with the old Bishop in your heart."

"Not altogether. But religion isn't my subject."

"You wouldn't like to see the chapel here—you've got one, haven't you?—all full of crucifixes, and people saying prayers on week-days."

"If the prayers were honest, I don't think I should mind it."

"Oh, but Popish prayers aren't honest. They're only grovelling about in fear of Purgatory, and bribing saints with lights——"

"I'm getting cramp," said Miss Jebb without waiting for more; and thrust the enormous book back with difficulty into its place. Then she descended her ladder, and with an innocent eye commanded:

"I want above all things to see the garden."

"It's not at its best," Theo was apologising. "We're getting on towards winter."

"But you've greenhouses, surely?" said she, fixing him. "A house of this age, goodness! You ought to have an orangery."

"It's pulled down, I'm afraid," Theo answered, astonished.

"I'll look at the site, then," said she, and swept to the door. Then, as if she were in a shop where they sold such matters: "And have you a maze?"

"An alley of yews," Theo said apologetically, "but it's not a maze exactly. One can dodge in and out through the arches, but it's hardly a maze."

"One couldn't get lost in it?" I said maliciously, having pierced her design.

"Oh, no," said Theo, simply, "they're in two straight lines, you know."

Miss Jebb suddenly turned, facing us both. Her glance held a kind of amused fury, and rested more particularly on me.

"I think, after all, it's late. We'd better go home."

“Oh, but,” said Theo, distressed, “won’t you stay to tea? I hoped you’d be free for the whole afternoon.”

Miss Jebb was prim.

“We’ll come another time, if you’ll ask us. I think now we’d better go.”

Theo said “I’m sorry,” and we all moved along the corridor between the old wooden walls, whose only pictures were those that the windows at regular intervals afforded. The park outside, framed in these wide squares, composed itself in a series of masterly landscapes; a grove where Watteau’s ladies might have lain, a hollow beneath a hill through which ran one of Corot’s streams. But Miss Jebb had no eyes for them. As she had determined to come, now she was determined to go, and not by so much as a glance would she deflect from her purpose. Buttercup was summoned by means of one of the self-possessed young men who had received me, but there was an awkward little five minutes before Morrell brought her round. I had the satisfaction, for what it was worth, of having wrecked all Miss Jebb’s managing plans. Theo, who had seen me at my worst, and never once alone, had no satisfaction at all from the visit. As for Miss Jebb, she was deep in her comical rage, and had no word for either of us.

Theo came to the door, and with his own hands stowed us safe. I was to drive, I had offered to take the reins in preference to the knife-like back seat, on which Morrell therefore must balance. Theo came round to my side of the cart, and did something unnecessary with the tongue of a buckle; something still more needless with a rug, tucking it round my feet. Seeing him so kind and so helpless in the face of two women’s stormy moods, I was sorry all of a sudden, and would have liked to stroke his head, whose fair hair the wind was roughening. I put my right hand, instead, down on his left that was stretching up towards the whip-socket, and gave it a quick sideways pressure, a caress as inexpert as a first kiss. He looked up at me flushed, and turned his hand in mine to grasp it; Miss Jebb was looking, or so I thought, and I coolly withdrew. Our good-byes had the usual jollity and repetition; but somehow, in that last instant, and for that last instant, the whole visit had become worth while.

IV

The drive home went in silence, Morrell’s back was to ours, his ears were not a foot from our mouths, and so neither Miss Jebb’s rage, nor my impatience with her could find voice. Buttercup’s steps had never seemed so laggard. It was nearly five o’clock by the time we got home to the long room

smelling of peat, whose curtains were drawn. Tea was brought, which we both of us called a wordless truce to drink. Cold airs had come with us over the hills, and in the last quarter-hour a fine mist that still lodged in beads of wet on our hair. We were chilled, both of us, though full of fight; therefore, like armies in Flanders when war was still a game, we drew off, and provisioned, and got our weapons in trim; then at the clang of the last cup on saucer, as to a trumpet, we came on. Miss Jebb fired the first shot.

"You behaved to-day," said she, rising and standing to have the full advantage of her height, "like one of Beelzebub's imps."

"I minded my own business, anyhow," said I, meeting her frankness, but weaker in phrase.

"Why all this backing and filling? Why didn't you come in the first place?"

"Because I hate being moved about like a piece of furniture that you think would look better in another light."

"Why follow, in that case?"

"Because I didn't know what you might be saying to Theo about me, if I left you alone."

There was the plan of battle; the opening moves were made, our respective strategies declared. She considered for a moment; I could not see her face, for the light was sideways to it, and a profile shows no more expression than a portrait in silhouette.

"Will you answer me one question honestly?"

"Depends what it is."

"Would you marry that man if he asked you?"

I hesitated; not reluctant to answer, but honestly unaware of what was the truth. Would I? I was sorry for him, liked him, enjoyed being with him; there was no frantic pull, irresistible, such as had sent me off in a hansom to get speech with the false Martina; but I wanted to let myself like him, to like him tremendously and without people watching.

"Well?" said Miss Jebb.

"I suppose I would," I answered slowly; then, with certainty and spirit: "but we can both get along without interference."

“Can you?” said Miss Jebb contemptuously. “You’d have let him marry that poor child that was here, if I hadn’t stopped it.”

“You stopped it?”

“Of course I did.”

I was almost made speechless to hear her confess it. Suspicion is one thing, certainty another. And that she should brag of it—She was going on.

“They weren’t happy. Girl distrait and timid, man with his eyes everywhere but on you. The parents, bullies both. The really very romantic rescue of you on the ship. My dear child, if I had all those threads in a book and didn’t make a true-lover’s knot of them, how should I call myself a novelist?”

“This isn’t a novel,” I said angrily; “play about with your writing people as much as you like. You’ve no business to interfere with real people. Real people go on and on; you can’t just bring them to page 381 and leave them there in the air. They’ve got to go through their whole lives—stick to your book people. Let us alone.”

“Yes,” said she, voice a little changed. “I do stick to my book people. I have to. I make my own life of shadows; but I want you, I want all young things, to take their chance, and live.”

This was a different tone, not quarrelsome any longer. Nor was it sad; it just stated a fact, but the statement quieted me. I spoke more gently:

“But—can’t you leave us to work things out for ourselves? It’s that, only that I can’t stand. Being arranged for. I want to choose, and be free.”

“Freedom,” said she, as if the word were a new one, to be thought over and wondered at. “There are freedoms that, believe me, aren’t worth while. I’m free. I’m queen—among my shadow people. Do you think I enjoy it?”

I answered that question, though she expected no answer.

“Yes, I think you do.”

“Well,” she went on, considering, “in a sense, yes. Power of any kind is fun. It’s what women long for, and scheme for, because in most of the bigger senses it so rarely comes their way. I like playing sun, making my shadows move. But—have you ever tried to do a day’s walk or a day’s work on the shadow of a loaf; or to quench your thirst from the shadow of an apple against a wall?”

This was not acting. I found nothing to say, and because of what I heard in her voice I would not look at her. She went on, with difficulty, with none of her usual glibness and joy in a scene:

"One thing my way of life has taught me; that any other way is better. You think I'm throwing you at this man's head for my own reasons—mischief, perhaps, to show off; or because he's got money, and I'd like to see you well settled. No; it's not that. It's——" She halted, came and stood over me. The attitude was commanding, but the voice when it came strangely broken and mistrustful of itself. "Perhaps I'm altogether wrong; a muddling fool. Do you care for him at all? You've got all the signs, but—what do I know of such things? Look at me, Clotilde, please. Do you care at all? I asked would you marry him, and you said you would. But do you care?"

Still I did not look up. I did not want to see the reality—the face without the mask. I said in an outburst that sounded petulant, and was actually a cry to be shown myself:

"How on earth am I to know? Perhaps I do, but what chance have I had? How can I know?"

"A thousand ways," said Miss Jebb surprisingly. "Can you keep to the path of your day's work? Or do you stray without knowing it, and lose yourself wholly, and come back to the blank paper in front of you, with the clock marking half an hour gone? Are you forever waiting, you don't know for what—some silly trifle, a step, a letter? Restless, are you, day and night? Thirsty? Is there the whole strength and purpose of your body trembling behind a touch——"

"Ah, don't," I said, in anguish for her, "don't, please! How was it I didn't see——"

"See what?" she caught me up in quite another voice; jealously, fiercely.

"That you knew from yourself how it felt."

She walked away at that; took a few paces to and fro; ate some sandwich or other that had been left. Then, with half a laugh, and the bread dulling the normal clearness of her voice, said in her everyday tones:

"My dear, I'm just guessing. Believe me, only guessing. After all, I've had nearly forty years in this world, and good eyesight all the time. I make my income by my guesses. They're good, so it's handsome. Let's go back to the point."

“I care for Theo, and I’ll marry him if he asks me,” I said in haste, for this donning of the mask again was almost worse to watch than the downing of it. “Please—I think I’ll just go upstairs and change. It will save time. There’s a few more pages I could do before dinner.”

“Do, child,” said Miss Jebb, taking another sandwich absently. “And have a bath. There’s nothing calms the soul like a hot bath.”

I picked up my discarded hat and coat and was going. She moved near the lamp and struck a match to light it. With the small flame between her palms and lighting her face from below she showed, I thought, eyes oddly sunken, pale cheeks—but she was always pale. She said, as I paused:

“That’s all right, then. Because he will, you know.”

I would not pretend to misunderstand.

“He’s got other things to think about just now. Why should he?”

“Because,” replied Miss Jebb, lifting the glass, adjusting the wick, “I told him he’d better, just before you turned up.”

She was trying to tease me, trying to get back the old mocking supremacy. She failed.

“Did you?” I said gently. “Well, I hope he takes your advice.”

And I went upstairs to the recommended bath, the lavender-smelling peace of my bedroom, just across the passage from hers. Her closed door brought a memory; and putting it with this evening’s scene I found an answer to an old question. It was sobbing, not laughter, I had heard that first night of my arrival, when I told of the woman who had stolen her name and bought life with it.

CHAPTER XIV

I count him but an Apparition, though he wear about him the sensible affections of the flesh.

—*Religio Medici.*

I

The years went by at Toller like an army with banners; a mediæval army, dressed in rags and tags of colour, coming home after conquest. Year by year I looked, when April came, for the mist of bluebells to rise from the ground in our copses; for the ruffs of courting pheasants to grow green; for the creepers to redden, and mushrooms to push up in the fall of the year. I loved the garden proper, but it was not mine. Gardeners with all the tenacity of thirty years' service kept it trim, and dressed the borders ritually, such flowers for this month, such others for that, much as the liturgy lays down canonical colours for vestments. Theo had for occupation his Petty Sessions and his political meetings; he spoke sometimes, painfully but well, when a candidate came our way, and once or twice even made something of a stir in the House of Lords. But politics meant London, and London, except in very small doses, would not do. He gave up, after half a dozen years of striving, all thought of a political career; gave it up with a kind of smiling shrug, and went back to fining poachers and conferring gravely with men who stopped the earths of foxes he could not hunt. He made an apology to me for this come-down, one evening when we were sitting alone.

"You've been awfully good about all this, Clo."

"All what, my dear?" I answered absently, stitching.

"Taking a back seat. Sticking down here in the country all the time."

"Theo, don't be absurd! You know I love it."

"It isn't the same for you," he persisted; "I was born in this house. I've always had this country round me. You come from a different side of the world, where things aren't so slow."

"I miss the sun sometimes, that's all. I don't care if I never see Australia again."

"They gave you a rotten bad time."

“I don’t mind that. I’ve forgotten all that. It’s the place I couldn’t stand.”

“Do you keep up with your people there at all?” I looked up surprised, and he said: “You don’t tell me much, you see, and I don’t want to ask questions.”

I got up and went to him.

“My dear! If I’d thought it would interest you——”

“Things about you do interest me.”

Yes, I knew that. Theo had gone on being in love with me, foolishly and shyly, like a boy. There is no need to say more than that I could not, for all my goodwill to him, match what he felt. This he understood. But he had the idea, fixed in so many men’s heads, that you can earn love by means of deeds and display; and so he had made his attempt on politics, again and again, until he was beaten back by the sheer dirt of London’s air. He thought that if I could be proud of him, I might begin to love him, as if the kind of love he wanted depended on anything so logical as fair exchange. With it all he remained clear-sighted, and when pity drove me to act the part he wanted he was never taken in. So now, when I came to his chair and put down a hand to his cheek he did not respond, because it was a gesture of pity, and not the kind of gentleness love does unthinking. He said:

“Things about you do interest me. I’d like to see the place where you grew up. I’d like to tackle all those people who were rude to you.”

“I’ve forgotten them all. Faces, names, everything gone. How long is it —ten years?”

“It doesn’t seem so long. Have you really forgotten, then?”

I suppose he wanted me to say that I had been too happy to remember, but I said something very different before I had time to think.

“You can forget anything if only it’s bad enough. So women tell me who’ve had babies.”

He was silent after that. We had no children, and Theo minded, though he never told me so.

He had that strange English persistence that will wait years to try out an idea. He never spoke of Australia again to me except most casually. But at the back of his mind was always a feeling, not of contemplated revenge, exactly, but of displaying me to the Antipodes in splendour, with a—“Here’s what you turned away from you!” He did not believe me when I protested

that I loved England, loved Toller, was happy. I had protested other loves that his instinct told him were pretences. He would not believe that I could enjoy, I who had come to it late, and with a stranger's eye, my bluebells and mushrooms and the changing English seasons. He set to work for the triumph that he thought I longed for, over enemies now so vague to me that I could hardly remember their names; only a dress or two, and a tone that had made me angry, and a laugh here and there.

II

It was at the end of 1912 that Theo began to be summoned to London for mysterious conferences. He, usually so frank, never told me where he was going or why. He was mysterious and almost mischievous, like a little boy in illicit possession of a squib. He went off for the day, came down again, and instead of chatting at dinner, was mute. I asked no questions. Perhaps if I had loved him I might have wondered, and invented other women, and tormented us both with suspicions. But in a relationship like ours the only infidelity that can hurt is a faithlessness to the code, public slighting, public rudeness, and of that it was impossible that Theo could ever be guilty. He was hurt by my incuriousness, and drew little red herrings across our table-talk from time to time. "I called at Downing Street to-day," or "I was having a word with Puncheon"—a Colonial Secretary of whose policy he thoroughly disapproved. I answered, "Were you, my dear? Did you?" and went on about my gardens, or what a keeper had been telling me about birds straying. Toller at this time was my whole life; the house, and the land lying round it gave me the living interest that a man's love, or a child's, means to other women.

Theo's excursions culminated in a grand visit to London, lasting two days. I was not asked to come, or rather was asked not to come, as a mother must promise her family not to look until all is ready for the firework display. Theo came back late on a November evening, when the mist lay white down in those hollows which bluebells filled in the spring. I did not hear the car drive up. My first sign that he was home was a great bunch of roses brought to my door by his man as I was dressing for dinner. It was a pretty trick he had on great occasions—Theo always remembered anniversaries, as regularly as I forgot them—and I was, as ever, touched and pleased. I pinned some of the roses on my dress and went down to find him in the Queen Anne room, alone but magnificent; white tie, tails, his best buttons and studs. I stood a moment at gaze, and came forward.

"My dear! How superb you are! Shall I go and put on Court feathers?"

He turned abruptly, and his eyes went at once to the roses on my dark lace.

“Ah, you got them safely. That’s right, you like those red fellows.”

“Theo,” I said gravely, my hands on his shoulders, “suppose you tell me what you’ve been up to? What are we celebrating?”

He was silent an instant, then burst into an excited laugh, like a child, and wagged his head at me.

“Ever read the Scriptures? Of course you don’t, you Papist, you; ‘And the Government shall be upon his shoulder’—that’s a phrase, isn’t it? Jeremiah, or one of those old fellows.”

I was really curious by now.

“Don’t be so mysterious. Did the Prime Minister send for you?”

“Incidentally, he did.” Another chuckle, and then out it came in a burst. “They’ve offered to make me Governor-General.”

“What? Where?”

“Where do you think? Your native land, of course.”

“And you accepted?”

“Jumped at it. As far as a back number of over forty can be said to jump.”

Orpen came in then to announce dinner. Neither of us took the least notice, that I remember. Instead of turning towards the door I dropped into a chair, while above me Theo stood, laughing, and rocking back and forth, heel and toe, as he always did when he was pleased.

“But,” I said, staggered, “my dear; all the relations——”

Said Theo, the careful, the nice of speech:

“They’ll all have to bloody well bob to you.”

And, before I could recover:

“I shall be representing the King out there. You’re my wife; first lady in the land, and all that. Relations! They turn you out of the place, bundle you off alone with that odious woman”—he had never forgiven Lilian—“for something that was no fault of yours. They expose you to all that gossip; a girl of eighteen! It’s the one way you could ever go back there; the one way in which going back would be dignified. Besides,” said Theo, dropping to

practical considerations for the moment, “it carries weight, your being a Catholic. They rather want to conciliate a somewhat important minority out there.”

I thought of the story, told me often by Laura, of the social strivings of the Tooheys and Bannigans. Tooheys and Bannigans were getting into Cabinets out there now, rising to Lord Mayors. They had retained, however, all their clannishness and all their Irishry, as unmixable with other strains as oil with wine. I saw the Government House functions as engagements in the military sense; I could almost scent the reek of battle as the upstarts clove society apart. And I thought, very quickly and clearly, of my own position, seeing just what it would be. “The one way you could ever go back!” The one way I could never be forgiven. The prodigal unsuccessful is pretty sure of his welcome always, since his distress affords a chance for people to think well of their own hearts. But the prodigal coming back as master; coming back richly and reputably and having authority—what relations are going to fat the calf for such a return as that?

I was beginning to say it all, when I saw Theo looking at me with a kind of pleading attention and dismay. He had ceased to rock back and forth joyously. He stood there in his finery, hands hanging loose, and the life gone suddenly out of his face. I could not do it. I got up from my chair and clasped his arm with both hands.

“My dear,” I said, “I was taken by surprise. I didn’t know there was so much sense in high places. You’ll govern beautifully, and won’t I be proud! Fun, Theo. Splendid fun, my dear.”

He did not see through that pretence. My triumph, his own success preoccupied him. Our dinner *à deux* was gay.

III

Six months later I saw Sydney Harbour again. Our P. and O. slipped in through the Heads on a pearly spring morning, halted for the pilot, and went slowly tacking up the channel, like a hound with its nose to an old scent. The shores were misty. I knew their shapes, though, and where the landmarks lay. I had no emotion to spare for the convent, solid on its hill, nor for the islands where we had picnicked, nor for the roofs which presently the mist would lift to show, under which soon my relatives and acquaintances would be astir. I was overcome at that moment by the most passionate homesickness for Toller in June. The harbour with its eternal greens and blues, its loveliness which never changed or ripened, was

unsatisfying. I wanted with my whole heart that which had become my substitute for love, motherhood, work; the old bricks and mortar of Toller, now let to strangers, beauty dying and renewing round it as the seasons changed.

I felt an arm through mine; Theo, muffled against the mist, was beside me.

“Magnificent, what one can see of it. Jove, it’s cold, though!”

“Yes. It’s almost winter.”

“You’re glad to be back, aren’t you, Clo? After all, the place one was born, and all that; there’s a pull, isn’t there?”

“If blood pulls, I shall end up in Ireland or in France.”

“It may come to that if they tax us any more. Lovely country, some of those downs above the Somme—hello, what’s this?”

It was the sudden splitting crack of gunfire; the guns on Pinchgut making salute, and the echoes of them racketing after, all round the bays.

CHAPTER XV

> As for those wingy mysteries in Divinity, which have unhing'd the brains of better heads, they never stretched the Pia Mater of mine.
>
> —*Religio Medici.*

I

Almost the first step ashore landed the pair of us plumb into comedy. There was the usual welcoming municipal fuss, with a blue-jowled Lord Mayor, ill-at-ease Aldermen in fur, a band, policemen in unfamiliar shaped helmets. Theo, in a grey frockcoat but holding himself soldierly, inspected the guard of scarlet-breasted Cock-Robin lancers. There was a bouquet for me, much handshaking and saluting; all was passing as mellifluously as the voice of the Mayor, a Bannigan voice that assured me I was welcome as the flowers in May—"or, I should say—for we're all heels over head in this grand country—the flowers in September."

"It's nearly wattle-time," I said, my mind going back twenty years.

"It is so," agreed the Mayor with decision, "ah, that's nothing new to yourself. But they're arranging a taste of it, I believe, for His Excellency, to afford him a glimpse of Australia's beauties."

The taste met us as we emerged from the Quay; a triumphal arch with the inscription Welcome in red Turkey twill letters upon a blaze of yellow blossom; wattle, thick-blossomed, stripped of its feathery leaves, so intense a colour that it seemed to give out light, and wafting in our direction, on the breeze, its impalpable golden dust. Theo halted, to give the expected look of admiration, and drew an unwary breath. The pollen assailed his sensitive poor nose like an invading army; hay fever was one of his minor maladies, and the one he found hardest to endure. He gave one or two little cat-sneezes behind a handkerchief, pressing his lip, I knew, to stop the paroxysm—the old trick. In vain; the wattle pollen is more penetrating, more intolerable than seven fields of barley in spring. Theo, standing ringed with furred municipals, eyed by a troop of six-foot lancers, fought it awhile, holding his breath like a besieged castle, then crashed. Shaken by the convulsing invisible power of the pollen, he remained rooted and suffering in face of the triumphal arch.

I got him into the landau at last, the Lord Mayor opining for our consolation that he'd go in dread of a cat himself, he was that ticklesome, and made our progress without any considerable incident; though what the bystanders in the streets must have thought of the weeping figure in the first carriage is probably as well undivined. There was no great enthusiasm, but then enthusiasm is not part of the Australian character, save in the form of a kind of smouldering regard for the performances of certain horses. Governors-General, even flavoured up with lancers and arches and tall grey hats, were not, to the reasonable Australian mind, inspiring. We made our progress pretty well unregarded, save as we interfered with traffic, and swept at last, after a roundabout journey, in at the stone gates, and down through a green paddock to the crenellated villa that was Government House.

I had been here once or twice to a dance in the old days, and had forgotten it wholly except for the view from certain harbour-facing windows, which by night framed, each of them, a most enchanting night-piece of blue-black sky, and the broken light of stars and ferries on the water. By day it was a very ordinary house, built with no regard for the climate and defenceless against it, save for the honest thickness of the stone walls. (Will they never, in this hot country, build round a courtyard, and refuse windows on the northern side?) There were flowers everywhere, the ominous wattle chiefly, from which I steered Theo away. Our own servants were greeted, our rooms visited, some sort of meal was taken to which the aides-de-camp, still in their uniforms and spurs, came clinking; and there was a brief respite, for me at least, before we must dress, and be off in our best to the Mayoral dinner at the Town Hall.

"Six-forty-five, for seven o'clock," Theo wondered, looking in the engagement book, already sketched in with meals and functions by an energetic secretary. "I thought meals were always later in these tropical countries. Is this right?"

"Quite all right, sir," the secretary answered officiously. "It's usual. Something to do with the servant question, I believe, sir."

"Oh," said Theo blankly, for whom a servant question had never existed. "Will there be decorations?"

"Yes, sir, certainly. Miniatures, pretty much as for a Guildhall dinner at home——"

"I wasn't thinking of medals," Theo broke in, "it's these confounded flowers, this mimosa. I suppose we couldn't ask them to, ah, stick to ferns,

and so on?”

“It’s the national flower, you see, sir,” said the secretary, sympathetic but firm; “one doesn’t want to put any slight, you understand——”

“Of course, of course,” Theo concurred, “but isn’t there anything else? What about waratahs?” He pronounced it with stress on the middle syllable. “I understand they’re less pervasive.”

“Not in season, sir, yet.”

“Then, damn it, I can’t make a speech,” said Theo crossly, turning away. “I can’t get up and talk looking like an infernal influenza patient. Telephone and see what can be done.”

“I’ll telephone, sir, certainly,” said the secretary dubiously, “but I’m afraid it might seem rather an unusual request.”

“I’ll write a note to the Mayor in person,” I said, joining in from the window where I had been opening my letters. The secretary brightened.

“Ah, that would make a different thing of it. A personal favour—but believe me, sir, it wouldn’t do to make the request officially. It’s these little things that count. One’s simply got to be careful,” twittered the secretary, who had come to us from an Indian staff, “one never knows where the most trivial act may lead in the way of consequences——”

Conversations such as this, which to the outsider unversed in the business of Government might have appeared pure nonsense, were, I was to discover, daily to be heard at Government House.

II

My letters were all from relations; aunts, an occasional cousin, a brief note from Jack, my father, still at Corazon. Aunt Marie-Céleste’s page may do for a specimen. She wrote, in her really rather beautiful thin convent hand:

> “My dear Clotilde,
>
> “This very brief line welcomes you to your old home, which you revisit after so many years in such happy circumstances. No doubt you will have many calls upon your time, and we cannot expect to see as much of you as we did during your girlhood. I trust, however, that you will find an occasional leisure hour for the ties of relationship!

> "Although correspondence has been somewhat interrupted, yet we have often had news of you from our many friends who have visited the Old Country. You may regret, now that this opportunity has come, that you allowed yourself to lose touch, to some extent, with those who could have kept you abreast of all Australian news and views. But never mind, I am sure that your natural quickness will help you over many stiles, and that you will be of great assistance to your husband, of whom we hear nothing but the kindest reports.
>
> "Your uncle, possibly, will make his acquaintance before I do! This may seem strange, but naturally, as Chief Justice, he must take the first opportunity to call. All news later, at whatever date we may meet. It will be soon, I trust!
>
> "Your ever affectionate Aunt,
> "MARIE-CÉLESTE."

This, for all the fine handwriting, and the judicious phrasing, was nothing more nor less than a request for an invitation. They all rang the same tune, except those which rather too obviously rebuffed the invitation before it was offered. Scraps of family intelligence were scattered here and there. Cousin Georgette had married a nice young doctor and had two such sweet girls, already at school. Cousin Cora was back again, a widow—yes, I could see Cora as a widow, rich soil for mischief, with a top-dressing of crape. There was talk of having to sell Corazon, the land taxes were mounting; "all these plumbers in Parliament," my father put the exactions down to, trying to get more money to spend than the country could earn. He had a good and graphic phrase for it. "These fellows are trying to lift themselves by the seat of their own pants." And in other letters there were groans about the state of things. Labour rampant, all the station-owners broke, some having even been taxed with such ferocity that they could no longer afford to race. The Dominican aunt wrote from her convent that they were starting a new girls' school up in the mountains, and that it would lend impressiveness to the event—"parents like such things"—if I or my husband could find time to attend the formal opening, when they hoped the Cardinal would preside. "We can offer no golden key such as they do at more worldly ceremonies, but you shall have the prayers of all of us poor nuns—Lord's Dogs we are, you know, and we shall sit up and beg our dear Master for graces for you." This was the enchanting aunt, so pretty, old Gustave-Félicité's favourite, who had run away at eighteen to Christ. Her letter was touching in its Boissy flippancy tamed. I told myself that come what might I would attend that

affair. She signed herself, “Your affectionate old relative in J.C., M.M. Philomena,” and there was a postscript. “It will save a stamp if I enclose with mine your cousin’s little note. You knew, did you not? that your cousin Barbe had come to us? You may not remember her well, but she is eager to write,” and a little cocked hat of a folded paper, which had puzzled me when I opened the envelope, was explained.

