

of doing all your moving, talking, thinking by numbers, at someone else's orders, think of having to salute a superior officer, think of having to obey and never being allowed to argue! My dear, you've not got grit enough for the job."

She affected to laugh at him, but there was a taunt in her voice, and he heard more of the taunt than of the laugh.

"I'm sorry," he said stiffly. "This wasn't mere talk, I *was* thinking of volunteering, if war broke out—as it's bound to do now—atoning for my wasted life, you know," he added with heavy sarcasm. Then his eyes shone with sudden excitement. "What an opportunity a thing like this must be to people who've made a mess of their lives! A shipwreck, fire, flood, war—anything of that kind—whether you come out of it alive or not, people think you've redeemed yourself. If I went out to-morrow and took a bullet through my brain——"

"Please don't, Deryk!"

He glanced up to find Idina looking at him with eyes full of tears.

"It's perfectly true," he went on excitedly. "People don't criticise me much as yet, because they think I'm still pretty young, but they'll let themselves go, as I get a bit older, if I don't do something. My life is wasted, I've done nothing so far, and the devil of it is that I see no prospect of doing anything in the future. If I got altruistically knocked on the head, everyone would say that it was magnificent of me to be fighting at all—as for being killed. . . ."

"D-Deryk, old man, you're t-talking about yourself t-too much."

It was the first time Felix had spoken. He had sat down smiling with obvious pleasure at finding himself in a new restaurant; he had removed his spectacles and polished them, the better to gaze round the sunlit dining-room; only by slow degrees had he concentrated his interest on his own table, and by that time his wife was flushed and Idina almost in tears, while Deryk seemed to be proying and swaggering rather objectionably.