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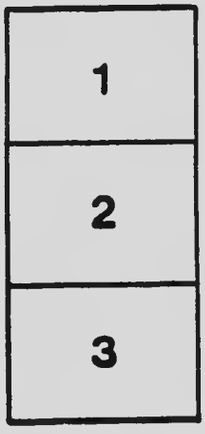

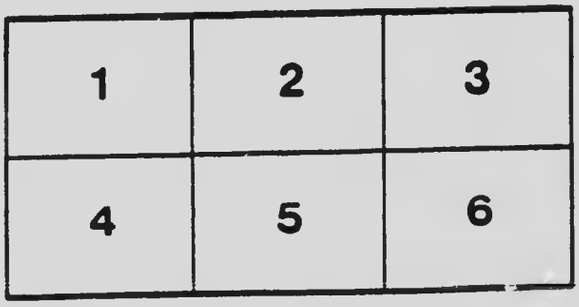

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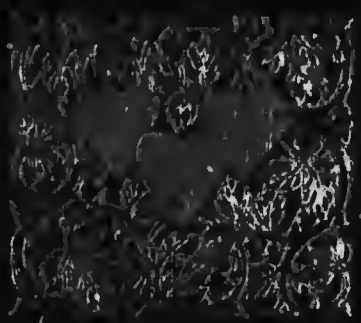
BLANTYRE VILLEN

BY

ALAN SULLIVAN



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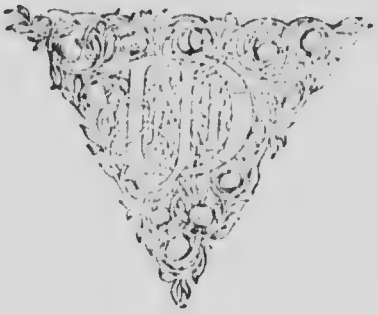
BLANTYRE—ALIEN

BLANTYRE—ALIEN

BY

ALAN SULLIVAN

Author of "The Passing of Oul-i-hut"
Etc.



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BLANTYRE—ALIEN

PART I

I

WITH elbows on the rail Blantyre, ship's doctor, stared from the *Harmonic's* deck after the dwindling form of Stella Blake. The girl turned at the corner of the landing stage and raised a grey-coated arm. For a moment their eyes met, then—his peaked cap still lifted, she vanished.

He stayed for some time motionless. The vessel cleared herself of passengers and luggage. She began to disgorge cargo. The noisy routine of harbour life asserted itself. Derricks whined. An army of Italian stevedores assaulted the high black sides of the liner. She had shaken herself free from her transitory tenants. There was a sudden revelation of varied utilities. The ship yawned. She was drab and commercial in an instant.

Blantyre felt this transformation. It was too familiar to attract him. His mind had gone back to ten days ago when he had leaned over the same rail in New York Harbour, and cynically scanned the oncoming tide of travellers. Always in this survey he had a curious sensation that somewhere in this influx there might be something or some one who would break the chains of circumstance.

Many influences were at work in Blantyre. He often thought himself a theatre for conflicting emotions. The blood of old Celtic kings stirred him to revolt. Their pride had fallen on him. Later came a stern and uncompromising ancestry, rigid and unjoyous. The mothers of his race bore children to send them abroad and serve their country. It almost appeared that life at home was modulated lest youth love it too much to leave it. That vision remained unsoftened by years. There were no tendrils to hold him with memorial affection.

He did not know when or why Stella Blake had refused to merge herself into the rest of the procession. Nor could he imagine what hitherto unused faculty of his own had blossomed into unaccustomed action. He had stopped astonished at those first advances. Now, working slowly back, he fastened on one night when the *Harmonic* lay off the Azores, and he had joined Stella to watch the twinkling shore lights. He had been talking, diffident and impersonal as ever, when suddenly the suggestion came at him. A week before he would have scouted it, but now, for the first time in all his detached existence, he deliberately gave himself up to the thought of self-interest.

To Blantyre the sea was a wind-blown wilderness across which he was thrown shuttle-like between New York and old world ports. Such humanity as he encountered seemed as elusive as the sea itself. He sensed its colour, life and motion—all its kaleidoscopic unrest. It used him reluctantly when it had to, with inward questionings as to whether he

would be there if he were a well-qualified practitioner. He was, after all, a reminder of what most people came abroad to avoid. Then the procession passed on, leaving him with cold reminders that he was at the wrong end of a long telescope. His respect for his profession struggled beneath the unprofessional character of many of his duties. He was constantly surrounded by those who had no interest in exploring his own personality—but his duty was nevertheless to keep in touch with the pilgrimage.

He had been thinking of this when he watched Stella Blake climb the gangway at New York. It was still in his mind when together they leaned on the rail at the Azores.

How the ice was broken he did not know. But staring through the dusk with the girl beside him there began a slow realisation of the ease with which some men live. Up till now he had seen it without realizing. There had been neither envy nor comparison. He had not cared enough to analyse the difference. But at last something in the nearness of the girl made the severity of his own cabin unreasonably severe—a small and narrow thing beside the scope of other people's lives.

The latitude of the far horizon took on some new insistent attractiveness. It whispered of freedom—and did it whisper of companionship? Then he turned and looked at Stella. He had been talking without reserve, casting off successive shells.

Stella was motionless, drinking in the ineffable suggestions of this semi-tropical night. Impulsively her hands went out towards the land. She was intensively alive to the beauty of the world. Blan-

tyre watched her curiously, moved not by love or desire, but by a sudden glimpse of what a woman like this had to give.

And as to Blantyre, Stella was conscious that he was distinct from any man she had known. He seemed moulded into a precise outline by hereditary instincts. She felt that he was too traditional to blend with the ordinary, casual march of average men. His aloofness was eloquent of a pride that appealed to her, his reserve spoke of unexplored vistas that piqued her curiosity. He appeared a man of parts, who by some turn of the wheel had not yet found himself, but in the finding of whom there might be infinite possibilities. Blantyre had begun to curse himself in that he was not like his fellows. Stella was drawn to him for the very same reason.

He had been talking quietly, diffidently—almost impersonally, and again with a thread of revolt. It gave her strange sensations that they had each come from an infinite distance to meet and speak. There was a shutting out of the existence of other people and things from this suddenly intimate exchange. And, all through, the Celt in him revealed itself. Thin lips, large mouth, with its characteristic lift of expression—mobile eyebrows above hard blue-grey eyes—long, straight features and strong, restless, prehensile hands, sudden glimpses of humour effaced as suddenly by quick, savage little self-thrusts—all these allied in a measured story of an unbalanced life, such an unfolding as a week before he would never have dreamed of giving.

"I am bound to everything and a part of nothing. Can you imagine a nature that is always questioning, and generally critical? I am so detached that I have not attempted to climb the barriers, and"—he hesitated, then added abruptly—"I built them myself."

Stella gazed at the shore lights. They shone through the dusk, suspended in luminous clarity, like promises, it seemed, of all the waiting world had to offer. Why need this lonely man turn his eyes to the empty sea behind, when there breathed in him so much of proud independence and lofty strength. Had he shut out the world? Could he see nothing but his own isolation?

"Is that nature?" she said, with a touch of sympathy.

"I didn't want to think so." Again he turned to her. "I have tried to be reasonable among unreasonable people—but——" He concluded with a shrug and a quick thrusting of thin lips.

"Don't you think it all comes back to the procession? It needs you for two weeks, then moves on, and you wait for the next one."

His grey eyes caught her own and held them for a moment. She had a glimpse of something that stirred in them. "You are perfectly right, but I don't know how to change it. The sea has her servants. She hates to let them go, and there is a sign mark, too, that goes with them when they do leave her."

Stella was silent. Indecision seemed a strange quality in Blantyre. The man's clear-cut face, the latent strength of form, all flouted the harbouring

of a questioning spirit. The cords that held him seemed breakable with the slightest exercise of a power of which his whole person was eloquent.

"I got so far as to consider a practice in Canada," he added smiling.

"Why not in London," she ventured.

"London rather appals me—even if I could afford it. Too suffocating, especially after this. No, I rather hanker after the country. Dog-cart, hedgerows, jolly old women at cottage doors and all that sort of thing."

"But——"

"A limited, somewhat vegetable existence if you like, but a jolly good life just the same."

"You mean professionally?"

"Yes, even professionally. What's the good of a trade if it does not make you happy? Perhaps I am not ambitious, I would much rather be comfortable. I am too much of a cynic to be contented discussing imaginary ailments with over-fed passengers. I say, it's awfully good of you to listen to all of this whining. Don't think there is nothing else. There is. The doing of things doesn't seem nearly so hard to me as the making up one's mind to do them."

"And there is so much for you to do," broke in Stella, the colour rising quickly to her cheeks. "And the world needs what you can give. Oh, if I were in your place I would——" She stopped in sudden confusion.

"Yes," he answered slowly, staring straight into her eyes. "I think you would."

II

MISS INNES, Stella's aunt, was unwittingly responsible for these developments. She had expressed firm convictions as to the ship they should take. She loathed the cracked flyer. She felt no admiration for high speed and whirring turbines. She did not want to smash the record, and conceived that passengers on fast vessels spent their days in restless anticipation, devoid of all the benign influences of the sea. Hearing these breathless travellers talk, they appeared to her inoculated with a certain mechanical frenzy.

A few hours out from New York she had congratulated herself that it was otherwise with the *Harmonic*, as she rose in majestic dignity to the long smooth swells. Here was no effort, no tremor. The broad white decks seemed tenanted with restful folk to her own taste. They did not care what day or hour the *Harmonic* would furrow the bay of Genoa. There was no haste, no surging of aerial messages, but just a steady, comforting progress of a small and confident world.

Miss Innes, looking back, wondered at the temerity that led up to this embarkation. She had not contemplated the disturbing of roots that for a lifetime had struck deep into Canadian soil. It hardly consoled her to remember that Stella was at the bottom of this vagary. She was inwardly satisfied that Europe offered nothing in the end more satisfying than that which she had so deliberately left, if only for a year. She was too contented to be

curious. She had had fifty years of life, twenty-five of them spent in mothering the motherless Stella. John Blake had called to her appealingly, when, at Stella's birth, Catherine Innes' younger sister slipped into the grave and left her husband in a grim solitude from which he rarely emerged. She had always had a great respect for John Blake. Intuitively she felt that she would have married him in defiance of the Prayer Book if he had asked her. But John Blake clung to solitude. In it he laid the foundation of the Blake fortune broad and deep. Then five years later he died, and the reins of government fell naturally into the hands of Catherine Innes.

She accepted the charge unsurprised. It seemed that fate had elected to hang around her neck every reason why she should not marry. There had been one man of whom she dared not herself think too much. But now she had gradually become divided between a sense of financial responsibility for Stella's fortune and a depth of love for this motherless girl. When Stella came of age Miss Innes had feebly attempted to retire from her watch tower. She was silently proud of Stella's place in Yorkton society. She rarely touched its fringe herself, but regarded the male portion of it out of the corner of her eye. John Blake had been indifferent to social interests. He had felt himself too much a part of the economic side of things. There blossomed, however, in his daughter the flower of his solitary days, a rare communicable spirit. She had the petitionary charm of face and manner that unlocks the surliest of dispositions—a peculiar gift this

suggesting a kinship of existence, a wistfulness to share the inwardness of the world.

Miss Innes came to the ultimate conclusion that Stella was a lighted candle and Yorkton was populated with moths. But Stella laughed from behind her feminine barricade. In truth she did not want to marry yet. Never a suitor came who assured more of companionship than she already had. It seemed, as well, that those who did come were, like herself, favourites of fortune, the sharing of whose lives involved little more than a change of name and address. Then came the desire to travel. Miss Innes expostulated, then realised that, for a year at least, she would be off duty. This release from a too prolonged defence looked suddenly attractive. So the big house on the hill which overlooks Yorkton was closed, and the two set out to see the world.

Plain walking has certain undeniable virtues, and it was this habit that first aroused deep-sea suspicions in the wiry frame of Catherine Innes. She hated walking alone, and her walks were getting shorter. Eight times around the *Harmonic's* deck equalled one mile. The first day out they walked two, tramping vigorously past rows of swathed and inanimate figures, who spent the hours in glancing casually at a small but already too familiar procession, and declining the attentions of a solicitous steward. By the time the Azores were astern, the two miles were reduced to a scant one, and when Gibraltar arose in the East Miss Innes decided that the matter needed looking into. She surveyed Blantyre much as a general peers through his glass

at an opposing force, too wise not to realise that all things are possible to youth. But in Blantyre she could discern only a ship's doctor, who looked, as well, an uncompromising cynic. So she snapped her glass shut, and accepted without a quaver when he asked them to his cabin to tea.

She softened a little under this influence. Afternoon tea is of an emolient nature. Under its process there is a slackening in the most formidable. It touched even the immaculate severity of this rectangular box, ornamented with a few pictures flattening themselves against the walls in mathematical order.

Stella found it difficult to realise that Blantyre actually lived here. It seemed strange that all his possessions could have been gathered in this tiny domicile; that there was, after all, nothing transitory about it, but that he did really emerge from this cube, morning after morning, and return to it every night as his home.

Blantyre was explaining his photographs? "This is Kildonan." He pointed to a bare stone house on the hillside of rock and heather. "And this is my father." He nodded at a face that curiously resembled his own.

Stella looked across the blue Inter-Oceanic cups. "Your father is a doctor?"

"No. He was in the Service and died with Gordon." He caught her gaze full of sympathy, and without knowing why went on, "My sister and I were left the house. You know there are a good many unendowed Irish houses," he added quizzically.

Miss Innes glanced round the prison walls. "And why don't you practice at home?"

Blantyre laughed. "If you could see the people you would not ask. Their only ailments are when some one gets half-kilt, and then they think more of the wake than calling the doctor. Patience is the only thing one can practise there. No—most of us have the wandering foot."

"Has it taken you far?" said Stella. She had begun to wonder whether it hurt to live in this box.

"Dublin—King's College—then as relief for a London man on his holidays. But I didn't like that," he interjected.

"No?"

"It's true, I didn't go to bed for weeks. City children have a distressing habit of being born about three in the morning."

Miss Innes laughed from the battlements of her years, "And then?"

"Then after some hospital work, I shipped on a big P. & O. freighter. We were trading between England and the China Seas, nosing into all sorts of out-of-the-way places. That held me for a couple of years. I liked it. Then I literally drifted into the Inter-Oceanic. This is my second boat with them." He smiled rather grimly with a tightening of the lips. "Curious kind of life, isn't it?"

Miss Innes looked at him keenly. It seemed an ineffectual story—too ineffectual from a man whose exterior, at least, betrayed nothing of vacillation. She wondered if he would always be contented thus. Then she thought of Stella and questioned herself whether there was in the girl a touch of the dogged

constructive spirit of John Blake to draw her to Blantyre and build him into the man she felt he might be, if he only would. But this all seemed so remote, so unheard of, that she flouted it.

"So now you are only burdened with a patient for ten days at the most," smiled Stella. "Which gets the credit; yourself or the voyage?"

"It doesn't matter much. A doctor is a person to be gracefully ignored, except in time of trouble," he put in with a shade of bitterness. "The procession stops long enough sometimes to say 'Thank you,' but not often. It makes me wonder whether I am really a doctor, or just a man with a thermometer and some pills."

"But think of the doctor's table."

"I do," he said firmly. "Often."

She caught his eye. "How thankful you will be next week," she said daringly, "when you remember that your companions change as often as your patients."

The corners of his lips dropped. He looked suddenly boyish and serious. Miss Innes, watching him, had a sudden glimpse of another Blantyre, one that she hadn't reckoned with.

"Well," he answered slowly, "I have been considering the price I shall have to pay on my next voyage for the rare fortune of this one."

And it was the cabin tea after all that really made Miss Innes suspicious. She scouted the idea, but it made her uncomfortable for days. There had been an intimate atmosphere about it, a touch of domesticity, that, austere as it was, had reached even her own elderly susceptibility. She went back

over previous premonitory stages when Stella's incipient interest had made this man or that appear probable. She found nothing to guide her, but now Stella seemed to withdraw delicately into herself and put on some maidenly armour that Catherine Innes could not penetrate. But, she reflected, they would be in Genoa in three days.

Some more tender part of her might have been aroused, could she have followed Blantyre in his daily round through the steerage. Whatever sympathy he lacked, whatever hardness he wore on the steamer's decks above, adjusted itself here in the packed swarms of humanity. His tall figure, his immaculate uniform, his confidence and precision, all spoke of a balanced merciful order of things amongst these polyglot throngs.

The intense reality of poverty, the tremendous appeal of the unkempt wakened in him sensations devoid of bitterness or cynicism, sensations that responded truly to this cry of helplessness. This tainted atmosphere assured him of the mercy of his mission. Life and death crossed each in their shadows. They were communicable mysteries. Always in the women's quarters he felt awed. It was a close, vital precinct, in which he explored the motherhood of the world. He could reverence that. Further on a stoker lay groaning, cursing a crushed foot. Blantyre bent over him with a fierce satisfaction. The sufferer woke a responsive chord. This was where he came in! This man was blackened and scarred in the toil of the stoke-hole, but he was real and vital, even his oaths were honest. He laboured in darkness, an invisible element, driving

the wheels that bore the well-dressed procession so comfortably along. He was naked, unashamed, unmodulated. But Blantyre felt that, by God! he did the work—without airs or concealments. And he understood—much better than most of the popinjays on the first-class list could ever understand. And this was the side of him that Catherine Innes never guessed at, but was subtly revealing itself through all his cynicism to the clear gaze of youth.

