

"I have; but I'm afraid you'll be cross with poor little me."

"Couldn't be done. What makes you say it?"

"Well, I couldn't get it so cheaply as the last lot. The silly old Government's——"

"I get you. What's the price now?"

She looked at him shrewdly. How far could she bleed him yet? Better be modest until the time came when he must have the stuff.

"It's fifty shillings now, not forty," she replied. "I couldn't get it for a penny under."

"Do you think another ten shillings matters?" he asked.

"Some soldiers are so poor. Mind, I don't blame them. They've given up all for the country. But the stuff's got to be paid for, hasn't it?"

"When you know more of the world," he said, "you'll be convinced that everything's got to be paid for."

"I know my way about quite as well as a nice girl ought to," she said. "I sometimes fear you think me too forward."

"You're the original innocent lamb," he said.

"Not quite, I'm afraid. Here's the stuff. Don't take too much, or it'll harm you. It's a good friend, as you've found, but don't increase the dose too quickly."

"Does it have to be increased?"

"Oh, yes, to get the same effect after you're used to having it. Don't overdo it, though."

"Keep calm, kid. I won't go the whole jag on it, though I'm not out to deny it's seductive."

"Cocaine's like a girl," she said; "you can love it too much."

"There's a whole heap of girls in London a man couldn't love too much if he lived till Niagara was down to sea-level."

"And I'm sure you think I'm one of them?"

"I'll tell you all I think of you some time," he promised. "When can I have some more of the stuff?"

"In about four days, I hope. Anyway, I wouldn't let you have it before."

"Don't say that."

"I really shan't be able to get any sooner."

"Oh. In four days, then?"

"Yes. Where?"

"Here's good enough, isn't it?"

"If we're cautious."

"I'll be as cautious as a starved Sioux tracking a fat bull moose on a done-for horse."

She did not understand the simile, but the tone in which it was uttered gave her assurance. Quite often she did not understand the things men said to her; quite often her victims transcended the limits of her vocabulary. But by some sharp sixth sense she was always able to divine whether the boding of unfamiliar words was good or evil.

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Sister Barbara shook her head, and McKay leaned over the supper-table towards her.

"Why are you turning me down?" he asked. "What's it for?"

"You know quite well. You go on meeting that girl, and I think I understand why."

"Why?" he challenged.

"Well, do you pretend you like her?"

"Man in his time plays many parts," he quoted; "and I'm a man, but I'm not up to speaking those lines with any conviction."

"You mean you don't like her?"

He nodded—almost appreciatively. If there was one thing he liked about Sister Barbara—and, Heaven knew, there were a thousand and one things clamouring for the premier place—it was the directness of her attack.

"Barbara, you get me in one. You've taught me a heap of things, and the chief of them is that a man in love thinks of only one girl. You're that girl."

For very much less than a second she looked happy, and then, a moment later, thoroughly miserable.

"Why have you met her three times this week?" she asked.

"We'll have this thing out right now," he said. "I've just told you something you couldn't have been blind to. I love you. Now, what's your answer to that?"

"Very simple," she said sadly. "I'm fighting not to love you."