> “My dearest cousin, welcome, as Reverend Mother has already said in better words than I can. It would give me such pleasure to see you, though I fear you must have forgotten me, and to show you our garden here. The lilies seem to be just waiting for Our Lady to step down among them! Reverend Mother kindly says that if you come I may have a ‘beggar’s licence’ to ask your help. We do need a new sprinkler so very badly!
>
> “With every kind wish from your affectionate cousin in J.C.
>
> “Sister Mary Barbara.”

I remembered Barbe now, Aunt Josie’s daughter, an odd child of about eight when I left Australia, and subject, as far as I could place her, to fits. My memory associated her with shrieks shrilling from a white small face, and vehemently kicking legs. Odd to think of her coming to heel, hunting mute with the Lord’s Dogs, and quietly growing lilies. All the better; and when I found time to shop she should have her sprinkler for a surprise.

Apart from this letter, my postbag held nothing of interest.

III

The dinner at the Town Hall was portentous. It was the Lord Mayor’s party, and he was the happiest personage at it. He had no wife, it appeared; a thin terrified half-sister did the honours of Mayoress, but impeded him no whit. Her name was Miss Toohey, and I longed to ask her if she knew Wollondoola, or were related to the magnificent Con. But his Worship would allow no time for speech with her, busy as he was with presenting notabilities. There were members of the Legislative Assembly, members of the other House, and one most impressive figure in purple, His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop, who set for me, by his mere greeting, a nice problem in behaviour. My instinct was, as he rustled to a standstill before me, to make the customary little bob, and kiss his ring; he extended his hand, indeed, back upwards, as though this were what he expected. I had the wit, however, to realize that I stood there as wife of the King’s

representative, which King was head of his Church and admitted no spiritual superior; so that the gesture which as a private person I should very readily have made, would not do for His Excellency's wife. I took the hand, therefore, in the usual way, to shake it, and made a little deeper bow than to the other presented persons, smiling my best, and with a word of talk to cover the difficult moment.

"I hear your Eminence is to be at the opening of the new Dominican school. My aunt, you know, is Reverend Mother. She writes to me in great excitement about it all."

"Ah," said His Eminence slowly, "your aunt, is it? That will be Mother Mary Philomena. A very valuable woman, and a saint into the bargain."

He spoke English with some West of Ireland traces; a lovely voice to hear rounding over the words of the Mass.

"The right sort of saint," I said, stupidly, meaning only that she was loveable. But His Eminence took me up literally, speaking with a cold eye above the smile:

"And is there a wrong sort?" I laughed for want of an answer. He went on more smoothly:

"Well, maybe there's some mightn't pass as well as she does by the tests of the world. She has the kind word, and the right word always. The world finds it hard to understand that some may be blunderers and troublesome to the greater glory of God."

That was all. His Eminence moved away with a swish of watered silk, and I had leisure to note the arrival of my uncle, Chief Justice now, with Aunt Josephine on his arm, wider than fifteen years ago, but with correspondingly more jewels. Inconceivably rich looked Aunt Josephine. There must have been some legacy, some piece of good luck I had not heard about; the Chief Justice's salary could not permit of quite such glittering. My uncle's face was hidden for a while behind the shoulders of a lanky soldier, but when it emerged I saw it stiffen, a most curious transmuting—for I remembered him as a kind little man—of silver to steel. This, as he drew level with the Lord Mayor, who was affability's self.

"Well, well, me Lord Chief, it's a sight for cross-eyes to see you here to-night! And how's the handicap? They tell me you're knocking the heads off all the cracks at Rose Bay——"

The almost imperceptible handshake, the stilly bow with which this was received! But the Lord Mayor's large cordiality remained unwithered even

under a similar snub from Aunt Josie; he pushed her in my direction by her gloved elbow, with the introduction:

“Here’s a homely face for your Excellency! Speaking for myself, there’s no relation I’d hook to like an Ant!”

Aunt Josie might have come into money, but she had the Boissy ear for a phrase, and the studied smile she had prepared for me swelled at His Worship’s words to a grin. Our eyes met, our lips quivered. She said, bursting out into the young family laugh:

“Well, I hope you can say as much, Clotilde! You remember your uncle?”

I did, now that the steeliness had departed. The round little silver-headed man made me a bow for my Excellency, then took my hand warmly as a niece with some pleasant sentence of welcome. I liked him, and had a feeling of relief. What had I expected the relations to be like? The distress of my mind, quitting Australia, had cast over them all a horrid aura of sternness, insensibility, and convention.

I saw other familiar faces before we settled down to the banquet; one, dark, with the curious kind of virile baldness of Italians, could only belong to a Rotti; and there were one or two profiles, thickened under the chin, that I had last seen pigtailed and veiled at school. I was kept busy, but had time for a glance at Theo. He looked very well, with his collar of the Thistle, acquired by no damned merit, but simply by minding his own business and inheriting through his mother a Scotch barony.

When we were seated—the table, I saw with approval and Theo with relief, was decorated with smilax—I said idly to his Worship over the soup:

“My uncle’s looking older.”

He gave me the drollest sidelong look, a rollicking look that wondered how much this fine lady from England would stand in the way of plain speaking.

“It’s the responsibility of the Bench,” said the Lord Mayor gravely, “that’s soured him. And then, d’ye see, it’s awkward for him to be here.”

“Oh, but why?”

“Well,” said his Worship, “not to put too fine a point upon it, ’twas him that gaoled me.”

There was nothing for it. I laughed so helplessly that heads turned my way in concern.

"Sh!" said his Worship, delighted with the success of his bombshell, "all a misunderstanding, I assure you. Political, political, nothing low. I bear no grudge, but some way, your uncle can't get over it. The face curdles on him when he sees me."

"I'm glad it was nothing low," I said recovering. "May I ask——?"

"Bribery," said the Lord Mayor, dropping his voice conspiratorially "and corruption; proved up to the hilt. But sure, what's proof? It's the sentiment counts."

While I was trying to see how sentiment could enter into such a question, he had turned from me, with his agreeable laughing look, and was at once into the heart of a conversation with the Admiral's wife on his left. I parted from him with reluctance, and my right-hand neighbour, the Premier of the State, took up my attention.

This was a very different man, a desiccated personage, shrunk within evening clothes too big for him, whose mouth ran straight as a razor-cut, but bloodless. I had heard something about him. He had been a Nonconformist preacher of note, now he preached Labour; a fanatic fiercely honest within his own convention; one of the Robespierres, incorruptible, but in outlook sea-green. In his voice, as in the Cardinal's, Ireland sang, but harshly; he was Irish of the North, as his name, McGirk, made evident. He spoke to me without friendliness but with the best he could do in the way of a smile.

"You know this country already, I think? You're not a stranger here?"

"Oh, no; I was born here. I left before I was twenty."

He seemed to sum up my age in one uncomplimentary glance.

"You'll find things changed."

"Tell me about it."

"Your relations'll tell you about it fast enough," said he. I thought of my father's letter, of the plumbers in Parliament lifting themselves by the seat of their pants. "We run this country differently nowadays to when you were last here."

"Is there so much difference?"

"Well, twenty years ago a man like me wouldn't have been sitting next you at this sort of a function."

It was not said simply as a commentary on the changed state of things. The tone made it a defiance. I tried to be civil, to take it lightly.

"The Premier of the State would have sat next the Governor's wife, even twenty years ago. You don't get time, I expect, for much gaiety."

"If you call this gaiety," said he grimly, "I don't."

Well, I did call it gaiety. We were being given an excellent meal, good wine; there was talk, and everyone in their best. I thought him an unnecessarily dour personage, but the Lord Mayor was still engaged with Lady Ormerod, and I had to make the best of him. I was turning up some pale but acceptable remark about the harbour when he came at me again.

"You're a Roman, aren't you?"

"A Catholic? Yes. My people were French, you see. My grandfather naturally stuck to his religion." Then, hurrying on: "Have you ever heard of the story of him shooting Billy Rudd, the bushranger? It was in the very early days——"

But Mr. McGirk refused to be side-tracked.

"And your husband; what's he?"

"Religion? Oh, Church of England, naturally."

"Naturally," he repeated; then seemed to realize that he had been unmannerly. "Religion's a very vital question out here. That's the reason I asked you."

"Religion's rather important everywhere, isn't it? Well, now, Mr. McGirk, tell me about Sydney. How terribly they're building over the harbour foreshores!"

He went away on that, and was loud for the necessity of large cities, presumably to provide persons of his kidney with constituencies. He would never have had a chance for an up-country seat. "Wowser," would have been his label, and more than enough to damn him. He had that irritating trick, common to the extreme politician and to the lunatic, of suddenly dropping his fixed idea like a squib into ordinary calm conversation. I had said something stupidly enthusiastic about the climate; how good to be able to reckon for six months at least on warmth. He had answered:

"Yes. It's all right to do nothing in; all right for surfing and such. Have you ever been down a mine or in a factory with the thermometer at ninety?"

I said, perhaps not very wisely:

“A country with such a climate oughtn’t to try to run factories or mines. It always seems to me Australia’s task in the world is to grow things. That’s what she does best; does superbly.”

“There’s other ambitions for the workers,” said he drily, “besides making money for squatters.”

I could not take up the gauntlet, of course; and from having wondered at the colourless conversation of such official wives as had come my way, I now leapt to comprehension of their vagueness. Inanity, when you stand above the wars of party, is the only attitude that can be reckoned safe. I had, too, a perception of trouble in store, battles of orange and green in which loyalty would be puzzled. There were all the forces ranked in polite rows, smiling, feasting, which a nothing would set clashing. My delightful Mayor, out for his own hand and the Church second; His Eminence, Church first, Ireland second; the Chief Justice, with his dividing loyalties of Church, party, and wealth; McGirk, with his mouth blowing the Church to hell, and the rich after it; Theo, remote from it all, and I believe quite honestly unaware of the appallingly difficult situation which my religion and connection with the country must create for him; myself, aware of this, and afraid. That function was the setting of the board for a game on which fates might hang. It was the salute masked in smiles, and all the passions hiding.

Theo’s speech was a good one. He said, in his thin voice that carried so admirably, and sounded easy despite the short breaths he must take:

“My Lord Mayor, ladies and gentlemen; you are kind enough to welcome this evening a man new to your great country and its problems. We are not here to question the wisdom of His Majesty’s choice of representative; that lies neither in your province nor mine. But we are all human, gentlemen; and it is only human nature to say, when a Governor confesses ignorance, Why do they send this fellow out to us? How can he appreciate our difficulties? How can he sympathise or attempt to guide? I think that such questions must be in every mind to-night, and while officially they do not touch me, as a private personage you will let me answer, and have patience with such explanations as I can find.

“Very simply, it is this. The world is drawing together; it grows smaller every day. How? Because every day some inventor is giving his attention to problems of transport and speed; every day money goes to finance some project of quickening up communications. The Empire is knit closer with each extra knot the liners travel in the twenty-four hours; with each day off the delivery of the home-going mails. I am no prophet, gentlemen, but I see

in this increasing rapidity of transport a matter of vital importance to this country, with its wide spaces, and its isolating seas. We draw closer. England watches Australia coming up over the horizon like a ship nearing home. The same with the other Imperial possessions, all the sister countries; India, Canada, the Cape, invention draws them closer every day.

“I speak of the Empire, but this remains truth for the rest of the World. The nations are neighbours. No one nation suffices for its own needs. It must buy from its neighbours and in the best markets. I will ask you to look with the eyes of seventy years back at a commonplace of to-day; meat that has travelled twelve thousand miles through all temperatures and two tropics, being sold at Smithfield in London at only two-thirds of the price of meat home-grown. Apples go in loads of a hundred tons at a time from Hobart, and at the end of a six weeks’ voyage, housewives in Manchester are able to afford them for their children. The whole world draws together; and I believe that such a rapprochement is for good. We are all at too close quarters, nowadays, not to live neighbourly.

“Now, gentlemen, you may think I have been long about my argument, my apology, that is, for coming to you with no expert knowledge of your affairs. Here is my conclusion, a simple one. Nowadays, the affairs of one are the affairs of all. Buying and selling, the trades by which we live, are the same the world over. You are not your own customers; you do not, as the phrase goes, take in each other’s washing. You sell your primary products to French, Dutch, English buyers. You have, therefore, to begin to think in terms of world citizenship. Your prosperity matters to the world more than it does to yourselves. Believe me, this is no paradox. It is the strict and literal truth. In these circumstances, a man coming from the other side of the world is at no disadvantage in dealing with your problems; he may be of service, though he cannot pretend to any local knowledge. His acquaintance with your customers may be more useful to you, entering the world market, than a lifelong personal understanding of the goods you have to sell; even, such an understanding might prejudice him, and affect his judgment in a matter where world interest was in conflict with patriotic feeling.

“That sounds as if I condemn patriotism. No, gentlemen, no. There is no finer spirit than that which comes from playing for one’s side. But a man who plays cricket, who thinks in terms of runs and averages in wartime—for commerce is war without bloodshed—what would you say of such a man? I need not press that analogy. A nation that produces such Test teams as yours for the Old Country to tackle will understand what I mean.

"One word more. I do honestly and with all my heart desire to know and serve Australia. You know, perhaps, that my wife was born in this country. She left her home for mine, when we married; now I am glad, for a few years at any rate, to make fair exchange, and take her home for my own. I am confident that a great future waits for this country; I shall count myself fortunate to have been allowed some small share in the bringing nearer of that future, and I am willing to work for it with such strength as I have. You have here wide spaces that could grow food for all Europe; you have metals, you have coal, you have gold. Water you lack, but science will not leave you long under that disability. So that you possess all the means; the end, an honourable place among the nations, rests, under God, in the hands of your people. I have kept you long enough——"

It was a good speech, and Theo meant every word of it. He did really think that local differences of viewpoint were secondary, and would be abandoned when any Empire question was at stake. He saw nothing but concord and loyalty, Australia bowed in proud subordination to England, daughter to mother. The speech went well enough; he had a pleasant delivery, not too offensively English; he could always make himself heard. But I doubted, even while I clapped and smiled at him as he sat down, if he had paid quite the compliments, given his hearers quite the food for thought they wanted.

IV

My first glance at the newspapers next day made me wonder if my forebodings were not more founded than his optimism. There were leaders, of course, dealing with His Excellency's arrival, polite leaded type, and the usual description of the arrival of any personage by sea. "Our harbour was at its most beautiful to welcome the Earl of Frome as he stepped ashore yesterday. Blue dancing water, sparkling in the sun, lapped softly about the bosky slopes of Lady Macquarie's Chair. The Domain and the Gardens offered a welcoming mass of verdure to the eyes of the distinguished visitors as their pinnace clove the laughing waters of the bay." The welcome was real, though expressed with a touch of America, new since my day. "Australia Says, Shake!" was one caption, implying that the country was glad to meet Theo. Another paper, more staid, was of opinion that a compliment had been paid Australia by selecting as King's representative "one linked to our land by the nearest and dearest of domestic ties." I was the domestic tie; the fullest possible description was given of my dress. There was also a pen-picture of Theo, in which his nice normal nose received the epithet "high-lineaged." Altogether, we had a good press.

It was the political news that gave me my inkling of trouble. There were rows brewing over a Government measure connected with schools. What were the terms of the measure exactly, it was difficult to make out, for the conflagration was at strength, and the causes of the outbreak naturally were not repeated from day to day to a public already familiar with them. I gathered, however, that Mr. McGirk's Cabinet was a troublesome team to drive. A small group, with names like Corrigan and Cahill, threatened him with withdrawal of support, and endeavoured to whittle down his original intention. I gathered that Catholic interests were touched by the proposed Bill, which involved taxation. I said to Theo, reading with knitted brows:

"My dear, I believe the Micks are at it again."

"Micks? Who are they? Oh, you mean the Catholic interest. Yes, they're a nuisance—saving your presence, Clo. It's this divided loyalty—the Pope's got to come first."

"Theo," I said, "do you suppose it's the Pope who wants Home Rule in Ireland? Don't make a bogy of His Holiness; that's what the low-caste papers do out here. The Pope only wants his people to be able to say their prayers in peace. It's the Irish that want the power."

"They're using their Church's authority to try and get it."

"Yes, that's true. But look here, Theo——" I halted, seeing him frown, then went steadily on. "I said to myself when you first spoke of this post, that I wouldn't ever interfere. Because of my being so—tied up with the place, it was quite necessary for me to keep out of things. But when I see so clearly the sort of hint that only I can give you—just because I'm a Catholic, but not a Mick——"

"Go on," said Theo.

I did not immediately find the words. When they came, it was in a flash of memory, a phrase from my talk with Gloria Jebb when she urged me to marry.

"It's the power," I said slowly; "weak people are greedy of power. Oppressed people, too. The only power an Irishman has been able to hold this last three centuries is the spiritual. That's why religion is so important in Ireland; why every family's ambition is to have one member a priest. Political power's denied them there, here it's not. England keeps Home Rule from them there, and lets them get their fingers on it here. They want it, they'll use every means to take it. And they'll hate England the worse when they have it, because it's only Australia they hold, and not Ireland."

“But Catholicism’s in with this whole movement. The priests are behind it.”

“Yes, as Irishmen.”

He smiled, but ruefully.

“How are you going to consider an Irishman apart from his religion? Isn’t it like considering the body apart from the soul?”

“I can’t explain. I’m just suggesting a way of tackling the problem. If you have to go for them, go for them as Irishmen, not as priests. As disloyalists. Stress that. Never let a breath of religion creep in.”

Theo stared.

“Of course not. The religion itself is nothing to me—nothing to any Government.”

“Isn’t it?” I said with something of the Premier’s own grimness. “Ask Mr. McGirk which way he hates them worst. He’d swallow the shamrock; it’s the Pope he strains at.”

There was silence for a moment or two; then Theo put his hand across the table and held mine for a moment.

“That’s pretty sound advice. Thanks, Clo.”

“I won’t ever talk of it again. Whatever you do, I won’t interfere.”

“Publicly, of course you can’t. But privately, here between ourselves—I wish you’d interfere a little more.”

He got up from the table, stood behind me, his hands lightly on my shoulders.

“You’ve forgiven my taking the post, haven’t you? You don’t mind, now we’re here?”

I took his hands.

“My dear, it’s only that I was afraid. The relationship, the religion—I was afraid they’d both be stumbling-blocks.”

“On the contrary, they help. People cheered when I brought you in to the speech last night. The papers are full of you. And you’ve just given me a pretty wise lecture on policy.”

“What good am I if I don’t help you?”

“You’re my wife, and that’s all I care about.”

“Still?”

“Still.”

But there was no sweetness left in it for me. The thrill of the touch, or the unexpected word, was gone.

V

I could do no less, noblesse obliging, than ask one or two of the relations, without ceremony, to tea on my first free afternoon. They had been punctilious, there was no pushing. Names had been written in the ordinary way in the book at the lodge, and now they were waiting, and secretly purchasing new dresses, in hope. I telephoned to each personally. Nothing of Government House crept in to the little gathering. Theo might or might not have time to come and be shown off. The only quite involuntary touch of hauteur showed in the date, for my first free afternoon was a full month after we landed.

However, they came, Aunt Josie, dressed as for the races; Aunt Marie-Céleste, always more pious, but also much less well-off, in grey; her eldest daughter, Helen, Mrs. Rouncevell, slender and sour; Georgette, ripe and sweet to rottenness, like a loquat. No husbands were invited, for husbands might have disturbed the non-party aspect of the whole affair; Elliott Rouncevell, for example, was member for the Wollondoola district.

The talk was pure family, and after a while I realized that this was because we had nothing else in common. Any excursion into books bothered them, and dried up the flow. English politics, my only other topic, they were vague about, confounding Liberalism in Australia with English Liberalism, its antithesis. So we fell back on family, which fortunately offered an enormous range. They had brought photographs of all the children. Georgette’s two were podgy, with glasses, which pleased me. Helen’s three sons were cornstalks, showing very good teeth, and sitting easily on station horses. Wollondoola had a new Town Hall, there were public gardens—at least in a good season they were gardens. Corazon was hardly recognisable, drifted with creepers, and with unfamiliar flower beds in front.

“Your father’s taken to gardening,” they told me, “such a good thing! Because at one time he was rather bitten with stocks and shares, and he’s always so trustful—And there was the training-stable he started, you knew about that? But it worried Gran, so he gave that up. Poor Gran! Then, after her death he didn’t seem to have the heart to start all over again. So it’s really a great bit of good luck about this gardening.”

I told them of Aunt Philomena's letter and the note from Barbe. Aunt Josie flashed up into a rather too bright interest at that.

"Ah, yes, my little Barbe! She isn't strong, you know. They look after her, keep her up in the mountains, and out of doors as much as they can. She broke down with the teaching. She's sacristan and gardener now." Then, away from the subject: "Are we going to see your nice husband? What a very good speaker he is! Your uncle says he's the very man we've been wanting here this long time."

"He may come," I said non-committally, "but he doesn't get much time to himself. These first weeks——"

"Ah, yes," said Aunt Marie-Céleste, with a chill innocent eye, "one must excuse a great deal to busy people. And what have you been doing with yourself since you came?"

The belatedness of the invitation was not after all to pass without comment. My eye, when I answered, however, was guileless as her own.

"There seems to be an appointment for every moment. I had no notion of the amount of opening Her Excellency had to do! I open this and that from morning till night."

"And what about Aunt Philomena's school?" said Aunt Marie-Céleste.

"I should love to come. I've told her so."

The relatives exchanged glances.

"And your husband—will he be there?"

"I believe there's some political fuss fixed for that day."

"But he makes no objection to your going?"

"Why should he?"

Cousin Helen came out with the kernel of the matter.

"It's very right of him. Very strong. It will just show McGirk that there's no need for bigotry. You know how he's behaving over the Schools Question. If you're seen at this new big important school, it may make him think."

I sat, confounded. The Schools Question! I had the rights, or rather the ins and outs of it by now. It was a money-raising proposition, which sought to apply the ordinary rate of taxation to charitable institutions hitherto exempt. While exemption had been in force a good many of the Catholic

schools had accepted the social stigma of being charitable institutions; individual teachers, after all, received no pay, and all moneys earned went into more schools, more buildings; no individual was the richer for their activities. Now Mr. McGirk and his supporters were on the track of these enclosed riches; they had found a formula which denied to all those schools which took fees for their services the qualification of charities; and the result had been a rather serious agitation up and down the country, invective in the House and out of it, martyrized sermons, one of which I had myself heard in the Cathedral with His Eminence sitting by, nodding approval from his throne. Theo, though the wind of it came more the State Governor's way, was distressed about it, harassed by a party bitterness and ill-manners which hitherto had never come into his ken. I had determined to have no hand in the matter, and lend no colour, either orange or green, to prejudice. And all the while in my book that engagement lay forgotten, which, in fairness to Theo, it was out of the question that I should keep. But I had to say something.

"I'm afraid politics isn't much in my line. They seem to be making things awkward for poor Mr. McGirk."

They all snorted, issued disapproving noises.

"Poor Mr. McGirk! He's a most horrible man. He's in the pay of the Anti-Vatican League. His one aim in life is to humble the Church. Of course these awful Labour people have all the power at present. Naturally! Buying votes with maternity benefits—that the poor mothers never see, I can assure you! It's always the father that draws the five pounds and gets drunk on it ——"

"But," said Helen Rouncevell, her voice coming clear out of this confusion, "we can use social pressure. It's the only weapon we've got left. Fortunately, all these people have wives and daughters who hanker after Society, as they call it. We can snub them, and we do. When it's necessary. Quite a lot gets done that way——" she smiled, with a hint of cruelty, "through the wives who want to show off their offspring at the Golf Club."

"So you see, dear," said Aunt Marie-Céleste, picking up the thread, "of course I'm not dictating or even suggesting what you should do in any shape or form. I'm sure you understand that. But, you see, these people are bringing ruin on the country. Preachers, and dock labourers—what can they know about Government?" She appealed with a glance to Aunt Josie, who sat in a judicial silence, tied as I was by her husband's place above party, and obtaining no response went on, even more wildly: "So you see, it's really

our duty to go against them. And then when it comes to things like this Schools Act, well, that's tantamount to persecuting the Church, when the poor nuns don't even keep a halfpenny for themselves, always planning, and building, and—— Aunt Philomena tells me she's gone grey in this two months with worry. So you see, dear, what a comfort it would be to her to see you standing up there beside the Cardinal, and showing all these people that you're not afraid to show where your sympathies lie——"

"I'm afraid I can't afford to have sympathies, situated as I am."

"Oh, Clo!" That was Georgette, with her silly laugh. "Everyone's got sympathies. All this stand-offishness won't do out here, you know. They like people to be human. They won't stand high and mighty attitudes——"

I looked at her with some steadiness, and perhaps she remembered our mutual youth, and dreaded some unanswerable stable-boy response emerging, in obedience to her call for humanity, from the countess's lips. Aunt Josie, who felt for me, saved me the trouble of quelling her.

"Your cousin has to think of her position. She has a very difficult duty to perform——"

"Oh, I don't envy her," said Georgette, tossing.

"Well, dear, think about it at any rate," Aunt Marie-Céleste interposed, "your Aunt Philomena would be so intensely delighted to see you, the poor old woman!"

Each Boissy regarded itself as perennially young, and spoke always of the next in age above it—though eighteen months was the longest difference—as of some decrepit stranger.

They left me with food for thought.

VI

The opening of the school was fixed for a fortnight hence, November 17th. This was the date when the buildings were to be completed; there would be no scholars as yet, not until after the summer holidays and the Christmas heat were past, but the aunt was apparently unable to wait for blessing on her new toy. It was her own creation, built with money saved in halfpennies here and there, begged shamelessly, or with novices' dowries. I had seen photographs, by which the place had great beauty; a shaded cloister for exercise, a chapel all of white marble. The garden was as yet mere raw trampled clay. Barbe would have scope there. And the view was over the eternal blue unfolding distances. I would have liked to see it, and to have

word with the enchanting aunt. But the political wind blew furiously, the newspapers shrieked against each other, voices of the gale that sped the gale, and I knew with complete comprehension that it would not do.

I said as much to Theo.

“No,” said he, worrying his lip, “very difficult for you. But you’re right, of course. It’s out of the question as things are.”

“I’d like to see her, though.”

“No reason why you shouldn’t. As a private individual. Go when there’s no show on, quietly. But even so, with all this school ill-feeling about——”

He paused worried.

“I think you ought perhaps to wait a while.”

“I think so too. But I must go eventually. We’re between two fires here. If I see my family at all, it’s nepotism, or—what’s a word for the influence of aunts? If I don’t, it’s snobbery and uppishness and disloyalty to the Church.”

And I let him have a summary of Georgette’s speech, and Helen’s. He listened, then said shrewdly:

“They admit they don’t count much politically. Their social pressure—it may work on these climbers; it can’t affect Her Excellency. Of the two, if anyone’s got to be annoyed, it had better be your relations. But it’s a problem. It’s the deuce of a problem.”

So much for his and the Home Government’s notion that my relationships and religion would be helpful. But I did not rub in the notion’s futility.

VII

The new school was opened without me. I wrote quite frankly to the aunt, saying that just at the moment, when the balance must be held level, I could not, in fairness to Theo, come. She accepted this decision at once, with just one small pitiful wail towards the end of her note.

“But—tho’ I know it to be necessary, and your duty, dear—I wish such worldly discretion need not be. You know Our Lord’s opinion of the prudent people, those who were neither hot nor cold, and those who hid talents, and those who reproved St. Magdalen’s generosity as useless. Well, if it be not

irreverent so to put the thought, I share His love of rashness. But you know your own duty best."

In return for this, and by way of peace-offering, I sent the sprinkler.