For the rest of the voyage Blantyre felt himself subject to cumulative influences. He had strange promptings, mystical suggestions, that now, if he would, he could find the way out. For once in his life all his defences were levelled. He tried to imagine the return voyage, and had a queer halting of the breath, realising it would be utterly different.

The days slipped by, and he unfolded more and more of his diffident self. He was not consciously drawn by any magnetism of sex. As yet he did not love, for Blantyre could not forget Blantyre, but he wrestled with an impulse that he could take and enjoy the woman made for man.

The *Harmonic* was gliding along the Riviera coast, when Miss Innes expostulated. This vagary was assuming formidable dimensions. "Stella, you are not fair," she said abruptly.

They had been talking itineraries. Baedeker slipped from the girl's hand. She was staring at the shore line. "Is that Nice or Cannes?"

"Yes, I think so." Then Miss Innes coughed. "Did you hear what I said?"

Stella looked at her curiously. "Not fair? Why?"

"You know very well what I mean. That doctor of yours!"

"Well—isn't he a nice doctor?" She took the older woman's hand and patted it. "I am sure you think so."

Miss Innes pulled the hand away. "You are carrying this too far. I don't like him, but it is hard on him, and you are old enough to know better."

Stella's lips trembled. She wanted to laugh. Then Miss Innes went on.

"The captain told me all about him. He is as poor as a church mouse, not a stick to bless himself with. It's a very old family. They have lived in the same place for hundreds of years, and are as proud as peacocks. The captain says their blood is so old that it's thin. They always seem to get hold of the wrong end of things, and never give in or admit they're wrong, and always die fighting."

"Tell me some more, Auntie."

"I will," replied Miss Innes acidly. "There's a time when a game becomes something else, that's what I'm afraid of with your doctor. You've everything to lose, and he has everything to gain."

Stella felt suddenly breathless. "What have I to lose?"

"Yourself and your money," said her aunt with a touch of asperity.

Stella saw Blantyre's tall figure at the far end of the deck. He hesitated a moment, then disappeared. The sight of him flashed a quick question through her brain. Was it a game? He had seemed to approach her through hitherto unused channels.

He had offered nothing, not even himself. He had pictured no future, but spoke only in depreciation of himself and his attainments. She admitted as yet only the stirrings of a new interest; it was, however, different from all other interests. Now, feeling Miss Innes' questioning gaze, she wondered whether remembering Blantyre, she had not too much forgotten Stella. She could not regret her sympathy, but searched her heart to determine if it was, after all, only sympathy. In these ten days she had been more with Blantyre than with any other man in her life. The empty spaces around them had induced an intimacy improbable elsewhere.

She evaded him the last evening of the voyage. He did not understand this. It was already very natural to be with her, and he had an incongruous sense of detachment. But when she said good-bye at Genoa, there had been a lingering glance and the faintest pressure of his hand.

This was in his mind now, leaning over the rail and gazing after her. Then, when her figure disappeared, he opened a pocket-book, took a card from it and stared with wrinkling brows and a sudden hardening of eyes and mouth.

III

In Rome, Stella and Miss Innes met old friends and made new ones.

Amongst the latter was Lady Perkins and her daughter Felicia. Lady Perkins was very tall and had a beautiful skin. She was handsome and outspoken. In her youth she had been considered daring—even dangerous. The late Sir John capitulated at her first assualt, bestowed on her one daughter, a small place in Surrey and a still smaller one in town. He then departed this life with that dignity so seldom found except in Englishmen of his own station and birth. For a few years Lady Perkins battled courageously against a steadily decreasing income. The place in London went at a sacrifice, then she migrated to Canada, and took up colonial life with a raised eyebrow and inward protest.

Colonialism had never appealed to Lady Perkins. Her insular mind pictured Canada a sparsely settled country, the bourne of English younger sons, where a scant population occupied a fleeting summer in frenzied preparation for the rigours of an appalling winter. She had sent bales of clothing to Canada, bales crammed with sweaters and rigid underwear, and ancient copies of the *Church Chimes* and the *Children's Friend*. She had visualised the opening of those bales by hardy woodsmen, who snatched a moment from the felling of gigantic pine trees which they thrust continuously into roaring furnaces.

But Lady Perkins had lived in Ferndale, a suburb

of Yorkton, for ten years. She had undergone a mental re-adjustment. Felicia's lean person evidenced no congenital advantage. She possessed neither her mother's force nor her father's dignity. Her expression reflected recognition of the fact that the females outnumber the males. She did not mean to shrink, but suggested a continual whispering of " Are you sure I do not intrude," all of which was gall and bitterness to Lady Perkins. Eight months ago she had squandered two months' income on Felicia's launching into her own pool of society. But almost before the ripples died away, Felicia sheered off into a manless backwater, where she had remained ever since, a backwater whose virgin flood was only stirred by Church Socials and Dorcas Societies and rarely, very rarely, by the milky wraith of some apologetic curate.

Stella knew them both—but slightly. There were four hundred thousand people in Yorkton. A title had ceased to be unusual. Furthermore, titles were very regularly bestowed by an appreciative Home Government. But in Rome both Stella and Lady Perkins were divested of those things which in the ordinary and ordered community make people often but the pale reflection of their circumstances and position. So they drifted happily together with that pleasurable feeling of mutual discovery with which we take to our bosom in foreign lands the casual acquaintances of home.

There was also Stephen Ellison. Miss Innes saw his handsome persor and groaned inwardly. He was the leading surgeon of Yorkton. Disappearing periodically, people met him abroad revelling in

professional emancipation. It was not so much what he had said, as what he could say that agitated Miss Innes. He had laid no open siege to Stella's heart, but Miss Innes guessed instinctively that he only abided the appointed time and place. Professionally he had translated himself. Whatever in him was fair and noble had gone straight into his work. It meant something that called for tenderness as well as skill and courage. From the calm enclosure of his sentimental immunity he had watched friends marry, and it seemed to him that after marriage came a certain obliteration of much that he had found before. The merging of his own personality had not appealed to him till now. He treasured the sharp distinction of the individual. There was something of himself that he did not want to give to any woman, but feared that almost any woman would demand. His was a quietly prophetic soul that had hitherto recoiled from the idea of surrendering its very capable ego.

But Stella differed from the women he knew. Her delicate independence spoke of a being inherently complete. It would make no temperamental drain on another. She appeared rather one who would diffuse influences all her own—would do something more than absorb or even reflect the individuality of others.

Under soft airs and Italian skies, all this dormant consciousness blossomed into fruition, but betrayed nothing in word or look. He realised to what extent Stella's beauty had affected him, but it seemed a normal thing in conjunction with herself.

There were very happy days in Rome—to all

except Miss Innes. Rome to her was English, not Italian. Rather cynically she studied Lady Perkins, who met many English friends. In these meetings Canada dropped into the background. Lady Perkins' manner was diffident, with an apologetic touch. "Sir George had left his affairs in really shocking condition, and you know, my dear, there was simply nothing else for it." She did not once voice the perennial truth that eight hundred pounds a year kept her in evidence in Yorkton, whereas it would have meant social eclipse in London. She emigrated, determined on making a hymeneal offering of the angular Felicia, but had searched in vain for some sacrificial altar.

Opposed to the unprofitable Felicia was Stella, the epitome of what Felicia might have been, but for adverse fortune and mysterial pre-natal processes. Lady Perkins' acidity sharpened when she looked at Stella. What could not be achieved with such a daughter. It would not have been so trying had Stella possessed merely beauty or money or brains, but the combination of all three was depressing to an anxious and weary spirit. The lack of all three was an insuperable maternal handicap, and to these Stella added a virginal appeal suggesting a soul slowly unsheathing to perfect maturity. This quality, this rare indefinable essence was, above all, the charm of Stella Blake. It was subtly revealed in the broad, smooth brow and the liquid steadiness of her brown eyes, but more eloquently in a nameless distinction, an individuality all her own—proud yet sweet, confident yet petitionary. This mental poise expressed itself in bodily proportion, in an

admirable and physical medium. She had the fair olive skin and straight suppleness of many Canadian girls. Her manner spoke of comradeship. It was prophetic of that trust in the world which only self-confidence can breed. She seemed a creature potent with all that a man may desire or reverence. She had as yet no consciousness of the magnitude of woman's great surrender. Thoughts of marriage had come and gone, leaving her like a pool that once disturbed, sinks again to placidity.

Stephen, free from professional care, was full of boyish enthusiasm. He cajoled Miss Innes, appeased Lady Perkins, was attentive to Felicia, and spent every possible moment with Stella. He knew Rome, with him it was a favourite holiday objective, and steered his party into interesting, intimate places, unvisited by most travellers.

Always he studied Stella. The ruins of the ancient city invested their own sanguine lives with a sharp, new touch of sweetness. Together they watched the white oxen pled the Appian Way, and listened to the booming echoes in the dark labyrinths of the Catacombs. But even while he yielded to the magic of her presence he could read in it nothing that answered to his own heart. "She is too absorbed," he thought. He was beginning to be afraid of his own well-disciplined self, lest mistaking the time and place, it imperilled his heart's desire. Outwardly he was, as ever, the self-controlled Stephen, but the touch of her thrilled him, and her face was haunting his dreams.

Miss Innes began to be restive. She had had all of Rome she wanted. The break with her Western

home was a weightier thing than she had anticipated. Her mind was not in an exploratory mood. Like many others, she did not realise what a good Canadian she was until she left Canada. This place seemed too memorial, too dead, to occupy thoughts that already repented of their wandering. Many new friends began to irritate her, and she wanted to shake it off, and find more congenial companions. She was home-sick.

In the background moved Blantyre. Never had Stella lost the vision of his tall figure at the *Harmonic's* rail. She had thought of him so much that his strange, twisted personality was invested with something tender and intimate. She felt that she knew Blantyre — that she had got close to his difficult soul. He of all men had suggested to her the loneliness of the unshared life. He had made her want to give.

This was strong upon her, as they all returned one evening from the hush of sunset beside the grave of Keats. The English Cemetery in Rome is peopled with the shades of great Saxons. Shelley lies there; Gibson the sculptor sleeps beside him, and Keats, the rarest spirit of them all, lies beneath a great, grey stone. Beside them stand sentinel cypress, and over the walls soars the pyramid Cestius. Beyond this smiles the Campagna.

The beauty of it was in her eyes and face. She glanced at Stephen. Instantly Blantyre's image swam between them. Then she knew that it was love.

That night a letter came from New York. She looked at it curiously. The large, bold writing

was unfamiliar, but the blue Inter-Oceanic crest was stamped on one corner of the envelope. She opened it with hands that trembled. There were only five words:

"May I come?

"BRIAN BLANTYRE."

IV

MISS INNES got out of the railway carriage at Como and looked up the long blue vista. "This," she said briskly, "is what I came abroad to see. I am tired of ruins and catacombs and arches."

Stella was very silent. Three days ago an answer had sped to Genoa. Shorter even than Blantyre's, it had taken a day to write. Then because she must have time to think and subdue her disorderly heart, she had suggested to Miss Innes that they go north to Como. In ignorance and relief her aunt jumped at the proposal.

Three miles across the lake Villa d'Este dreams at the foot of the emerald hills. Centuries have not robbed it of an ancient glory. Tourists invade the halls where once stepped the Borgias, but no modernism has touched the beauty of its gardens. Thus Stella found it, bedded in laurels and the songs of birds. Five thousand feet Monte Generoso shoulders up on the north, fending off the winds with his gigantic bulk. Southward, beyond the lake, a riot of olive and pine rises sharply into the clear skies. In the gardens there is, of many seats,

one that stands by the end of a colonnade opening on to the lake. From it you can see the roofs of Como across the water. You can look east to Maggiore and lift your eyes to Monte Generoso. There is nothing but beauty. Here, sitting with her aunt, Stella got Blantyre's answer.

Three days to yield to the magic of the place, three days during which her heart had thrust out countless delicate tendrils and strange flowers of anticipation. A thousand times it was on her lips to speak. Always as the words rose something silenced them. It was real, yet unreal—this season so intimately her own—the last that would ever be completely her own.

Miss Innes watched her curiously. No telegram was expected in this haven. Then she saw the yellow sheet tremble in Stella's fingers.

"What is it?" she said anxiously.

A lovely colour flooded the girl's cheeks. She held out the message. "Read it." There was an indescribable tenderness in her face.

Miss Innes took it, wondering, her brows puckering into wrinkles. It was dated that morning from Genoa:

"To-morrow evening.—BLANTYRE."

There was a long silence. The paper slipped from her grasp, and she slowly stooped to pick it up. Then she smoothed it and looked at Stella. The girl's shoulders were shaking. A dumb appeal moved in her eyes—the unfathomable glance that sometimes streams from dogs and oxen. Miss Innes put out her arms uncertainly and drew Stella

to her. For a time they stayed thus—wordless. Then she whispered: "Is this why we came to Como?"

Stella did not look up. A tremor ran through her. "I love him," she said brokenly. Her face was still hidden on her aunt's shoulder.

A hand crept up to the thick, dark hair. "Are you sure, dearie? How can you be sure. It was only two weeks."

"But I love him, my heart tells me," whispered the girl.

Miss Innes did not answer. This was something to which her own age could speak with no authority; perhaps with counsel, but not with authority. Now she struggled for some understanding of it. The best she could do was to hold the girl to her in a communion that needed no speech, a bond that rivalled that of motherhood.

The trembling of the slight form ceased. Stella looked up with eyes that shone through her tears. "I thought you would understand, and you do, you must, understand. I am so much happier now, and to-morrow you, too, will be quite happy about it."

A sense of disorderment began to obtrude itself upon Miss Innes. She had come abroad to travel and rest, not to find a husband for Stella. The arrangements of fifty years were not so easily subordinated to the vagaries of twenty-five. She had never thought seriously of Blantyre. Now that his personality filled her horizon she regarded him as an adjunct to Stella's peace or unhappiness, as events might prove. As for himself, she regarded him not at all. His own negation had ruled him

out of her reckoning. His name had not been mentioned since they left the *Harmonic*. Her own life was so rounded out in Stella that any suitor was, first of all, an interloper. That was the penalty of a great devotion.

She smothered all this in a companionable wave. It carried them both over the next day. They could never be so close together again. No longer as aunt and niece, but only as women they bridged the span of years. And all the time Miss Innes was haunted by the thought that Stella in Blantyre's arms would attain the deeper insight, the ultimate completion of life, that she herself had sacrificed for love of the girl.

Exactly at five o'clock Stephen Ellison swung down from the Rome express at Como station, and stepped thoughtfully out to the road for Cernobbio. He walked slowly, with no regard to the exquisite scenery around him. He passed the village in the same abstracted mood. Entering the grounds of the Villa d'Este the first person he met was Miss Innes.

She regarded him with unmixed astonishment. "How d'ye, Doctor Ellison, I had no idea of seeing you again so soon."

Stephen smiled. Nor had he till the night before. "I hope I am not a bad penny, but I am turning up."

She had a vague discomfort, and fenced for time. "And Lady Perkins and Felicia?"

"Still in Rome—very happy and very Anglican. How is Miss Blake?"

He spoke quietly but with a touch of premeditation that fanned her suspicions into flame. The

last vision of the peace of Villa d'Este was shattered. She had a sudden resentment against time, place, and people alike. She was old and weary and defenceless all in a moment. Then she looked at Stephen and felt sorry for him. She had never compared Stella's admirers before—they were all equally unwelcome. But this was the best of them all.

"Well, thank you, very well," she answered helplessly—then in sudden revolt—"Doctor Ellison, may an old woman speak frankly to a young man?"

He stooped, lifted her hand and deliberately kissed it. "It would be very kind of her."

Catherine Innes blushed pink. She had not felt a touch like that for a quarter of a century. It wakened something very strange. "Must you see her?"

Stephen glanced at her sharply. "It means a great deal to me," he said simply.

She had a swift desire to save him, then a fear, equally swift, of thrusting herself into the elusive processes of these young hearts. He looked so quietly hopeful that she hesitated. What was the wisest, kindest thing to do?

Stephen caught her troubled eyes. "Well?"

"Stella's in the garden," she said, in abrupt surrender, and glanced at him again. There was great dignity about Stephen. His clear blue eyes met her own boldly, with nothing in them but confidence and calm.

At his step Stella was afraid to look up. Her heart was rioting and out of bounds. She had not

counted on Blantyre's arrival before dusk. Then she saw Stephen.

"Doctor Ellison!"

"I am sorry if I startled you. This exquisite place makes one even walk quietly."

"Isn't it perfect? And you, have you begun your wanderings again?"

"I don't know—yet. Would you be surprised if I said I came here to find out?"

She laughed, then stopped in quick confusion. "I don't think I understand," she said doubtfully.

"There seemed to be only one thing to do," he went on thoughtfully. "That was to come here. We were all so busy in Rome."

Intuition flashed a warning signal. But Stephen had his own imperturbable way of putting things. It made her question her quick feminine instinct.

"There were several things I wanted to say—but there seemed to be no opportunity of saying them —one especially."

Now she knew—absolutely. "Doctor Ellison!"

"It means so much to me," he continued, gazing at her intently, "that I've got to say it. The best part of me would die if I didn't. I don't know whether you can guess it, but I think you can."

Stella was very pale, her eyes full of distress. She was not unconscious that this was the tribute of Stephen's whole soul, a soul hitherto remote from any woman. And because of her respect for all he had made of himself and of life, every merciful fibre recoiled from this useless offering.

She tried to speak, but Stephen marched doggedly on. "Until I came to Rome I thought lif as

complete. I was over-satisfied with what it offered me. Men are prone to that," he added quizzically. "But I was wrong. Life is barren now, because I am conscious of a thousand things I never guessed at before. The last few weeks have done that."

"Please don't say any more." It seemed traitorous to Brian to be listening.

"Perhaps I was wrong to come here—and now; but it's the best part of myself that brought me, the part I want to offer to you," he said gently. "In one way it's not worth much, but in another, I hope, perhaps you might think it was. I have an enormous respect for women, and reverence you above all. You would be safe with me, if you would trust me."

She had a sudden sensing of the man's nobility. He offered service before love. But through the approaching dusk another lover was hastening to answer the eternal call. She looked at Stephen through a mist of tears. There was no doubting the depth of the emotion that swayed him, though he kept it dominantly in subjection. For a moment her spirit poised over the unwritten void of the future. She knew that the memory of this would follow her always.

"You honour me," she said unsteadily, "but, please, I beg you do not say anything more."

"Is it no use?" His voice was low.

"I am sorry to hurt you—sorry with all my heart."

His tones dropped to a whisper. "Is there any one else?"

She nodded, she could not speak.

He looked fixedly at her for a moment. He was stunned. His eyes wandered up the long blue lane to the hills beyond. In his face was that which suggested a mind seeking some old and ordered solitude in utter hopelessness—a mind that had essayed love and found the venture strange and not to be spoken of.

She held out her hand. It lay for a moment in his own. "Good-bye." Then she added with petitionary sweetness, "My friend."

Slowly their eyes met. A profundity of suffering was in his gaze, but behind this moved all the chivalrous strength of his nature. "Will you remember that always. I would think it a merciful thing if I could sometime serve you. Will you promise to let me know at any place or time."

"Yes, I will remember." She spoke with difficulty and trembling.

Stephen's gaze followed till she vanished through the trees. He sat plunged in thought. No emotion was visible on his smooth features. The shadows lengthened, the sun dipped, and he walked slowly through the gardens, then turned into the white-walled road to Cernobbio.

Half-way to Como he was roused by the approach of steps, sharp and unmistakably not those of a native. A tall figure came rapidly towards him and stopped abruptly.

"I say, can you oblige me with a light?" It was an English voice.

Stephen mechanically held out his match-box. The stranger struck one smartly and lifted it with sheltering hands to his pipe. In the tiny red glare

from the curved fingers Stephen caught a strong, clean-shaven face tanned a deep brown—grey eyes —thin and rather mobile lips—a pair of broad shoulders and lean sinewy hands. The whole vision of the man seemed to sharpen into something almost cruel as he sucked at his pipe. Then the flame died.

"Thanks. Jolly night, isn't it? Am I right for Villa d'Este?"

"Yes," said Stephen, indifferently. "You are quite right."

V

Dusk comes sweetly through the hills around Como. It steals imperceptibly around their feet, climbs delicately up the olive slopes and then very gently its greyness masks the light that lingers on the mountain tops. With it comes a cessation of the cruder noise of day and the awakening of those tiny but multitudinous sounds that blend into what we call silence. And after the dusk creeps a divine period when night seems to pause ere she envelops the world. The stars begin to tremble and on the hillside a myriad of lights wink like fire-flies. A subtle exhalation rises from the earth. The air is full of noiseless sheathing of flowers as if things both inanimate and sentient were preparing for rest.

In the midst of this earthly sacrament Stella waited for Blantyre. In a stillness that she dared not break there came a rustling in the odorous screen of branches. Then a liquid note, mellow

and questioning, throbbed out. Silence for a space, then another and another, till one by one the nightingales flung their songs into one passionate outburst. She was caught up in this palpitating flood. It was carrying her she knew not whither—but to things unimagined and wonderful. Suddenly it ceased.

Blantyre was standing in the shadows. Stella saw, but could not move. He came toward her slowly, almost uncertainly, and without words, stood directly in front of her. So long he stood, and so motionless, that again a questioning note sounded from the grove. Something robbed her also of speech, and she stretched out her hands.

Blantyre, towering above her, took them in his own. "Do you really care, can you really care?" There was a strange note in his voice, as of some great, uncouth thing blinking at the light.

"Care?" she whispered. "Can you think it is only care?"

"I don't understand it," he said simply.

"Must you understand it, Brian? I don't want to."

"I have nothing. Never shall have anything. I am a ship's doctor. I have no right to be here." He said it with a doggedness, as if this was something he must say at the very outset.

"Is that all?" she answered softly.

For a time Blantyre did not stir. Then he added, "There is only one thing to offer." His eyes travelled slowly from her hands to her shoulders and face, and met the question in her gaze. "There never was any one else, you know that."

He was fighting with himself. The greater the struggle the more her heart went out to him. Even his love could not speak till he had made things clear.

But the woman in Stella was alive. In this man, motionless in the dusk, she descried her mate. Something stirred in her and took her by the throat.

"Your letter," she said unsteadily. She was very pale—her lips were parted. A sudden singing sounded in her ears through which she heard Blantyre's breathing. It was short and sharp. Nearness and night had reached him too. They were driving the blood furiously through him.

"I want you," he said brokenly. "It is a month now, and——" his words trailed out into a silence that dissolved with the sound of rustling leaves.

"Tell me," she whispered. "Tell me all."

"I tried to fight it out," he said, with a sudden evenness in his voice, "but it was no use. I had finished with the sea when you left Genoa."

Swayed by an invisible force, she moved towards him, a slight, infinitesimal movement. Her shoulder touched his. For an instant they stayed thus, conscious only of that delicate burning pressure. Then his arms went out and around her. "Stella," he said fiercely.

"Brian," she whispered again, "I love you."

She relaxed in his embrace. Very gently her lips were turned to his. A wordless space in which she felt only the strength of his arms, and then in the shadowed screen thrilled out a tiny voice. It rose and pulsed and paused, and ere its chain of melody broke there chimed in another and another throb-

bing sweetness, till the whole invisible choir scaled the heights together.

For a moment thus. Then because her heart was surcharged with heaven-born tenderness and because in that moment she had changed forever, Stella slipped from his arms. He watched her white dress shimmer through the dusk. The garden had fallen into silence again. In the chestnut grove a feathered rustling told that the small brown choristers were settling down in their cloistered sanctuary. Blantyre pulled himself together with a characteristic movement of shoulders, and turned to the lake. It lay like flat silver beneath the peaceful moon. He felt in his pocket and thoughtfully lit his pipe. His lips closed round its stem in a hard tightness, and for a long time he stood thus, smoking and staring. So far as his face could express emotion it spoke of much. It had the same look as when he gazed over the ship's rail at Genoa—but now it was more confident, if more reflective. Then he knocked his pipe sharply against the stone balustrade. "I did not say it," he said, half-aloud. "I could not say it."

VI

STELLA breakfasted with Miss Innes in her own room.

She had awakened from troubled dreams to a sudden need for the nearness of the older woman, who was reading her with wise and kindly eyes.

"I know what you must think," said Stella.

"Then, my dear, you know more than I do. It is not the present I am thinking about. It's the future."

Stella flushed happily. "Auntie, will you tell me something?"

"As if you hadn't been told enough lately," flashed Miss Innes.

"But will you tell me something?"

"I'm not promising. What is it?"

"Were you ever in love?" said Stella evenly.

Miss Innes' cup paused half-way. A delicate colour crept into her cheeks and mounted her temples. She stared at Stella for an instant, as if fascinated. The lace on her bosom began to tremble. Then the cup descended uncertainly, and she walked to the window with a film over her eyes.

"My dear, it's five-and-twenty years ago, the year that you were born."

Stella went to her quickly and tenderly.

Catherine Innes brushed away a tear. "It's all right, and right that you should know. He was a fine, upstanding man, too, like this doctor of yours. We were happy till stories came of his doings in far countries of this and that. So I asked him to explain."

"And then?"

"And then he told me that the past was dead and done with, and that he offered me the future and the best that was in him. He would put away the rest altogether. But it was not enough for me, and I could not rest about that past of his, though

God knows it was probably no worse than most other men's. So I demanded to know it."

"Did he tell you?"

"He told me that it was not worthy of me or himself either. I was angered at that, and sent him away, loving him more all the time. He went to fight Riel," she added faintly, "and was the first man killed at Batoche—and may God forgive me." She dabbed at her eyes. "There's your man now, he's waiting for you. Go to him, girlie, and when you do give—give all of yourself. Don't be asking too many questions. Eh, but it's a lang time syne," she added, in the broad Scotch she always used when greatly moved.

Blantyre on the terrace below was gazing across the lake. He turned with a curiously deliberate movement, met their eyes, and lifted his hat. Instantly he appeared to Stella as he had just a month ago at the *Harmonic's* rail. She had wanted to go to him at once, but at the sudden recollection of that month she hesitated. It was a small thing, that lifting of a hat, but it drove home to her the swift coming of her own decision. He waited, looking up quietly. The blue uniform had given way to soft tweeds that wrapped loosely his tall, broad figure. The greyness of them blended admirably with the clear bronze of his face. The sun penetrated the small curly folds of his brown hair, touching them into something gold and red that was suggestively vital and strong. He had that characteristic cleanness of appearance of the well-groomed Englishman—a cleanness that applied to expression and poise, as well as a certain trans-

lucency of skin. And over him all, from the spotless canvas of his shoes to the lambent light in his hair, rested the sign of the sea. It revealed itself in the smooth breadth of shoulder, the lean, latent activity of frame and an indefinable physical balance. The man's body seemed restful, yet alert, slack and yet tuned to instant action.

And Blantyre, waiting in the sunshine, was conscious of one thing only. He had fallen on his feet. He felt as yet no promptings of emotion. Civilian clothes, civilian ease and freedom, these he was keenly alive to. What he should give in return had yet to be settled. The main question was how he should comport himself. He only casually reckoned the magnitude of Stella's gift. Nothing in the happenings of the previous day had reached the inner man. He had as yet no pride in the possession of Stella's virgin beauty. The physical side of him felt no pulse of desire. The realisation of this surprised him. He had not known he was so cold, that the nearness and touch of the present and the intimate promise of the future would leave him almost unmoved.

He heard her step and looked up. At this approach he changed. Something new and strange hammered at his heart. Stella was standing beside him. The transparency of sunlight endowed her with a living, palpitating entity that he had not been conscious of the night before. No longer veiled in shadows, she now appeared the exquisite physical embodiment of all that her presence had so lately promised. He stared at her.

They walked through the grove in a breath-

less silence. "Is it true, all true?" he said suddenly.

"Yes, a thousand times." She slipped her arm into his own. "Oh, my dear, my dear."

Blantyre's blood began to quiver at the touch of her. Quick, intimate suggestions came at him, thrilling with potent whisperings of things but dreamed before. Then the old Blantyre awoke—queer, exacting, and differentiating. "Do you know—do you understand—what it all means, to rearrange everything and everybody. Do you realise that you are giving so much and I so little." He heard voices within shouting at him: "Be fair, be fair with her." He wanted to crush her in his arms to prove his own possession.

"I am giving nothing, except"—she hesitated—"myself. You are doing just the same."

He stared at her hungrily. He had not yet thought much of the future, except that in a vague way it was to be different from the life he loathed. He did not want to think of it now, but to luxuriate in broad anticipations and acclimatise himself to a new and exquisite environment. But Stella had waited confidently for love. The manner of its coming was not so much a revelation as a natural widening of boundaries that had never been rigid. To her their betrothal was a dedication, to Blantyre it was the shattering of chains of circumstance.

He almost heard them dropping, as Stella urged him to send his resignation to the Inter-Oceanic that very day. "I have nothing else," he protested doggedly. "It's hard for you to believe it—literally nothing else. I send ten pounds a month

to my people. I have saved two hundred more. "What right have I——" He stopped abruptly, the blood rising to his temple.

"Brian, dearest, don't; never speak to me like that. You hurt me. What is the good of money, my money, if you will, if not for our happiness? You don't know, you can't know what I have been planning, yes, ever since I wrote you to come. To-day is ours and the next, and the next, and all our lives. You must leave the *Harmonic*. Not an atom of you belongs there. You are all mine."

"And then?" he said, his pulses beating faster.

"I want you to practise in Canada. Do you remember what you said about doctoring a procession? I have never forgotten it. Don't you understand, dear, I'm proud of you and your skill. You must buy a practice, yes, you—whatever I have will be yours as much as mine."

He looked at her soberly, amazed at this quiet confidence. He doubted his own skill not at all. He had seen enough of the world to know the value of a beautiful and clever wife to a professional man.

"I'm afraid I would be lost in Canada."

"Would you feel lost with me, Brian?" she replied, with a delicate promise in her eyes.

Again that new-born hunger assailed him, and again he beat it down, lest he terrify a soul that as yet faltered on the brink of passion. "I'm not afraid of myself professionally. It's the social, human side of life that baffles me. I can't make this seem reasonable, I know that." He spoke with careful thought. "Some people naturally attract, the world likes them and they like the world. That's

a personal gift. I'm afraid I have a kink in me—I've felt it all my life—and that's why I hesitate about Canada. It's probably egotism, pure and simple," he added with a touch of bitterness.

She shook her head. "It's modesty and reserve, pure and simple, Brian, and I love you all the more for it. It's hard for me to explain now about Canada, but I'll be more fond of it than ever with you."

Her assurance of love was such that she leaned on it. It had effaced everything but this planning of their lives. Spiritually, she had given herself absolutely. Emotionally, she had not yet awakened to the point of the great surrender. She wondered if she seemed cold to him.

Blantyre felt a twinge of remorse. His difficulties appeared small in the face of this larger vision. His mind was charged with the reasoning that had brought him where he was. It seemed contemptible. "Don't misunderstand me," he said very gently. "I want to do the very best for us both, wherever it is. The *Harmonic* didn't suggest Canada—you suggest so much that I'm rather staggered." He put his arms round her impulsively. "Do you think you can face your home with a half-tamed, intractable, cranky Irish doctor who thinks most maladies are avoidable, if not altogether objectionable?"

He got his answer unspoken. At the touch of her lips he knew that nothing was impossible. The narrowness of the *Harmonic's* surgery vanished. He could, if he would, exercise a beneficent sway—it was all in the point of view. He would join the

ranks of the normal ones and a truce to questioning criticism. More than that, he was endowed with an exquisite mate, the woman made for man. At the thought, something uncontrollable shook him. He held her closely and passionately. "I don't understand," he whispered, "but I love you—love you. I can't see anything except you. Let the rest of it go just for to-day. I want nothing now but your embrace." His kisses covered her face and neck.

For a moment she lay in his arms, her heart beating furiously against his own. Then she drew away, very pale and breathless, but with a marvellous light in her brown eyes. He watched her while the colour crept slowly back to her cheek. He was shaken, himself, utterly. A new Blantyre was rising within him, one of which he had no knowledge.

In the days that followed it was strange to feel that he meant anything to anybody. The matter of his return to the *Harmonic* smoothed itself out with astonishing ease. He did not know how it was done—he only knew that the sea had loosed its hold on him. It was a novel sensation to discuss the purchase of a practice, a thing that most of the men he knew had built up with years of toil. It was stranger still to anticipate a life that would continue in comfort whether he made money or not.

They circled around the date of their marriage till Catherine Innes put the question squarely. She had accepted Blantyre. He was the inevitable end of her protective campaign. The whole affair was too final, too absolute. It had violated all her views of a normal courtship. It seemed to have

descended abruptly from the skies and enveloped Stella in a whirlwind from which she emerged, breathless, determined and engaged. Now, her aunt philosophically surveyed the scene of combat, and animated possibly by weariness, but equally possibly by a sense of personal relief, calmly demanded that the victor take possession.

"You can wait of course as long as you like, but what's the use of waiting. Buy your man his practice and settle down. I'll bide till the day, then I'm off to the north."

To Blantyre she said very little, but watched with wise, observant eyes. Their youth was blatant and dominant. It made her feel weak. She didn't like the English—an inheritance, perhaps, from Border days. Blantyre's indifference toward them actually made him negatively more acceptable.

To Stella she said more, keen, trenchant things, tempered by the knowledge that she was so soon to lose her. There lived in her that Scotticism which is still one of the strongest elements in Canadian life. What was English might be good, but she had her doubts. She was deaf to Stella's entreaties that she would live with them.

"No, no," with a shake of her grey head. "There'll be new friends and new voices. Stella, you'll be busy mothering your Brian, if I'm not mistaken. It's these stiff-necked Irish that need handling. To-day you have them, and to-morrow you're wondering where they are. You've got a big order, girlie, and it's all your own. There's no room for an old woman—except—except—well, I'll know when I'm wanted."