His Eminence's speech on the day of opening was fully reported. I could imagine him pacing, with censers swinging at his back, before the newly consecrated altar; hear his curiously reedy but true old voice giving out the tune of the Pater Noster, which comes alone in the midst of High Mass as though a white bird flew up out of the celebrant's breast. He neither preached nor gave any exhortation at all under the chapel roof; this was discretion too, though Aunt Philomena, weeping with joy in her stall, might not have called it so. But afterwards, when the vestments were off, the thanksgiving made, and the square of the new cloisters filled with an attentive crowd, His Eminence spoke from the steps of the chapel. I could piece the speech together from the several papers, each of which, according to its political complexion, suppressed certain passages and gave others in full.

"Dearly beloved brethren, and my flock under Christ," said the Cardinal Archbishop, "to-day, by the patience, thrift, and foresight of pious women, a new building rises to the greater glory of God. In this beautiful cloister your children will walk, learning the ways that are pleasant to Our Lord, learning to understand our holy religion; that in time, when they are wives and happy mothers, their children shall learn at their knee, not only the speech of the world, but the language of the soul, the very speech of Our Lord Himself, which is prayer.

"They will be taught, these young creatures, other things necessary to a full and useful life in the world; the history of their country and of the Church; the songs of poets; even the mysteries of science, so-called, which seeks to penetrate the secrets of matter. They will be sent equipped into the world, to play the part of useful citizens, or to return, if God calls them, to the cloister, there to impart knowledge to a new generation. Is not this a service to be ranked among the highest? To my mind, and setting apart the service of the altar, which is not for women, there is no higher; nothing the State should set greater value on, than the efforts of this great Order to instruct young citizens in docility, piety, and all useful knowledge.

"But the State—I name no names. We must render to the devil his due, and these persons speak in the name of the State—the State says, No! Of what value are these services you speak of? Can you tell their worth in terms of money? We answer that we cannot. But the State taking up, let us say in

parable, one of these ingots of heavenly gold that we bring it, asks: Whose image and superscription is upon this? We answer, God's. The State, flinging it contemptuously down, says: It should be Cæsar's. Those who render service must not only give, but also they must pay for the privilege of giving.

"Now, my dear brethren in Christ, this is a very serious condition of things. Recollect that these nuns pay taxes upon their income already; rates upon their property. They live more frugally than the labourer that mends your streets or tends your gardens. Their food is scanty; their clothing—to-day Reverend Mother wears a new veil in honour of this occasion. Her old veil and I are friends; she has had it this six years, darning, patching, piecing it. Her community follow her gladly in her example of thrift. No halfpenny that they earn goes towards their own adornment or comfort; it goes all, with a generosity that should inspire us, towards the more fitting service of God and the education of these young girls, God's children.

"Is it right, to your minds, that charity and industry should be penalized? Is it right that God should be cheated of His dues that the State may profit? We are all of us, in lesser or greater degree, God's servants. If we stand by and see Him cheated, are we worth our wages? Are we not rather by our silence, by our cowardice, knowingly accepting other wages, those of sin? And those are dreadful wages that sin pays out; terrible to think of, terrible to watch in their bestowing. Pitiful, hateful, and uneasy, go the servants of sin.

"But these are thoughts that we may all of us, without incurring the charge of lukewarmness, put from our minds on this sunny afternoon. The Sisters, with their usual indifference to the deadly penalty of gluttony in their neighbour, have prepared a most appetising tea——"

The rest was uneventful.

VIII

Within a week after this speech matters came to a head in the Cabinet of Mr. McGirk. There were two resignations, and the vacancies were not so easily filled. The Upper House had thrown out the measure a second time, and the temper of certain of the Premier's followers among the rank and file was altering. He could, without loss of dignity, have let the thing drop. There were other ways of getting money, without treading on quite such sensitive and powerful toes. His colleagues recommended this course, which would have been the safe one. They had only had two years in office, they were

getting into their stride, and it was not, to their minds, worth stirring up the Catholic hornets' nest for some petty million or so. But the Premier, backed by his Treasurer, listened grimly, shook his head, and drove forward, some unknown force urging him. A paymaster? or simply—and this was my guess—the hate of the Orange for the Green. One sneer of his got into the papers—not an official sneer, with his name to it, but in the form of gossip concerning "one of our most prominent statesmen." He said: "The Lord spoke of building His Church upon a rock; to hear some dignitaries talk, you would think He had said a shamrock." If ever I heard a man's voice in a phrase, McGirk's was in that.

IX

A visit to Adelaide took us well into the month of December; that month when the grass is browning under the approach of summer, and when the purple shadow of the jackerandas lies under them, a shadow made of fallen flowers. We returned to Sydney to find politics calming down, taking on the general summer listlessness. The State Governor, ex-sailor and keen yachtsman, took Theo for a week-end down to Broken Bay in his *Atalanta II*. I thought that the time had come when I might, without precipitating a crisis, visit the Aunt's convent.

I went by car, alone, up a road very different from that cantankerous affair by which Gustave-Félicité and his bride had travelled; a road which swung in a series of great loops up and up, till the distances that had been blue turned grey-green with nearness, and one could see tree-tops two thousand feet down swayed by the wind like a sea. It was past midday when we found the convent, raw and new, but dignified already as a building may look that is built to face out centuries of weather. The Aunt herself came on the portress's heels to the grille of the door, and I felt the stiff edges of her cap on my face, one side and then the other, before I could look at her.

"Dear!" said Aunt Philomena, drawing back, "so many years, dear child, good child! But how thin you are! What's the use of riches to you? Look how I thrive and get fat on our poor nun's fare. Sister Bonaventure"—to the portress, laughing for delight to see Reverend Mother so pleased—"run now, there's a good sister, and see is the kitchen doing its best. Did ever you see a child so thin? Well, well; and now tell me"—a searching glance—"you're friends with Our Lord, aren't you, Clotilde?"

"Yes, Mother," I said, like the child she saw in me. She meant did I perform my duties as a Catholic?

“That’s right, that’s all that matters,” said she, holding my hand fast. “You’ll pay Him a little visit when you’ve had your dinner. Now I want to hear everything about you. No children?” I shook my head. “Poor child, that’s sad, and for your husband, too, with his great name. But it wasn’t to be; so you must do your mothering some other way. You know, our orphanage——”

“Aunt,” I said, “you’re going to beg.”

“Dear me,” said she, with a comical twist of her eyebrows, “so I was! It’s one of these habits that takes a hold; like whisky. I can’t open my mouth now to God or man without some sort of a petition popping out of it. It’s taken ten years’ hard begging to raise these walls——”

“Worth it,” I said; “it’s the loveliest building I’ve seen so far in Australia.”

“Well, please God we’ll be able to keep it open; but there’s a lot of new taxes threatening—you can’t tell me which way that’s all tending, I suppose? No—I couldn’t expect you to tell. But it’s a worry to me, dear child. Wide shoulders I have, thank God; they can carry the burden they know. But suppose someone creeps up behind the poor ass, unsuspecting, and puts another few pounds weight on his back, what’s the creature to do?”

She then told me, very simply, in terms of money, just what the new taxation would mean to the Order in New South Wales. It was a frightening total.

“We’re told not to worry,” said she, wrinkling her forehead, “but it’s all very well for our dear Lord to talk. Nuns aren’t birds of the air, more’s the pity, nor lilies of the field. It’s wrong to look ahead, it shows distrust of God’s goodness. But a mother can’t help being afraid, longing for security for her children. Well, that’s enough of our troubles. Here’s Mother Mary Ambrose coming to tell us dinner’s on the table; a good dinner, too, and mind you eat well, or you’ll affront Sister Mary Gertrude. She’s grown very puffed up since she cooked for His Eminence.”

I was being led towards the usual convent parlour, a beautiful room all windows, with interspersed Popes. Aunt Philomena would have no help to serve me; she shooed nuns away who wished to be useful, and stood over me while I did Sister Mary Gertrude justice. I was greedy, to please her; each time that I hungrily held out my plate I got an approving pat on the shoulder. When I had done the aunt surveyed me narrowly, as though she

hoped to see me bulged like a kitten, and led me off to the chapel. We knelt a while, and came blinking from its shade into the chaotic gardens.

"How's Barbe?" I asked at random.

At that a curious little reticence seemed to come between us. The aunt took a moment to answer.

"Less well," said she at last, "less well."

"I'll see her perhaps, before I go?"

"No, dear," said the aunt without hesitation. "I doubt if that would be wise."

"Goodness, is she really ill? Aunt Josie said nothing——"

"I have not troubled your Aunt Josie with it," said she, just a little stiffly, "Barbe is my responsibility now. I don't mean that her mother has no longer any concern in her, that would not be true. But a matter of this kind is for me."

"Is she having her old trouble again?"

"An old trouble?" said the aunt. "Ah, you mean those attacks. No. It is not the same. That would be easier——"

"Dear Aunt, what's the matter?"

Again she paused before she gave her answer.

"The world is apt to suppose that nuns have nothing to do but grow hysterical; that they take all kinds of odds and ends of imagination for the direct revelations of God. The world thinks we are easily duped, and wish to believe wonders. But that, you know, is not true."

I could half-guess where this was leading. She went on:

"It is not so. We are not so presumptuous as to suppose ourselves chosen. Who are we, that God should honour us with miracles? And so, being a practical old woman—convents do not live on air—I am accustomed to look somewhat doubtfully on any claim to such a special favour."

I thought of Barbe's letter, the lilies ready for Our Lady, and guessed the rest of the story.

"Barbe has been having visions, then? That's a great change from fits ——"

“Not so much, not so much of a change,” Aunt Philomena interrupted. “She has always been—devout, yes, but an imagination that has no bounds, and is dangerous. These fits, as you call them; they ceased during her novitiate, and for good, we thought. That was a great grace. We thanked Our Lady heartily for that. But I begin to wonder,” said the aunt, puckering her forehead again, “whether we were not just a little too prompt with our gratitude. You know more of medical science than I can do, you hear such things discussed. Is it possible, do you think, for such a malady to run underground, like a stream, for a while? And reappear?”

I could not tell her; it seemed likely.

“Has a doctor seen her? What are you doing for her?”

“Just now,” replied the aunt, advancing stately down her cloister, “we are trying castor-oil.”

I did not see Barbe, but I was permitted to write her a little note. I would send her up seeds, I said, from Sydney; and some linen had been presented to me which was the very thing for altar cloths. She must hurry, I said, and get well, so that at my next visit I should find her up and about, and my sprinkler gaily whirling. Aunt Philomena read the note and approved it.

Then it was time, for I must be in Sydney again by nightfall, to send for the car and say good-bye. All the nuns came crowding, with their withered-apple faces, or young gay faces, or faces heavily moustached, to say good-bye, and to marvel at the car. I had kissed some, touched hands with others, and was being close held by Aunt Philomena when I saw over her shoulder a rubicund nun whom I knew to be the Sister from the kitchen, sliding a parcel under the rugs. I caught her eye. She retreated, laughing. I said aloud:

“What mischief are you at, Sister Mary Gertrude?”

The aunt moved forward, stirred the rug, lifted the parcel, smiled.

“Ah, yes. That’s right, Sister.”

“But what is it?”

“The remainder of the tartlets, dear child; the tartlets you had with your meal. You seemed to fancy them. Sister wants you to take those that were left to nibble on the way.”

“Aunt dear,” I said, “how old am I?”

“You’re thirty-nine, Miss,” said Aunt Philomena with spirit, “But what’s that to me? I know this much, the sweet tooth never grows old, though it

may drop out"—with a twinkle at one aged nun—"so take your tartlets, and have a good journey, and God bless you."

"God bless you!" all the nuns echoed, standing ranked on the steps. I looked back at them, the little white and black pack of the Lord's Dogs, so obedient, so humble and happy. Barbe; what was she doing, she and her fits, in that tranquil company?

X

Theo returned from his cruise, and, in a temperature of ninety-five degrees, we all set about the performance of our Christmas duty. I had a children's party on the day following Boxing Day. The politicians rested. The newspapers had all the seasonable jokes to make. Sermons became tinged once more with loving-kindness. In that breathing space from the interminable and savage warfare of the Schools Measure, Theo and I decided to launch our first big official ball. Since it continued to be intolerably hot, I had the idea of letting people dance in the open air, an innovation very dubiously considered by the secretary.

"But if it rains?" said he, surveying in turn the cloudless sky and the carpenters at work, building a dance-floor on the lawn.

"We'll put a marquee over it."

"I'm afraid it won't be a very popular move with the older guests, if you'll forgive my saying so."

"The older guests, presumably, won't dance."

He was dissatisfied with me. Never had he been obliged to control and excuse a more unsatisfactory Excellency. Unconventional, and then this religious business—his grey eye said that it was worse almost than having an Eurasian as wife to the Governor of Bombay.

It did not rain, of course, on the night of January the eleventh. It had been a hot brooding day with threat of thunder, and the sunset that I watched from my window as I dressed was a sensational affair of reds and after-greens. "Red at night——" such a sunset holds no delight for the Australian shepherd; it means drought. In this case it meant, too, that victory over the secretary was mine.

Yet I was saddened by the splendour. It threw my mind back uncomfortably, to the false Martina reading against such a glow, to the convent library, whence I had so often watched, with trouble and wistfulness, the death of beauty. Senseless memorising! I was ashamed

when Tellier, my maid, caught me on the edge of tears, and bustled me back to the realities of a new gold dress, and the ceremonial fetching of pearls from the safe in Theo's dressing-room.

XI

It happened somewhere about midnight, while I sat indoors, my duty dances with the State Governor and the Admiral done, the preposterous but stately official lancers over; I had been standing for a long time receiving, and was glad to sit and talk for a while to half a dozen women. The long room was almost empty; my dancing floor and the gardens by the water were claiming the guests. In the midst of a discussion on clothes my hostess's eye, alert, saw a footman searching, who finally observed me, and came up, a scrap of paper on a salver in his hand. He looked disturbed, shocked somehow out of his party bearing. I beckoned him near.

"What is it?"

"Someone, your Excellency—a lady, asking for you. I told her you were engaged. She said"—he had to swallow to get this out—"she said she was a relative, my lady. She said to give you this."

I took the note from the salver. It was not new-written, but crumpled and much folded. I opened it out, and my own handwriting looked up at me; my note to Barbe, with across it scrawled in pencil one word—"Please."

"Where is she?" I asked the man.

"I left her in the hall, my lady. I didn't know if I ought to trouble you; but she seemed urgent."

"Forgive me for a moment," I said to the women about; all hearing what the man said, a good deal intrigued. A relative? Uninvited? I left them guessing and turned across the long room, dotted sparsely with the more staid and official of the guests. Before I could reach the door I saw heads turning; voices ran up in astonishment, then dropped.

The strangest apparition of a woman was standing in the doorway that led to the hall. She was dressed in an old mackintosh over some indescribable jumble of clothes beneath. She wore no hat, and her head—this was 1913—had the red hair on it cropped short, almost shaved. She held her coverings about her, looking this way and that with intolerably frightened eyes, and shaking, I could see, from head to foot. When at last the ranging glance looked me in the face, it was Barbe, come goodness knows how from her peaceful convent a hundred miles away to seek some other

kind of sanctuary. I went forward to her, the heads turning to watch me, while the voices, that had hushed in astonishment, politely swelled once more in talk.

"Well, my dear," I said. "We meet at last. But it's a little noisy here. Won't you come up to my room and talk quietly?"

She did not move, but planted her feet, in the square nun's shoes and thick knitted white stockings, securely to withstand the light pressure of my hand on her arm. Nor did she answer me, but looked, peered rather, searching my face.

"I'm Clotilde, your cousin. You sent in a note to me, don't you remember? Clotilde——"

"Yes, yes," said she impatiently, yet vague, "I came here to speak to you."

"Come along then," I insisted. The band was slowing, the room would soon be invaded. "Come to my sitting-room, won't you?"

The footman had stood by, with enquiry in his eyes, expecting, I suppose, to be ordered to throw the intruder out of doors. I sent him away with a brusque nod, and patted reassuringly the arm I held.

She was yielding. Then behind me I heard a rustle, approaching feet, and saw Barbe shrink in pure terror, putting up her hands against the person approaching. Over my shoulder I heard Aunt Josie's voice, cracked and shallow with anger.

"Barbe! Come away from here at once! What are you doing in your cousin's house, in that dirty old coat, and your head—come away at once, home——"

Barbe, with a sudden horribly despairing motion, fell at my feet, her black clad arms about my gold knees. As I felt the mad strength with which she was clinging, I saw through the windows the clasped dancers outside in the light release each other, laughing. I knew that Aunt Josie's method was useless.

"Barbe!" I said gently, "It's all right, my dear. Gently; you're safe."

She muttered something against my dress that I could not hear. I saw the secretary approaching, eyes lit with horror at this invasion of his ceremony, his hands together as though he were about to wring them.

“Go out,” I told him, “tell the band to play an extra, keep those people from coming in.”

“It’s supper-time,” said he, aghast at the break in the ritual.

“Tell the band, please.”

He went, his sloping shoulders rueing the day that ever he set foot in a Governor’s establishment liable to invasion by lunatics. Aunt Josie had her hands under Barbe’s arms by this time, trying by main force to lift the girl, who held tight, until between the two of them I could hardly keep my feet. Aunt Josie was beyond her own control with anger and humiliation. In her endeavours to shorten the scene she was prolonging it, making it infinitely more painful and noisy. She had always been one of those whom anger reddens, and now her face burned, her neck and the hands that wrenched cruelly at her daughter were flushed scarlet. She kept talking.

“Wicked! A wicked, intolerable thing to do! You must come home with us instantly. Let your cousin go, she doesn’t want you, nobody wants you—you hysterical silly child!”

She may have really hurt Barbe at that. Whether or no, as she spoke and pulled with her diamond-covered ugly hands, the crouching figure lifted her face suddenly from my skirt and screamed, a hideous racked sound that turned all the heads despite their intention to be polite. The band struck up an instant after, and I saw the dancers begin their revolutions. But the scene could not go on. It was agonising to all three of us, Barbe in terror, Aunt Josie in humiliation, and my own heart torn with pity for both. One way or another I had to take sides.

“Aunt Josie,” I said sharply, “please let Barbe go. I’ll answer for her. I’ll look after her. Don’t touch her. Can’t you see she’s terrified?”

“She’s my daughter,” said Aunt Josie, standing stock-still, save for twitching hands. “She has humiliated us, and ruined herself, I suppose. This masquerade——” Her sparkling hand showed the tattered mackintosh. “It’s not only myself and her father. It’s the Church she’s betraying and making a laughingstock, at this time! This time of all others!”

“I think you’d better go,” I said. “You’re doing harm, Aunt Josie.”

“She’s mad,” said Aunt Josie furiously, “that’s the best that can be thought or said. Mad!”

The figure at my feet writhed, lifted a face so piteous that although my mind echoed Aunt Josie’s declaration I had to contradict it.

“Nonsense! She’s perfectly well, only a little tired, and in trouble——”

“Yes,” Barbe muttered, “in trouble. Terribly troubled.”

“She’ll be well in the morning. She’ll talk to you then.” A shake of the head against my knees; I put my hand on the short hair, stroking it. “She’ll stay here to-night with me. She’ll feel safe with me.”

Aunt Josie looked at me with eyes horribly cynical, yet angry still.

“I don’t know which of you is the greater fool. What will your husband say? At this time of all others to be harbouring a runaway nun! It will wreck me, it will wreck your uncle. We don’t matter, she’s our child, it’s our duty. But you in your position—your husband will put a stop to it.”

“We’ll ask him,” I said.

I had seen Theo coming through one of the long windows, alone save for the secretary at his ear. He came towards us deliberately, calm as though such a group of women were no more than one of the straining bronzes that strove in the hall at Toller.

“Theo,” I called, when he was a few steps away, “my cousin’s in trouble. There are reasons why she should not go home. I suggest that we should keep her here to-night.”

Theo must have thought the whole proceeding perfectly lunatic. He had never seen Barbe. I had not troubled him with any account of her. Now here was a person in a mackintosh, with a shaved head like a convict, turning up at midnight and grovelling on the floor at his wife’s feet. But he remained perfectly calm. Aunt Josie’s anger saved her from embarrassment. The most unhappy personage of the group was the secretary, standing with arms away from his sides as though to screen us from observation with his meagre person, without precedent to follow—a runaway dancing girl from a royal harem in the Punjab had been nothing to this—and aware that somewhere, liable at any moment to intrude upon the conclave, was the State Premier. Aunt Josie put the exact situation clearly for us all.

“This girl’s my daughter, run away from her convent. Am I the proper person to look after her, or is the Governor’s wife?”

“She’s frightened. She doesn’t want to go with her mother,” I said. “She’s come here for help, Theo.”

“Of course,” said Theo, “quite right.”

Barbe looked up at him. The secretary nervously twitched his head over his shoulder, tormented by the invisible presence of gloating Protestants. Theo took one of the kneeling woman's hands very gently, saying with a little laugh:

"I say, you're making Clotilde rather uncomfortable, aren't you? Holding on so tight? There's no need for that. Come now!"

None of us had thought of trying that point of view on Barbe. All her training for years had gone to make her consider others, and now appeal to the training got past, somehow, the obsession. She loosed her grip and got clumsily, apologetically, to her feet. Theo slipped her hand into the crook of his arm, very kindly. He was without guile, and she felt it as an animal might.

"Come along," said Theo, "we'll talk in Clotilde's room."

And with the grotesque figure on his arm, Aunt Josie and I closing in, and the secretary hovering wretchedly behind, we made our exit from a room grown by this time tactfully empty. Outside, the music slowed and died.

XII

She stayed with us that night, in a little spare bedroom used for sewing. Theo, with his dependable loyalty and sound sense working together, stood by me in my war with Aunt Josie. Obviously it was better that Barbe should go quietly to bed in our house than that she should be carried screaming from it by policemen or doctors, which was her mother's solution. No one need know that she was there. In the morning she might be calmer. A plan of action might be made. For this one night it was the only thing to do. He was reasonable, gentle, he prevailed on Aunt Josie. He sent for her car and her husband, and despatched them unnoticed while the other guests swarmed to supper. Barbe was safe, left in the care of Tellier. We descended to see out our party. On the stairs I said to him:

"Theo, the poor creature, I couldn't see her bullied. But now that Aunt Josie's gone—if this is going to mean trouble for you, out she goes to an hotel, gaol, anywhere. You brick; you dear. But I'll choke her with my own hands if they're going to make your life a misery with all the bigots on both sides at you hammer and tongs."

"Both sides?" said he ruefully, halting on a turn of the stairs.

“Both. And for the same reason. Harbour a nun! says the Protestant, horrified. Harbour a runaway nun! says the Catholic, just as shocked. Theo, I’m unhappy about it. I thought I was right—she was so pitiful—now, I’m unhappy. Let’s chloroform her and cast her out.”

“No,” said Theo, unsmiling, “I don’t think that would do. We’ve chosen our line of action. We’d better stand by it. Only half-past twelve!”

And indeed only half an hour had passed since that apparition with the bare red poll had stood clutching her old mackintosh in the door.

The five minutes succeeding Aunt Josie’s departure had been long enough to put me in possession of the story I had already guessed at, from Aunt Philomena’s silences. Barbe had seen a vision of Our Lady in the garden.

At first, she had not paid attention to the apparition, taking it for granted in a curious way. (I thought of Mary on Easter morning, disregarding the appearance of Christ, thinking Him the gardener.) Then Our Lady had spoken, and she knew.

“What did she tell you, Barbe?”

“I mustn’t say. It was not speech like we use; no words. She poured her meaning into my heart.”

That was a good phrase, one which any of the mystics might have used. I looked attentively at the figure sitting by me, eyes calm now, voice confident. She was telling what to her was reality, so much I knew, telling it well and sanely apart from the content. I saw Theo watching her, and knew that he was as puzzled as I.

“Yes; and then?”

“After she had spoken to me she went away, and I was left behind crying.”

“Crying?”

“I wanted so to go with her.” This very simply, and with no explanation. “Then, when I was better, I went directly to Reverend Mother and told her that we must bring flowers to put on the place where Our Lady had stood. She wouldn’t listen. She turned away and laughed.”

“She thought perhaps that you were deceiving yourself.”

“Saint Thomas thought the other apostles were deceiving themselves. But Our Lord took his hand, and put it into the Wounds—oh, horrible,

Clotilde, wouldn't it be? To touch the raw flesh, and hurt Our Lord again!"

"They were glorious wounds," I said, not knowing what to answer. "They didn't hurt Him any longer."

"Thomas didn't know that," she answered with complete certainty. "It was his punishment for doubting, that he should think he hurt Our Lord. Reverend Mother doubted. She wouldn't hear me. She told them I was ill, and they put me to bed. The infirmary windows are too high; I couldn't get out. I was a prisoner. Oh, they treated me with such terrible unkindness. They tried to make me say I had invented the whole story. How could I invent that happiness, or the pain that came after? I was patient—it must have been for weeks. They could not break down my faith. So then they tried other means."

She paused. The whole mad recitative was given with sincerity and a kind of pathos. She looked so very forlorn, and though I was fairly sure now that this was insanity and Theo's nipping at his moustache confirmed me in the uncomfortable certainty, I could not help thinking that Aunt Philomena's specific was hardly the right one.

"They began to give me medicines; not ordinary medicines at all. Bitter—horrible. And there was one that they made a great mystery about, preparing it, warming the spoon, and hiding it from me. I was frightened. I had a feeling of something wicked all about me, people trying to keep Our Lady's message from being given. I wouldn't take the medicine. I struggled. The two of the lay sisters held me down. Mother Mary Augustine said—she laughed, and said: 'You couldn't make more fuss if it were poison.' Then I knew. And I had to come away."

"Barbe," I said, and laughed myself, "how can you talk such nonsense? Why should the Aunt try to poison you? You know that if you wanted to leave Santa Scholastica, leave the Order, all you had to do was walk out. No one would try to hold you."

"Ah," said she, with a gleam, "but they did. They want to keep my money, the money father paid for my dowry. They don't want to give that back."

"Dear, that isn't so."

She kept a stubborn silence. I tried again, gently, the first point.

"Why didn't you tell your father you were unhappy? You know quite well that you were free to leave. The dowry doesn't matter. They must have let you go. A convent's not a prison."

“It’s worse,” said she, shivering; “it’s the abode of the blind.”

I changed the subject.

“Let me send you something to eat, at any rate. Have you had anything all day?”

“No,” said she, her eyes flickering, “but no food, no food, please.”

“Why not, Barbe?”

“It isn’t safe.”

It was no use to argue. We left her, and went down. The last private word Theo had in my ear was:

“Better get a doctor to her in the morning.”

XIII

But in the morning Barbe was gone.

She must have slipped downstairs in the night, terrified, blundering in the dark through unknown rooms, yet silently, to a long window which in the morning was found open on to the lawn and the deserted dancing floor. What frightened her I could never guess. But she was like a cage-bird freed, alert to every suspicion, her mind darting and bruising itself against the looming shapes of the world. My nightgown shocked her, perhaps. It was an affair of Irish crochet, nothing startling as such things go nowadays, but to the mind of a nun revealing and unashamed. Or she may have thought, cunningly, that all our kindness was a trap; she may have read in both our minds that significant phrase about the doctor. At any rate, reason or no, when we came to find her in the morning she was gone, taking nothing, leaving no trace.

Theo said, when I told him:

“Not a bad thing. Embarrassing, keeping her here, you know. Her parents’ house was really the place for her. It saved a fuss, keeping her here last night; but you know, in the circumstances, she’d have had to go. This cuts the knot. This lets us out. I can only say that it’s a considerable relief to me, Clo.”