VII

THEY were married very quietly in London. Miss Innes and two of Blantyre's sisters were witnesses. Tall, angular girls these, with faces like Blantyre and suggestions of a strong, permanent, unyielding strain. Evidently they regarded Stella as some strange creature moving in an atmosphere unknown to them, but she liked their independent informality and made them promise to visit her. Two weeks later they sailed for Canada. On the ship were many people Stella knew. This intimate voyage, under the scrutiny of familiar faces, revealed Blantyre at his best. He was still unacclimatised to his new freedom. Fragments of the old life still clung to him. It was strange not to occupy the surgery, hard not to yield to the invitational suggestions that came automatically at certain hours.

She watched him lovingly and with pride. She knew that he constantly felt how meagre was his share of their mutual offering. Outwardly he assumed the normal independent husband — inwardly he was full of contrasts. On deck it was hard for him to mingle with the procession he had for so many years contemplated with no personal interest.

There were passionate seasons when she quivered responsively to the outpourings of his long lonely soul, glimpses into the luminous depths of his remote and difficult spirit. Passion was marvellous. His embrace was like burning flame. But even from

the abandonment of her own surrender she looked out with searching and prophetic eyes.

On the ship were many English travellers, but more Canadian. Blantyre, now from the inside, studied them with interest. Of the English people some were going to live in Canada. Its virile prosperity was a magnet. It drew them away from a life of fruitless effort, arduous and unproductive, whose object was the difficult maintenance of social position, whose future was nebulous and unpromising. In spite of blood and breeding, in spite of custom and tradition and countless memories there was now no room for them at home. Blantyre knew what it meant. He felt something of what they felt.

The others interested him most—returning to all corners of Canada, confident people who accepted cheerfully all Britain and the Continent had to offer, then set their faces westward on the long trail home. Lawyers, brokers, manufacturers, all seemed to enjoy life with an unhesitating acceptance of the future. Blantyre was struck by the freedom of their thoughts. What would have been business confidences in England were here discussed without reserve. There was none of that English reticence, that coldness which is, after all, merely an unwillingness to appear too interested in other people's affairs. They were interested, and said so frankly.

They were patriotic, these Canadians. They loved that element of English life which understood their own country. They spoke quizzically of British formalities, but with the affection of a boy for his school. He could see that they were divided

between respect for British traditions and unwillingness to hitch their own waggons to any individual star, however ancient and glorious.

He was fascinated by two men especially. Some one had called them kings of construction. One was of medium height, with wide forehead, pointed beard, and extraordinarily brilliant and observant eyes. He moved with quick nervous precision, and was patently preoccupied. The other was massive—with huge shoulders and head—a leonine face with dark slumbrous eyes that lit with sudden gleams of depth and relapsed again into apparent inattention. Blantyre had heard of this combination. It had dotted Canada with vast undertakings and furrowed it with railways. The men themselves had ceased to be private individuals. By now they seemed rather instruments of astonishing force and efficiency, instruments that were vitally a part of the progress of the country, and without which that country would move more aimlessly and ineffectually. There was also a well-known Scottish divine who had accepted a far call, knowing that in the roots of his new life Scotch influences flourished exceedingly. A former Canadian Prime Minister, now in opposition, journeyed homeward from the Riviera—tall, suave, courtly, an old-world Gallic type in a new-world setting.

Stella knew them all. Brian was quietly proud of their attention to her. He began to see that under alien skies his own horizon would widen vastly.

The Laurentian gate-way opened magnificently before them. Belle Isle Straits yielded to the

shoreless expanse of the gulf. Blantyre knew that though he was already in Canada he was still a thousand miles from Montreal. This illimitable unfolding was compelling, with suggestions of immensity. This sea, encompassed by the oldest mountains known to man, flashed brilliantly in the June sun. It was radiant.

Stella surveyed the wide-flung country with infinite pleasure and affection. Intensely a child of this new soil, a delicious pride thrilled her that it was to this she was bringing Brian.

"I love it all," she said, pointing to the glistening whiteness of a French village that lay in a fold of the hills.

Brian laughed. Then his hand closed over her own and held it fast. "I am fascinated. One's ideas have to be remodelled here. I got used to New York, one dropped in on it off the sea; but here we seem to sail for days through Canada and never reach it."

The ex-Prime Minister halted in his constitutional. "Well, what do you think of it?" There was a fibre in his voice that Blantyre liked. He had ceased to be Gallic—he was national.

"Honestly, sir, don't know what to think. It's too huge to grasp, especially when one tries to link this with the West."

The Minister looked at him thoughtfully. "That's exactly it—to link this with the West—the dream of every good Canadian."

"Is it a dream, sir?"

"Yes—as yet, but not a dream for the future. Think of it—millions of them here, more millions on

the way. All races and religions, further from each other, some of them, than the Norwegian from the Italian. Different occupations — different conditions—different requirements—one section claiming as a right that which would mean, at present anyway, commercial death for the other one. The Hindoo clamouring for admission to British Columbia as a British subject. Poland and Russia emptying their unfiltered scum through Quebec. Yankee farmers treking by hundreds of thousands into the Prairie country." He turned abruptly. "What is to hold this motley throng together? Nothing but a common ambition which must be the growth of a common interest."

"Sir John, please go on." Stella's eyes were brilliant with interest.

"I get inoculated just here—every trip," said the Minister smiling. "I go to England and the Continent every two years. One gets a better perspective. There is so much in the older countries that practically shouts to be noticed. I've been accused of being a Socialist. In the right sense of the word I am. One feels that in Europe the human hive is too thick. They rub off each other's down—being reduced to naked necessities. What impresses me there is how difficult it is for the ordinary man to get on under ordinary conditions. There are too many of them—slaves to cast-iron tenets of birth and position. Their radius is limited. They must know their place and keep it."

One of the construction kings wheeled in his walk. "In other words, Sir John——"

The Minister's finger tapped the contractor's

broad shoulder. "In other words—take yourself. What did you start with?"

The big man wrinkled his brow. "Started with? Why—nothing."

"Exactly. Call it nothing if you like. I call it the personal equation. Now, to get back. My point is that whether the ordinary man gets on in Canada is a question of the personal equation rather than the local conditions which governed him before he got here."

"Just what do you mean by the ordinary man, sir?" said Blantyre.

"Fairly productive, fairly determined, fairly energetic, and, above all things, sane. I don't mean that fortune awaits such a man, but I do mean that he can establish his own independence and, what is much more, his spiritual freedom. He becomes a national asset, instead of a national responsibility. Mind you, I speak of the man who comes voluntarily and who is not sent. There is a vast difference. If he feels that this country wants him, has room for him, it's one thing, but if he is mainly conscious that no other country has room for him it's a very different thing. It all depends, broadly speaking, on whether he's looking west or east."

"What about his race, his traditions," put in the contractor. "I run up against a good many of them. Are they absorbed politically and racially?"

The Minister scanned the shores of Anticosti. Its densely-wooded plateau dipped to the gulf, dark, impenetrable, full of shadows and mysterious suggestions.

"That's the big question." He lifted his hand.

"Look at that shore, now—speechless, untamed, unprofitable. But I happen to know that just round the corner there's a thriving population—fishermen and lumbermen. The place is being opened up with clearing and roads. It's reflecting more and more of themselves. It's not something they inherited—but it's something into which they put themselves, actually, physically, vitally. Every stroke of an axe makes an impression and a difference. Now consider that Anticosti is nearly four thousand miles long, and two thousand deep. What do you get? A multitude making its mark. What's the result? The things they make are the expression of their cumulative and prophetic selves, and mean more to them than any shibboleth of monarchical traditions which the march of the world has out-stripped. That's why I don't feel that the racial question is one that we need be anxious about. These men are propagating a new nationality, and," he added reverently, "please God, it will last while the world lasts."

"It will last all right," said the construction king thoughtfully; "but what about the other fellows—the ones that are sent?"

Blantyre waited intently. He had heard that Canada was the bourne of younger sons.

The Minister laughed. "That day is nearly over. The English know better now. But I used to hear a great deal of it indirectly, and the Civil Service suffers, undoubtedly. As a matter of fact, you railway men are the greatest educators."

The two drifted into a general talk. Blantyre heard the opening of a transcontinental railway

discussed by the men who backed and built it. He heard the attitude of governments analysed and the purchase of a steamship line suggested. Nothing seemed impossible to this man who had incorporated himself into the irresistible march of this new kingdom. It left him breathless and amazed.

The gulf narrowed, and next day they skirted the Gaspé coast. Typically French it was, with white villages clustered round a monumental parish church. Always the church dominated the scene.

Presently came the Isle of Orleans. That afternoon they rounded Point Levis, and Quebec in all its ancient beauty was before them. Blantyre thought he had never seen anything to compare with this bold city of olden days, suspended in a blaze of sunlight on its massive mount. Below ran the St. Lawrence, wrinkled with wind, ploughed continuously with passing steamers, sailing vessels and ferries. Up the precipitous banks climbed the narrow streets of old-world houses, queer irregular structures, inviting memories of Montmartre and the commune. High above all rose the grey historic battlements, baptised again and again with blood, but now slumbering out their mellow age beneath a stainless sky. Down the river, the Falls of Montmorency flashed like silver in the sun. Southward the plains of Levis stretched out, long narrow strips of vivid green, with farm houses edging the white road that wound past their shining rows of windows.

It was all very beautiful. Stella gazed at it entranced. Blantyre remembered suddenly that night when she had leaned on the *Harmonic's* rail and stretched out her hands to the Azores. She

was beautiful then, but she was transfigured now. He wanted to take her in his arms. In their own cabin he had his way. She was delicious and yielding. Then she drew his head to her heart. "You are mine, all mine, and, Brian darling, you are coming home."

VIII

YORKTON in 1911 had outgrown its clothes. It was the point of departure for the West, and in close association with older and Eastern Canada. Prosperity had smiled on it for years. One after another, factors had developed that turned into it increasing tides of humanity. As a city it reflected a swift transformation from a humdrum university town. Sky-scrapers shot up on its business streets from a medley of commonplace old-time buildings. The streets themselves were narrow, and gorged with traffic. Transportation threatened to become chaotic. There was a curious mixture of old and new, a blending of things nearly complete with others but recently conceived, all permeated with a casual acceptance that this progress was, of necessity, unending.

The city had marched northward. Historic residences were engulfed in the flood. The business section sprang out spasmodically with uneven jumps, seizing psychological corners, neglecting others. And all this had hastened with the universally accepted axiom that the twentieth century belonged

to Canada. European countries fostered the idea by pouring in capital, England leading with hundreds of millions sterling. This ceaseless influx from invisible coffers intoxicated many Canadians. They felt that Canadian projects of almost any complexion would always be welcomed abroad. It was reflected in the rapidity with which companies were organised and subscribed.

Younger, smaller and less metropolitan than Montreal, Yorkton was subject to diverse influences. The Roman Church was not a local factor. French atmosphere was unrecognisable — there was no seaborne traffic, but in place was the United States, Cobalt, the university " sphere " and immigration. Of them all the proximity of the United States was perhaps most noticeable. Canada's eight millions rubbed elbows with a population ten times as large. Across the line, numerous economic and social tendrils were being pushed northwards. The money markets marked time with New York conditions. Manufacturers, suddenly wakened from the lethargy induced by high protective walls, discovered that American factories were shouldering up against their own. American apartment-houses reconciled thousands of Yorktonians to the life of a cave-dweller. Railways put on special trains to carry the Yorkton business men southwards.

The silver deposits of Cobalt had enriched many and impoverished a few. Yorkton soberly remembered other mining booms, and held back, though Cobalt was at its very doors. Later came the awakening. But Cobalt was stupendous and lavish. It developed into the greatest silver camp

of modern days, and with it came a new type of Yorktonian—very rich, very sure of himself, not yet acclimatised to wealth, blossoming with extravagances of affluence.

The university atmosphere was difficult to define, but of deep significance. It was better recognised, perhaps, outside Yorkton limits than within them. Education was cheap; some said too cheap. To the halls of Yorkton College flocked four thousand students, self-elected candidates for the nimbus of a degree, a motley, energetic, ambitious throng, ravished largely from depopulated farms of Ontario. There was no natural selection, no process of elimination. A degree was the heaven-born privilege of every man who could write his papers. The Government took the same view of it, and subsidised the university. Thus streamed northward and westward yearly droves of young men, some admirable enough, but, in their confident ranks, many a spoiled artisan and emasculated farmer.

It was difficult to know what the professors thought of it, this modern and automatic process, this inverse ratio between quality and quantity. The country demanded education. The country got it. But was it teaching the country how to live?

The university set was small, and, whetner consciously or not, somewhat remote. Dominated largely by the Oxford School, it renewed these historical associations at every opportunity. Such pilgrimages served to increase the distinction. Between this professionally traditional circle and the larger one in which it moved, Yorkton boomed

along, occupied with most things, diverted by many. But many professors looked across the sea to satisfy an intellectual appetite, interested in the ethics and method of teaching rather than the ultimate destiny of the man who was taught. The rural population of the province decreased steadily for years, and just as steadily swelled the roster of the university. As yet this had caused no comment. The cost of living in Yorkton increased fifty per cent. in ten years. But education was cheaper than ever.

Society was perforce polyglot. Financial prominence brought with it social opportunities universally recognised. A prominent banker was spoken of with deference, invested with qualities to which he might never aspire, and social circles swung easily open for his entrance. And this, because Canadians felt subjectively that these men played a large part in the national game. Their demeanour was a national barometer. Arts and science carried with them no special recognition public or private. Wealthy men spoke patronisingly of local talent and bought pictures in Holland. Canadian painters had not yet secured any affectionate regard from the people at large—the general feeling being that Canada was as yet too young to produce imaginative work of high merit. As a result many of them went to other countries.

The British Government was bestowing titles, occasionally with recklessness, though most of them were opportune. In this onward rush old Yorkton families found food for reflection. They surveyed historic acres that a few years before had

been their home farm. Sold for insignificant sums, they were to-day a wilderness of bricks and mortar. But few of Yorkton's earlier settlers had had the prophetic vision. Now they glanced at flashing motor cars and reflected that twenty years ago they knew every one, while now one hardly knew any one. They had stuck to the professions, though trade and manufacturing possessed the land.

Thus there existed a circle, growing yearly smaller, more limited and more exclusive—desecrated periodically by the defections of sensible and commercially-minded apostates, who veered off into tabooed channels of business pursuits.

But of all this the new aristocracy took little heed. The world was very good to taste, and money was easily made. They were flushed with sudden success, and lacked the tempering touch of experience.

As to England and the English, opinions were divided. A certain pride and affection for Great Britain was noticeable everywhere. Inchoate imperial sentiments were ruffled when English visitors mingled bland interest with a touch of condescension. Canadians had become tired of being interpreted to themselves by influential foreigners who grasped the situation in a glance from a private car. Politics created no social division. There was nothing to approach a salon in Yorkton. Membership in the local parliament meant nothing to most Yorktonians. A seat in the Ottawa House was a matter of only a day's comment, except from office-seekers.

It was difficult to say to what extent the people

of Yorkton were affected by the presence of vice-royalty in Canada. Its sphere was primarily social. It had no real executive or economic significance. Always wise, always courtly, always worthy of his high office, the occupant of Rideau Hall was a reviver of ancient memories, but the mechanic and the carpenter were men of the present—also at heart they were democratic. The very dignity of vice-royalty imposed upon it limitations, and brought forth comment in a country of equality which it faithfully endeavoured to serve. The Governor-General came periodically and touched the fringe of agitated social circles, but the man in the street asked whether these ceremonies were not mediæval makeshifts that Canada had outgrown. The governor himself was poised delicately between monarchical principles and democratic requirements. His sailing orders were from Downing Street, but his barometer was in Canada. One viceregal personage had described himself as having for four years walked the tight-rope of platitude and compromise. The position was difficult and full of pitfalls.

The question of Imperial defence was made a mutual weapon of political offence. Canadians, to a man, were personally and intensely loyal, but a contribution to Imperial bulwarks was, in Ottawa, a party factor and little more. Canada lay back, cradled in a security toward which she had contributed service, but it was a service of silver to an individual British battleship. Men squirmed in their humiliated souls and straightway cast a party vote. Why worry when the seas of all the

world were flecked with the foam of British Dreadnaughts? There was small thought of possible peril, no visualisation of lurking catastrophe, no forward step to shoulder a portion of the world-burden of the Saxon. Canadians waved the flag, but Canada buttoned up her pocket.

Yorkton was a sporting town. Not that the majority of its inhabitants engaged in sports, but they spent much money on them. Cricket, football and baseball, hockey, bowling and racing flourished exceedingly. There was even polo for the elect. There was a largeness of view about sports, in that those who watched them were interpreted as taking part. In nothing was this so evident as in baseball, which, so far as concerns the cities of America, was an arduous and scientific profession rather than a game. Competition between cities for noted players was keen. Teams were purchased at exorbitant figures, the salaries of individual artists equalling that of the Premier of the province. Newspapers published columns of higher mathematics recording the permutations and combinations of league games. Baseball developed a new language, beside which Sanskrit was elementary, a weird verbiage that circulated far beyond the fields and filtered into national speech and idiom.

In spring and autumn came the Yorkton races—a speechless struggle between stable and dressmaker. Here Yorkton approached the metropolitan. Society bowed and beamed. It was good to see vice-royalty again. An animated spectacle this, with tiers of fluttering boxes, the hydra-headed crowds outside the members' enclosure, the great green oval of

velvet turf and Lake Ontario flashing in the sun.

Cricket lived only in virtue of Anglo-Saxon predilections. It was not a national game. Football, principally a university function, approached baseball in its tactical signals and evolutions. But golf had done much for Yorkton. The Canadian business man was a compromise between a Britisher who regarded golf as a religion and the American who was just waking to its temperamental invitation. Thus Yorkton was a city of many golf clubs, in which membership was at a premium.

Sleighing, skating and hockey, the latter a brilliant apotheosis of shinny on ice, depended upon the winters, which were uncertain. Lacrosse, the finest of them all—played in Canada by Indian athletes ere the Jesuits came—was professional and moribund.

In general the desire of the heart was the desire to win. If this meant money, by all means spend the money. Canadians, in the mass, were immersed deeply in constructive, material undertakings that demanded the justification of victory. But it might be asked whether they had yet grasped the psychology of sport.

A panorama of residential Yorkton would have revealed the presence of architectural vagaries, dotted amongst rows of substantial if depressingly uniform houses, an abundance of open, well-kept lawns, and a complete absence of bottle-crowned brick walls. Farther out would be descried speculative areas in which one-time farms were adorned with massive stone gates, through which doomed investors were whirled cheerfully to their fate. The

atmosphere of the city was that of home, security and friendliness. The shops were numerous, mostly expensive, and served principally by Scotch and English attendants. One house of business had twenty thousand employees in its factories and sales rooms.

A predominating feature was the freedom, opportunity and economic position of women. As confidential secretaries, as administrators of departments, as press contributors, as sociological and executive experts, their achievements were remarkable. The suffrage question was under serious consideration of municipal and provincial government. Opposition to it was active, based on motives of selfishness, or prehistoric interpretations of the feminine sphere of occupation, a negative and indifferent intelligence at variance with local conditions.

Church influences were strong. Baptists and Methodists, numerically in the ascendant, tended to trade and manufacture. Anglicans leaned to the professions and the university. Presbyterians divided themselves in a fairly even ratio. There was no alliance of Church and State, but Sunday morning habits encouraged a certain social segregation.

The local Press was a curious admixture of news, sensation and advertisements. Authoritative financial reports were from the United States. European happenings, considered remote, were usually dismissed in a few lines. Party politics induced virulent leading articles, and personal attacks were pointed and scathing; this in curious

contrast to a general indifference as to the personality of politicians.

Pages were devoted to sports, mostly professional. Society columns were padded with pointless paragraphs. The advent of a murderer was the signal for nauseating columns, deleterious in colour and incident, while in the next issue might be observed untempered criticism of the Yellow Press of the United States. But through this *mélange* was observable a growing national spirit, a crescent throb of power and resource. Thoughtful journals were beginning to foster contemplation of the deeper things of life. More and more space was devoted to Canadiana, literary, historical and scientific. The members of the Fourth Estate were conscious of professional ethics.

Canadian humour, an elusive attribute, was difficult of recognition. Whatever existed had a curiously practical nature, removed psychologically from that of older countries. It amused, but it did not relieve. One or two humourists drew forth national smiles and thanks, but on the whole Canadians were too pre-occupied for mirth. The stage looked to London and New York. There were no Canadian playwrights. Opera struggled for life in Montreal, and visited Yorkton for a fortnight.

In this one city the municipal Board of Education spent no less than one-third of the total realised taxation, a scholastic orgy with lamentable results. The Board was inoculated with financial frenzy, and mediocre men were invested with tremendous power. The public schools taught everything,

except good manners, but gleams of life were apparent with the increasing demand for technical education. The mechanic might yet save the situation.

Is it asked what was the characterisation, the temperament and colour of the people? Sanguineness and independence without doubt, in this land where nothing was impossible. There was neither the reticence of Edinburgh nor the forbidding sameness of an English population. Everywhere one saw crisp fresh evidences of what had just been done by individuals whose sole capital was under their hats. That this induced a certain casual acceptance was not to be wondered at. Instead of it being told that the house of Thompson was three hundred years old, one was impressed by the fact that it was only five years old. Look at it now. These swift processes upset the arguments of laborious years. If an English house took fifty years to build a business, it took too long. And, behind all this, the faith of Yorktonians was pinned confidently on the West. So long as those millions of acres could grow wheat, fundamentals were secure.

Such was Yorkton in 1911. Tempted by prosperity, democratic influences and champagne—saved by conventionality, the relics of conservatism and Scotch whisky.

IX

STELLA's first dinner party caused her a good deal of thought. Brian felt he would be under fire, and surveyed the list quizzically. It was headed by the Clay-Stewarts, the academic link between the local university and Yorkton society. Clay-Stewart himself, a man of remarkable gifts and even more remarkable modesty, had been acclimatised by thirty years in Canada. At home he was known as a genial professor. In foreign laboratories he was honoured as a great scientist. His wife, after long self-immolation on the altar of official sacrifice, combined charm of dignity and responsiveness with a certain gentle weariness at the immutable recurrence of university functions. Stella felt very safe with them both. Then came Renton the banker. Renton for several years had been the unattainable object of Yorkton mothers with marriageable daughters. To the daughters he seemed almost too good to be possible. Politely diffident, superficially, at least, a perfectionist, and already wealthy, he was regarded by debutantes as a gilded god. His thirty-five years achieved an intermediate advantage, which operated equally successfully in virginal bosoms and the more established ranks of the younger married women. To balance Renton was Miss Ponsonby. Stella had a twinge of conscience when she posted her card. Miss Ponsonby, as a matter of fact, was to be the outward and visible sign of what Brian must not under any circumstances be himself. It was left to Miss Ponsonby to

be perfectly natural. Stella could always count on that. It was all she wanted. The Sturtridges and Dynocks completed the list. Sturtridge, a successful young broker, called himself a typical Canadian —unoppressed by tradition and uninfluenced by precedent, he kept one ear to the ground and both eyes on the main chance. He had a certain happy way of accepting other people as he found them. He was healthy, hard riding, and unimaginative. His wife was regarded by readers of the society columns as a social headlight. She was what might be termed a relative woman, in that she appeared to take part in everything that went on in Yorkton. But her contribution, if analysed, dwindled to an attractive frock, a marvellous complexion, a large white bosom and an intellectual vacuum. She was a feast to the eyes, but a famine to the brain.

The Dynocks stood for the old, unbending strain that now faced a social revolution, in which they were unceremoniously shouldered aside. Well-born and well-bred, they had felt it incumbent to express themselves critically about much that had developed in Canada in the last ten years. The expression had been neither fortunate nor justified. They had inherited a position which they were bound to take —and kept it unflinchingly. As a matter of fact, they hardly cared to belong to anything that any one else belonged to. An increase in the membership of one of his few clubs usually gave Dynock serious thoughts of resigning. He would liked to have selected every member himself. He played golf with soul-destroying precision and drank only Scotch whisky and water. He enjoyed himself

with unyielding self-control. Mrs. Dynock wore short skirts and square-toed boots, and carried on good works with just a shade of condescension. She held that the Maker of all women had endowed them with an all-sufficient grace and attraction, and did nothing to improve on the handiwork of nature. She rose above everything that might have softened the angularity of her active person.

Blantyre took in Mrs. Clay-Stewart. Looking around the table he was impressed at once by the evident geniality of their guests. There seemed to be nothing tentative, no preliminaries to go through. The women especially seemed spontaneous. They talked quickly, with assurance. Among the men he liked Clay-Stewart and Renton. Meeting Stella's glance, he felt suddenly that they were not only her friends, but that they were there on his account and ready to be his as well. An evident reminder, this gathering, of all that Stella contributed in this new life.

"I hear you are going to practice in Yorkton," volunteered Mrs. Clay-Stewart.

"I hope so," said Blantyre. Then, with a glance at the table, "If my friends give me time."

"Well, I have known a great many girls in the last twenty years, and your wife has more friends than any of them. Have you seen any one about a practice?"

"Yes, several men, but I don't think I've got the right end of things yet."

"Did you talk to Stephen Ellison?"

Blantyre shook his head. "Don't know him. Who is he?"

"Stephen Ellison," said Mrs. Clay-Stewart with

a certain dainty impressiveness, "is the cleverest and most unassuming surgeon in Yorkton; also the best looking. I think," she added with a touch of delicious horror, "that if any part of me had to be disposed of I'd send for him. It's funny though——" she stopped abruptly, and shot a swift glance at her hostess.

"What's funny?" put in Blantyre.

She hesitated a moment, and Sturtridge's voice came in:

"I've been trying to persuade your husband to come to Cobalt next week."

"I hope he'll go," said Mrs. Clay-Stewart. Then turning to Blantyre, "You know all about Cobalt?"

"I have visions of mountains of silver."

"Well, you're not so far out. But it's made a great difference in Yorkton. The rich ones are richer, and we poor ones more poor than ever. There's a Cobalt aristocracy, with private cars and motors and large incomes."

Sturtridge twisted a wine glass and eyed its shining rim, "It's our own fault that we didn't get more of it. It was too near home to be true, so we just folded our hands and watched the procession come up over the line. Then, when we woke up, it was too late."

"What was it?" asked Blantyre, "British conservation?"

"No, I don't think so. It was because Canadians as a rule are too near their own country to get it in perspective. We are a part of the picture and don't see it. When I go to England, I burst with pride at the thought of Canada, and when I get home

I turn down things that I would have jumped at if they had been cabled."

"Oh, really," said Miss Ponsonby suddenly, "how very curious."

Every one laughed—and her high-pitched voice held on. "But it is curious, isn't it?"

"It's something else too," struck in Renton crisply. "As a rule we don't accept things until some one else has passed us them. We wait for some outside sign manual. It's the same with books, pictures—almost anything you like."

"Do you mean that Canadians don't trust themselves?" asked Clay-Stewart, who was keenly interested.

"Not exactly. But I mean that we often might be perfectly convinced as to the desirability of a thing, and yet not voice that conclusion without outside support. We are not lacking in originality—but to be honest, we are rather afraid of it."

"We have an idea that Canadians aren't afraid of anything," said Blantyre, smilingly.

"Politically?" queried Sturtridge, with a grin. "It strikes me you take a very generous view of it."

Blantyre hesitated, and Sturtridge went on. "Look at us politically. A bedlam we call Parliament, divided into two sections equally keen on expressing our imperial sentiments, yet stultified by that insufferable thing they call Party. I tell you, as Canadians, we are ashamed of it. The British Government is in an awfully delicate position. It can't say a word without seeming to intrude. It can't even suggest. And here we are playing racquets with the biggest idea of a century."

"I hardly feel that I can say anything about that," replied Blantyre, "but we haven't forgotten what your men did at Paardeberg."

"British to the core," laughed Renton; "there's pure Saxon."

"Perhaps it is," persisted Blantyre, "but I want to be just as good a Canadian as any of you."

"Canadians have dreadful manners," put in Miss Ponsonby abruptly, then turned her pale blue eyes on Renton. "Don't you think so?"

The banker's lips twitched. "I think you're perfectly right. But do you know why?"

"I really can't imagine."

"Two reasons. Canadians—average Canadians—don't often expect them at home, also don't often teach them. Was a boy ever taught to say 'Sir' in a Public School? Quite the reverse. They get the idea that civility is servility. It's in the air. English working people come over here with what we think are mighty good manners. In six months they lose them with their complexions."

Every one laughed. The ladies were lifted into a wave of white shoulders by that extraordinary glance with which a hostess conveys her feminine signal. The men settled back to smoke. Mrs. Dynock drifted into a corner of the drawing-room with Mrs. Clay-Stewart.

"Isn't he nice," she said; "but who is he?"

"I know all about him," replied Mrs. Clay-Stewart. "Irish, of course; old family—very good family. The Blantyres have had the same place outside Dublin for two hundred years, and I don't know how much longer."

"Money?" asked the philanthropist.

"Not a penny. Lost it ages ago. But they simply didn't know how to let go and clear out. His grandfather was an Admiral, and the father was killed in service. All the Blantyres are good-looking, and proud as they are poor."

Mrs. Dynock hesitated. "How does Stephen Ellison take it?"

The older woman rippled into a smile. "My dear, how does Stephen Ellison take everything. That man is an automatic machine. You can't see his inside works."

Mrs. Dynock relapsed into interested sympathy. "Perhaps one can't. But just the same, I'm awfully sorry for him."

"Don't waste your sympathy. Stephen Ellison is just as proud as our host; but perhaps in a different way."

Mrs. Dynock tapped her square-toed slipper, and looked across the room at Stella. "Well, do you know," she said thoughtfully, "the reason I'm so interested in Stephen Ellison is because I'm perfectly certain that he feels infinitely more than he expresses. I don't expect a surgeon to be a bundle of sympathy. It's out of the question. He's got to be more or less mechanical—just as you say, but somehow——"

The men came in from the dining-room. Sturtridge had his hand on Clay-Stewart's arm, and was talking about Cobalt. Blantyre looked happy. He had a certain indefinable proprietory atmosphere that reached Stella with new suggestions of intimacy, and brought the colour to her cheeks. Their eyes met for a moment and flashed prophetic signals.

X

THE next day Blantyre went to see Matthews, M.D., general practitioner. Matthews, rotund, good-natured and easy-going, had built up a tremendous practice by shrewdness and a genial acquiescence in his patients' ideas as to their own maladies. Nothing could have been more happily conceived than his bedside manner, as he sat pink-cheeked and white-whiskered, prescribing innocuous drugs with fatherly friendliness. Admirably non-committal, he would have made an excellent ambassador. Men talked to him in confidential moments of a convalescence which they credited to him, rather than to a nature he had been wise enough to let alone. He had a certain impressiveness which was, as a matter of fact, due to his faith in the world at large, and not to any quality of self-reliance. He made positive progress through the negative method of encouraging his patients to do everything they could for him. As a result he was universally popular and respected. He had known Stella for years and now surveyed her husband with interest.

Blantyre put the case succinctly. He wanted a practice and was willing to buy one—he had studied under such men and had such experience—what would Matthews advise?

Matthews hesitated. For the last few years he had experienced a dawning suspicion that he himself was not, so to speak, absolutely up to date. Some of the younger men, notably Stephen Ellison, were upsetting pet theories of his that he still clung to as

professional assets, though worn by constant use. Having amassed a comfortable surplus, he inwardly recognised the charm of retirement and the psychology of the moment.

"One doesn't buy a practice in Yorkton—at least, not patently," he said, thoughtfully, and with a certain dignity. "It is almost too personal a thing. People balk at the idea of being bought and sold. I would suggest an association—a partnership with some one already established. But as a matter of fact," he added, "that might be rather difficult too."

"Is it a question of money?" put in Blantyre bluntly.

"Well, since you put it that way, yes—I think it is."

"Do you know of a partnership with a good man, one that could be arranged—leaving out the question of price."

Matthews got up, thrust his hands in his pockets, walked absently to the window and stared out. He wanted time to think.

"I'm in a position to make any reasonable financial arrangement," concluded Blantyre.

The older man pursed his lips. "What would you say to a partnership with me?" There was a nonchalant lift in his voice.

"Is such a thing possible?"

Matthews threw off his diffidence, instantly assuming a heartiness that served him admirably. "My dear fellow—yes—subject to terms." His bland eyes fixed on the younger man. "I'll put my cards on the table. I am sixty-two. I confess

—to you—to being a little tired. I have the best general practice in Yorkton, with no one to help me. That practice brings me in say, eight thousand dollars a year. Equally frankly it is getting beyond my strength. As for a partner I know enough about you to say that there is no reason we should not join hands. Besides, you are your wife's husband, and that stands for much in Yorkton. Don't mind the inference. It means, perhaps, more than you can realise as yet."

The reminder nettled Blantyre. He pushed bluntly through this bland preliminary. "Can you suggest terms—for consideration?"

The pink tips of Matthews' front fingers slowly found each other. Thrust into a welcome corner, he was thinking rapidly. "So much down—balance on time—equal division of receipts till it is paid. What do you say to dining with me to-morrow? Talk it over, eh?"

Stella was delighted. The matter had long dominated her thoughts. Stephen Ellison was running parallel with them. She would have valued his advice. She felt that Brian, if he would, could go far. These two were linked subjectively. She wanted the man she loved to achieve the goal already reached by the man whose love she had refused, and began to realise that in spite of position and means there was much that money could not do for him. But Stephen had played his game alone.

Blantyre dined with Matthews. The affair was settled without difficulty, an astonishingly simple thing in which he but dimly realised the power of

money. Matthews began to talk with his second glass of port. He had taken the season when it served, and profitably transferred something of which he was rather tired for a consideration infinitely more tangible to him than to the purchaser. Leaning back, he looked at Blantyre and wondered shrewdly just how much he knew of human nature. Then, moved by a genuine impulse, he began, twisting his wine glass, fondling his cigar, letting himself go with intimate suggestive touches of a mind that unrolls itself with relief.

"It's a big order for any man," he said thoughtfully, "and you start in the middle of it. Thirty years ago there were about one hundred thousand people in Yorkton. That's when I commenced. It was an old family place—you got in with them, and the rest came to you. Now the population is four times as large and things are entirely changed. One doesn't necessarily cultivate the old families in the same way. There's a certain amount of prestige attached to it, of course, but they are not what they were—financially. There's a new aristocracy—that of money. A different lot—but wealthy and profitable. Manufacturers—real estate men—railway men—Cobalt speculators and the like. These will be your patients, very largely. All this was in the air years ago. I saw it coming, and, I think I may say, got my share of it."