And to me, for the moment. But I had to report the loss to Aunt Josie. I had to telephone to each relation in turn, trying to discover just where Barbe had gone. And when no relation, high and low, no convent where she might have fled, and no private seeking could lay hands on her, after three days I

had to agree with my uncle that the police must be asked to help. He was wretched, the round little Chief Justice; his cheeks were like winter apples, shrivelled and fallen. He said, when for a moment his wife left us alone:

"I'm in a quandary, Clo; a detestable quandary. A problem of conduct. Whether to resign."

"Don't," I said, unthinking. But he went on to explain, staring at his shining boot toes: "If Barbe—if anything has happened you see, there will be an enquiry; publicity, both as a nun and my daughter. Cowardice, perhaps, not to face it out. But for your Aunt I believe that I should send in my resignation and leave for England. She won't have it. She wants the child, if we find her, certified as mad. She wants the certificate made public. That—dissociates Barbe from us, she seems to think. Well, nothing can be done till she's found."

But she was not found. When she walked out of Government House she had possessed no money—she had stolen the amount for her ticket, she told me; she had owned no change of clothing, had taken nothing that might serve as a disguise, and was surely a most noticeable figure with her shaven head; yet she had disappeared as though the world she had walked out into were blind. The only possible explanation of her disappearance was a dreadful one, the harbour. But it is not easy, in that patrolled and busy area, to drown unseen, or, having drowned, not to rise. There were stories of bodies, unrecognisable, that sharks had worried, found by the water police, but none of these were women.

A month passed, and Theo and I were in Brisbane, six hundred miles away, when a blare of newspapers told us that a writ had been issued against Aunt Philomena and her community, legally described as "Mary Philomena Boissy and others," for assault and wrongful detention of Barbe Sinclair Llewellyn, known in religion as Sister Mary Barbara.

XIV

This action, which was disputed in the District Court before his Honour Judge Birkbeck, usurped, in the minds of all Sydney citizens, pride of place. The usual excuse given for hysterical public interest in any event is that the event stands out, solitary, and has nothing to compete with it in the daily news. It was an excuse that in the case of Sister Barbara was by no means valid. There was a Parliamentary row in full bloom. There was an acrid dispute swinging down minor columns of the newspapers concerning a name for the proposed Commonwealth city, and the partisans of Myloe (the

good meeting place) and Allawah (I camp here) raged furiously together; there was an interesting series of prosecutions under a council by-law, of women found wearing dangerous and unprotected hatpins; these were being rounded up by the police in great batches of fifty or so at a time, and fined five shillings apiece for their anti-social conduct. There was a Test Match in progress in Adelaide. Any one of these interests would have sufficed to sell newspapers in ordinary times, but the case of Sister Barbara eclipsed the lot, and sent circulations soaring.

The first and significant fact to the vice-regal circle was that neither Theo nor I was called as a witness. I believe there was a good deal of search, and much weighing of privileges before we got off, with citations of the late King Edward's evidence in the Tranby Croft case, and some distant Cumberland who deposed against his valet in George IV's day. But Theo stood in the shoes of the King himself; precedents from Princes of Wales and Royal Dukes could not apply to him. We were let off, therefore, or so it seemed, and received at any rate no summons to appear as witnesses.

Barbe's counsel was Mr. R. H. Bolitho, instructed by Messrs. Lyman, Wilson and Co., which was as much as to say that Barbe was backed by a certain Protestant organisation, almost a secret society, known as the A.V.L.'s: the Anti-Vatican League. Solicitor and counsel were prominent members of this. The conclusion was unescapable that some bigger game was forward than a mere action for assault such as the police-court magistrate might have settled. For Mother Mary Philomena was Mr. Alexander Ignatius Cassidy (solicitors, Messrs. Regan), and here the conclusion was every bit as evident that the Church was on its mettle; for Mr. Cassidy was at this time the most famous pleader in Australia. The expressions "sob-stuff" and "spell-binder" had not yet been introduced from the States; Mr. Cassidy lived before his time, that is to say; but more than one newspaper had acclaimed him as "silver-tongued," and he commanded fees that might make an archbishop blink. Sydney, when it knew that Mr. Cassidy had been retained, knew also that its evening paper would give good value while the case lasted.

It lasted a surprisingly long time—six days. I followed it breathlessly, in my exile, amid deputations from Sugar Growers, dinners of Fruit Growers, harangues from pastoralists, angry demonstrations by waterside workers. Even those remote papers, taken up as they were with our arrival, and the interminable troubles of a huge half-desert state, devoted columns a day to Sister Barbara and her woes. They refrained in every case, a delicacy with which the Sydney editors cannot be reproached, from mentioning the

escapee's connection with the vice-regal visitors. She might have been born after the manner of Melchizedek, having neither father nor mother nor any tribe, so far as the Brisbane editors were concerned.

Only one brief paragraph, tactfully printed on a different sheet from the reports of the case, gave a clue to the initiate. "We learn with regret that the Chief Justice of New South Wales, Mr. F. St. J. Llewellyn, announces his resignation. Ill-health is the reason given for a step which the Bench as a whole will deplore." Poor little uncle! He had been that happy creature, a rich man doing his work for love of it. I thought when I read this paragraph, "He will die before long, in idleness."

Thus, amid speculation and feverish interest, at the end of a fading summer the famous case began.

XV

Barbe, from the reports of her answers during examination, seemed to be back in her right mind. She was coherent, and well-coached; her story hung together well. And her counsel steered her with exquisite skill away from such very questionable facts as visions of celestial persons. This was her story, as Mr. Bolitho elicited it. (The newspapers commented favourably on her grey dress, her clear voice, and good appearance in the witness-box.)

She had, she said, been regarded for some time, on account of her indifferent health, as a drone and a burden upon the Order to which she had belonged and to her own particular convent. She had gradually been obliged to relinquish the duties of teaching, and had been given the task of gardener at the new school, Santa Scholastica; this, in addition to her ordinary duties as a choir-sister, singing office and so on.

"In what condition was this garden?" asked Mr. Bolitho.

"It was as the builders had left it. Reverend Mother wished to have a grotto made, in which a statue of our Founder could be stood. I was obliged to dig the stones for this grotto, and carry them myself. I had to dig, and pull a heavy roller."

Driven, you see, implied Mr. Bolitho, to perform menial tasks that might tax a man of considerable strength.

"In consideration of this heavy work, you were provided, no doubt, with extra, more nourishing food?"

No, Barbe was not. She gave the convent menus, and very exiguous they sounded.

“Hard manual work; inadequate feeding. How long, in these circumstances, were you able to continue?”

“I broke down after a month——more; six weeks of it.”

“And you told Reverend Mother, I suppose?”

“I told her that I did not think I could go on. I asked to be allowed to do other work.”

No question from Mr. Bolitho about the nature of the other work. Not a word about visions. Just hard manual work imposed upon a frail girl. Mr. Bolitho even offered His Honour photographs of the garden to show him the nature of her difficulties, which, if they represented it as I saw it, cannot have failed to convince.

The questions moved on. Reverend Mother had flown into a passion, it appeared, when her daughter in Christ, and niece in the world, protested against the treatment; had slapped her face furiously—how well I knew that tap, the middle finger flicked on the cheek—and had told her to go at once to the infirmary.

“And what happened there?”

Dreadful things had happened to Barbe in the infirmary. She had been dosed, and tied down in her bed. She was frightened, because another young nun, sent there some six months before, had mysteriously died. She felt ill after one of the medicines and complained. She was told that it was all for her good. She was kept in the infirmary for a fortnight, hardly fed at all, each day growing less able to resist the medicines, which made her sick. There was one that had a bitter taste. When she tasted it she became afraid, and spat it out.

“What were you afraid of?”

“I was afraid that if I took that medicine it might do me harm.”

Mr. Bolitho’s nod implied that she had done well to refuse it. His questions continued.

“Was anything said while this medicine was being administered? Yes. By whom? Mother Mary Augustine—was she the regular infirmarian? Why was she present? You don’t know. Well, and what did she say?”

“She said—I remember the very words because they frightened me so; she laughed and said, ‘You couldn’t make more fuss, Sister, if the spoon held poison.’ ”

“What did you think she meant by that?”

“I was in a very weak state. I had had hardly any food for a fortnight. I had known the young sister who died very well——”

“Yes?”

“And I suppose in my weak condition I was not able to judge clearly. I thought they intended to give me poison. No doubt I was very foolish.”

Carefully coached, all this. It would never have done to say, plump out, that a reputable community had intended to poison off one of its less useful members. Even the Anti-Vatican League could hardly have persuaded itself of that. But a very pretty suspicion was thrown, which by its vagueness gave scope to non-Catholic imaginations. The girl, herself, the plaintiff, disclaimed any real suspicion of murder by poison, but she was obviously a nice, pure girl, who could not be expected to look at things from the seamy side. Nuns were mysteries, laws unto themselves. Who knew what indecency or misconduct their enclosures hid? And were not medicines given for purposes other than death; criminal purposes? Anti-social purposes?

All this, Mr. Bolitho’s silences conveyed. And as smoothly he drew from her the rest of the story in a manner to reveal her sane beyond question, but terrified beyond reason, listeners made up their minds to a good battle, with a certain amount of muckraking when the medical evidence was called.

Meanwhile, how had Sister Barbara escaped? The morning after the bitter medicine incident she had determined to get away if it were at all possible. Appeals to Reverend Mother had been without result. She had, therefore, while all the nuns were at Mass in the chapel somewhere about seven o’clock, descended, in what clothes she could find, to the sacristy, behind whose door she knew the priest always hung his mackintosh. There was some money on the table, offerings brought for the purpose of having Masses said, which the priest had not yet pocketed. It was not much, but she took it—a good thing too, said Mr. Bolitho’s sniff—and the mackintosh, and stole away, hatless as she was, to the station from which she knew that a train left for Sydney at about seven-thirty. The money, which had since been refunded, had been just sufficient to pay her fare. Arrived in Sydney she had gone straight to friends, who had advised and cared for her; and the present action was the result.

It would be difficult for any person knowing the ins and outs of convents to discover anything much more disingenuous than this story, though to one

not so familiar it held water. I could find no explanation and certainly no excuse for Barbe, except the one which called her sanity in question. And this defence was exactly what the defendants, who got their turn on the second day, decided to put up. From that moment began the war of the alienists, which raged like a bush fire for two days through His Honour Judge Birkbeck's court. It was, like the dispute at Wollondoola led by the Tooheys, a war of the Micks, a religious war. The defendants chose, with care, co-religionist doctors who vowed by all their degrees that Barbe was out of her mind. She had, they said, psychoanalytical terms not being yet common, one of the forms of hysteria. She wished to make herself important. Hence the fits as a child, which were not epileptic and had no physical basis; which ceased under the influence of genuine religious enthusiasm during her first months in the convent as a nun; and emerged, when that enthusiasm waned, in the form of visions, heavenly revelations and the like.

Ding-dong, the doctors went at it. Mad, said the Catholic ones, intent to defend the honour of the Church, jeopardised by this hysterical woman. Sane, said the Protestants; sane and the victim of a cynical oppressive system, tortured by drugs, by physical ill-usage—there was, unhappily, no disputing the tying-down in bed. She had been so tied; Mother Mary Augustine, with tears, admitted it, and was confirmed by Sister Agnes, the infirmarian. She was violent, they said. A doctor who had seen her before, in one of the early fits, had told them that this was necessary to prevent her harming herself. Had they called in a doctor in this instance? No; they had not thought it necessary. You see, said Mr. Bolitho's lifted eyes and hand, no doctor. Why? Why should not a doctor have been called to this sick girl? And so the battle went on.

But as the days went by, one thing became clear to me, reading; uncomfortably clear. This question of Barbe's sanity was one which could, in fact, hardly be decided while certain facts were kept dark; and one such fact, the main one to my mind, the business of the vision, was shoved on one side. Barbe had, for some twisted reason, not raved during her confinement in the infirmary; she had spoken vaguely, of "other work" that she must do, had clamoured for freedom to perform this other work; but save to Reverend Mother and to Theo and me, she had apparently never told the full story. The result was, her word against Aunt Philomena's; Aunt Philomena, who had ordered the incarceration, ordered the medicines, refused to listen to her complaints, slapped her cheek. And Barbe denied the whole thing. She had what she wanted, for the moment. She was the centre of attention for a much larger public than her tiny convent world. The vision could go; it no longer

served the purpose of exalting her vanity, which the tense atmosphere of the court, the general excitement with her as central figure, most amply assuaged. She denied, and Mother Philomena had no corroborator for her story.

XVI

Except one. When I saw how things were going, I went, newspapers in hand, to Theo, sitting ruffling his hair over another set of cuttings on his desk. He looked up as I came in.

“Your young relative is making the fur fly in Sydney. Disgusting business. Frightful thing for decent women to have to go through.”

It was an ordeal. The Protestant doctors had asked the nuns questions which an ordinary woman of the world would find it hard to answer in public, concerning Barbe’s morals. And there were suggestions of “a certain condition” for which the bitter medicine might have been given. It was ugly and difficult, and must have been torture to all of them.

“A horrible thing. And what’s worse—you know, Theo, she’s going to win.”

“Who, the girl? But she’s raving, I thought you said.”

“So she is. You heard her yourself. That story about the vision in the garden—did you think that was sane?”

“Shouldn’t have said there was a doubt about it. I rather wondered they didn’t make more of that.”

“How can they make more of it?”

And I put the position to him very clearly. I put the problem which had been troubling me all night in his hands. Barbe was a liar, and an hysteric, and the puppet of the A.V.L. She ought not to get away with it; but she would come through triumphantly with large damages and a fresh lease of life for mischief if we stuck to our pedestals and refused to say what we knew.

“Good God!” said Theo, getting to his feet, turning, striding. “Good God!”

I said no more. It was for him to settle. I was not the King’s representative. And I believe that if I had spoken I could not have bitten back some reference to that statement, so lightly made in the yellow room at

Toller, about my religion and relationships being a help to him in his new office.

“I don’t know,” said Theo wretchedly, “I’ve never been on this job before. I can’t get the habit of thinking impersonally. Officially, these brawls are nothing to the Governor. He’s got nothing to do with the judiciary. Constitutionally, you know, we’ve a perfect right to keep quiet.”

“Keep quiet, and see the judiciary make fools of themselves?”

He turned again, two or three times.

“The Catholics are already up like hornets over this schools business; sticking out for them as charities, and doing such a lot of good for education, and so on. Then this infernal case comes along; and these so-called charities are places where they ill-treat young women, and tie them up and hang on to their money. It’s right into McGirk’s hands.”

“What’ll happen if the Schools Bill goes through?”

“Well, upon my word, you know,” said Theo despairingly, ruffling his hair, “it’s going to mean a sort of civil war. The Catholic taxpayers won’t pay up; not only the convents, the whole pack of them; half the population. A taxpayers’ strike, that’s what we’ll get if the Bill goes through, and not N.S.W. only. The priests will call the tune all over the Commonwealth. But that’s nothing to do with what we were discussing——”

“I’m sorry, Theo,” I said. “I think it is. Listen to me.”

It was our chance, I told him. One of us only need step into the arena. He might stand outside; but it was my plain duty to offer to confirm on oath Mother Philomena’s statement.

“If we can prove Barbe’s a liar the whole case totters. If the judgment’s against her, if the nuns win, you’ll see such a prodigious wave of sympathy rise that McGirk will be drowned in it. Australians don’t like a dirty piece of work. They won’t stand corruption in racing, though they put up with it in such unimportant matters as politics. If we can prove the nuns haven’t had a fair deal; that there’s been a whole lot of lying and mud-throwing with Protestant money at the back of it—Theo, don’t you see it? The whole public opinion will swing round.”

“And dish McGirk?”

“Scare him, anyhow. He’s a stubborn man, and an Orangeman; but—who says politician says poltroon. It would mean a big swing round of opinion; a frightening swing.”

Theo considered for a moment, eyed me up and down, strode, stopped. Then, with his gentle smile said, looking at me:

“You know, you’d have made a statesman. Speaking as an officer of the Crown, and all relationship aside, it’s the very deuce of a pity you weren’t born in breeches.”

XVII

I sent a wire to the solicitors, Messrs. Regan. “Am in possession of evidence which may be vital in Sister Barbara case. How shall I give it?” They answered briefly: “If possible come at once.”

Brisbane is some thirty hours by rail from Sydney, and there is no very great choice of trains. I made, Theo backing me, excuses from any engagements for the week, packed, and fled by night. The last thing he said to me, as we met for an instant, he returning from a function, I fleeing, was:

“Good luck. I’ve got a statement ready, signed—use it if you need.”

The running secretary brought an envelope, which I crowded into my bag; and having kissed Theo’s cheek, ran for my car and the train.

That day and night of travelling was undertaken in great discomfort, the last heat wave of summer. Even our speed of over forty miles an hour could not make a breeze for us; hot winds from the north followed and kept pace. We met a dust storm during the early morning while I slept, and I woke to find the sheets, my clothing and face, rust-red from the window which the stifling night had obliged me to leave open. The moral effect was not so very different. This interval between conception and action, if it must be spent in idleness, rusts the spirit. I had seen myself riding hot-foot to the rescue of a multitude; now, in this dirty morning light I was a haggard woman hastening to give evidence, which might not even be believed, that a defenceless cousin was out of her mind. My Excellency, my very cousinship, which had been my trump cards, seemed now only to render the errand more futile, a mere officious blunder, involving Theo, making his position and my own henceforth impossible. My mind’s eye, reddened with the sifting dust, saw letters coming from England suggesting resignation, tactfully deploring the march of events——

I pulled my soul together, and opened Theo’s envelope. It contained a statement, evidently taken down from dictation, describing in detail the scene of Barbe’s confession; her ramblings of visions, constraint and poison. This statement reassured me. Barbe did, seen thus, seem so very mad; and if

she also seemed pitiful, I had to consider the trouble her victory might make for others as innocent and more sane than she.

I spent the day formulating my evidence, getting it clear in my mind, even writing down the more formidable points, and interrogating my memory very closely for her actual words. We drew towards coolness, going south, and I could look out with affection upon the parched clearings, the grey frugal gums of country I knew.

Messrs. Regan were alert, simmering with activity and the foretaste of excitement. The day of my journey was a Sunday, and there had been no session. I was in time. Jeremiah, the elder, with an upper lip the length of a horse's, neighed with triumph as he escorted me to the court in his car, having already given notice to judge and counsel.

"Bolitho made a fight against admitting the evidence, but Birkbeck soon settled that. There's no precedent, y'see, and His Honour liked the notion of creating one; he'll go down in the law books of the colony. Besides, we'd have brought an appeal, and slipped you in there. Bolitho knew that. That's what he'd enjoy. More money for the lawyers, eh? But His Honour's salary doesn't vary; he's no axe to grind. So in you go. By Jimmy," continued Mr. Regan, slapping a leg, "we'll hit them for six!"

We talked cricket for the next few minutes till the District Court was reached.

XVIII

Mr. Cassidy, naturally, had first turn at me. Mellifluously he enquired:

"You give your evidence voluntarily? You were not summoned in any way? May we hear what induced you to offer your testimony in this court?"

"I believed that I was in possession of information which ought to be brought before His Honour."

"Information which you alone possess?"

"I and my husband."

Mr. Regan was bobbing up.

"We desire to put in a signed statement from His Excellency, who is unable, by reason of his duties, to attend."

Discussion, objections; finally, the statement allowed. Mr. Cassidy could proceed.

“And you have made this long journey from Brisbane, through what my morning journal informs me was record heat, in order to make this information public? Because you believed it your duty? Very good. Now, will you cast your mind back six weeks, to the night of the ball given at Government House——”

I told the story. They had heard it before, as far as the astonishing entrance to the ball-room went. They had heard Aunt Josie on this subject, and one or two of the elderly lingerers who had been near enough to observe. Aunt Josie, Mr. Regan had informed me, had made a terrible mess of her evidence. She was too bitter against the girl. And the fact that in her trouble Barbe had fled to me, not to her mother, strengthened the feeling that the mother was to blame. Hard was Aunt Josie, and her temper came flashing out despite warnings to be careful. Barbe had humbled her; nothing was too bad for Barbe, and she said so. She had contributed very largely to pull opinion round against her own cause.

Cassidy was clever; he did not attempt to rehabilitate Aunt Josie, but pressed me adroitly with questions that contrived to blacken her still further, to make her seem a personage in whom not even an Orangeman could believe. I followed his lead, seeing pretty well his intention. (A woman half-mad, unnaturally prone to anger; and the plaintiff is her daughter.) Then we passed on to the scene upstairs, when the runaway had told me her reasons for the escape.

“Barbe was in a most hysterical condition. I put this down to fear, and also perhaps to lack of food. She had eaten nothing all day, she said, but when I offered food she would not take it.”

“Did she give any reason?”

“She said it was not safe.”

“This was in your house?”

“Yes.”

“To which she had flown for safety?”

“Yes. My maid left something by her bed, some custard, I believe, and a plate of biscuits. They were still there in the morning, untouched.”

“You saw this yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Now,” proclaimed Mr. Cassidy smoothly, “we’ll proceed to her interview with His Excellency and you. Perhaps you’ll tell the Court what occurred in your words.”

I told. Mr. Regan had just hinted, in our brief conclave, what to stress, and I made much of the vision, of the message which she, Barbe, was to deliver to the world, and of her wild accusations concerning the death of the other young nun. Then the flight—

“You say that you left her calm?”

“Compared to her condition when she entered the ball-room, yes.”

“She was still not normal?”

“I don’t think so. Her last words to me were the refusal to take food.”

“Because it was unsafe?”

“Yes. She seemed to be obsessed with the idea of poison.”

“Very good. Was there any reason whatever why she should depart from the shelter of your house?”

“None, that I know.”

“You were kind to her?”

“As kind as I knew how to be.”

“Nobody knew that she was in your house? She could have had no apprehensions, for example, of being followed, and forcibly brought back to the convent?”

“Certainly not.”

“Can you suggest any reason whatever why she should have left your house to which she had fled for safety, and where she was, in fact, safe?”

“No reason.”

“What conclusions did you draw from her behaviour while she was in your house?”

“That she was temporarily out of her mind.”

“And from the fact of her departure without warning or reason?”

“The same conclusion.”

“That she was not responsible for her actions?”

“Exactly.”

That might have been the end, but Mr. Cassidy had a word to put in on behalf of Aunt Philomena.

“You have read the evidence offered by the plaintiff that the Reverend Mother of the convent treated her with barbarity and violence. Have you any acquaintance with Mother Mary Philomena?”

“I have known her all my life. She is my father’s sister.”

“Have you experienced kindness from her?”

“Often. She was my class-mistress at school.”

“Ah! You were at school in one of the institutions conducted by this Order?”

“For many years; about seven, I believe.”

“Did you ever observe anything in the nature of violence during her teaching of the class?”

“Never.”

“In her conduct at any time, so far as it came within your notice?”

“Never.”

“How would you describe her, from your personal knowledge of her character?”

“I should say that she was a very practical and very good woman. I don’t know if I am allowed to quote another person’s opinion——?”

“It is your own opinion I am asking.”

“I quote someone else’s words because they are an absolutely satisfactory expression of what I think myself; much better than I could put it.”

“Well?”

“The Cardinal Archbishop, Cardinal Rafferty, said to me, speaking of Mother Mary Philomena: ‘A very valuable woman, and a saint into the bargain. She has the kind word and the right word always.’ ”

“And you agree?”

“Entirely.”

Then Mr. Cassidy, with an eloquent gesture, left me to the mercies of Mr. Bolitho, who pounced at once:

"You are a member of the Roman Catholic Church?"

"Yes."

"A belief in miracles is part of the Roman Catholic creed, is it not? Saints are reputed to have performed miracles, are they not? Is this not one of the tenets of your Church?"

"The Church teaches that miracles have happened, yes. So do all Christian Churches. The New and Old Testaments are full of miracles."

"I am not speaking of the New and Old Testaments. Come to more recent times. Is it the view of your Church that the day of miracles is not over?"

"You should ask a priest these questions. I suppose you are right."

"Take it from me, I am right. I have had a most interesting time, during the past fortnight, among these tortuous matters. Is it your view that a miracle may happen to you or me at any time?"

"Certainly."

"In any place?"

"Since God is everywhere, yes."

"In a convent garden?"

"Possibly."

"Why do you refuse to credit the possibility of such a revelation having actually occurred to a relative of your own?"

"I believe that if God wished to send the world a direct message, He would choose some person more dependable than Sister Mary Barbara."

I was off my guard for that second, and at once he began to score off me.

"More dependable. What do you mean by that?"

"Saner. Not hysterical."

"And are you aware, madam," leaning forward impressively, "that the so-called stigmata of St. Francis have been diagnosed as hysterical phenomena?"

"Really?"

“Certainly. Yet St. Francis is a saint, is he not?”

“Yes.”

“One of the greatest of the Church?”

“A very great saint.”

“Yet these marks on which part of his claim to canonisation is founded have been observed in recent years on inmates of lunatic asylums?”

I saw the chance, as a fencer sees an opening, and whips round his blade. But I delayed to answer, polishing my phrase.

“That shocks you?”

“By no means. I am glad that you see how closely connected are lunatic asylums and claims to direct revelation from God.”

He lost his temper with me after that. I was strung up, matching my wits, and enjoying the sensation. He could tease me, but not shake my testimony as to facts; the mad entry to the ball-room, the refusal to take food in a friendly house, the unreasoning flight. He let me alone after a while. And when Theo’s deposition had been read, and a few unimportant witnesses heard, His Honour summed up, very carefully and slow, for the benefit of his jury of eight. He ended late in the afternoon. The jury retired, and were back in ten minutes with the award of one farthing damages against the Superior of the convent of Santa Scholastica.

XIX

That was the end of it, that contemptuous verdict, and the end of other things more important than the case itself. It was, for instance, the end of the Schools Bill, at any rate for that Government’s period of office. It was the end of Barbara’s freedom; for within six months from this cruel disappointment, having dropped into obscurity, her sick vanity prompted all kinds of fantasies, which at last removed her finally from the world’s eye, and sent her, posturing still, to seclusion at Gladesville. It was not, however, the end of Aunt Philomena, who took up her life again with the enthusiasm of the victor. She had been betrayed and pilloried by one of her own spiritual daughters; she had been obliged to answer vilely intimate questions, and to pay for the proving false of such preposterous accusations as those of constraining, cruelly ill-using, and robbing a girl under her care. Any other woman of sixty odd, who had spent forty years in a convent, must have sunk under it; but Aunt Philomena was tough. She was a worldling turned holy, and such make less account than other saints of the buffetings of the world.

She asked to speak with me before she went back to Santa Scholastica. I went to find her in the convent where I had been schooled, and waited in the familiar parlour—but with two new Popes since my lessons with Mr. Potts—for the familiar rustle down the corridor, and the click of advancing beads. She came after the inevitable convent wait, and tolling of bells. (Each nun has a number, and this the bell in the turret spells out, tugged, by the portress, when a visitor comes.) Eighteen was Aunt Philomena's number, and had been mine at school. I was back at the sound of it into a misty past of black silk gloves, and veils, white for feast-days; of curtseys at the parlour door, and dusty crowns of roses thrust askew on my head by visiting Bishops at prize-givings; of stolen minutes at a west window, staring across the inscrutable mirror of the bay. The flame of beauty flickering out so soon! Love missing the road, or coming masked! Was this indeed the only way to happiness, the way the fingers of the Popes were pointing? My mouth was parched, and what spring might slake it was out of my guessing.

The aunt embraced me as usual, nun-fashion, backed away from me to focus my face, and pecked twice. Then she came to business.

"You know, my dear child, we have to thank you. All the Catholics in this country should say a prayer for you, and I'm sure they will."

"Dear Aunt, but you'd have won anyhow."

"No," said the aunt shaking her head decisively, "Mr. Regan says not, and I say so too. You were a strong help. Your husband's deposition too—now, there's a good man! And no coward. That's what this country wants. That's what we all respect, even though he may bark up the wrong stump in the matters of religion." Suddenly, before I could follow the twist of her flexible mind, she thrust: "You're not happy, child, are you?"

I laughed; but she had caught and surprised the secret behind my eyes.

"Dear Aunt, who's happy? What's happiness?"

"I'm happy," said she, "thank God. And as for what happiness is—well, it's giving, perhaps."

"I give what I can. All I have."

"It's the giving more than you have. Giving that which you don't know's in you till it's out. My dear child, dear Clotilde, you have so much. I don't speak as the world reckons; but you have loyalty and courage and imagination. You'll find no ease till you have put all those to their fullest use."

“In God’s service?”

“Or man’s,” said she; “I’m an old woman tucked away in my convent; what do I know? But you get no tune from a fiddle-string until it’s stretched almost to breaking.”

“Barbe?” I said, timidly. Her face did not change its look of compassion.

“Some of the fiddle-strings are flawed. They snap as the bow touches. Barbe was such a one, poor child.” Then, with a sudden transition to briskness: “Well, now, Reverend Mother here wants to see you, and she’s got a little medal of St. Alphonsus Liguori for your husband. D’you suppose he’d wear it, under his shirt?”

“Why St. Alphonsus?”

“I don’t know, dear, I’m sure. But he looks a very responsible learned man on the medal. Will you come along? And Sister Mary Elizabeth will lay you some tea. What would you like, now, to eat?”

“I’m not one bit hungry. Just a cup——”

But Aunt Philomena overbore me, nodding.

“Ah, of course! I remember. Sister Mary Elizabeth, come along, come in with your tray. Now tell me, do you think you could look in your cupboard and find Her Excellency a tartlet or two?”

XX

The Lord Mayor, though delighted, naturally, at the verdict, confided to me at our next meeting that he thought I had been rash.

“Coming roaring down from Brisbane through that heat! It was enough to draw a stroke of apoplexy on you. And unnecessary too.” Then, as I protested: “Ah, but it was. Listen now to me a minute. Where was the difficulty? The doctors, wasn’t that so? Swearing this and that according to their religious convictions, till judge and jury couldn’t hear themselves think. What you wanted in this case was an impartial man, an arbitrator. And where there’s Catholics and Protestants complimenting each other tooth and nail, who’s your impartial man? Ah, go along, your Excellency, it’s clear as day. Why, a Jew!” I laughed. “You don’t need to laugh, when you think you might have saved a dirty long trip, and kept your name out of the papers—though it’d be in anyway—by this simple expedient. A Jew was what the case, judge and jury and all, was looking for, with their tongues hanging out.”

“Why didn’t you suggest it? Mr. Regan would have been grateful——”

“I had a young man in me eye,” responded the Lord Mayor, with a certain heaviness on the lid of that organ, the weight of an impending wink; “Cohen was his name and I’d have put him in Regan’s way for a song. Introduced him, and mothered him up as if he’d been my own son. At the last minute I could have got him a subpœna. It would have been the advertisement of a lifetime. But there, y’see, that’s a Jew all over, no thought but for money. He wouldn’t come up to me price.”

CHAPTER XVI

> We vainly accuse the fury of Gunnes, and the new inventions of death; it is in the power of every hand to destroy us.
>
> —*Vulgar Errors.*

I

We came back to England in the beginning of 1915. Toller was still let. I stayed in London making surgical boots at a depot in Belgrave Square while Theo buzzed at the War Office with the unreasoning pertinacity of a fly on a window-pane. But his asthma was enough for them; their doctors could hear him whistling rooms away. Earl or no earl, Reserve of Officers or no, they were not going to hand out combatant jobs to a fellow who, as one of his friends put it, ought to be wearing a tube in his throat. They offered a few red tabs and a remount depot. Theo, sulking wheezily, accepted; got an outfit and went to Yorkshire as a brigadier. Five weeks of it, and they sent for me to see him in hospital, where he sat propped up, blue in the face, more horribly breathless than I had ever seen him. He found voice to gasp at me:

"Tell these fools it's nothing but a damned cold——"

But "the fools" had formed their own opinion, and kept to it. A Board told him, not unsympathetically, that he was unfit for service; any service; quite unfit; no fault of his. Theo went white, then red, made no comment of any kind, walked out and back to his quarters, where he threw his tunic with the tabs at his batman, telling him to sell it for what it would fetch. This was the end and beginning of his soldiering.

Toller came back to us in June. We went down there and tried to pick up the old life; but the menservants were at once thrown by Theo into the maw of the local recruiting office, and the women were haring off to munition-works at five pounds a week. I assembled a willing but creaky staff, shut up the vast Georgian wing, and sent an S.O.S. to Ada Rollestone for officers to entertain; she kept some sort of roster of desirables on leave who needed cosseting. I had in decency to say that we should prefer Australians.

They came, all grades of them, in batches of four or five at a time; names I knew, and names I had never thought to know. There was nothing much that we could do to entertain them, even the last of the hunters had gone, and the solitary car progressed billowing along the roads by means of a gas-bag

on the roof. Still, they liked being asked; they wrote home a good deal on our impressive note-paper which Theo would never modify, and which had in the top left-hand corner pictures of a train, telegraph wires, and a telephone receiver, with instructions how to get at us by any of these means. Theo was civil to the youngsters, and tried to interest them in his rock-garden, but the sight of their uniforms made him feel angry and envious, as if he had been side-tracked, done out of the chance of really getting on with the war.

One day, when a batch was leaving, he went up with them to London and—no consulting of me, nothing but sheer blind impulse to help—offered Toller to the War Office, lock, stock, and barrel, for a hospital. When he came home and told me I was angry, and lived for a week in dread; it seemed at first sight the kind of offer they were unlikely to resist. The house was eight miles from a station, lit by lamps, and possessed two vast chilly bathrooms only, with a pleasing variety of sanitation. But the letter when it came civilly declined the gift on behalf of H.M. Government, while appreciating the spirit in which——and so on. Theo, who up till now had made a brave show of pretending to approve the Government—"we must let these fellows get on with the job; got to forget about party"—began to carp and make cynical talk with neighbour cronies.

"Fact is, that little whipper-snapper Ll. G. can't forget his party. You know Fuller; a Liberal, simply rolling. He offers his great barrack of a place, right on some railway line or other—accepted with thanks. Fuller'll find himself a baronet soon. And when the war's over, you'll find him remembering his maker, and the party chest won't suffer. Here am I, don't need to buy a ticket in the raffle, don't want a step up; and, they regret the building is unsuited for the purpose suggested. It's my politics that are unsuited—or my pocket. Not much left in that."

And the cronies would nod. The Government was slack about spies, slack about propaganda, slack about everything except the collecting of money. That was raked in by its minions with the exact wariness of croupiers, and, true enough, there was not much left by the time Inland Revenue officials had dealt with an income derived solely from land.

We shut up a few more rooms and took in three officers at a time instead of five. I remember very well that first batch of three which, so far as I was concerned, was also the last. Two British came, one a waif called Morton, with a bar to his Military Cross and apparently no relation or belonging in the world; Condamine, an Irishman, melancholy-gay, friend of poets; and a lanky, sulky young Australian doctor.

II

I have to give rather more of a portrait of this latter; he cropped up later on, made me half in love with him, and died on a stretcher while I dragged through the mud of a Somme valley beside him. He showed me the war through a man's eyes; and, better than that, let me look with my own eyes on the actual blasted places where men so casually walked and slept and accepted a three-to-one chance of death. I am more grateful to his memory for that than for the shared emotions. These went by in a month or two; even the look of him, the picture a mind makes when it is bidden, grew blurred, dropped away as I suppose flesh does in the grave.

Still, I must attempt the portrait. Hugh Mitchell was an Australian anywhere, at first sight, from any distance; long head, long legs, long lean chin. Hair, the usual dust colour, apt to drop down over the forehead; face, the usual tan, with no hint of red behind it; eyes, the womanish charming outback eyes, belying the masculinity of all the rest. The Australian voice, not disagreeable when it is deep. A talker when the mood was on, abrupt and sulky when it was not. A reader and strayer in byways of English literature. Impatient, yet enquiring, an unbeliever quite untempted by any faith. An observer. A dark horse. This, a mere catalogue, must give the impression of him as it can. I cannot give anything like the true picture. I have, quite honestly, forgotten.

III

The four men, lazing over their wine of a night, used to argue about the war; Theo irritably curious, feeling ashamed of his asthma and his safety; Condamine and Morton grimly patient of the whole fantasy in blood; Hugh combative. This was October, '16, when the Somme flurry and stir was settling down to an old-fashioned trench affair of waiting and marking time.

"I had a letter," said Condamine one evening, "from my cousins in Limerick. They write from a neighbour's house. Their own was made a bonfire of by some masked brigands or other. Ireland's the place to be, there's loot there to be had, and you fight in comfort, moving from place to place. Where we are in the line we're like flies on sticky paper for the mud. It'll be worse with winter."

Little Morton, eyeing his port, knowingly:

"Give the war a miss while we're here. I don't want to think of winter, or lice, or blood, or any of the rest of the damned nonsense. A place like this

makes the whole show look”—he sought for a word; found an unexpected one—“look so silly.”

Theo looked round his dining-room; temporary, the breakfast-room really, but the genuine gorgeous Georgian dining-room was shut away. It was a Queen Anne parlour, with long square-paned windows, a mantelpiece of amber-coloured marble, and one picture, Theo’s grandmother, with her green dress slipping off her shoulders, looking startled out on us from under arched brows.

“It’s gone on for a good many years,” said Theo, who loved his house. “Wonder how many places like this have gone up in France?”

“Hundreds,” said Condamine, laughing. “What’s it matter? They’re going up in Ireland too, all the big old wearisome places that had mortgages clanking after them like tin cans. They don’t suit an age of high explosion. Our sons’ll build underground; concrete and steel.”

“Like the new Boche pill-boxes. Only six inches of ’em show above ground; just room to swing a machine-gun.”

“Pity”—this from Theo—“I suppose war was always pretty filthy. Always a lot of dirt and breakages. Good houses smashed and so on. All the same——”

He left in the air his regret; then went on, turning to me:

“Your grandfather’s place—the family place—isn’t that somewhere round about where they’ve been fighting? Wonder what’s become of that?”

“It’s in Artois. But it’s been out of the family for a hundred years.”

“No reason why your people shouldn’t go back there one day. Your father spoke of it. Start again, with new blood——”

“Plenty of that,” said Condamine grimly. “Plenty of decaying animal matter, which makes good manure, they say. Well; it’s a comfort to know we’re all going west in the sacred cause of French agriculture. It’s the Mérite Agricole they ought to be handing out to us instead of little tin crosses.”

Little Morton, who for all his knowing glances at his port never rightly estimated its strength, came out in a rush with:

“For God’s sake stop talking about out there. Some chaps don’t mind it. I do. I’m not brave. I hate being dirty, and I hate the stink, and I’m frightened more than half my time. I look round at myself up in the line sometimes and

I think, What a fool, what an absolute silly goat you are to be here. I'd run away only I'm afraid of getting shot. And anyway, where to?"

"Why don't we all run away?" Condamine asked, mockingly. "Because we're all cowards, and don't want to stop to think. If you start wondering why the devil the war should exist, you get asking, why pain exists, or disease. Ah, no! It's more comfortable, believe me, to live lousy, with the fear of a bullet in your belly, than to be safe and warm, and asking the universe questions. How long have you been out?"

"Fifteen months about. Six weeks' leave out of that."

"And I've had a month or two longer. Well, we two needn't worry. We're dead men. There's an agreeable thought for you, now, Morton; a comforting thought. These months of muck and fright have laid the souls of us dead as doornails. When the splinter of shell finds us we'll hardly notice, we'll be in such good practice and trim for dying."

"Shut up," said Morton, angrily; then, as if he noticed my presence for the first time, putting on a touch of bravado: "We've got to blow off steam at home, Lady Frome. It's not such hell, really. It's just that it doesn't do to get thinking."

On which silence fell, and we all dropped into thought, that experiment which in France didn't do. There was a curious interlude marked off by some seventy ticks of the clock, in which not a word was said, and the five of us, without awkwardness because intent, sat thinking. I had a quick vision of that house in Artois which I had never seen, but which had bred the remote great-grandfather, and through him, as Theo said, was in the bones of the rest of us. It did seem a permanent thing, something to come back to when we had all done roaming. I have always had, very strongly, this sense of houses, that they have something to do with the breeding and growth of their occupants, and like humans make friends or repel. Toller was aloof, for all its beauty, and Corazon for all its freedom had something still of exile that hung about it and made it not a happy place. I made, in this minute's withdrawal, a clear picture of Auguste-Anne's manor of Mortemart in Artois, and had a feeling that on its threshold I should know, for the first time in my life perhaps, that I had come home.

It was Hugh who brought us all back.

"I don't know," he was saying, slowly, "of course I'm not a combatant officer. It may be different for you. But I'm enjoying this war."

Theo liked that. Secretly I had watched him being a little shocked by the other's admissions of fright and disillusion. Now he sipped approvingly in Hugh's direction and said:

"That's refreshing. Glad to hear it."

"It's great practice for you," Morton grinned, "you're seeing life. Twenty years' experience crammed into one."

"No," Hugh contradicted deliberately, "I get no practice in surgery. I'm just a sorter——"

"Sorter medico, eh?"

"—I deal in lumps of meat. You see nothing, you don't learn a thing you can apply in ordinary civil life. Even the fractures are different, bone blown away and so on. I'm handy with an injection, but that's about all. That's all I do—dope men, and sort 'em, and send 'em back where they can get patched up."

"A C.C.S.?"

"Aid-post; a bit nearer the line. We send wounded to the advanced dressing-station, they send them to the C.C.S., and so on. There's about six relays before they get to the base. An aid-post sees them nice and raw."

"Do you get shelled?"

"When there's anything doing. Things are starting to settle down now for the winter. What's the mud like?"

They began a discussion about mud; carrying stretchers over mud; men drowning in mud; men with their puttees, trousers too, sometimes, pulled off struggling out of mud; effect of mud in wounds; depth and tenacity of mud on the Yser and the Ancre. Condamine and Morton had spent last winter in it; Hugh knew it only by repute. The first two had been bitter about shell-fire, they were savage about mud, eloquent about it. But I pulled the talk away out of this commination back to Hugh.

"But all the same, you're enjoying the war?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

He looked at me with a glance which said that I was forty and a woman, and that to such his sentiments were not explainable.

Condamine put it into words for him.

“Mitchell likes being part of the machine.”

“Not the machine,” Hugh contradicted at once, “the body. A battalion’s alive.”

“Have it the way you like. You enjoy the pulling together; being with hundreds of other men all on the same job.” To me: “Men don’t mind herds, you know.”

“Women do.”

“I know that. They’ll fight our planes for us in the next war; each one on its own and please yourself so long as you come home at night. But Mitchell, now, he’s from the wide-open spaces. He’s a he-man. He likes the crowding and the scrapping, and the sense of being tested. All right for the men who are good metal. But Morton and I, we’re like these new half-crowns they’re passing now. Six weeks’ wear, and the yellow shows through.”

Theo swept this aside, and scolded Condamine for throwing his tongue without cause. The talk drifted away and was somehow concerned with the proper season and method of clipping yews when Hugh, who had been brooding, burst out:

“You’re all on to the war. Every one of those people that came to tea yesterday, they talked as if the war’d come smack into the Garden of Eden. They talked as if before 1914 everyone had been healthy and happy and we all loved each other. No disease. No sweating. No swindling. All a land of brothers. Why, civilization was stinking already when the war blew it to pieces; just like a shell landing at last on a corpse you’ve been watching and getting the wind of for weeks. It’s better, I reckon, to go out and do murder, and put your whole soul and body into the job, than sit on a stool counting farthings. You get to hate all of the human race that way. I’d sooner fight the Boche than germs and my own digestion and the rate collector and the boss. ‘Peace hath her victories, no less renowned than war’—I don’t think.”

The others laughed, but would not pick up the challenge. The talk went off again to gardening and the problem of continuing to preserve pheasants. I left them and passed through to my little sitting-room two doors away, feeling curiously irritable and stirred. My hand on Theo’s shoulder as I went out was as near as I ever came to him; it was as near as he wanted; as near as I wanted. It would have troubled me, any ardour from Theo, whom I liked, nevertheless, and who was the best friend I had now Gran was gone. But there are times, brief with some women, with me, when affection and

companionship do not satisfy. And somehow this masculine unguarded talk, when the thoughts of all four men were as far away from sex as possible, unreasonably woke some kind of primitive thirst in me. It centred on no one person, though it left out Theo; it passed with a lift of the arms and a sigh. Instead of sitting down to my bootmaking I slipped out of the long window, closely shaded for fear of aircraft even here, a hundred miles from London, and began to walk the terrace in the cold. It occurred to me, tapping along on high heels and shivering in the October air, that this was the way of St. Francis with temptation; wasn't there some story of him rolling in the snow one night when the flesh plagued him?

I gave a wisp of a laugh, told myself that I was getting on for forty-one, and looked it, and couldn't expect anything more in the way of strong emotion from life. I had never wanted it; had always fled from it. I would not even put my mind to the war, but made conversation and oddly-shaped boots, and repeated rumours as a child might tell of an accident it had seen. In effect I was only reflecting the behaviour of half England and all classes. I do not mean that there were not bitter particular tragedies of loss, but only that the whole blistering insanity of the thing went by us. We walked in nightmare, accepting nightmare as the reality, and adjusting our lives to it; displaying, not courage, but incuriousness.

IV

The three men only stayed a fortnight. Two of them I never saw again. While the oldest butler in the world was stacking their suit-cases on to the brake, a pre-war relic, they stood about rather awkwardly, in the doldrums of conversation that any departure makes. Morton and Hugh were going back to France; the man who loathed the war, and the man who was finding it fun. As we strolled along the terrace abreast, waiting the moment to say good-bye, it was Hugh who suddenly turned and stared at the house, mellow in the autumn sun. Theo began at once to explain about the architecture, apologising for the jumble, giving dates. Hugh, in his aloof way, did not even pretend to listen. By and by he said to me across Theo:

"It's beautiful, all right. We've got nothing like it."

"We" meant Australia. I agreed with him.

"No, nothing. It takes centuries."

"This front," said Theo, indicating, "was built about 1810. My great-grandfather won a pot of money that year at White's——"

“Perhaps it’s just as well,” Hugh went on, slowly, “a good thing for us we haven’t got places like this.”

“How’s that?” Theo asked, bristling slightly.

“When you’ve got perfection,” Hugh answered, “you don’t go on trying. That’s the way England looks to me. Settled; just right. Finished.”

Condamine, the Irishman, nodded. Theo said in a huff:

“We’ve sent two million men to France. Finished—no, Mitchell. Not yet.”

“Men like me,” said Morton, in a tone that was jocose; but we all of us had his words of a few nights before in our ears, and there was the briefest pause.

“I don’t say it isn’t beautiful,” Hugh went on. “This place is something new on me. I never knew people could live so finely; in such comfort and yet not showy—I mean, not such an awful lot of money spent——”

He floundered. Theo laughed, his little moment of dignity over.

“You’re right there,” said he; “come after the war’s over, when we’ve got a few more pounds in our pockets——”

“That’s not what I meant,” said Hugh doggedly.

The luggage was stowed, wrist-watches showed the time to be nearing the margin allowed for transit to the station. We all turned and strolled in silence towards the waiting brake. It was the moment when good-byes and good lucks should have started, but we all were shy of these, and I think we all wanted to know what Hugh had at the back of his mind. He took time, as always; and as we reached the top of the steps came out with it.

“This is as civilized as it’s possible for people to be. You can’t get much beyond this. But things move on; they keep moving. And when a country can give beauty, and ease and safety, what’s left for it?”

“High explosive,” Condamine answered him, “and start again at the beginning.”

“That’s about it,” said Hugh. “Well, Australia hasn’t got that far yet, thank God. We’re safe. Plenty of discomfort left out there, and raw bad taste. No, we’re safe yet awhile.”

Then, in a rush, we got the good-byes over, and the brake rolled off, the two pessimists waving and smiling, the optimist glum. We saw Morton’s

name in the casualty list something over a fortnight later.

V

It was Janice Quorn—naturally, it would be an American—who had the notion of adding yet another uniformed entity to the array of women's corps, detachments, legions, and leagues.

"I was lunching with Brookes the other day," she wrote suddenly, "and between us we got an idea like a kick from a mule. Woman, do you realize that those men out there have to rely solely on Frenchmen to do their interpreting for them? Liaison officers, they're called; not too proper, what do you say? Brookes says a Women's Interpreters' Corps would go like a prairie fire. We'd be confined to bases, of course, but we needn't stick around with soldiery all the time. Plenty of people would be glad of us, hospital matrons and so forth. How do they manage when they want a little shopping done, for instance? I've just laughed at a joke in *Punch*—first time for years. Did you see it? The young officer buying eggs and onions and fowls—'*pour la mess*.' '*Mon Dieu, quelle religion!*' says the scandalized fermière. This is the sort of thing the Corps would do for them. Brookes is quite serious about putting it to the W.O. and I'm getting busy with the personnel, and bringing my brain to the uniform, which must be snappy. You were the first person I thought of. Mix in, my dear, and we'll see life."

I laughed and tore this letter up. I didn't even trouble to answer it. But a month later a buff-coloured envelope came which informed me that a Women's Interpreters' Corps had been approved by the War Office, and was in process of formation; that Viscountess Quorn had given my name, among others, as being competent to assist with the work of organization and would I kindly attend a meeting in room so-and-so, Whitehall, on November the such and such. I showed the thing to Theo after dinner, to amuse him. He shrugged, and laughed, and called it tomfoolery; then grew rather silent, and stood before the fire frowning. I went to my writing-table.

"Janice will be angry," I said as I sat down, "but she had no business to hand in my name without 'with or by your leave'——"

"You're refusing then, are you?" said Theo, nipping at his moustache. I looked round, astonished.

"Of course I'm refusing."

"You're not giving the matter much consideration."

"Why should I? It's just a stunt; one of Janice's stunts."

Theo came over to me, stood near me dubiously.

"I don't know. It's a *fait accompli*. The War Office must think it's serving some purpose."

"I quite agree with the War Office, only I don't like the sort of purpose I think it's going to serve. One's heard stories, Theo. Barbed wire round the nurses and V.A.D.'s at night, and no permits allowed. That's because nurses are necessary. No barbed wire for certain other women's units, and permits two a penny. Also a maternity home on the coast. No, thank you, my dear. I don't want to join Mrs. Warren's profession just yet."

"Stories!" said Theo angrily, wheezing, "I dare say there are. They're not getting the right type, that's the whole trouble."

I got up from my writing-table, honestly annoyed.

"Theo! You don't want me to join this ridiculous corps?"

He would not meet my eyes. He took a turn or two away from me, and then went back to the fireplace to stand under the portrait of his great-grandmother. She seemed to give him confidence, though heaven knows she would have disapproved the whole question, and more especially his side of it, with all her heart.

"Well, you see," said Theo, rather painfully, his slight stammer coming back with nervousness, "you haven't done a great deal for the war so far. I don't blame you"—hurriedly, as I began to speak—"I know you're no good at nursing. But we've held some sort of a position; and after all, I can't make much of a show—so they say. I'd have done all right in a warm climate; Mesopotamia, somewhere like that."

"Dear, you know what the doctors said. You know yourself how——"

"All right, please, please! I'm a crock, not worth my ration-card."

"Theo! I didn't say that. Nobody's said or thought that."

"I've thought it often enough."

It was the only time he ever referred to his own disability, and his own cruel disappointment and chagrin. I was shocked. I had nothing to say, except a futile:

"Old man, I'm sorry——"

But he cut across that, impatiently.

“I can’t do anything. I think it’s up to you. I’m not criticising. But after all, what’s a few pairs of boots and having a few of these fellows to stay? You’ve got a pretty good brain. You’re tough. You’ve got common-sense. Only you’re hanged lazy.”

I said quietly, after the first astounded silence:

“Perhaps I am. I wish you’d said some of this before, Theo.”

“Don’t you see”—the stammer—“you ought to have been saying it to yourself. I said when we were married I wouldn’t interfere with you. It was up to you. There have been opportunities enough.”

“If you want me to take a job, hadn’t I better try for something less—odd?”

Now came the little bit of Theo that one had to laugh at; the little consequential side of him that was always so surprising when one considered that he really was seventh earl, with no need to show off.

“Well—but in a thing like this they’d be pretty sure to give you the command. After Australia, and all that.”

“Command? But I know nothing about it, what we’re expected to do, nothing! And if it’s the kind of thing I imagine——”

“Look here, Clo,” said Theo, “if you go into it, that’ll be your job, to stop it running to seed. Go up to the War Office, tell ’em you’ve been wife of the King’s representative, tell ’em you can organize. Get it away from Lady Quorn if necessary and run it straight. One of us ought to be doing something over there.” He gave a lop-sided smile. “I’ll stay behind, and do my bit on the bench; fining butchers for selling offal without a coupon.”

He began to choke and wheeze; said, “Hell take these chrysanthemums; what d’you want with a room full of them?” and went towards the door. It is always hard to let the end of a situation alone. I went after him and caught his arm.

“Theo, listen a moment. I didn’t know you wanted me to do anything. I never thought—it isn’t that I was bored with the idea of working; I didn’t think anything I could do would matter. I’m such a fool really. After all, we’ve given money.”

“Quite,” said Theo, gasping. “Not your fault; any more than this is mine.” He touched his hollow chest. “But money’s too easy. It’s not as if we had a boy out there.”

And this was the only time he put that second great disappointment into words. The tone wasn't a reproach; simply it accepted bad luck rather gallantly. I felt little, and ashamed of myself for having taken Theo so much for granted during these past years. He had kept quiet, too quiet; but a woman, and his friend, ought to have guessed.

I went back to my table after he had gone upstairs, and answered the War Office letter, saying that I was glad to give what help I could, and would attend the meeting in Whitehall on the appointed day. Then, without warning, sealing up the envelope, I began to cry. It was a thing I had not done for years, and what brought it about at that moment God knows, except that I was sorry for Theo; sorry, too, for myself. The thirsty moment, brief but tormenting, was on me again. I kept, for fear a servant should come in, the half-control that holds back actual sobbing; down, in silence, slipped the tears, on to my dress, and my hands holding the War Office letter. A silly performance. After a while something came into my head that made me dry my eyes, and laugh, though not prettily, aloud. It was the memory of Theo's words about taking charge of Janice's venture and keeping it straight; that, and the old Latin question about who shall watch the watch-dogs.

CHAPTER XVII

—and its life so short in summer, that for Provision it needs not have recourse unto the providence of the Pismire in winter.