Blantyre nodded, and Matthews went on. "Now I'm going to be very frank, and against anything you may think I put the best practice in the city—remember that. For some years I have felt a change in the atmosphere between doctor and patient. I

miss the former absolute acceptance of what one said or did. The old intimate relation seems to be in danger, and largely by the attitude of some of the younger men who have a certain misguided frankness.

Blantyre looked at him intently. He remembered his Browning. Was he playing Gigadibs to the Blougram of Matthews. "Don't you believe in frankness?" he said abruptly.

"Up to the point where it ceases to be beneficial. Don't misunderstand me—I'm trying to get at the psychology of the thing—as I see it." He spoke slowly and carefully. "You must admit that a large part of the respect people have for our profession, or indeed for any profession, is based on their ignorance of it. I'm not depreciating the practice of medicine. For the moment I'm a patient—do you follow me? My doctor comes, tells me exactly what's the matter, how easily such a thing is avoided, then lets nature take care of herself—where possible. What's the result?"

"That depends on the patient."

"Exactly. And in nine cases out of ten he says, 'What a fool to call a doctor.' Now take the other side of it. I prescribe, knowing that the temperamental effect is one of my principal assets. I say no more than is necessary or advisable, but establish that atmosphere of intimacy, favourable not only to the patient but to myself. He recovers with gratitude to me and respect for my calling. You see, my dear fellow, you are going into a practice that has been built up on the study of the individual as much as anything else. Your manner, your

attitude—I'm putting this very bluntly—are of enormous importance. If a patient thinks he knows it all—by all means let him know it. It may do him good. But always you must suggest for his confidence the dignity expressed by scientific assurance."

He sipped cheerfully at his port, liking the ring of that last sentence. Blantyre mused without words. He saw that Matthews was unfolding himself as perhaps never before—moved by a genuine desire to serve his new partner. He studied him thoughtfully—a round fresh-coloured face—grey hair through which the dome of his skull shone faintly pink; grey eyes that looked shrewdly benignant beneath heavy brows, lips a trifle full, short straight nose and red cheeks singularly devoid of line, a healthy, bullet-headed type. Then he thought of eight thousand dollars a year.

He told Stella, who listened intently, having no other ambition than Brian's interest. "I like him but I don't like his interpretations," he concluded.

"Need you bother about them?"

"Not necessarily; but I've got rather a bad taste in my mouth. He practically admits that he has always thought as much about himself as his patients. That's what I baulk at. And yet he's got a big reputation and a tremendous practice."

Stella laughed and drove a common sense wedge into this altruism. "It will all be yours, and Doctor Matthews will be forgotten, and you will be the leading man in Yorkton, and we are going to be very happy, and I love you."

So it was settled.

XI

It was arranged that Blantyre should get to work without delay. He was keen for it. He felt the need of some anchorage of routine in this maze of new impressions. Matthews gave him a list of calls to make, all of them on those he termed profitable perennials.

Blantyre entered the Digby house, tuned to the occasion. He found Mrs. Digby in bed, looking charmingly indisposed. A frail, nervous woman, with a marvellous complexion that defied even cosmetics, short, light hair, wide saucer-like blue eyes, and a small petulant mouth. Mrs. Digby had a headache, but was extremely animated.

She surveyed Blantyre with interest, and a certain surprise. "Oh! I expected Dr. Matthews."

"I—I am associated with Dr. Matthews, Mrs. Digby, and he asked me to call."

She looked at him curiously. Blantyre was very good to look at when he liked. Now he was doing his best. There was a sharp youthfulness about him; an open-air freshness that, allied to his undeniable good looks, roused in her pleasurable sensations.

"That's quite all right. I'm very glad you came. My headache has been simply dreadful." She lay back on the pillows; the white lids dropped for a few moments over the blue eyes.

He studied her intently. She fitted into the room like one of the Dresden figures on the mantel; very pretty and very fragile. "When did you

get your headache?" He put his fingers on her pulse.

"I—yesterday—the day before—I really don't know—but it's worse and worse. And now—I must have something." She took a box from the table. "This is what Dr. Matthews gave me last week, but I've finished them."

Blantyre looked at it. "May I use the telephone?"

She nodded. "Of course. Are you going to give me some more?"

From the chemist he ascertained the drug. It was a common remedy, dangerous to the heart, ineffectual save in temporary results. "I don't know," he said, thoughtfully, "Dr. Matthews, of course, knows you better than I do, but since this has not helped you much, I think we'll try something else."

Mrs. Digby brightened at once. "I'm so glad, because I simply must get up. I've a ladies' lunch at t[illegible]

He shook his head. "I wouldn't do that; your pulse is high now, as well as your temperature."

"But you don't understand. This is an engagement."

He hesitated. He was trying to prescribe for a person who wanted to be drugged, not doctored. "I'm sorry, but I did understand, quite. You see you're not fit to go out."

She was vexed at his frankness. "And if I do?"

"I can't say, but it would not be wise. You're in a nervous condition. I think you have taxed your strength; and," he added with a touch of

austerity, " you make it a little difficult for me to help you."

" So if I went out to-day I probably couldn't on Thursday? "

" You might—but much against my advice."

" And if I am very good," here Mrs. Digby looked slightly roguish, " and stay in bed till Thursday, and take whatever you send me, may I then go out? "

Blantyre laughed. " Yes, I think so without question."

" Then," said Mrs. Digby, " I'm going to be good, because the Yorkton Club Ball is on Thursday, and I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

It all made him feel ineffectual. Then he went to see Robbins. Six months ago Robbins, in his private office, had felt a curious numbness in his left arm. He had rubbed and pinched it without avail. To-day Robbins was staring, cheerful and undaunted, into closing shadows. His spirit was the tonic Blantyre needed—a big strong man who had hewed his way to the front and carried a host of weaker ones with him to comfort and independence. Always before, in such cases, Blantyre had noted a slackening of mental powers, that gentle reconciliation with the inevitable which is the last fruit of a yielding mentality. But Robbins' flame seemed to burn brighter as he neared the end. His slowly capitulating forces massed themselves in ultimate combat.

He moved a broad, long hand in welcome. " I'm glad to see you, Doctor."

Blantyre knew instantly that he could talk as man to man. " How are you to-day, sir? "

Robbins' eyes turned to him. They were full

of knowledge. "As well as one can expect. How is the practice going? What's the matter with Matthews? I heard about your arrangement."

"I only commenced work to-day, Mr. Robbins. This is my second visit." Something in the elder man's face made him feel that he would have had a friend here.

"Too soon to ask what you think of it, eh? I'm told you're a salt-water man."

"I was for some years, sir."

"Well, there's nothing of that here." He moved wearily, but went on indomitably. "That's the touch Yorkton needs. That's where Montreal scores. How did you get in with Matthews?"

Blantyre hesitated. "Dr. Matthews felt the work getting too much for him. I was very glad to make an arrangement."

"Good fellow, Matthews," said Robbins, and looked at Blantyre shrewdly. "But I'm glad you came in. He needed new blood. Do you mind touching that bell?"

A maid entered. "Please ask Mrs. Robbins to come here."

Blantyre scanned him for the moment. His affliction so far struck his body only, but its insidious assault was creeping steadily upward. His flesh was white and waxen, his hair thick and iron grey. The strength of his face fascinated Blantyre, with its square chin, heavy brows, large, firm mouth and dark burning eyes. These moved restlessly, lest something catch and dim them should they sleep.

Mrs. Robbins came in. "What is it, dear?"

"I—this is Doctor Blantyre. You know he is

taking over Matthews' duty—also he's kind enough to come and talk with me."

She stood beside his long chair, a large fair woman, with the steady gaze of a stoic. Her hand crept to his shoulder, resting there as though to communicate some wordless language all their own.

Her gaze met Blantyre's. "Talk to him," it said. "Divert him, if only for the moment."

He did what he could entertainingly—with the China Seas for a background. Robbins followed him keenly, shooting in penetrating questions that made Blantyre talk as seldom before. When he rose to go, Mrs. Robbins followed him to the door. "Thank you so much," she said gratefully. "Please come again. It helps so much."

Other visits were paid. He lunched at home. Stella was full of excited interest. "Who did you see, Brian?"

He told her. Mentally he was contrasting Robbins and Mrs. Digby. It made him feel futile.

"I don't know Mrs. Digby. I know about her. She's very pretty—and——" she hesitated. "I don't believe I would care for her."

"You wouldn't," replied Brian, with conviction; "but I do like Robbins."

"Is he very low? I heard about him months ago."

Blantyre nodded. "He can't go very far now."

"It will be a great loss for Yorkton," she said thoughtfully. "Brian, he's a wonderful man. He does so much good in the finest possible way. No one hears a word about it from him. He's been

very successful, and she is splendid. Now, dearest —about yourself? My heart has been trotting after you since nine o'clock."

"It's awfully good to get back here. Frankly, I felt a bit lost. It's so different from the procession of the last few years. Then one's patients were only a few feet away. Now one spends most of the time hunting them up."

"Were they nice patients?"

He laughed. "Some of them had more character than ailments. One man said he wanted Matthews, and if he couldn't have Matthews he'd have his own doctor."

"Brian, who was it?"

Blantyre shook his head. "At the risk of offending, I refuse to answer. I'll get him yet and then I'll tell you—in the meantime I love you."

Her lips turned to his kiss. She clung to him for a moment. "Dearest," she said slowly, "I want so much to help. I don't know yet what a doctor's wife can do except to make him happy and comfortable. Beloved, I want you to feel always that that is my great ambition. When things don't go well—as you want them to—I'm here waiting for you—and the time when I will be in your arms again. I missed you dreadfully this morning. I know it was foolish—but I couldn't help it."

The afternoon was spent in his surgery in consultation. There was not much of it, but one visitor impressed himself indelibly. Matthews had for years examined applicants for life insurance in one of the largest local companies. This work he now turned over to Blantyre.

To-day's caller was a tall young man with stooping shoulders, a long, thin, narrow face and brilliant colour. "The company asked me to see you," he said easily, "there is some form to go through."

Blantyre produced a printed sheet, plunged methodically through it—then scanned the hollow cheeks. "Please take off your coat. Now breathe deeply." He pressed hard with the stethescope.

Instantly there came the familiar whistling of unsound lungs. Persistently he explored the emaciated frame. The thing had gone beyond salvation.

"I'm sorry," he said gently, "but do you know you are not in very good shape?"

The young man stammered. "Oh, do you mean my chest? I have a bit of a cough—but that's all. It doesn't bother me much in cold weather."

Blantyre shook his head. "I regret having to tell you—but—have you seen any other doctor?"

"No—I didn't like to spend the money. I really felt fairly well. It"—he coloured quickly—"was largely a matter of expense. Then when our baby came last month my wife made me promise to take out a policy. Just in case, you know."

He caught Blantyre's eyes, then stared at him. "You don't mean to say that——" He broke off, incredulous and apprehensive.

"I'm afraid I can't help you in this matter—no medical officer for the company would be justified in endorsing your application."

The boy, for he was still a boy, was standing with head bent forward, his brilliant eyes reading Blantyre's very soul. "Then in your opinion I

really have——" he hesitated, then blurted—"consumption?"

Blantyre nodded. It was hard to face this burning stare.

Suddenly the boy dropped into a chair and buried his face between his long, thin hands. "My God," he whispered, "what will become of my wife?"

There fell an impalpable silence. Blantyre could hear the ticking of the clock. It seemed loud and strident.

"She begged and begged," came the boy's voice, "and I always laughed and said there was plenty of time. Then the kiddie came—and now——" he jumped up and grasped Brian's hand. "I say, Doctor, can't you shove me through? Can't you stretch a point? Do you understand that my wife will have nothing, not a cent, unless I can get passed? Do you want that? The company has millions—can't you recommend an acceptance this time?"

The hand on Blantyre's arm felt like a bird's claw. It closed in a thin grip, pulsating with every nervous emotion of the frail expostulating body. It seemed as though this quick clutch were that of one who, slipping from some giddy precipice, thrust out a desperate hand to another standing strongly poised on firm ground. This contrast between himself, secure in body and circumstance, and the lad, tremulous, impoverished and riddled with disease, struck him with savage and merciless sharpness. He did not know what to say. He only knew that nothing he could say would help. "I can't do that—it's quite impossible. I am very sorry, and it's much better that I should tell you frankly about

your own condition. May I "—he stumbled for an instant with an instinct of pity—" may I come and see you? "

The lad looked up. He was now very pale. His eyes, half closed, were narrow with introspection. He was palpably contemplating that which they yet must face and that which his wife must presently face alone. His whole person had aged immeasurably. He got up slowly, lost in the poignancy of this vision. " Good-bye, Doctor." His glance met Blantyre's. It was unfathomable. " Yes, please come." Then under his breath, " Thank you for telling me."

In the silence of the surgery Brian heard a knock. " May I come in? "

Stella was on the threshold. " Why—what is the matter, Brian? "

" Everything," he said grimly.

" Tell me." She put her hands on his shoulders. " Tell me everything."

He told her. Some inward part of him was in revolt. He felt that this practice of his would require of him that which was difficult to yield. It would be a constant merging of himself into the lives of others, a merging that demanded more gentleness, more self-forgetfulness, more prophetic insight than he had ever guessed at. Here, surrounded by every endowment of love, he questioned his surrender of the narrow life of old. The transatlantic procession had been casual enough, but it had cost him no temperamental struggle.

She listened with exquisite understanding, recognising the bigger Blantyre moving within his crust.

"I think I know what you feel, and I am only beginning to see how much of you I shall have to give up. I didn't quite realise that before. If you fear what other people will expect of you, don't you think it is still harder for me? Every person in Yorkton has more right to your time than your own wife. Any one can call you away from me at any minute." Her arms went round his neck. "Help me, husband, I'm often going to be lonely without you."

She had given herself to him so completely that for the time she wanted to be conscious only of his nearness and strength. She had not known that within her was harboured so deep a flood.

Blantyre's level pulse began to beat faster. This seclusion—this intimate enclosure of walls and doors, this silence that seemed to carry only the sound of their own breathing, this touch of the girl's slight form, all burned into him the thought that they were here alone, linked in life and body. Not often had he felt thus.

That evening, after dinner, they surveyed Yorkton from the terrace. The Blake house looked out from the edge of the long hill that lifted to the north. Its level crest paralleled the lake for miles. From the terrace, Yorkton stretched into the summer night; softly luminous, ribbed with lines of diamond-pointed light. The rumble of traffic had dwindled to a murmur. It seemed as if a dense variegated blanket of humanity were spread at their feet, palpitating with invisible tremors of life and death—suggestive and vital—elusive and intangible—a blanket that would absorb and cover them both in vast, soft folds.

It fascinated Stella. Through this immensity the threads of their own existence were to be woven. Linked indissolubly, they would become a part of this intensely human mass. Somewhere hidden in the darkness were those whose lives would be an open book to Brian. She was suddenly impressed with terrific meanings.

Blantyre had turned his eyes from the city to Stella. The whiteness of her neck and shoulders and breast shone in the dusk. She seemed a creature made for love and rapture. His arms closed round her. "Let us go in," he said thickly.

XII

THE Yorkton clubs were a constant interest to Blantyre. Men took him to one after another. It appeared that Canadians were casual about matters that affected the municipality, but not about their individual luxuries. They put up, cynically perhaps, with general conditions that could have been remedied with ease, but were unanimous in exacting private satisfaction.

This was his reflection when they dined at the Country Club with the Sturtridges. The approach lay by districts through which Yorkton was sprawling out—a section neither city, town, nor village.

The highway was neglected and abominable, but had magnificent vistas of the lake and surrounding country. It seemed barbarous in immensity. Then the motor swept into the smooth perfection of the club road.

The building was long and low. It fitted admirably into a niche in the encircling timber. Swallow-like it peered in hooded security from precipitous banks across the blue plain of lake that flashed responsive to the sun. A prophetic setting this, thought Blantyre, of a young nation staring boldly forth into the unknown.

Later he surveyed the Yorkton younger set with its elbows on the table. The scene was fascinating, almost brilliant. Parties were dotted about irregularly. The women were beautifully gowned. There was no formality—every one knew every one else. Men called from table to table. It was a gala night.

Sturtridge had just closed a successful stock transaction and was exhilarated. He had asked a dozen people. To Blantyre it seemed that Sturtridge's only present anxiety was lest he should not spend money as fast as he might be making it. Every one wanted to help him. There was something infectious in the spirit of the evening.

Outside, motor after motor whirled up, disgorging loads of young people practically all under forty. Inside the babel became more strident. He was struck with the hardness of Canadians' tones when heard many together, with the high-pitched evenness of their voices.