—*Vulgar Errors.*

I

The strange thing was, Theo was right. They did give me the command, or at any rate authorized me to do the organizing over Janice's head. A forty-year-old Countess made a better figurehead by far than a thirty-year-old Viscountess who looked younger than her age, and whose voice was the voice of Jacob Kahn her father, the cereal king. Janice herself made no opposition. The scheme looked well enough over a luncheon table, or full-blown into uniform in France; in between came a dreary stretch of offices and tea. Janice, whose sense of gesture had got her on, handed this period over with a pretty deference which annoyed me, as if I were some aged reverend lady in diamonds and lace. I was Director, she Sub-Director; the newspaper photographs and paragraphs, however, were entirely concerned with her.

I looked into the thing, using my rusty wits to discover what possible use such a service would be. The Censor's office was fully staffed and independent. We might release some of the translators and decoders at the War Office and Admiralty; they had woman clerks already at the latter, whom I inspected with a view to incorporating them. They casually handled such things as coastguard reports, suspected whereabouts of submarines and so on, and between whiles made elaborate underclothing; I would not have trusted them to keep even the secrets of their own persons. Besides, all the stuff was English; no interpreters needed.

Things were much the same in the other departments. Foreign Office, Transport, War Office—they all had their staffs for their particular purpose, and were in good, though extravagant running order. It would have served no purpose to clap all the women dealing in languages into uniform. Discipline would not have improved their work; women are impatient of it. Stability, which such bondage would have given, was procured more simply by lavish scales of pay. I saw no use for any corps of interpreters in London, and said so to Sir Horace Brookes. He looked at me with one eyebrow up and answered:

“Oh, come now! You don’t take a wide enough view.”

I persisted; presented the report over which I had taken some pains. He glanced at it, put it tidily into a wire basket, whence I suppose it went into the incinerator, and said not very heartily:

“Great. Great work. The organizing brain, that’s what we want. Point out the difficulties, and then get over them. It’s the only way.”

I could not honestly see how the difficulty of having nothing and nobody to interpret could be got over, and said so. Sir Horace gave one of his jolly laughs, and made answer:

“You’re right of course, Lady Frome, perfectly right, no question about it. That is, as far as England goes. Your report only covers England. Now, nobody had any idea that much use could be made of such a service in England. Of course all these staffs you’ve interviewed ought to have some co-ordination; they ought to be under one direction. We’d save the Treasury money, getting hold of them and paying them at the rates of the fighting services, or the nursing service. Scandalous, the money they’re getting, some of these people. But however; as you say, they’re running pretty smoothly as they are. No, it’s in France we look to your corps to be of great assistance. A couple of officers attached to each base hospital, for instance, would have plenty of work on their hands.”

“Have the hospitals applied for anything of the sort?”

“Well—but you don’t get the demand, you know, until there’s a prospect of supply.”

“Oughtn’t someone to try and find out if we could be any use?”

“Most certainly. First-rate idea. Would you undertake the job? We could work you out some sort of itinerary. Take a fortnight and explore. Lady Quorn, meanwhile, can be getting on with the personnel. She’s giving over her own house, you know. People’s generosity is quite astonishing.”

Janice’s father, a German by birth, disapproved his daughter’s vicarious participation in the war—Quorn had been killed, and his younger brother wounded—and had recently cut off supplies; such was the gossip, which began to look like truth. H.M. Government would pay for the use of the house in Hertford Street which she couldn’t keep up any longer. However, I said nothing. Sir Horace Brookes knew Janice and her circumstances possibly better than I did. One thing I did fix on in his speech.

“Is it much use collecting personnel until we’re sure we can employ them?”

“Certainly. By all means. Get the thing taped, have it ready; then on the word go, there you are, don’t you see?”

I supposed so and took leave of him, aware of the impression I was leaving behind me; a woman without tact or even humour, taking the whole tuppeny-ha’penny plan far too seriously. Of course, said the cheerful short-sighted eye of Sir Horace, women weren’t any use in a war; not in any of the more enjoyable and conspicuous jobs anyway. But one had to let them think they were being a help, and jolly them along. In the tilt of Sir Horace’s expressive eyebrows as we parted was, I think, a certain rueful sympathy for Lady Quorn, who had caught in her silk net this coroneted Tartar, and himself, who would have to jolly the savage along. Australian-born, unappreciative, like so many of her countrymen, of the higher strategy——

For all that, his final bow was a masterpiece. “The ladies, God bless ’em! With particular heed to the countesses,” said the protecting droop of Sir Horace’s shoulders, and the gay parterre of ribbons below.

II

Theo, bless him! came to London to see me off, and we went shopping together, an occupation he loved. Janice and one or two others were still evolving the uniform, which turned out to be a khaki affair with claret-coloured tabs, just staff-like enough to be snappy; I did not bother with it. Theo took me to his tailor in Conduit Street, and amid protests—“but we cannot cut the skirt, sir. What we can do to oblige her Ladyship we will. But skirts do not come our way——” got a hybrid but well-cut garment out of them, and an overcoat warmly lined. He equipped me, too, with boots of his own devising, rather like field boots cut down. I protested, hating the feel of leather about my ankles. But Theo, who had really taken to heart what our guests had let fall about the mud, insisted, thank goodness. The ordinary laced country brogues I had thought to wear would have pulled off in the first half-dozen steps away from duckboards.

When he had equipped me, and paraded me in costume, looking tailored but without the conscientious maleness of the usual woman in khaki, he smiled suddenly and slipped his arm through mine, walking me towards the door.

“Take ’em all off,” said Theo, “and put on that red dress with the lace. I’m going to show you a bit of life this evening. Look nice. Be ready in an

hour, and we'll go and dine."

We dined, not in our usual half-silence. Theo talked with a queer burst of high spirits, as though I had been a stranger, a woman he wanted to interest. It puzzled me, but I played up. He came out with little incidents of himself—school, the Sandhurst years, his short excursion into Indian life. I asked questions, laughed, teased him as though he too had been a stranger. At the other tables men and women were having just the same conversations; I could overhear scraps of talk. But there for the most part, it was the women who made running with the men. Not a word was said about the war; but the war was behind all the light talk, the laughter, even the delicate food and the scent of the air. The women were talking to keep the war out, so that the men, young most of them, soldiers who would have to go back to it, should be able to forget for a while. And as Theo prattled, stooping his rounded shoulders towards me, coughing a little but smiling, breathlessly talking of times that had been happy, I saw with a pang that at our table things were the other way round. It was the woman who was going away, the man who was concerned to amuse her and make her forget. An odd, a pathetic turn for the situation to have taken; and a trifle grotesque, considering what my mission was to be: a tour of the bases, to discover justification for a stunt which should pay the rent of Janice's house and keep her in the news. No shred of danger about it, no chance of being really useful; just a stunt.

But that was not how Theo saw it. He put into this silly expedition the whole zest with which he himself would have gone out to the war. He was as game, Theo, as a bantam cockerel. With a few more millimetres of air in his lungs he would have dived into the discomfort and fright at first call, and come out for a breather, and gone back till he dropped with lead in him or the war ended. But the unlucky chance of his disorder held him at home, and his childlessness denied him even that share, of taking part by proxy. There was only this shadow of adventure, my going out; and so he talked and flattered me, as, if things had been different, he would have wanted me to do for him. The contrast between the reality at other tables and our poor little piece of play-acting gave me the first shock of pathos, the first moment of real tragic feeling that I had known in the two years odd the fighting had lasted. I got up from the table abruptly, saying:

"Let's dance."

Once round the room, and Theo began to show distress. I stopped immediately; we went back to our table and our coffee, and took up our chatter. I was as kind as I knew how. I put nothing into words, so as not to

embarrass him, but I have never felt as sorry, as pitiful of any human creature as of Theo then.

When we got home and were undressed he came wandering in to my room. I was in bed, reading some French book or other, Phillippe Millet's memories of liaison work, which I had bought with some vague idea of finding what was expected of interpreters. My suit-case lay packed at the bed's foot, my official-looking tunic was ready, with the formidable boots standing near. We had to be careful with coal and this was November; the room was unbearably cold. Theo wandered, looked at the tunic, fingering the stuff.

"You'll get cold, my dear," I said, for something to say.

His back was to me, and he was fishing in his dressing-gown pocket. A little case was in his hand when he turned.

"I forgot to show you this," said he. "I just thought you ought to have something. You'll get used to it on your wrist in no time."

And there was a small gold wrist-watch on a efficient strap, a little gold grid protecting its luminous face—from shell-splinters I suppose, and the other rough chances of war. For me, who would tool round the bases in a staff car! On the back was my name.

"You ought to have put yours too," I said awkwardly, touched, and not knowing what to say.

"I'm out of this hunt," Theo answered briefly. Then without transition: "Mind if I stay in here with you to-night? I don't want to be a nuisance——"

"Of course you'll stay," I answered, hating myself. Why hadn't I made the little gesture to invite him? I was sorry for him and fond of him, and the everyday way of showing it just didn't occur to me, because in my heart I did not want him to touch me and turned sick at the very thought that he should. Ungenerous!

"Nuisance!" I said, scoffing. "Come in at once, before you get pneumonia. It's all warm, there's a divine bottle. Quickly, and less of that nonsense about nuisances——"

I overdid it, I suppose. I was so desperately anxious that he should be comforted, and that he should not feel the recoil of my body and mind. It rang shallow, even to my own ears, and yet I was trying with all my soul to deceive him. He hesitated, not looking at me, then took my hand, kissed the wrist, and dropped it.

“All right, my dear. I think I won’t after all. You’d get no proper sleep with me whistling all night. Besides, I need such a hell of a lot of pillows. Good night, Clo.”

He went out. It was something after three by his gridded gold watch before I could sleep. Was it thus hard to subdue your body to a lie, a decent, fond lie? At forty-one years of age? It used not to be so.

III

Next morning early I went off from Victoria; not by the leave-train, but a civilian affair filled with a hotchpotch crew of commercial travellers and dress-shop buyers. Theo found me a good corner seat, and then standing by the door, with that aloof and semi-royal look he had, kept intruders away until almost the last moment, when a colossal old woman made bulkier by furs swept past him and in. The bustle of her arrival—she had quantities of coloured luggage and a pale maid—secretly relieved us both, and passed the last minutes quickly. Before she had settled down the train made its first lurch, and Theo had only time to peck at my cheek, and slip out on to the platform. I hate leave-taking; but this time I hung out the window in the corridor until the line curved, and Theo was lost. He stood with his hat off, and shoulders hunched against the cold, making from time to time a little gesture like a salute.

The train gathered speed, and I returned to my corner, littered with the papers he had bought me, my heart full of nothing else but Theo, tenderness for him, friendliness, everything but love. I picked up the first paper that came to hand, glanced casually over it at the lady opposite, and caught her eye. A Boissy eye it was, large and lively; the resemblance was there to Aunt Marie-Céleste, and when she spoke it was in the curiously unexpected Boissy voice which inflects the English phrases French-fashion, tilting up their tails. Said the lady without preliminary:

“I’ve been reading the label on your suit-case. Do you know who you are?”

“Your niece,” I answered tranquilly.

“Bother you!” replied the lady, now definitely placed as Aunt Marie-Madeleine, that aunt who had married an aide-de-camp, a defenceless personage, in the year of my father’s return to Sydney. “Bother you!” said the aunt with spirit, “you might have let me get it in first.”

And she laughed, the flat Boissy cackle.

“You’ve got on,” she resumed, “since you made that scandal in Sydney. Josephine writes now and then. First they were all quite happy abusing you. I used to get letters all round, every mail. Then you brought off this marriage. Believe it or no, the letters fell off just as if they’d all taken to their beds. I hope you gave plenty good formal parties at Government House, and made them bob to you. Redastable gang!” ended the aunt, using the family word meaning “to be deplored.”

“I did,” I replied.

“Good!” said the aunt, nodding. “I hate snobs. We’ve never been back there since Bertie pleaded the Gaming Act, and I’m just as well pleased.”

I remember now about Bertie, who had failed to meet certain sacred obligations to bookmakers. The only wonder was that he had not met them out of his mother’s funds, to which he had access as trustee. However, he had chosen the dishonourable course, resigned from several excellent clubs, and departed into exile in Spain for years; at the end of which time, by some irony, he drew the second horse in the Calcutta Sweep, and found himself nicely provided for. Hence Aunt Marie-Madeleine’s furs, and her size, and her contempt for snobs.

“And where are you off to?” she enquired, her eye travelling my service semi-uniform from hat to boots. “Not nursing, by the look of you.”

I showed her the French visa on my passport—“dame militarisée,” it read. The aunt broke into wicked laughter again.

“Something new for a Governor-Generaless,” said she, almost tearfully. “I suppose it means starting official brothels; one knew they’d have to come to it some time. The French women do their best, I don’t doubt, but it can’t be like home. Well, my dear, take my advice, install a cash register in each house. It’s always done in America, Bertie tells me, and he ought to know.”

She must have been seventy, well past the allotted span, and coming up the straight to her latter end; yet there she was, quaking with laughter at her own equivocal talk, not a Hail Mary about her. I wished I had known her before.

“Aunt Madeleine,” I said on an impulse, and clean away from the subject; moved to the question by her likeness to the portrait of Gustave-Félicité that Laura had left me—“Aunt Madeleine, do you remember Grandfather?”

“That I do,” said she, coming out of her quaking, “he always liked me. I was one of the better-looking ones. (I’m a sketch now, I know.) Papa used to

line us up, and he'd go past our faces with a candle, 'You are like me,' he'd say to the handsome ones; and 'You are like Laura,' to the frights. There weren't many, on the whole; only Josie and Céleste; and even for them a good hairdresser could have done wonders."

"He died in France, didn't he?"

"Yes. He's in Père-Lachaise to this day; we bought the grave in perpetuity. So macabre, this uprooting the bones after five years. Yes, there he is. You should take him a few flowers when you go through Paris."

"I will, if I do."

"You know, he wasn't a happy man, Papa. He wasn't born in France, but he had the place in his bones. We all have. Look at me. I'm always back and forward, doing these cures. They do me no good, the doctors all lie to me. But I've got to give Bertie some reason for coming. No, I believe the happiest moment of Papa's life was when he felt his blood going back into French soil. You've never seen the old house, I suppose?"

"No. Is it still standing?"

"It took no harm in '70. I've been there. Went there the first year Bertie and I came home. It's nothing much, you know. Some sub-prefect or other's got it now—or had then. They were civil people; showed us over. Just a farmhouse really, with a couple of big ruined wings. But the funny thing is, Papa never was there."

Kentish fields were flying by us, safe though wintry, with the snug brown farms tucked away in their hollows. Aunt Marie-Madeleine looked out of the window, frosted by the heat of the carriage, with almost a contemptuous lift to her nose.

"Well," said she at last, "I'd rather have that in my bones than this. There's not been a foreign soldier over these fields since the Conquest. Nothing happens to these people. They've gone pulpy. You can have too much of safety."

Hugh Mitchell's diagnosis, in other words. I said:

"I suppose people have to think of their children."

"That needn't concern either you or me," the old lady rapped back; then, seeing perhaps by a flicker of the eyes that I was hurt, she went on quickly: "All this talk among women of my age, and yours too, of giving their sons; nonsense; twaddle. The only people giving sons in this war are these poor

young men, killed before they've time to have any. That's giving, if you like. Now tell me all about your nice little husband. That was him, I suppose?"

I told her about Theo. She listened, pursing her lips and nodding.

"That's what it is to have quarrelsome blood. I expect you've got a lot of red-coated portraits at Toller. Now Bertie's people are just law lords; bills of costs are more in their line. Bertie didn't last long with the Greenjackets. It's hard on your Theo, having to die in his bed, willy-nilly. The Boissys are a quarrelsome lot, too. Look at Papa. And I must say I like a row myself. But you can't indulge too often with blood-pressure at 250. Now, if you don't mind, I'll put my feet up."

She did, and drowsed. I contemplated her blurred but lively profile and reflected on so much as I knew of her life. How she could have made Australia sit up, with her tongue like a stock-whip and her excellent connections! But a community that lives for, and largely by, sport would never accept even an honourable who had betrayed, quite legally, his bookmaker's trust. She woke up at Folkestone.

"Let's hope we don't get sunk," said she, bustling her pallid maid, "I can float myself, but I don't look my best doing it. Pace, take the dressing-case. Thank God, at any rate, we're not travelling with a lot of animals, monkeys and so on. Bertie took out two gibbons and a ferret when he first thought of Cordova, and he was sick the whole voyage and so were they. He wrote to me from Algeciras—'my animals are still alive, I can't think why!' "

On the boat she refused the shelter of a cabin and sat on deck in the lee of a boat, purpling with the bitter wind, but unconcerned.

"This ought to bring the blood-pressure down," she observed when it sleeted.

At Boulogne, amid the sheep-like huddling on the boat deck she said good-bye to me.

"Nice to have had this glimpse of you. You're not perhaps quite the sky-rocket I'd hoped, after hearing all these scandals from Australia. You've calmed down since then; the nice little husband, no doubt. It's a pity not to keep your spirit, if you have any. Don't just settle down to fatten and be right. Ride for a fall sometimes."

"Like France?" I suggested.

"Yes, like France," Aunt Marie-Madeleine agreed, "the poor fools. An annoying country, but we don't all have to be lovable. Thank the Lord!"

Aunt Marie-Madeleine tapped my cheek, nodded, and shuffled up the gangway on frivolous heels. I felt sane for the first time for weeks and climbed smiling into the staff car sent to find me.

IV

It serves no particular purpose to name the towns and activities of my tour before I came to Amiens. They were all pretty much alike. I was shown round and about by polite but faintly preoccupied young officers, talked with hostile matrons, had an excellent lunch here and there, got my information, and moved on. Staff cars were very pervasive; there were always lifts to be had. From Abbeville to Amiens I was driven by an agreeable man in a uniform crowned and starred, who turned out to be a New Zealander and an inspector of dental units. He had thought up this job himself, he said, as being—since one had to earn one's living—a kind of toiler's paradise; and the War Office had frozen on to the suggestion, and to his astonishment had appointed him. He drew Lieutenant-Colonel's pay, was allotted a car, "and not a soul has slobbered over my fingers for months." He was far too well-mannered to suggest that I was on much the same kind of lay, but there was a twinkle when he looked at me sideways whose import it was difficult to disregard.

The roads, as dusk fell, seemed to become busier, but none of it was the ordinary traffic of the countryside. Cars and lorries, all khaki or grey, with now and then a team of mules picking their way featly; the whole trade and commerce of Route Nationale 35 was with war. All drove with headlights turned down, or the glass across the lights painted green, like cats' eyes. We got into Amiens somewhere about six o'clock; the date—I remember it—December 13th.

It was still a town, still had streets, and the cathedral was entire, though with sandbags covering its main glories. But it too, like the roads, had ceased to serve civilian purposes. Not a light showed; they had a curfew, my colonel-dentist told me; and the figures that wandered the streets were soldiers mostly, accompanied by women who, I supposed with Aunt Marie-Madeleine, were doing their best. I had been told to go to a little hotel in a street with a wonderful name—rue des Corps Nus Sans Tête; my dentist dropped me there, asked if I would dine with him, took my refusal lightly, and departed, having drawn for my guidance a little map of the town on the back of an envelope. Departments and dominations of various kinds had their quarters indicated briefly, after the manner of the railway time-table, with crossed knives and forks.

“We don’t live badly here,” said my dentist, with his twinkle, “did you know this town used to specialise in *foies de canard*? Ducks’ livers? It did; and there’s plenty left. Good-bye. Hope you’ll have a glorious war. I must be off and see if any of my folks have downed drills since I left.”

He sped off down the dark street of the Naked Trunks; the corner as he turned it shut the noise of his engine clean away from me, and I heard for the first time, coming down the wind, a brief muttering of guns along the Somme.

V

Arrangements had been made for me; I was expected, and given a stuffy room deliriously striped in red and white bands, six inches wide, which an oil stove and never-opened windows protected against the increasing outer cold. A kind of portress lugged my suit-case up, indicated the bathroom—but no hot water to-night. Twice a week only. Fuel was rationed, and dear, and much better used for cooking. I could have a carafe—strange term! And certainly the jug of warm water that appeared was not much bigger than the glass bottle which at table chaperones the wine. I washed and went down.

The dining-room—but what is the use? I could describe every inch of it, the pattern of the china, and stains on the ceiling and walls. It was an old house, and across the room loomed a great rugged beam hewn out of a tree trunk, with the marks of sixteenth-century adzes on it, such as we have learned to observe and admire. A wall-paper even more lamentable than the one upstairs, a crying linoleum, everything in the worst of French bad taste. I saw it only once, and remember it instead of other things, vital, that I had no wish to forget.

The room was half-full of men, British officers mostly, a table or two of Frenchmen in blue, with their usual ill-fitting leggings and unmilitary boots. They all stared at me as I came in, but two years of vice-regality had hardened me to that. I faced all of them and saw none of them, the only method of disregarding a crowd. The British eyed, and summed me up; good clothes, no lip-stick, a lady, let her alone. The French, traditionally more responsive to a feminine presence, lifted their heads for an instant from food, stared, and returned to it. A foreigner of forty, and the lean leathery type at that! Not while a duckling Nantais gushed out under their forks its admirable odour of red wine, dark flesh.

I stood for a while, looking about for a place to sit. The aged waiter and the girl, his assistant, both were serving. I spied a table, empty, as I thought,

by the window, away from what warmth the stove afforded. Someone was there already, a man in khaki, reading, while he ate, a book propped against the cruet. He looked up as I pulled back my chair, scowling slightly; then his face changed. Did mine, I wonder, change as transparently?

"You here," said Hugh Mitchell, "Lord!"

And he got up, for all the pleasure in his voice and eyes, in his usual deliberate way, and shook my hand across the cruet and the propped book.

"What's brought you out? Come to have a look at the heroes?"

I said:

"You've got another pip since I saw you."

He shrugged his shoulder, with its major's crown on the strap.

"Regal, isn't it? How's Toller?"

"Mouldering away. What were you reading?"

He picked up the book, as people always do, and looked at the title on the back, as though he were not sure himself.

"*Barchester Towers.* Know it? I used to think it was rubbish when I read it first in Australia. Since I've been to England I know it's all dead true; a storm in a Crown Derby tea-cup. What'll you eat?"

"Whatever you're having; an entrecôte, is it?"

"Some kind of a steak. It's not half bad. Did you ever eat a chop grilled out in the open, over a wood fire?"

"Haven't I! Up at Wollondoola we used to go out——"

"Wollondoola! Of course, I was forgetting. You're a dinkum Aussie too."

"I am, but I never liked the place."

"Nor did I. I like England. But what's the use? The poor old island's falling to bits. There seems to be some idea that she can stop the rot by sending all her best young men out here to be blown to pieces. I don't see it, myself. Look, what about something to drink?"

He picked up the list, studied it, and laid his finger on one name.

"This stuff, it's a claret, damned good. You order it, I can't pronounce it; but it's a great little wine."

It was a Clocher-de-Pomérol of the year 1906; odd how I remember that, I who know nothing of wines or their years! We drank it amicably and slowly, and talked with an immediate friendship which showed that at Toller we had taken note of each other, observant but wary like children. He was in one of his good moods, easy to rouse to argument yet not too savage with the world. I told him of my preposterous job. He nodded gravely, and said it was just the sort of wave that ruffled the brains of the Higher Command from time to time. He thought I should make a good thing of it.

"But I'm reporting against the whole scheme! We can't be the least use to anyone out here."

He regarded me with a kind of amused pity.

"All right! They'll give it to someone else, that's all. Once a thing's taped out in the army it's got to go through; and the mugs drop off by the way."

"I'm a mug, am I? There's such a thing as common honesty. What on earth use can we be? Answer me that."

"Comfort for the troops."

"With a cash register in each hostel, I suppose." He laughed. "Well, but what am I to do?"

"Take what you can get. It's people like you and the brass hats in general that us blokes are so glad and joyous to be fighting for." With relish: "I threw a stick-bomb near one of 'em yesterday."

"One of what?"

"Staff. They come up in the line sometimes, and stand about with maps in a nice quiet spot, exposing themselves gallantly. About half an hour later, after they've gone, the Boche hopefully sprinkles the spot with high explosive, annoying the troops. Hence the bomb."

I was not going to have this; it had the wrong quality of anger.

"You said at Toller you were enjoying the war."

"So I am."

"But you're always grousing; you're always bitter about the staff. I've been seeing a lot of them in this last ten days, more than you, perhaps, with all your service. They're an intelligent lot, take them all round. You talk as if they didn't care what happened in the line——"

"Nor they do."

"Oh, that's absurd! I'm sorry, but really you're talking like a schoolboy."

He was silent, his face quite expressionless. For all the hazards and horrors they had seen his eyes were very young. When they looked at me my whole forty-one years came and leaned on my shoulders. At last he spoke.

"Well, you see, you haven't had a proper look at the war. Most of them haven't either. You can't blame them. It's the same in peace-time. There are always people who never see the dirty or the working side of life. Like royalties visiting a hospital. It's just the same with the staff. Everything's clean and tidy when they stroll round the trenches on a quiet day. There's contours marked on their nice clean maps; nothing about the depth of mud, which is the sort of thing that interests us. But then we're not what you'd call intelligent."

"How do you expect people like me to get a look at the war? How are we to know about the mud?"

"I don't expect it. I know I'm annoying. Talk about something else."

Coffee came, and we drank it in silence. Now that this topic had been started there seemed nothing else to talk about. I said at last:

"But someone has to try and see the thing as a whole. Mud and so on—it's beastly, but it's a detail, isn't it? I mean, what's the use of stubbing your toes on stumps trying to see the shape of a wood?"

"It's the details they give a lot of their minds to, unfortunately. On Gallipoli, with forty drowned flies in every cup of tea you drank, and clouds of the brutes sticking to your face and the blood while you worked, they sent a circular round. The nuisance might be greatly diminished by the use of fly-papers, they said, and they recommended hanging them in quantities on convenient bushes. I've kept the circular. And trench feet. 'This condition may be avoided by carefully drying the extremities, and exposing them to the rays of the sun.' That's a recent one; I'm keeping that, too. You won't appreciate the nice irony of it."

I had nothing to say. Then a thought flashed into my head and was out in words almost before I knew.

"I suppose it wouldn't be possible for me to have a look at the line?"

He did not laugh, or immediately scotch the suggestion. He looked gravely interested, thought a moment, and asked a question.

“How long are you here for?”

“I can take my own time.”

“It might be managed. We go up to-morrow.”

We left it at that. He got up, and took his tin hat and a coat from the chair beside him.

“I’ve got to get back to Morlancourt, to the battalion. Come out and have a look at the cathedral. She’s pretty good under a moon.”

It had been snowing a little, small crisp flakes, all the afternoon. Now that was finished, and in a clear sky the three-quarter moon was riding. We stepped over the cobbles, he guiding me by a roundabout way so as to come on Notre Dame from the west. Streets crowd up to it, and narrow and low-built as they are, contrive to hide the great bulk till the last moment. Hugh said that you could see it from half-way to Albert, a dip in the land hiding the town, and leaving only the long spine of the cathedral and her towers showing, like a huge stranded ark.

We came into a little *place*, and there without warning was the Church of Our Lady, her carvings bordered with snow. We looked in silence for a while. Hugh said as we moved away, with a jerk of his head towards it:

“That sort of thing any use to you?”

I told him I was a Catholic. It was a religion that wore well, at any rate, I said; like its churches.

“I don’t know,” Hugh answered, “war doesn’t do churches much good, whether it’s dogma or Last Judgments in stone.”

We walked away slowly. I stumbled a little over the cobbles, and he put a hand under my arm to help me, and kept it there, even when we got on to level pavement. I was exactly as nervous and uncertain as though I had been eighteen, wondering what would happen if I were to press the hand to my side; afraid lest if I did he might feel my heart hammering. We halted for a moment in an old doorway. Ages ago, in another existence, I had seen and been faintly contemptuous of close groups in doorways. The hand shifted, lifted, pressed me hard to him sideways. He kissed me over one shoulder, a muddled kind of kiss, both our faces too cold to feel it, then suddenly let me go. I said nothing, standing stock-still, too much troubled for any words. I heard him, after a second or two, say:

“Bloody cheek, I know.”

But he did not say he was sorry; I answered as though he had.

"It's all right. I didn't mind."

We began to walk on slowly, the clean snow crunching under our feet.

"You didn't mean anything. I'm not offended. Let's get back."

"I did mean something."

I laughed—of all the unnatural sounds! High and silly, the kind of laugh one hears in doorways.

"My dear Hugh! I'm—" But I could not say it; not the actual number of years—"I'm goodness knows how much older than you."

"I'll die before you, though, most likely."

"That's not fair."

He went back doggedly to his first sentence, walking along beside me, not touching.

"I did mean something."

"It's because you haven't seen a woman for months."

"There are plenty of women here, if that was what I wanted."

"What do you want?"

The streets crossed at a *carrefour*, and I hesitated, looking which was our way. He said, neglecting my question:

"It's up to the right, if you want to go back to the pub."

I turned to the right, he still walking beside me. I let the whole talk drop, and said as lightly as I could:

"How are you going to get to Morlancourt?"

"Lorry-jump. I kissed you then because there's something about you—I don't know; something that gets me. All right, I know what you're going to say. I don't care how old you are."

"I do, though." I got it out then in despair, a kind of last defence. "Fifteen years, Hugh."

"Yes; but we're not proposing to marry."

That silenced me. He went on:

“Age is all bunk. There isn’t any age out here. We don’t look forward much. When you say ‘fifteen years, Hugh,’ you mean you’ll be sixty when I’m forty-five, if we go on long enough. But we’re not going on. It’s not like starting a career and children and all the rest of it. It’s only for to-night.”

I said:

“Women can’t look at things that way. At least, I can’t.”

“You didn’t mind my touching you, though.”

“Well?”

“Well, isn’t that good enough?”

We were coming up the turning that led, I knew, to the street of the hotel. A soldier and a girl passed us; her mouth, thick with paint, looked black in the moonlight, like a wound.

“That sort of thing?” I said, very low.

“With a bit more to it. Why not?”

We walked on, and were almost at the hotel door.

“No,” I said suddenly, “no, no, Hugh! Please——”

He stopped, hands in his trench-coat pockets, his hat slung on one arm; nodded, and swung round.

“All right. Good night.”

He was half a dozen steps away before I realised it. Tears came to my eyes and I held out both hands. The same words served:

“Hugh, no! Please.”

He turned as abruptly, but did not take my hands. There were uniformed figures about. At the steps leading to the portress’s lodge he hung back.

“What is it?”

“Get your key. I’ll wait.”

I was so lost that I would have marched in to the lodge with him at my side; have walked up the stairs with him, and turned down the same passage-way, under the eyes of half a dozen men who all, by this time, must have known my name. His common-sense served. I went in, looking as calm as I could, despite the snow on my hair; spoke to the portress, made arrangements for breakfast, said a civil English good night to the gathering of men; then went out across the dark courtyard. A tall shadow leaned

against the opposite door. As I passed Hugh took my hand with the key in it, felt the number cut on the brass tag, and leaned back again in a niche of the snowy wall.

I went slowly upstairs to my room with the peppermint stripes, and looked long at my own face in the gilt mirror over the mantelpiece. Something had happened; the glass reflected a happy treachery of the mouth and eyes. A scrap of forgotten nursery rhyme came into my head, and with a little shiver that was half a laugh I turned away from the mirror and pulled undone the knot of my tie. But I was almost purely happy as I moved about the cold and ugly room.

"Sure, said the old woman, this is none of I!"

VI

I spent the next couple of days in official company, town majors and the like. I can only hope that none of them noticed anything odd or distracted about the woman to whom they made talk and offered meals. I was due to go on to Rouen on the evening of the second day, and the usual kindly staff car was in waiting to take me miles away from the dear chance of seeing Hugh. We had talked of the line; I cared exactly nothing for the line. If I went up to it, as I hoped and would contrive with my whole influence to do, it was not to see for myself the conditions in which a few men out of the hypnotised millions were living. Women without men at the front—I wonder if they were all as numb to the war as I was for the first two years of it, and as cruelly alive to it after?

I invented an ailment and dismissed the staff car; sat in my gaudy bedroom, or walked about it restlessly, meeting now and then the eyes of the figure in the glass. I cannot remember ever thinking of Theo at all; certainly not with any kind of remorse. This business of Hugh took nothing from him. I was as fond of him as ever; he was still my best friend. This other was something apart, life-giving, but devouring; fire, and Theo was good brown earth. I was not touching earth just then. I was obsessed and driven by my own body, mad for once, and glad of it.

The staff car drove off, condoling, about half-past four. At six there was a knock at my door. An Australian soldier, they said, had brought a note.

"Tell him to wait," I said as I ripped it open; "tell him on no account to go——"

I read it with a heart beating so that it must surely have shown in my temples; but the portress was not looking. Her hand was in her deep pocket,

and while my eyes were busy my ears caught that old familiar click and tinkle of rosary beads. Hugh's letter was short.

> "You could get up here to-night if you cared to chance it. I'm on my own in an aid-post just back of the line. The C.O. is a base wallah, spends his time in a tunnel writing letters to Horseferry Road. No one else will ask questions.
>
> "If you can get a lift to Albert, I can meet you there to-night at the officers' rest-house, outside the door. Dress, as near our get-up as you can; tin hat, trench-coat and long boots essential. A haversack, with a toothbrush if you like, nothing more.
>
> "I don't believe you'll ever find a quieter time, and it's a chance in a million that I'm on my own and can look after you. Do as you like, but it would be great to see you. And you'd really see for once how the poor live."

"Is the soldier there?" I asked the portress. She looked up from one of the Sorrowful Mysteries to say that he was waiting. I went down, and encountered a long-jawed Australian face in the lodge. Was he going straight back? Not that night. Was he Major Mitchell's servant? No, nothing to do with Major Mitchell. I offered a ten-franc note, which he refused, shook hands instead and sent him off; my mind made up, as it had been from the first moment of reading, but working slowly. How to get the tin hat and the rest of the things? I knew my friendly staff officers too well to ask them. Scandalised at the first breath of my intention, they would have packed me off out of temptation's way. But I was going to take the chance, if they shot me for it.

That was a bad five minutes. It was like being shut out from greeting a loved person returning by train through lack of the penny for a platform ticket. Then my mind, recovering from the confusion of excitement, suggested, out of the blue but with great sagacity, my colonel-dentist. I knew how to find his quarters. I was there in the least possible space of time, praying as I walked, actually praying that he should not have gone. This explains my first words as I saw him rising, plump and genial, from an office desk.

"Thank God!"

"Very flattering," said the dentist, but with a shrewd eye cocked at me. "Sit down and tell me."

I told pretty well all. Not the personal relation of course; but the circumstances, with a good deal of stress on the sporting nature of the adventure. I even gave him Hugh's note, which was non-committal enough. My dentist read, and:

"By gum!" said he, "why not? You could bring it off——"

He eyed me, dispassionately weighing whether there were anything in figure or manner that would betray the disguise. But my hair was short, I was long-legged and thin; the shapelessness of a trench-coat was all I needed. The weather offered sufficient excuse for mufflers and gloves to cover a woman's undisguisable chin and hands.

I have wondered since just how much that man realised the true state of affairs. I am no actress at the best of times, and no hand at concealing emotions. That spare and casual letter of Hugh's left plenty of room between the lines for an intelligent person to read. But the convention among Australians of not prying into each other's love affairs is stronger than the corresponding reticence among Englishmen. For one thing, any breach of it is liable to blow up into a more dangerous row than citizens of an older civilisation consider it good form to make. Don't get in the way of a man's hunting; help if he asks you, but never interfere. That was the code, and my dentist held to it nobly. I believe that he was perfectly aware of the true situation all along.

At any rate, I went back to my hotel escorted by a soldier carrying a kit bag; waited my chance till the dining-room had drawn off all possible watchers; clumped down the stairs uncomfortably in a pair of field-boots stuffed with socks four deep, and was into the dental car with my haversack by five minutes after seven.

VII

We found the rest-house, and Hugh pacing outside it in the moonlight. Albert was battered. It was more like devastation than anything I had yet seen. Whole streets were mere rubble, and the car, that had been travelling not too badly, tilted and swung over the bumps and pits in the road. I saw it like a stage scene, with interest, but no thrill. It was, for the moment, the place where Hugh had appointed to meet me, and when we found him I forgot it. I think—I hope—I thanked my discreet colonel before I got out of the car; certainly I never spoke to him after that. When he saw that I was in the expected hands he whirled his car with a great din of gear-changing and was off like a hare down the Amiens road.

Hugh said only:

"There you are. Like a drink, or anything? Come on, then. It's a fair step, about five miles. Are you good for that?"

We set off without so much as a clasped hand. That disappointed me unreasonably, and I said nothing as we walked side by side up the broken metal road. The silence that began in pique continued for sheer lack of breath as the road became worse, a mere track, with high sides, banks of debris; broken limbers, dead mules, smashed wood and iron and bones thrown there to be out of the way of troops passing. Silent men in little groups went with and by us up the road. Here and there was a bunch of horses waiting, stamping because of the cold, and now and then we drew in to let a limber go jingling by.

It seems strange that I should remember this road so acutely, and the way from Amiens to Albert not at all; but in the latter case, besides the swifter progress, which makes for blurred recollection, my whole attention was thrown forward to a hope. With sheer wanting and expectation I was blind. Hugh's presence gave me back my eyes, and walking beside him I used them curiously as well as I could for the darkness.

There were men in little shelters in the field through which ran the road, burrows dug out of heaped earth with a couple of men in each. Gunyah is the Australian word for a temporary hut or shelter, and these were gunyahs, roofed with sections of corrugated iron. Tiny fires burned in them, and smoked into chimneys of stove-piping. Here and there was a candle and a wakeful man; most of them were motionless bundles, sleeping fast in spite of the merciless cold.

We came to a place where tracks seemed to cross, and where on the left half a wall stood up comically in the moonlight. Hugh turned to me, saying some name. (He was walking in front.) But what that village was called I never learned. From just beside us sounded a terrifying clap of noise, and another, and two more. A yellow flash lit the heaped rubbish in front of me; in the road, bits of paper and the recent powdering of snow blew forward a foot or two on the sudden blast. The noise sickened me, and there was a sharp pain in the ear-drum nearest it. I stopped, and saw Hugh walking on steadily ahead. I thought it had been a shell-burst, and that there would be others, and called to him, my voice sounding very thin through that still vibrating air. He halted; came back.

"What's wrong? Feet hurting?"

“What was that?”

“That?” I put my hand to my ear; he laughed. “Sorry. Only our howitzers. I’m so used to the racket now I don’t hear ’em. Some people can’t get used to it. They take to drink. Here, try a spot.”

I was glad of the brandy. We had walked about three miles already without pause, over difficult ground. But it was only a three-minute breather, and we were off again along a road that grew steadily more humped and narrow and vile, while the shattered rubbish on either side of it seemed heaped more thickly. About us in every direction lay the faint swellings of the Somme downlands, innocent hills, shallow valleys, the whole surface of them broken and churned to an ugly pitted crust which the powdery snow hardly veiled. Forward in the distance were points of light, and here and there against the snow were outlined shapes of shelters, a man, or guns. The track began to creep towards a rise.

It was from the top of this, the ridge at Longueval, that I saw for the first time the rising and falling of the lights. They went swooping up, and broke, and dropped slowly, the shadows falling and flattening with them as they fell. Nobody has painted that picture yet, of the green lights soaring to the sky, and stooping again to the black and silver earth. I stood still a moment to watch, and Hugh nodded; but:

“I’ve got too used to everything,” was all he said.

The road, mere sketch as it was, roughed out in mud and litter, ended here, at a dug-out by which two ambulances were waiting. Outside this, in the kind of runnel that served as gutter, a couple of shapes on stretchers waited too, feet sticking straight up, heads folded inside the blankets that covered them. As we passed the lighted cave mouth of the dug-out another figure on a stretcher was carried out and lifted into the nearest ambulance; this one moaned in a rhythmic kind of way, and the weak little sound was a relief.

Hugh did not turn his head, said nothing, and started to walk along a line of duckboards that here presented itself. These lay like a succession of ladders, and rocked as we trod them down upon the frosty ground. A hundred yards along he threw me a word or two:

“Main dressing-station. Headquarters of our ambulance.”

“Were those men dead?”

“On the stretchers? Yes. The cold does for a lot of them.”

“Is that all the warmth they have? That blanket?”

“It’s the lucky ones get that much.”

“But——”

His lifted hand checked me, and I held my tongue. A couple of men were coming towards us, and went past with the strange incuriousness of this world, remote as the moon, where nobody protested, where nothing was too cruel or too irrational to be accepted, dead feet sticking up out of blankets they were lucky to get, and dead roads leading to No Man’s Country. I held my tongue and watched my feet. The surface apart from the duckboards was smooth ice, the very thing to crack an ankle on; and its dangerous smoothness lifted now and then to rounded swellings like gigantic frozen bubbles. One of these on which the light lay showed a belt or band of some sort round the circumference. Hugh told me afterwards that these were the bloated bellies of dead mules frozen into the mud. At the time I took them for granted as unquestioningly as the other inhabitants of this moon-world.

We came to a place where the duckboards were splintered. The broken wood showed white. Beside them here and there were holes some three feet deep from which an acrid smell was reeking. Hugh picked his way through this interruption with a lift of the shoulder and one word “Mice!” thrown over it. We seemed to be climbing slightly all the time, and there was a ragged wood on the top of the hill that faced us.

Noises of one sort and another had been going on continuously, angry postmen’s knocks which I supposed were machine-guns, and intermittent cracks that I knew to be rifles. Odd thumps and crashes in between these nearer sounds were not very disturbing. I had ceased to listen, and to note the country. My feet were uneasy in the heavy boots, and the whole adventure was going pale before the threat of a blister on my heel.

Something happened some two hundred yards in front that for a moment won my attention back to the war. Splashes of light suddenly appeared there, with ascending black ostrich feathers above them; a noise accompanied these with a peculiar quality, as of something in it being shattered; not so very loud. Then a second burst sounded quite close to us, and a whine passed over our heads. I remembered the incident of the howitzer, far more alarming, and was walking on, when I heard Hugh swearing. He had halted, and now without a word to me caught at my arm and pulled me over the icy sludge to a cavity a few yards away, a long slash in the ground, the remains

of a trench. I stumbled; he jerked me up roughly and hurriedly, still not speaking.

"What's the matter? What is it? Those weren't dangerous, were they?" I said vaguely.

"Get down," said Hugh.

I protested.

"Get down," Hugh repeated, "if I know that battery, the beggars will land their next packet just about on top of us."

I slid into the trench, not without a certain sense of physical relief. The duckboards made devilish walking. I sat, and chafed my ankles as well as I could through the field-boots. Nothing happened.

"How near are we?" I asked. "I'm sorry, but these boots——"

"Not far now," said Hugh, but absently, listening. "It's the support line we're making for."

"It's been fun so far," I went on. "I suppose even the nurses never get up so close as this? Are you aware that I'm supposed to be in Rouen at this hour? Probably I'm keeping half a dozen brass hats out of their hard-earned beds——"

"Shut up a minute," Hugh interrupted. "I want to listen."

They were, after all, nearly the first words I had spoken since we left Albert. I kept quiet, but in my mind was an unreasonable person, accustomed to be heeded and deferred to, who found his conduct a trifle brusque. This person had nothing to do with his lover of forty-eight hours ago, but they joined forces to feel a pang of resentment. A woman, insisted the person, even with a war round her, was still a woman, having certain claims.

We sat in perfect silence for a good two minutes. Then his hand shoved me flat, and an inconceivably swift crescendo howl made straight at us, and broke at the height of its yell to a splitting bang. My eyes were shut for that; but immediately afterwards, looking up at the sky, I saw its luminous blue wiped out, as though a black wing had shot across it. The wing spread, stopped, wavered at height, and collapsed. A shower of earth and stones rattled down upon us.

Three more yells and thuds, and sprays of earth followed, but none so near; then a brief pause.

“Medium close,” said Hugh, in a voice that sounded small and homely after the din. He was grinning, and I took it that the patch of shelling was over. But as I straightened my knees to stand up I heard his voice:

“Keep down, for God’s——”

The last word was lost in another of the infernal swift yells. I did not hear the crash of the explosive. A light blinded me, there was a searing blast of intolerable heat. Light, heat, no noise; but afterwards a screaming in the ears which deafened me even to my own voice. I was lying against Hugh, and I remember making with my mouth the motions of: “Are we hurt?”

Hugh mouthed back at me something which the screaming would not let me hear; it looked like “you’re all right.” We lay there together for a minute or two, unconscious of each other; hearts hammering, breath coming short, but no thought of love. A shell-burst can do these tricks as well as an emotion, and we lay as wearily after it.

Sounds began after a while to pierce through the wailing in my ears; the crack and rattle from the line, and at last Hugh’s voice. No compliment for my self-control, but only a half-humorous reproach:

“Why the devil did you try to get up?”

“Thought it was over.”

“Didn’t you notice there were five in the first bunch?”

“Of course I didn’t.”

“Well, you’ve got to up here, if you don’t want bits of you adorning about half an acre of la belle France.”

“Sorry,” I muttered.

But it was his business to look after me, I thought as we walked. How was I to know that shells came in numbered packets? Why fight by rule of thumb? This was another astounding sidelight on the lunatic business of war. My thoughts went this way and that, and as I walked along I found myself crying and my hands thrilling and jumping. That last burst must have been close.

Our duckboards descended to another sunk road running under a hill, from whose further side came rattles and cracks of firing, and the glow of the restless lights. Hugh gestured towards these, and I understood “the line”; then he spoke the two words, “Pilgrim’s Way.”

“This?” I asked, peering along the road, “Why?”

He did not answer, and I kept silence too. The place was inhabited. I saw lights coming from square wooden openings on our right; on the left were the same kind of hutches that I had seen before, but here dug into the side of the road; they were roofed with galvanized iron, or waterproof sheeting frozen stiff as tin.

Hugh stopped by one of these hutches, marked outside by a board with a cross on it—red, I suppose, by daylight. It had the casual, rather comfortable look of a watchman's encampment in a London street, with a charcoal brazier glowing in the middle. The two men squatting by this looked up as he spoke. One, I saw without surprise or sickness, was sitting on one of those blanketed stiff-footed forms I had seen before. True, there was not much other room. The conversation was casual.

"How've things been?"

"Nothing much. Nothing for you."

"Who's that you've got there?"

"Harris. A splinter caught him fair."

"Well, I'm going on down."

Hugh turned away and made for the square opening opposite this Red Cross hutch. I felt my feet grip on neat and solid wooden steps that went down straight some fifteen feet into the earth. They ended in a passage, running both ways. We turned right, into a small room, propped and to some extent roofed with wood. Hugh had to stoop. I could just stand. It must have been, I suppose, about five feet eight high. There was a bunk on either side and in the middle a Primus stove, with a soldier cooking something over it in a pan.

"Home, sweet home," said Hugh, and at last picked up my hand in both of his. But now, by some ridiculous scruple, I was concerned not to scandalise the batman—the square, tow-headed, incurious batman, who had not given one glance at either of us since the first moment of our entry.

"It's all right," said Hugh, guessing the cause of my ladylike withdrawal. "I've put Andrews wise."

The batman uttered no word, but continued to cook. I took off my tin hat, that fitted indifferently and was heavy, and with the inevitable feminine gesture, smoothed my hair. A damp clotted lock by the ear puzzled me; when I took away my fingers they were red.

“Look,” I said, showing them, “where’s this come from?” I shook my head and could feel no pain, only a headache from the detestable noise; then in sudden panic, “Hugh, you’re not hurt, and didn’t tell me?”

“What’s that?” said he, turning. He had been spreading a blanket over the wire netting of one of the bunks; now he came, and took my head gently in his hands, turning it to the light, and lifting the hair above the ear. Then he laughed, and let me go.

“Well, you’ve qualified for a little gold stripe, all right. Andrews, get on with it; we want some tea.”

“Wounded?”

“Just nicked your ear. You’ll look like a poor cat that’s been out on the tiles.”

“But I don’t feel anything; only this headache. I suppose you haven’t got an aspirin?”

He had, and gave me two. But I was worried by the feel of my hair, and the sticky mess on my coat. I said:

“Aren’t you going to tie it up?”

“What for? It’s clotting nicely. Drink up your tea and you can go to sleep.”

I drank the tea, which tasted of some chemical, and was sweet with condensed milk. The batman cleared away his kettles and pans, and after a brief “Anything more you want?” departed along the passage, having asked not one question, offered not one comment on the unique situation.

I hardly noticed his exit, or wondered at his discretion. I was overwhelmingly tired all of a sudden.

“How much do I take off?” I asked Hugh, trustfully, sitting on my bunk.

“Boots,” said he, “and your trench-coat under your head if you feel like it. Here, let me.”

He undid the laces, and the borrowed boots came off with an idiotic ease that made me laugh weakly. He folded the coat, and put the blanket about me, stowing me safe. His face rested against mine just for a minute.

I was asleep, I believe, before the candle was blown out.

VIII

I woke late by Theo's watch. The dug-out was dark as a cellar, save for a dim patch of daylight by the door, but I could see that the other bunk was empty. I got into my boots and overcoat, plunged my too-feminine hands in my pockets and went upstairs. Fresh snow lay crisp; the sun was climbing up out of white clouds towards a clear sky. It was, despite the welter and mess all round, great air to be breathing. The racketing noises across the hill were less intense than by night, and from somewhere came the musical hum of a plane. I looked up. There it was in the west, very high, bright silver; and in the opposite quarter of the sky where perhaps it once had been was a pattern of neat round balls of smoke. A day for cross-country, a careless singing sort of day; but the men still crouched in their gutters and burrows, and just opposite I saw Hugh busy with a man from whose fingers blood was dripping.

The borrowed tunic I wore had a packet of cigarettes still in the breast-pocket. I lit one of these and leaned against the bank of the road until Hugh should be ready, gay and at peace, and below these superficialities badly wanting my breakfast. The walk up the night before had been something too far away from the safety and sanity of my own world to be fun. This, with the sun, and the untroubled snow, was waking after nightmare; even the man with the dripping fingers could not bring back the horror. There were accidents with guns, after all, at Toller.

Four men came down the road from the line carrying a stretcher shoulder-high, and dumped it down by the board with the Red Cross. Hugh came out, and had a quick look at the man, who lay without moving. He was dirty; his beard showed dark against the greenish skin of his cheeks. I saw no blood; he might simply have fainted; he could not disturb the peace of my day. His bearers shambled off again towards the line; four others took the stretcher and hoisted it, and moved off down the track. I forgot at once the pallid unshorn face, and stamped my feet into the sunlit snow with the good-tempered impatience of a horse kept waiting. Hugh saw me and came across.

"Sleep well? There's nothing more now to come down. How about breakfast, could you do with it?"

"Let's have it in the sun."

But his hand at my elbow guided me inexorably towards the dug-out stairs.

"Why not?"

“Healthier. Besides, you don’t look too convincing by daylight.”

We went down. The mute batman was installed already, coaxing his Primus by the light of a couple of candles, and stirring on its flame a greyish lumpy welter of stew. He nodded as we entered, and paid no further attention to us. I thought of the side-table at Toller, its rich kidneys, its bacon delicately curled, the tea fresh-made for each person. I never ate breakfast at Toller, but I delved into this one, and handed my tin plate back for more of the stew. The tea repeated its disinfectant taste of the night before; the bread was almost, as they say of horses, past mark of mouth; excellent marmalade went with it, and I ate with abandon. A meal with a loved person gives an intimacy of sharing which is at the other and more comfortable end of the scale from passion.

Breakfast over, we talked for a while by the candle-light, and I explored the place. It was clean, and earthy-smelling. There were no rats, Hugh said; these came to dug-outs long lived in, and considerably died in, such as those up Ypres way. It had been built, as I might have known from the neatness of the handiwork, by Germans, who had vacated it in haste the previous month.

“Why do only Germans have places like these? Can’t our people dig? Surely there must be lots of ex-miners in the A.I.F.?”

There were, it appeared; but also there was the offensive spirit of the troops to be considered. They fought better for having frozen feet and being wet through; some, true, were blown to bits under their inadequate shelters, but this only encouraged the others. Such was the Olympian view.

I could say nothing, having the two systems, hutches and snug underground houses, under my eyes for comparison, and besides, I was not going to waste my few hours in Hugh’s company defending the staff. For the first time a pang of unhappiness shot across my day. How many hours? I asked him diffidently how long I might stay.

“No reason why you should go back to-night. There’s nothing doing, and won’t be yet awhile.”

“Am I a nuisance? Do you want me to stay?”

Forty-one coquetting with twenty-six; forty-one with hands none too clean, hair none too tidy, and wearing boots that made her feet resemble pickaxes. I got my answer, though.

“I like having you about. Stay, please.”

“What about my brass hats in Rouen?”

“Let them roast.”

“Right.”

“Come on out for a walk. Out for an hour, Andrews, along Pilgrim’s Way if they want me.”

The batman indicated that he understood by an affirmative jerk of his tow-coloured head, and we went up together.

“What does he think of all this?” I asked as we mounted the stairs.

“Whatever he thinks he’ll keep to himself.”

And he told me a brief story of the beach at Anzac, an unhealthy beach, along which for half a mile Andrews had carried Hugh on his shoulders to a hospital barge.

“Walking wounded, you see. So I got away. I was a stretcher-case really, off my head with typhoid. But stretcher-cases had to wait a week or so; lots got impatient, and died. So that’s how I happen to be here.”

We were out by now in the hollow trench-like road, and I got my orders.

“Don’t talk. Keep behind me. If anyone speaks to me, keep your mouth shut. Along the way we came up; there’s not much variety here in the way of walks.”

I was obedient, but my presence called forth no question. It seems odd that in a place where if there was no variety in the walks there was less in the way of incident, an unusual-looking stranger should not rouse so much curiosity as a turn of the head and eyes might show. But nobody troubled; nobody looked up at me. The atmosphere was that of action halted; the groups walked or sat listlessly in the sun as spectators do in the tea interval of a cricket-match. They took me, and the sunshine, and the crackling over the hill, and their own boredom for granted.

I could look about me. The hill-tops—but that gives an impression altogether too steep; the slopes about us were some of them crested with splintered trees. In that country the woods never lie in the valleys, which are marshy for the most part; they defy the plough, lying on the tops of the hills, like wigs. But this was land that had been fought over, and re-fought. From where we stood I could see a good few acres, and not a blade of grass. The earth was tormented and up-turned, every inch of it. Hugh told me that when there was no snow you could see the chalk subsoil blown from any level you please to the surface, lying in white patches on the brown. And so there was

not much to be traced of the woods, except that their stumps gave a prickly look, here and there, to the sky-line.

Once Hugh halted, pointing, and saying:

“There’s the kind of thing we dodged last night.”

And I had my first close view of shell holes by daylight. Their edges were blackened; all round the edges the snow was peppered with black grains. On the edge of one was a patch of scarlet, so vivid, so shiny, that I could not at first understand it to be blood. It was not troubling, nothing of the sickening mess of the street accident about it; just the kind of dreadful decoration that one would expect in this world, which had to make up somehow for the lost colours of grass and bracken.