Sturtridges' table was typical of the rest. Beside Blantyre sat a small woman with irregular features and exquisite figure. Mrs. Sidgwick had survived the assaults of time: more—had defied them. She was forty-one and looked twenty-eight. Her husband, a prominent King's Counsel, was not

there. It was generally understood that they agreed to differ. On Sturtridge's right was Miss Paxton, tall and slender, with black hair, olive skin and petitionary eyes. Miss Paxton was effective through a certain sweetness that men enjoyed for a while and then fled from, lest they be too much moved by her languid acceptance. She seemed Southern rather than Canadian. Then came Borthwick, plunged in his habitual mood, a saturnine social bear. People always asked Borthwick—not that they liked him—but because of a suggestion of strength and virility that silent, morose men sometimes attain. The Prices were the only other husband and wife. Mrs. Price's father had sold pork in gradually increasing quantities till ultimately he endowed a Unitarian College with a fraction of his surplus. Price had been a man about town, dabbling in real estate and insurance. Now he was still a man about town, but adhered strictly to Unitarian doctrines on Sundays—unless he played golf. He had fallen very much on his feet. He aped the aristocrat, but had a large stomach and a small soul. His wife was his adoring shadow. There remained Miss Buxtom—animated, intuitive and American. Miss Buxtom was more or less misunderstood in Yorkton. Men liked her, and were afraid to show it, women were afraid of her, but did not like to show it. The truth was what people called Miss Buxtom's unconventionality was merely an assurance at which most of them had not arrived. They feared what they did not understand.

Blantyre took to her at once, as most Britishers

to American women. She seemed unaffected by the gaiety around her, yet an essential part of it. The other women responded more palpably with brightening eyes and rising voices. Blantyre noted that every one drank champagne. At the next table sat a young man, dark and extremely handsome, with black eyes and hair. Opposite him a girl, extraordinarily fair, graceful and supple—a figure that melted into delicious curves and postures.

"Who is he?" asked Blantyre.

Mrs. Sidgwick laughed. "Robert, the home destroyer; otherwise Bob Angus."

Miss Buxtom turned, "Aren't they pretty people? And the girl?"

"His partner's wife," said Mrs. Sidgwick with a twinkle. "He looks deadly—but I'm told he's perfectly harmless."

"'Forewarned is forearmed,' Dr. Blantyre," rippled Miss Buxtom.

Brian glanced down the table at Stella. She looked exquisite. He found in her a removing quality of distinction. She was not less joyous than the rest, but suggested so much more than only gaiety. Somehow he thought the other women didn't—except Miss Buxtom. [illegible]s laughing circle made him distrait. He had [illegible] sudden longing to snatch Stella out of it, and t[illegible]e her home alone. The smooth oval of her face, the delicate poise of head and neck, the pale perfection of brow above the liquid depth of eyes—all this made her strangely more desirable than ever.

"Come back, come back," Mrs. Sidgwick spoke merrily. "You are breaking a rule of the Country

Club. No man is allowed to stare at his own wife here. Domestic signals are out of order."

Blantyre blushed. He was trying to find himself in this new atmosphere—to grasp a camaraderie foreign to his critical self.

Miss Sidgwick sipped her champagne and regarded him mirthfully. "The motto of this club is 'Abandon care all ye who enter here.' We do our best to live up to it. That tall man at the next table lost forty thousand dollars last week. He'll get it back next month and more. The woman beside him has six children and a perfectly good husband who is no use at all—that's why she's here. It tickles her palate. That's why we're all here. Over there in the corner—you see them—is a church warden and his wife. Just watch them to-morrow morning in St. Potiphar's. They don't exactly know what they want here, but come just the same. It maintains the semblance of youth. They don't entirely approve of it, but, bless you, we don't mind that. They think we are a psychological study. I'd as soon be that as anything else, whatever it is. Wouldn't you, Kate?"

Miss Buxtom nodded. "We are interesting. You know we are, and they know we are. I suppose there is a perfectly respectable background to every country club—but that doesn't make the club, entirely. It needs action. That's where we come in." She glanced at Brian. "I often wish I could live up to Stella."

"Why, what do you mean?"

Her mood changed. "She's sweet and beautiful," she said thoughtfully. "We all admire and love

her, but she's got so much in that pretty head of hers it makes me have doubts about myself."

"Also she's got an imported husband," said Mrs. Sidgwick contemplating the table.

Miss Buxtom nibbled an olive and fixed her dark eyes on Blantyre. "I don't believe even that can spoil her."

They all laughed. "You don't approve of the importation of husbands," asked Blantyre. He was getting into the spirit of the thing.

Mrs. Sidgwick shook her head. "Kate doesn't know anything about husbands—but on general principles I am compelled to say to the guest of the evening, No. As a rule they're not house broken. They don't recognise the full duties of husbandry."

"Duties of what?" chuckled Sturtridge from the other end of the table.

"Husbandry," replied Mrs. Sidgwick defiantly. "Don't you know what that is?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," called Sturtridge, "Mrs. Sidgwick will now define the duties of husbandry, which has always been of special interest to the members of this club."

Every one at the table stopped talking. Stella's eyes twinkled as they caught Brian's puzzled face. Then Mrs. Sidgwick's high-pitched voice came in. "Husbandry is the study of husbands—any one's husband. It is the science of making him love, honour, and especially obey; making him do and say exactly the right thing at the right time; making him, if necessary, speechless. It is, in short, developing the creature for the best and most convienent uses of women. The supply is limited.

Importations have already begun. We women must hang together and support each other."

Miss Paxton raised her glass. "To the desired, but improbable husband," she chanted languidly.

"Come on Borthwick," laughed Sturtridge. "We're all waiting to hear from you."

Borthwick was generally accepted as untamable, but had a certain dependable gruffness and a six-cylinder limousine. "Imagine me married," he said, staring defiantly at Miss Paxton. "Just imagine it. Put to the best uses of woman."

"You might rise on stepping stones of your dead self to higher things," chimed Mrs. Sidgwick. "Extraordinary results have been obtained with proper handling, Tommy."

Borthwick looked like an Airedale of uncertain temper. Blantyre studied him with a touch of understanding. All Borthwick wanted was to be let alone.

Soon they were all dancing to piano music. There was a peculiar lilt and swing about it. The musician himself seemed carried away in the lift and abandon of his chords. He was not there merely hired to make merry, he was an interpreter with something fine about him. And, curiously enough, in the rush of these flying feet Blantyre came as near understanding the spirit of Canada as one of his composition could come.

The faces he saw were young and care-free, but characterised, one and all, with a consciousness of competence. He could not imagine these people as unproductive butterflies. Their assurance was, he felt, born of capacity. It was this that enabled

them to let go so completely. It put them in better shape for work. Beneath this gaiety he sensed the sturdy root of progressiveness, underlying this superficial familiarity was an uncommon understanding of each other. He got the idea that these people hung together.

Later, with Sturtridge, he explored the Club. Bridge quartettes were stowed away, oblivious to rag-time. Hunting men gathered round a big fireplace, discussing recent additions to the kennels. The art of husbandry was being practised in secluded corners, and, on the lawn, the churchwarden of St. Potiphar's was exchanging impressions with his own wife.

The place was bathed in moonlight and shrouded with woodland. From within came music and laughter. Hundreds of feet below, Lake Ontario lisped ceaselessly to its sandy shore. Beyond, against the rim of the far horizon, was the glimmer of a Niagara steamer. The sky was jewelled with stars.

Sturtridge, touched with the beauty of these familiar things, slipped his arm into Blantyre's. He was no longer casual and noisy. "It's good, isn't it?"

Blantyre nodded. He was contrasting it with other nights when, alone, he had watched the slow procession of the heavens cross the *Harmonic's* shining deck. He wanted to say something now, but could find no words for it.

Then the horn of Sturtridge's car bellowed from the porch.

XIII

A FEW days later he was called again to see Mrs. Digby. She was pale and drawn, with a strange expression in her eyes. She had used various excuses for calling him. She felt for him that spontaneous attraction experienced by impressionable women for personable men. The fact that she paid for his services made no difference. She liked to have him there. Blantyre regarded her as shallow and effusive, a creature of pose and thin, plausible effects.

"Headache again?" he queried.

"No." She looked at him searchingly. "I just want to tell you about something—and—I hope you won't misunderstand me. It's very important that you don't misunderstand me."

"I hope I won't. In fact, I promise I won't."

"It's rather a long story and all about myself. I'll have to go back to before I was married."

Blantyre was going to say, "That's not very far," but something in her expression made him pause. "Yes?"

"My mother was not very strong, as Dr. Matthews will tell you. Neither am I, and when I married I was warned that I must take the best care of myself. I'm afraid that you'll think I've been over-doing things, but that really is not my fault. My husband's position forces me to entertain on rather a large scale. One thing has led to another till my time is practically all occupied with social duties. I'm not very fond of them."

He looked at the small weak mouth, the shallow brow, the intangible pettishness of the round, smooth face. "No."

"No, really. I sometimes think I'd like to give it all up and buy a farm." She said it with a gesture that divorced her for ever from anything agricultural. "But, in spite of everything I would really prefer, I am simply absorbed in other things. They take all my strength."

"Need they?" put in Blantyre abruptly.

"You'll understand when I explain better. You see my husband's business has a very important social side and he needs my help. What we both want is that he should retire, and then we would settle down more quietly and have other things we have not got now." She glanced at him and flushed. "One thing especially."

Blantyre waited. "Yes?"

"A child. Matters at present unfortunately make it impossible."

He was repelled. "Why?"

"My strength and obligations. I simply could not face it."

"Mrs. Digby, as a medical man I don't hesitate to say that you will become stronger and better than ever before. I know I'm on delicate ground, but almost every woman enters into a new life when she becomes a mother."

She bridled. Her large, blue eyes took on a shade of displeasure. This vanished and she became again petitionary and faintly evasive. "How beautiful. I do hope it will be that way with me—when the time comes."

"So do I," he said heartily; "but——"

"That's just why I want to talk to you to-day," she put in hastily. "I feel you know me, and won't misunderstand me, because what I want to say might be misunderstood by any one who didn't know me as well as you do. Dr. Matthews always saw it as I did."

Blantyre was mystified.

"Doctor, I want your assistance and help."

He began to see light. "What is it, Mrs. Digby?"

She looked down. Her face was suddenly scarlet. "Doctor, I don't want to be a mother." Then she added convulsively, "At least—not yet."

Blantyre got up, walked across the room and stared out through the film of curtains. He was full of a cold, white fury. Every instinct in him shouted for words. This was her interpretation of his office and of himself. But behind his anger came the warning voice of control. The man in him demanded utterance—the doctor in him counselled patience.

"You are making two very great mistakes, Mrs. Digby," he said, with a thread of feeling in his voice. "One is to think that such a course is wise for you—the other is in mentioning it to me."

The colour left her cheeks, but her eyes were large and round. "Why?"

"I can only repeat what I told you. Motherhood would be of great benefit to you. As for the other, what you suggest is out of the question."

Her lips narrowed and her face grew small and sharp. He now felt infinitely sorry for her. "I've seen enough to know," he went on. "And let me

beg you not to consider this under any circumstances." The cruelty of the thing shocked him. This house, spacious and luxurious—this idle mother with empty arms and heart—and no place for a child.

"You don't understand me at all," said Mrs. Digby hysterically. "I was afraid you wouldn't. The fact that I'm not physically fit does not count with you. You're not thinking about me."

"Yes, I am—more than ever before, and," he added sharply, "in a totally different way."

"I see that I've made a mistake." She looked in a moment hard and defiant. "I should not have given you my confidence. I always had doubts about your services."

"Thank you," said Blantyre.

"And this time I asked you to come and give professional help—not lectures. However, there are other doctors in Yorkton in whom I can fully trust. Good morning, Dr. Blantyre." She turned her back on him.

He strode to the door and glanced at her thoughtfully. She was standing stiffly in an attempt at outraged dignity. All her baffled smallness was visible in the doll-like face. She seemed a thing of tinsel, animated by petty ambition and soulless sentiment. He wondered what Digby was like. Then he went home.

Later in the week the telephone rang sharply in the small hours. Blantyre answered it instantly. The precision of old discipline had never left him.

Drowsily Stella heard his voice. "What is it, Brian? Must you go out?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so." He went into his dressing-room. "Damn it!" His voice was cold and metallic. "It's probably a false alarm—where's Baxter Street?"

"I don't know, oh, I think it's on the east side. I'm so sorry. Must you go." She was still struggling with the fragments of a dream.

"Must a doctor ever go," he said grimly.

She heard him at the door. His step rang sharply on the paved walk that led to the garage. A moment later came a throb of his motor. She listened while the pulsations of the machine died away.

Blantyre explored the silent city. Finally he found Baxter Street, a narrow lane in which ranks of small, airless houses shouldered up against each other in unkempt company. At the door of one of these a man was standing, huge, blackened with grime, a leviathan of toil. He jumped down the steps as the car slackened speed. "We're wanting you badly, Doctor."

Blantyre picked up his bag and followed him. The fetid air of the place was rank and poisonous after the cool and shining night. The man ran upstairs and through a door so low that Blantyre had to stoop. Within, a woman lay groaning on a heap of soiled and tumbled bed-clothes. Her face was drawn and twisted, her thin hair loose and lying in tangled knots on the dark creases of a dirty pillow. In the room was a chair and small table. The preparations made were pathetically inadequate. A friend had gone for a district nurse. Three children were staring from the door, their eyes full

of wonder, their small faces streaked with tears. The big man was bending over the bed. "Here's the doctor, wife." He turned to Blantyre. "She's been suffering something awful, sir."

Blantyre stooped over her. She was about to bring another child into this struggling, helpless scene. He had a darting vision of the terrific irony that would only add to the ultimate labour of them both. Then the vision was eclipsed by a swift revelation, the remembrance of the *Harmonic's* steerage. Automatically he administered chloroform as it all came back to him. The half-lights, the heaving iron floors, the close, breathless atmosphere, the moans of the sufferer, the intimate nearness of packed humanity, the groaning of the vessel's steel frame as she lifted to the long Atlantic swells. No casual procession was this, but the vital need of the submerged tenth.

The woman's moans softened into querulous half-whispers. Blantyre looked at her husband. His eyes were soft, luminous and dog-like, his mouth working uncertainly. The man was palpably aching to help in some way, however small. He was helplessly enormous. Then Blantyre saw his hands on the end of the bed. They had closed over it in a titanic grip that drove the blood from the great knobs of his huge knuckles. He choked. Tears began to run heavily down. "I'm main sorry for her, I am," he said huskily.

"How many have you," said Blantyre.

"'Twill be five with this one, sir. We are fond of children, but she always has a terrible time. I thought she'd die with the last one."

"Then why——" Blantyre checked himself. It was none of his affair.

"I know what's in your mind, sir. It's natural, too—but the wife says that it's woman's work, and they're company round the house."

The woman groaned. Blantyre bent over the bed. "Now," he said sharply. "You can help. Steady—there's nothing to be afraid of. Do exactly what I tell you."

In a few moments she lay still. An ineffable languor dawned in the small grey features. Out of the shadow and the pit she had come triumphant. In a little while her eyes opened and stared up at her husband. "What is it, Jim?" she whispered.

"A man child," he said thickly. He began to tremble violently, and, slipping to the floor, buried his face in the bed-clothes. His vast shoulders were heaving; his whole body shaking with dry, cavernous sobs. One great hand stole out and fumbled blindly.

Blantyre looked down at the last visitant to this abode of want. The house was utterly silent. The other children had crept off somewhere to bed, now that mother had ceased to call out so much. The lamp burned lower and lower. The woman slipped into the slumber of exhaustion. Beside her the man's bulk was a dark and formless mound. The deep breathing came slower and steadier. This was the epitome of the other side of things. In this squalor Blantyre had again discovered the motherhood of the world. Nothing awaited here but toil, and, in between, the blessing of sleep. Packed close around him in the merciful night

were thousands more, for whom life held just this and little else.

The district nurse hurried in breathless—a large, comfortable woman with the eyes of a Madonna. She did not know Blantyre. He gave directions briefly, almost brusquely, realising they were unnecessary. She had at once merged herself into this too familiar occasion.

Guiding his car slowly homeward he was very wide awake. He had brought strength and safety to dire need, but somehow this did not touch him. There were a good many things he had not done. These obtruded themselves parenthetically into a mind deep in self-searching. He had meant, amongst other things, to have a chat with the father and cheer him up. But however vital was this last hour, it had only moved him to reminiscences of a former Blantyre who was a good deal more his own master than this one. This job was all right, but he had performed it like a mechanical automaton. And yet, deep in his rebellious soul, he knew that it was the poor and only the poor who understood him, who would, if ever the time came, bring him the fierce satisfaction of dogged service.

The car rolled smoothly on. By now he was getting near home and traversing Yorkton's best residential district. He passed place after place of men he knew. Then he came to the Digby house. It was a blaze of light. Music was throbbing, and a maze of figures swam smoothly round. He glanced in as his motor drew level. At that moment Mrs. Digby came to an open window. She had a low-cut gown, and he caught the glitter of diamonds on

her neck and breast. Mrs. Digby had had her way. Nothing had interfered with her social duties.

Instantly his mind leaped to the weary mother in Baxter Street. "By God," he said savagely. Then the car jumped forward.

XIV

For Stella this was a period of re-adjustment. She had not imagined that her own life would be so coloured by a husband's profession. She had never dreamed that she too was to be absorbed into this insistent round. Not only were her thoughts dominated, but the house itself fell into a natural condition of waiting upon Brian's convenience. Everything was modulated to fit and help. It was not a matter of bread-and-butter, but of something for which she felt greater responsibility. She had set him up. It was her burden as well as his.