The sun was strong on our shoulders as we walked, and here and there on the slopes the snow yielded to it. There was no bite in the wind.

“It’s thawing,” I said idly, crunching a piece of snow in my hand.

“You’ll see the wrath of God if it does,” said Hugh. “This place goes back to the primeval slime in a thaw. God, and I’ll have to get you back, too. How are we going to manage that?”

“You’ve got a complex about mud,” I said, still idly, not really listening or caring. I was with Hugh, and there was sun on my hands.

“I’ve seen it kill a few people, that’s why.”

He stopped.

“D’you see that rise over there? A sort of chalk cliff? That’s where the regimental aid-post is; Chalk Farm, they call it; it was a château really. From there to my aid-post is a half-mile carry. D’you know how long it takes four strong men to get a stretcher along there when the ground’s soft? About half an hour; and probably during that they slip and let down half a dozen times. It’s soft falling; still, that sort of thing doesn’t do as much good as you’d think to a gentleman with half his chest blown away.”

“All right,” I said placably, “perhaps there won’t be a thaw. Let’s put up an extra candle in the dug-out when we get back, to St. Nicholas to keep it cold. Do you realise it’s almost Christmas? What a long time ago last Christmas seems! Where were you?”

“The Peninsula. God, it was cold, too.”

“I was just sailing from Sydney. God, it was hot!”

He laughed.

"Did you always have plum-pudding and cotton-wool snow out there on Christmas day?"

"Didn't we! The brandy used almost to light of itself."

"A hundred and seven in the shade was our best effort. The turkey went bad that year between shooting and cooking, so we were spared one course."

"We all did it. Why, I wonder? None of us like England—Australians, I mean. Why do we go on imitating English food and clothes and houses?"

"Or fighting her silly wars. Search me."

"Shall you go back after the war?"

"I don't mind. It's a good life up-country."

"Up-country doctoring?"

He hesitated for a moment, staring at an icicle by the road that had started to drip.

"Of course it isn't what I'd choose if I had the money."

"What do you honestly want to be doing?"

He got red and shy. A woman has to know a man very well, better than I knew Hugh, before she can question him about his ambitions. But I had in my mind the possibility of helping him. Why not, if it were very tactfully done? The recollection of the Australian private who refused my offered note, of Australian porters and cabmen and policemen who will not take tips, came back to me; but after all, why not? I suppose at the back of my mind I was scheming and praying for the relationship to continue, or to keep in some kind of touch with him even after it had gone. So I went on with my questions.

"You'll want to specialise, I should think. That means a brass plate with the right address—and I suppose you'd have to wait a year or two——"

"Wait! You're right. It's the hospital jobs that count, and they don't hand those out like D.S.O.'s at St. Omer. A Colonial hasn't a chance."

"With money behind him, he has."

Hugh looked briefly at me, and as briefly said:

"No, thanks."

“It’s my own,” I said quickly, “don’t be such a fool. Aren’t you as good as the next man? Why shouldn’t you have your chance?”

We were passing one of the inhabited huts; I fell behind at his heels, and was silent until we were out of earshot. Then I ranged up again beside him.

“Think it over. And—think me over. I don’t mean—the way we’ve been to each other. I mean just as a rather aimless woman, with nothing much to interest her or live for. I haven’t any children. I haven’t any sort of tie with the young lives that are coming on. The money’s there. We could come to some sort of business arrangement. Think it over, Hugh, please.”

To my surprise he made no further resistance.

“All right. There’s one or two things in surgery I’d like to try and look at from another angle. I don’t know. I believe I might be some use at it——”

He broke off, and faced round to me, smiling without wryness for once. His eyes were as gay as a boy’s; they gave the lie to his words when he next spoke.

“Curse you with your notions and your questions, putting ideas into a man’s head.”

“It’ll only be a loan,” I said in a hurry, “with interest, and so on. We’ll get solicitors to draw it up.”

“Oh, I don’t mind being kept. That isn’t what I was thinking. I was cursing you for making me break the rules. Looking forward doesn’t do out here.”

I said lightly:

“Don’t let’s, then. The moment’s good enough.”

And I too tried to keep my mind to that philosophy; for when the war was over, and the hospitals taken by storm, and that loan document drawn up by solicitors, how old should I be? And what use should I be, and what happiness would be left for me?

We came back to the dug-out in silence.

IX

I spent most of that afternoon reading. Hugh had to make some sort of round and could not take me; he left me safe underground with his batman to care and his books to amuse me. The war, he said, was the only period in his life he’d ever had time to read. The books were a rather forbidding

mixture. Anatole France—but I had read him all. An odd volume of Gibbon. Candide, with some of Voltaire's letters. The Apocrypha, quite new to me. Two Trollopes, and Mr. de la Mare's *The Return*. I lay on the bunk with the *Last Chronicle of Barset* and was served by Andrews, after an interval, with stew and tea. Provide he might, but converse he could not, though I tried hard to ingratiate myself by saying that I was Australian too, and asking where he came from. But there I drew a blank. He came from some outpost of the Northern Territory called Thompson's Creek that I had never heard of. What was his job before he joined up? Selector. How many acres had he? Inches of rain? Head of stock? His answers were monosyllabic and resentful. I gave up at last, knowing the type whose silence does not necessarily mean unfriendliness, and that will thank you most to leave it alone; nodded thanks for my tea, stuck two extra candles in their own grease on the lid of a tin, and took no more notice of him, to his relief and mine. In ten minutes I was in the thick of poor Mr. Crawley's troubles, which seemed so much more real than those stiff figures I had seen, or that stain on the snow.

At four o'clock, when Hugh still had not come, I put away the book, and went up into the dusk for a walk, taking his torch in my pocket to feel my way with. The sky was clouding over from the south-west, and from that quarter came a wind very different from the clean air of the night before. It was warmish; the snow seemed to be melting in great patches before it, except in the deeper hollows. My impatience had brought me out before it was yet quite dark, and I had to act the man, weighting my stride, and sinking my chin into my collar. But nobody looked at me twice. The men sat listlessly, smoking some of them, others with their blank eyes fixed on the ground, and hands dangling between their knees.

I was tired of the track by now. I turned out of it into the dead land that sloped on my right. A tank lay at no great distance, tilted with its nose in the earth, and its tail upwards. Here and there by it lay bundles of dirty clothes, too small, surely, too flat and withered to have been men. But they wore boots, and scraps of accoutrement. They were not horrifying or ugly; they were just detritus of war, and that they should ever have walked erect or eaten or loved seemed beyond imagining.

The tank was partly smashed. There were streaks on its sides of rust and fire. I spied into it through a pillar-box window in the bow, but dusk was on us, I could see nothing. I put my torch inside, flicked it on and peered in. A face was gaping at me. Some freak of fire and decay had fixed it in a mask of utter horror, a thing eaten and tortured, blind yet glaring—there are no

words. It stared me rigid in an instant; then my fingers dropped the torch, still lighted, into the tank's bowels, and before I could check myself I began to retch.

When that was over I turned back the way I had come. But even in those ten minutes, with the pall of cloud rushing up from over the setting sun, it had darkened almost to night. I was not going back to that thing for my torch. Sweating, I tried to make a memory picture of the shell holes, and to keep my head. It was the hardest task I have ever set my self-control, not to give in, and run. There was wire about, torn strands of it, thick enough to trip. I caught my foot in one of these twists and came down flat, at the very moment that the yelp of a shell began. It landed not far off, on the other side of the tank, with the usual flare and noise, and subsequent mutter of falling earth. I lay still, the memory of those other numbered packets in my mind; but nothing followed, the thing was a stray, uncompanioned. I got to my feet, listening. There was no sound, and I could see nothing, hardly the movements of my own hands. Then I turned my head, and saw the tank window still aglow behind me. The thought of the shape my torch was lighting set me running at last across the broken ground. I fell again, and then, groping, dropped back into the homely hollow of the track.

Hugh was in the dug-out when I got back. He looked sharply at me, and asked:

"Been for a walk?"

I nodded.

"Give me some tea, please. I'm beginning to believe in hell."

"Had a look inside the tank?"

I nodded, and took my tin cup greedily. He reached for his flask.

"Better have some brandy in that; you look all in."

"And there was a shell. And I've torn my boot on some wire. Don't talk about the tank, please."

"Bogies live in that cupboard, don't they?" said Hugh, and let it alone.

We talked; and for all its matter—which was of books, chiefly, and war, the only two sides of life he knew as yet—the talk was exciting. It had a violent exploratory quality. We each knew the other's body better than the other's mind, and that penetration of interest and thought was curiously engrossing. We kept off the future by mutual consent, and tried each other out with dogmatic statements of opinion, preferences, beliefs. There was a

moment, I believe, when, my long-forgotten catechism returning to me on the wings of some argument, I was putting up a reasoned case for the existence of hell, coupled, as toast-masters say, with the Pope. Hugh called me that Australian word of religious opprobrium, a Mick, and went on to the democracy that is bred in cities; the necessity of having people in command without axes to grind; the lure of old countries and accepted thought; the urgency of not yielding to that lure. A meal appeared in the middle of all this, like the oasis of calm at the typhoon's centre, very similar to breakfast, except that in deference to the hour the jam was plum, not marmalade. No one save Andrews the unspeaking came near us. We talked on, in and out of sentiment, hungrily gathering knowledge of each other, liking each other, to a complete forgetfulness of that other bond.

About midnight someone came to summon him. Hugh went up, and was back ten minutes later, cursing a little, and shaking himself like a dog.

"What?" I asked, up-elbowed on my bunk, half laughing at him.

"It's raining," he answered.

But there was something else, some trouble that I could read in his face. I swung my feet, in their clumsy socks, over the edge of the bunk and went to him.

"Hugh?"

He answered the question.

"There's an attack down for to-morrow morning. The blasted fools are going to make a set at Grease Trench."

"What's that? Is it important?" I did not see the significance of his news.

"Important, of course it isn't. It's a bit of a salient that spoils the look of their maps. But the point is, how the hell am I to get you down? I can't leave here. I've got to collect stretchers, and see the extra bearers know their job. I can't spare Andrews."

This was disconcerting; bitter, after I had looked forward to unlimited time. Still I did not see all the implications. I said, not wanting him to be worried:

"You mustn't trouble. I can get down alone, if you'll draw me a map."

"The whole track'll be thick with troops. God blast their souls! Who'd have thought of them starting to beggar about so early in the winter? I ought to have taken you down this morning. My fault."

“My dear,” I said, to soothe him, playing the adventurous great lady, “you don’t think I mind? You’re not to worry about me. How long will this attack last?”

“Twenty-four hours, more or less. It’s not the danger, it’s just—I could kick myself for being such a fool as to trust to their having sense.”

“Forget about the staff. I’ll stay here quietly till it’s over. I’ll tackle Gibbon while you get on with the quarrel. I’ve often wanted to read him, and never been quite bored enough.”

Hugh looked hard at me, but I brought off the pose I had chosen for once. He said slowly:

“It’s the only thing to do. You’ll be quite safe.”

“My dear Hugh, I’m not in the least frightened.” Nor was I. An attack? Intensified rifle-cracks; shells rather more frequent than the five or six that had landed within hearing that day; men shouting and running. No, I was not in the least afraid.

“What time does the curtain go up?”

“Zero’s seven-thirty; but there’ll be preparation for a while before. I’ll be down in an hour, perhaps.”

He came over to me, and put both his hands to my face, holding it up.

“I’m sorry, I’m God’s own fool. I never thought——”

“My dear, I’m goodness knows what age, and tough. Don’t think of it again.”

“All the same,” Hugh repeated, “I’m bloody sorry.”

He went out, and up the stairs. While I stared after him, unable to make up my mind what exactly had happened, a trickle of water slid in through the doorway from the passage, and widened to a pool in the candle-light. Queer weather! How dreary to attack in the rain!

And that was all I thought of the situation before I drifted to sleep.

X

I was aware, very drowsily, of Hugh coming and going; of the candles being alight all the night; and of a feeling of movement, as though all round the dug-out the night were alive. But no sounds occurred that were out of the ordinary.

I was dozing, and woke with a start. The silence suddenly had been broken apart, smashed into such an abominable clamour that even in the dug-out, fifteen feet underground, my ears were stunned with it. I looked at my watch; 7 o'clock, the preparation was beginning. The din by its very immensity drew me up out of shelter, to poke my head into a drizzling dawn, with yellow lights leaping out of it and over the hill in front, and noises, shrill, rackety, or sullen, usurping the whole air.

I went back, down again, not for safety, but to put that merciful thick pad of earth between my ears and the riot. At about half-past eight Hugh came, muddy indescribably, and tired about the eyes. I had mastered the Primus and found Andrews' store. We had some sort of a meal. When it was over I could question him.

"How does it march?"

"Not bad."

"Have we taken the position?"

"For what it's worth. It doesn't matter a damn either way. The killing's the thing. And to have something to put in the communiqué—This is the war of attrition, remember."

But the bitterness was only in words. He looked oddly happy and excited; and when a voice shouted from the top of the stairs, "Mitchell!" he was on his feet in a second. I heard the talk on the stairs.

"How's things?"

"A. 1."

"Where'd they got to when you left?"

"Doing a spot of bombing along Grease Trench. The whole show's caving in with this thaw and the shelling. It isn't the trench it was, not by a long chalk. Well, so long."

"So long."

I said, when Hugh came back again:

"What a liar you are! You want your side to win."

He grinned.

"Natural, isn't it? It's the side I've got my money on."

Another voice from the stairs called:

“First lot coming along, sir.”

“Can I be any use?” I asked Hugh.

“Not much; come up, though, if you want.”

Outside it was raining soddenly. Along the track from the right were coming stretchers, and some few men walking painfully through the sticky clay.

It was the bearers who first brought home to me the quality of the mud. All of them were big, the raw-boned Australian type, that will shift tons of stuff in a day on the waterside. There were four of them to a stretcher; the distance they had come was roughly half a mile; and when they had dumped their burdens inside the shelter they collapsed at the side of the track, gasping, and wiping the streaming sweat from their faces with wet sleeves. All, bearers and wounded, were soaked, and in the hollows of the stretchers water had gathered, so that the wounded lay in pools of it, their bandages, startlingly white against the general sodden mud-colour of khaki, growing red while I watched. The bearers, after a very few minutes’ rest, trudged off again towards the line. Other bearers went down with the wounded when Hugh had done what he could; fixing a splint, stopping any urgent bleeding. Sometimes the shelter where he worked was full, and then the stretchers lay out in the rain. Once in a rare moment of respite he came to the opening of the shelter, and saw me standing in the dug-out doorway. I said: “Isn’t there anything—can’t I hold things for you, or something?”

He shook his head.

“Nothing to be done. You can’t get them warm or keep them dry. There’s a dixie of tea for the walking, and a shot of dope for the others.”

“But how long will it be before these men get to a bed?”

“Some time this evening. The going’s still pretty good.”

“This evening? All those hours——”

“It used to take twenty-four at first. But we’ve got things organized now.”

With the memory of the sights, and some of the sounds that had gone by me that morning, I said:

“I shouldn’t have thought men could live after such things had happened to them.”

He said indifferently, but with his eyes on the track, alert for the next batch that might need him:

“Of course, a few conk out on the way.”

A voice hailed him from the other direction, and we saw coming towards us a single very muddy, very young officer. When he spoke I recognised the voice I had heard already on the dug-out stairs. It was too late for me to retreat; but the hatchet-faced young man took me for granted, at once launching into talk with Hugh.

“Well, everything in the garden’s lovely. Boche mopped up to a man. I wish somebody’d come along and mop up the trench.”

“Have you been down to supports?”

“That’s right; to ask what next. Consolidate; that’s their message of hope. How we’re to do it with the whole bloody trench slowly subsiding into the mud——”

He laughed, and as he shifted the respirator on his chest I saw a row of dirty but amazing ribbons.

“They’ll counter-attack as soon as it gets dark, and there we’ll be. There’s no getting to or from the place. They’ve got machine-guns covering it all sides. I’d like to souvenir one of those guns; take it back home for the rabbits.”

He laughed again, drank down a pannikin of tea, and with a “So long!” started off towards the place there was no getting from or to for German machine-guns. Another batch of wounded was coming down, and I went into the dug-out, where I found it less easy to take seriously the worries of Mr. Crawley and the lost cheque for twenty pounds. But in a quarter of an hour Hugh was down after me.

“More trouble. Look, they’ve dropped a shell on the Regimental aid-post. I’ve got to go up now and take over. You’d better lie low in here. If I’m not back by to-night you’d better make a break for it; Andrews’ll show you. You’ll be all right with him.”

“What about you?”

“I’ll be pretty busy if they counter-attack and they’re sure to. You heard what Holt said. Don’t count on me at all. It’s been a bit of unholy bad luck for you.”

“Nonsense. I’m enjoying myself. Good luck!”

He had been fearing a scene, I think—after all, we did not know each other so very well—and this casual parting was a relief to him. My heart was sick within me, but I had the sense not even to offer my hand. He went without another word, and I sat down on my bunk and took up Mr. Crawley again. But while my eyes followed the quarrels of Barchester I was thinking that where one shell has fallen another may; and catching up out of childhood comforting old legends that no two drops of rain come to earth in exactly the same place, and saying prayers to personages in heaven whom Barchester would not have acknowledged.

The noise went on outside, rising in waves and rattling away, but never to silence. There was nothing afterwards like the shelling that had woken me, but the machine-gun fire was incessant all that afternoon. Now and then I put my head out. Sometimes it was raining, sometimes not. The procession of wounded seemed to have ceased. Of course, no one could get back from Grease Trench, which did not matter to anyone. That was a long day. I set Theo's watch, which had run down, by a guess at the light, and went back to my candles and my book.

For the first time since Hugh left I heard steps on the stairs, and looked up. It was Andrews. He came straight in, without his usual tribute to my presence, his one concession, two clumps on the door frame with his boot. For the first time I heard him speak a complete sentence.

"That bloody fool, Mitchell, now look what he's done!"

I supposed this was rancour for my having been left in his charge to pilot to safety.

"I'm sorry; I believe I could get down all right by myself. But he thought he mightn't get back——"

"Too right," said Andrews grimly; "he's stopped one."

"Dead?" I asked, after a second's blank silence.

"Not yet. Hit in the chest. A machine-gun bullet, trying to get across to Grease Trench." That was all Andrews knew, and he was going up to see about it. I got up, and wrenched on my sodden coat.

"I'm coming."

"Not much, you're not."

"That, or I'll go up alone, after you're gone."

"You don't know. They're shelling again up there like beggar-all."

“You’re wasting time,” I said sharply, and was first on the stairs. We started, Andrews leading, up the sunken road as dusk was falling.

There were duckboards for the first hundred yards; then the road widened to a flat-bottomed hollow which was simply mud. Through it a vague track ran, skirting water-filled shell-holes and ragged patches of barbed wire. At every step I had to make an effort to pluck my feet out of the mud. Any slip off the track meant the slippery edge of a shell-hole and a ducking. I kept behind Andrews. Only once did we stand aside, to let a stretcher go by. Just past us one of the bearers slipped, and the whole thing, burden and all, came down splashing. They got up with the patient recovery of ants disturbed at some silly task, and blundered on. I had never before seen faces like those; not distorted, but blank; blind with exhaustion.

Andrews went on pretty steadily, not looking round. I was getting more and more done. Once I felt, with a throb of relief, firm foothold, and looked down; the white slats of ribs were under my foot. I felt no horror, and my mind, which for a while had wandered no further than the next step forward, went back to a waterhole in Australia that I had seen one time, in the middle of a drought. Round it lay the bodies of sheep that had got bogged and trampled, too eager to drink, and too weak to get away. This was so much the same that disgust would not come. I felt my foot grip firmly often enough in that half-mile.

We came at last under the lee of the chalk cliff, with a hint of buildings above, that Hugh had showed me the day before. There were dug-outs here, but it was dusk, and difficult to distinguish the red-painted cross that meant the aid-post. I sat down for a while in the mud, while Andrews put his head in and out of doorways. In a few minutes I heard him hail me. I got up, and stumbled forward through the slush to where he stood by a faintly lighted door.

It was the usual wooden underground room lit by candles. On the floor two wounded men were sitting; one, I remember, rocking backward and forward quite silently. At the far end were two of the usual stretchers on trestles, with the usual booted figures lying on them quietly, one propped, the other lying flat. As I stood hesitating, four bearers came down and carried the flat figure away. When they had gone I came forward, and with the helpless instinctive woman’s motion, dropped to my knees beside the stretcher that was left.

Hugh was dead white. His eyes were open, but sunk so terribly that it was strange to see life in them. He knew me, and lying still, only moving his

lips, eyes looking straight before him, spoke to me without expression in a voice gone toneless and small.

"This is finish for me. Sorry."

"My dear," I said pretty steadily, "we're here now. Andrews is out getting bearers. We'll have you down very soon. Hang on, Hugh."

He answered, in that bloodless voice:

"No good. Lung's filling up. Mafeesh—whatever you do."

His tunic was open, and there was a wad of some kind of dressing stuffed in under the right collar-bone. It was not very much stained. I said, taking some hope from this, in spite of his words, and his sunken eyes:

"Don't talk. Keep your strength. We'll get you back."

"No."

And with that gentle denial he did close his eyes and seem to be husbanding himself. Clumping footsteps sounded again on the wooden stairs, and another stretcher was brought in. One of the bearers bent over as they dumped it, and put a finger to the eyelid and then the wrist of the man on it. He made a signal to the others, and they lifted the handles again.

"Dead?" I said sharply, and the men turned their heads. One answered:

"That's right."

"Put him down, then. Leave him here. The major's hit. You've got to get him away."

They looked at Hugh, and one said:

"We're on the up carry. Bringing down from the line."

I said, furious, but keeping my voice low:

"What's the good of that? What's the good of bringing wounded here when there's no doctor? Pick him up, for God's sake."

The spokesman said dubiously:

"There'll be another doc. up soon. Word's been passed."

Hugh's voice behind me said:

"Carry on. I'm staying."

The men stood an instant; then the spokesman nodded to the other three; they stooped to the handles again, and carried the dead man out. There

followed a horrible five minutes of doing nothing, saying nothing: just waiting, and listening to the growing distress of his breath. I could have gone out of life gladly to let him live, and have his career and his health, yes, and women other than me. I wanted to help as I have never wanted any happiness in all my forty-one years. I knelt, praying for the chance of it; something, anything to do.

Another stretcher was brought in, a man on it with a mass of red sodden dressings on his thigh. His bearers set him on the trestles, and one, a corporal, lifted this mass away with his hand. At once there was a welling of blood into the gash beneath it. I saw Hugh's eyes turn, and heard him whisper:

"Shift him nearer. Forceps——"

Two of the men brought the other stretcher beside him. I stood, helplessly, not knowing what a forceps was, what to look for. The corporal brought a scissor-shaped instrument and put it into Hugh's right hand. He lay with closed eyes, as if to gather strength, then with a heave and a groan leaned sideways to paddle both hands in the wound. I slipped behind him on the stretcher, taking his weight for those few seconds. There was a yelp from the man, and a snap of teeth, like a dog caught in a trap; then Hugh fell back. The corporal mopped the blood-filled hole till it lay raw, and peered at it; the bleeding was not renewed. Seeing this, he collected his three with a nod, and they went out, leaving the man moaning.

They passed Andrews on the stairs, coming down with two men—one man short. He explained:

"Shell knocked out four on the way up. Can't muster any more. Better make a start, if we're going to."

He was looking down at Hugh and his voice told me that things were bad. Hugh was half-conscious, murmuring, and growing restless.

"He's asking for morphia," I said, my ear by his mouth. "Get it, he's asking for it. Morphia, quickly, he's in pain——"

Andrews' huge paws seemed to dawdle and falter, drawing the solution slowly into a syringe he had found. I suffered during those seconds as though it were my own agony that waited to be eased. But he thrust the needle into the forearm skilfully, with a quick jab into pinched-up skin. There was no waiting for the stuff to take effect. Almost at once he beckoned the two men to the handles by Hugh's head; and with a look at me

that compared our heights and found them level, indicated one of the other poles with his thumb, and some words jerked out:

"Reckon you can do it?"

I made no answer, but got both hands to the pole, as I had seen the men do, waiting his word to lift; my heart with all its misery, glad for the moment. Something I could do!

We got up the stairs and out into the sludge. It rained, pattering on our tin hats softly in the dark. The weight on my shoulders was nothing much; but as I had that thought there came a picture of those shrivelled men lying by the tank, so light and sunken that a woman might lift them, too, with her hands.

That was in the first twenty yards, the cold mud dragging at our feet. Then without warning I slipped on some treacherous edge; instinctively I kept my hold on the pole and so brought the stretcher, burden and all, to the ground. The men said nothing, taking it as a usual incident of the way. They picked themselves up and we went on.

Perhaps we got off the track in that nightmare walk through the wet dark. Perhaps thaw and rain together had really deepened the morass underfoot. It clung like a living creature to our boots, that in ten steps were shapeless; and the soil being clay we slipped and staggered on it perpetually, canting and righting the stretcher, like a small boat among waves. It was not the weight; my numb fingers held fast to the pole, my one chance of helping, and would have held till they bled. It was the mud that wearied our thighs and betrayed our feet as we laboured on, the heartbeats thudding in our throats.

Half-way along, when I had fallen for the second time, Hugh began to talk quickly, and to shout in a ghost's voice that sickened me, coming out of the night. He grew more restless, throwing his legs and head about. Andrews loosed a puttee and tied him down; then without a word took my pole in his right hand and carried alone. I made no protest; my falls had shaken Hugh. I could not even do this service for him, thanks to the muscular strength which God in his wisdom has seen fit to refuse to women. But even the men, labouring their breaths almost as horribly as his, could not keep their feet altogether. One of the leaders fell, and brought the others sprawling, before we got to the duckboards.

Outside the aid-post the way was blocked with stretchers. A voice, an officer's voice, curtly hailed us:

"More from Chalk Farm? Anyone taken on up there yet?"

And when he was told no:

"Wish to hell supports'd pull up their bedsocks and get to work. I can't keep pace here. How many more coming down?"

"It's Major Mitchell, sir," said Andrews.

"Mitchell?" The voice changed. "Let's have a look."

They edged the stretcher into the shed, and light fell on Hugh's face. It shone with rain, the jaw hung; across one eyeball lay a dark gout of mud. The officer gave one glance, then with an abrupt movement of his blood-stained hand waved us out of the shelter, and turned to deal with the living.

XI

Dully I heard Andrews talking, and smelt whisky under my nose. I swallowed as I was told, watching while he opened a map. He was proposing to get me back to Albert that night, I had nothing to say, and no tears. My mind had become fixed, as the eyes sometimes do. With an effort of will I brought some sort of attention to what he was saying.

"—I c'n see you that far. Then you want to hop on a lorry. You can't get bushed after that."

Suddenly I recognised the map, spread out under the candle's light. It was Hugh's: I knew the inkstain in one corner. I put my hand on it, something that had been his, and heard Andrews saying:

"Not there. Watch, follow my finger. Here's Chalk Farm, where we started from——"

I saw that where his blunt finger pointed the map read: Mortemart-en-Artois (château).

"Where we started from," I echoed, nodding stupidly, "I'll remember."

"That's right. Now look——"

And the blunt finger traced a road, a boomerang sweep by Longueval, Montauban, Fricourt, that led back to safety—safety!—and all the weariness of beginning again.

October, 1930-June, 1931.

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 *Boomerang* by Helen de Guerry Simpson]