Gradually she became an instrument for transmitting the ailments of friends and acquaintances. She was constantly at the telephone. It was all too personal to leave to another. And, listening to threads of anxious voices, she felt drawn irresistibly into the inner processes of other people's lives. They would not be content with any lesser ambassador than herself. She had curious sensations of knowing at once things that otherwise would only have drifted to her. She was like an editor sucking in news from the ends of the earth. And always she felt that here, at least, what she heard was vital and true.

For Brian she had anxiety — often fear. It seemed impossible that he could escape disease. She had said so, but only once—then strengthened herself by making him a medical Galahad, unassailable by things unclean. As to the rest of it, she now learned that to be a doctor's wife meant a readiness to dislocate their arrangements at a moment's notice. No engagement was safe. Especially she dreaded the night calls. They demanded all her philosophy. She began to be fiercely jealous for Brian's reputation and reward, and aspired to great things for him in the minds of others, who, it seemed, accepted his services very placidly. She wondered at times why she had donned this harness.

Unburdening herself to Miss Struthers, much of this was uppermost. They were in the drawing-room. A wood fire was burning. The French windows opened to the garden. The spring air was full of the sharp, fresh sweetness of new growths. The room, bright with chintz, was essentially homelike and lacked any hint of formality. An oil painting of Stella's mother looked down from above the hearth—there was the same fair skin, the same wistfulness. Flowers were everywhere. Beyond the windows the lawn sloped gently to the edge of the hill. It was dotted with daffodils, and dipped abruptly at a line of trees through whose tops, now feathered with budding leaves, the far expanse of Yorkton stretched southward to the lake.

Miss Struthers, snatching a precious afternoon, listened thoughtfully. She was thirty-four and self-possessed. She had a long, fair face, light curly

hair, steady eyes and three thousand dollars a year. Also, she was the leading woman journalist in Canada. People regarded her progress with something of astonishment, but she had stuck fixedly at work under the benign influence of a constantly rising salary and had capped the ambitions of hundreds of aspiring girl friends with one brilliant actuality. She often came up to the old Blake house to ease the joints of business life and drink an atmosphere of unadulterated femininity. She had poise and cheerful confidence, but behind this, in the back of her active brain, moved a question. She had shrunk from the first plunge, but, now that the future seemed definite and assured, was wondering whether her own success was not drawing her further and further from another sphere that seemed infinitely attractive. Full of natural longing, she rebelled at the general interpretation that she, a successful journalist, wanted nothing else — that life was merely copy. Looking at Stella, there came visions of long, flat tables, a floor littered with paper, and young sharp-eyed men scribbling with fierce impatience, clicking instruments, and, down below, the ceaseless rumble of whirring presses. In the presence of some people she was fortified by her own achievements, but Stella suggested the other side of life.

A good deal of all this was in her talk. "Have I made a mistake?" she concluded with characteristic frankness.

Stella shook her head. "Most of us think you're wonderful. You are our pride and despair."

Sarah Struthers looked at her thoughtfully. "It's

nothing like that—but—whatever it is—I owe it to men—not myself."

"You're too modest."

"It's perfectly true. Looking back at the last few years, I'm tremendously impressed with their generosity. That, just as much as the fascination of the thing, has held me. I suppose that women who work with men get new ideas of them. I have. I get them every day. A man may be absolutely uncouth and outwardly impossible, but my experience is that at the bottom he's chivalrous, and that's what I count on."

Stella laughed. "Then why didn't you take one?"

Miss Struthers' lip trembled. "No one has asked me. I've an idea that I'm not supposed to be the marrying kind. Men see me dashing off copy and hurrying about the *Planet* office with ink on my fingers and think I'm just a good fellow and one of themselves—attractive, perhaps, or they wouldn't be so nice—but still just part of the machine like the rest of it. They don't associate me with *tête-à-tête* dinners and pretty frilly things and cradles. As for the rest, the other men outside the office, they're rather afraid of me. They think I'm carving out my own career. I make as much as most of the nice ones do—that's another difficulty." Miss Struthers lay back in her chair and laughed mirthlessly. "Funny, isn't it?"

"What do you really want, Sarah. You never told me. Is it," she hesitated, "what's here?"

Miss Struthers leaned forward, put her elbows on her knees and with chin resting in long, thin hands,

stared into the fire. "Frankly, I don't know. Sometimes I think it is and then I get cold with fear lest I should marry and make a mistake. I want to know what love is—I admit that—but I'm afraid of what love might demand or impose. I suppose I don't trust enough. I like men—at a reasonable distance. Is it harder to give way at thirty-four than at twenty-six?"

"I don't think I did give way," said Stella thoughtfully. "There was nothing to make it a surrender, and," she added, "one should get as much as one gives."

"That's just it. I've created something that I would have to surrender—and don't want to. It's too much a part of myself. I suppose that's the way with every woman who makes a position for herself, unless marriage is used to make a position," she put in with a touch of bitterness. "Men seem to want pink and white things that can blush and wear pretty clothes. The business man is fine, just fine, but the sentimental man—Oh Lord!" She looked out of the window and stood up suddenly. "Here's Mrs. Sloane. She's my finish. Good-bye, Stella."

It was too late. The visitor saw her and signalled imperiously. "Damn," said Sarah Struthers, and sat down again.

Mrs. Sloane had grey hair, a large and rounded figure and bright brown eyes. She also had a husband whose income was sixty thousand dollars a year. Sloane was recognised in legal circles as a man of extraordinary astuteness. He could frame agreements in which the joker was so disguised as to

be perceptible only to himself. He was also recognised by his wife as the means to an end. She had the American feminine receptivity for dollars and deference. Sloane himself, after a few years in social double harness, had cut his traces. People said that Mrs. Sloane was an unusual woman. She entertained, dabbled in art and charities and maintained outwardly that high level of thought and existence impossible to those of lesser financial resource. Had she been analysed there would have been revealed a cold, modulated and passionless woman, superficially versed in subjects of conversational exchange, carrying her head high in assurance of the power of money, selfish in that she had a facility for deciding many things for many people, and with a quality of finality in her speech—a species of last word dismissal—that was based on alarm lest a discussion be carried beyond her own depth.

She shook hands with Stella and smiled at Sarah Struthers. "I've been trying to get here for weeks, but one's time is so full."

There was nothing petitionary about Mrs. Sloane. Sarah, listening to her, tucked away new ideas of the effect of marriage. Then she wondered how it had affected Mr. Sloane.

"I've been really dreadfully busy. One gets so little time to one's self nowadays. Woman's field is expanding," she added confidently. Then, turning to Sarah, "Your articles are delightful—so clever—really brilliant—but——"

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid you're a Suffragette."

"I am," said Sarah bluntly.

"You surprise me. I had somehow thought quite otherwise."

Miss Struthers moved impatiently. "Why?"

"Because you don't seem that type."

"Have Suffragettes a type?" laughed Stella. "I thought they were all sorts and conditions. Sarah says so."

"What I'm afraid of," said Mrs. Sloane firmly, "is that they will sacrifice feminine delicacy."

"Is that why you're against it?"

"Yes, partly, and I don't think that our standing with men would be the same."

"Do you object to my getting a vote?" broke in Sarah explosively.

Mrs. Sloane hedged. "No, but the thing isn't thought out yet. I'd sooner trust men than women, that is, in matters of buiness."

"I don't want to trust any one," flashed Sarah. "I want to do things for myself. And it seems to me that that's how all of us feel. It's perfectly natural, because we have generally done them."

"I've not been inactive," put in Mrs. Sloane.

"No, but you've had the means to do what you wanted. I haven't. What I have I've got for myself. I'm not sheltered, and there are plenty of others in the same box."

"Perhaps you have misunderstood me. I think we've more to lose than gain by suffrage. We are differently, more delicately, constituted. As a matter of fact we are superior to men and I for one, don't want to come down to their level. There's something about us," she went on, warming to her

subject, " that they or we either, don't understand. That's the hold we have on men, and I, for my part, don't think we should imperil it."

" Then you evidently depend on something you don't understand," interjected Sarah abruptly.

Mrs. Sloane flushed, " I believe I am acting in the highest interests of my sex."

She was so polite that Sarah wondered if she had been too abrupt. But Mrs. Sloane's politeness had the negative quality which reveals an inability to be swayed by opposing views, however sound. She had an extreme satisfaction in her own conclusions that blended with her patrician distinction in a certain harmony. The combination suggested that it would be only an extraordinary person who could differ from Mrs. Sloane. But there was one individual self-discovery she had never made —the total absence of any sense of humour. Mrs. Sloane was a prig.

Yorkton had undergone a varied feminine influx, backed mostly by money. Some were representative of the best. Others were loud-voiced, inconsequent, obsessed with the idea that man was made for women's best uses, that the first law of life was to be in evidence, and that a cessation of speech was the sign manual of social ineptitude. Mrs. Sloane saw this, held her head the higher, and ploughed her social furrow straight and deep. Art was an adjunct, but good works were her stand by. It was an axiom that good works levelled social barricades. Thus, cheque book in hand, she scaled the walls. It was all done very steadily and scientifically. There were no charitable orgies. Mrs. Sloane was

recognised and digested in five years. Now from her hard-won battlements, she critically surveyed the newcomer, but made no mistake with old Yorkton families. She dressed beautifully and entertained effectively. In short, Mrs. Sloane was secure.

Stella turned with twinkling eyes when the visitor departed. "Well, Sarah, what do you think now?"

"Think? I don't know what to think. She talks about the highest interests of her sex—rubbish."

"She doesn't understand you."

Sarah laughed, "I'm no enigma."

"I think you are to a good many. You are tremendously free, compared to the rest of us."

"Free? I work like a nigger."

"I know you do, but you are free. You're responsible for just yourself and your work, that's all. No one depends on you, no arrangements to make for others. You can come and go as you please. I used to feel like that always, now I think it's wonderful."

Sarah looked at her curiously. How much had not been said? She was about to leave when Miss Paxton entered and sank languidly into Mrs. Sloane's empty chair. She nodded to Sarah and kissed Stella affectionately. "How do you do, dear. Tea—thanks. What a heavenly house this is. I'm tired out." She was very pretty, and dressed with a touch of daring *négligé*.

"Mary, I believe you only come here when you are tired out. What have you been doing?"

Miss Paxton sipped her tea. She also noted that Stella wore a French frock and that Sarah Struthers' boots had low heels and square toes. "Doing?

Let me think. Oh, Yorkton Club ball last night, that's the principal thing."

Stella waited for more. She had wanted to go herself, but Brian had been called out at the last moment.

"It was rather fine and rather funny—a perfect jam—place full of roses and every one you knew. My best dress was torn to pieces because, you see, we couldn't pick up our trains while the Governor was there. He's a perfect dear. The men had swords trailing after them and wore spurs. The result was awful—a regular massacre of millinery. Why didn't you go?" she added suddenly, "you always used to."

"I couldn't; Brian was busy."

"Goodness—how awful. I say, Stella, why did you ever marry a doctor."

Stella laughed. "I liked the doctor. Isn't that enough?"

Mary Paxton pursed her lips. "I wouldn't marry a man who couldn't go out with me when I wanted him to."

Stella looked at her with twinkling eyes. It was all so palpable that that was exactly the man for Mary. The small spoilt mouth with the full red lips that pouted involuntarily; the large languishing eyes, the superficial poise, the careless richness of dress—suggestively revealing a bare white throat, the unspoken assumption that nothing much mattered except the filling of the present hour, the cheerful and not unattractive ignorance of her, these were all tributary to the fact that Mary Paxton was the ultimate product of casual wealth.

Externally there was nothing left undone to deepen the impression she aspired to make. And, equally unfortunately her mentality supplied no effective antidote.

Sarah Struthers contemplated her square toes. "What kind of a man would you marry?"

"I'm not really hard to please," rippled Mary. "Let me see. He must be good looking, he simply must. And of course he must be well off, that goes without saying. Then I should want him to be very nice to me, and not a bit stern. I don't like stern men, they frighten me. Also he must be a retired man and not bothering about business all the time. I don't want children at first, anyway; there are so many other things to do. And if other people admired me I wouldn't want him to be vexed about that. And, oh, he must be tall and dark with an olive skin and curly hair and beautiful hands, and musical—and not fat or oily. I loathe fat men, and—I think that's all." She lay back laughing, and swung a gold bag, "Wouldn't that be perfectly heavenly."

"How much of that do you mean?" said Stella mirthfully.

"Every word of it, just now. But, Stella, what makes you look so wise. Is it because you're married?"

"I'm not wise. But I was thinking how much you could help, if you wanted to."

"Help? How?"

"Well, there's Welcome House, for instance."

"Oh! that's where Mrs. Clay-Stewart and Lady Perkins go."

"But I go too. It isn't a question of age or charity either. It's only helping people to help themselves."

"What sort of people?"

"Every sort. Shop girls, clerks, mechanics. They do all kinds of things—work—give plays and music. There's dancing too."

"Turkey trot," put in Mary wickedly.

"Not yet. There are hundreds of things to be done, and you can choose what you like."

"Are they smelly people?" Mary was beginning to think of disinfectants. She always associated them with good works.

"Don't be silly, Mary. When will you come—next week?"

"Can't next week, simply impossible. Golf tournament—wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"Then the week after," persisted Stella. She wanted to corner Mary for once.

"No, I'm sorry. Can't then, either. We're having the Petersons from Montreal."

Stella surrendered. "Will you telephone me when you can?"

Mary brightened at once. "Yes, I will. I promise. It's very good of you." She tried to look grateful and nearly succeeded. "I believe I ought to have something like that in my life."

"There's a tall man down there with an olive skin and curly hair," hazarded Sarah.

Mary wheeled on the threshold.

"He's an Italian," concluded Sarah gruffly. "He peddles fruit."

The visitor vanished with a giggle and a swaying

of the gold bag. The two looked at each other and laughed. "She's the picture, and I'm the frame," ruminated Sarah.

"Oh, my dear, don't compare yourself with her." An arm slipped round Miss Struthers' waist. "She'll marry within a year and there'll be children just like her, unless she gets a strong man, and her sort seldom do. You are doing the things that count."

The telephone rang sharply. Stella started nervously. "I must answer myself; won't you wait?"

Sarah shook her head. "I'd like to, but I can't. My copy must be in to-night."

And all the way down the hill she was still wondering how much there was about married life that Stella had not said.

XV

YORKTON had had an eye on Parkinson for years. Robbins had started him in life, as he had many others. Parkinson, quick, alert and daring, was too impatient to hold with Robbins' conservative progressiveness and launched out single-handed. It happened he had embarked at low tide and was carried buoyantly on by a wave of prosperity then sweeping over Canada. His recklessness, which in ordinary seasons would have swamped him, only added to the brilliancy of his success. For years it had been good policy to be a bull on everything. Parkinson matched his financial fire-works with

personal prodigality. He had a curious passion for doing things that other people had not thought of doing, and always insisted on playing the game alone. This evidenced itself in meteoric flights. Yorkton surveyed them with interest and amusement. The city was indebted to Parkinson for a topic of unfailing interest. Parkinson saw through it and laughed. "Damn the expense," provided only that he expressed himself. He was, in fact, though Yorkton did not realise it, the extreme personification of the extravagance of the people who looked at his vagaries, tongue in cheek, and forthwith did exactly the same thing on a smaller scale.

But the flood tide of Canadian progress began to pause. Not noticeable to the man on the street, it was recognised by a few who were in touch with foreign conditions. Amongst these was Parkinson. For years he had been dipping into European coffers. Now, very slowly, the source of his supply began to contract. One, then another, of his proposals was politely declined. They were, of course, excellent, but under existing conditions his correspondents did not feel justified. In a few months Parkinson had come to the grim conclusion that he was a paper magnate.

Followed weeks of bitter reflection, in which his self-confidence came down with a crash. It was not so much the loss of money he dreaded. For money itself he had had more or less disregard; it seemed so easily made. But Parkinson, more than anything else, shrank from humiliation. His lip curled when he thought of the winks, nods and jeers; the smug "I told you so" of smaller, less imaginative men.

The clouds became very thick, and, pride in pocket, he went to see Robbins. It was twenty years since he had parted from Robbins. It was hard now to go back and on such a mission.

Robbins had watched, in silence, deeming Parkinson merely a product of his time. Such careers were dazzling, but had no enduring light. Then came Robbins' own bodily affliction. He reflected thankfully that he had ploughed deep and truly, and the harvest would be unfailing. In a way he expected Parkinson to come. His mind, now poised between earth and invisible spaces, had taken on a curious intuition. He used to lie in his chair day after day and feel things go on all around him. As to Parkinson it had always seemed only a question of time. He listened patiently.

It was a long story. Robbins, following its ramifications, was aghast. Was there anything Parkinson had not gone into. Mines in Cobalt—railways in Western Canada—trust and insurance companies—land and timber speculations—these had absorbed millions.

The promoter's face was pale and his fingers drummed nervously. "I realise now that I've gone too fast. But," he added, with a touch of old-time confidence, "one generally does that in a new country. You see, Mr. Robbins, it's only a question of a year or so; fundamentals are sound. I'm sure of that. Don't you think so?"

"That depends upon what you call fundamentals. We may not mean exactly the same thing."

Parkinson hesitated. He began to have doubts as to what they really did mean.

Robbins looked at him thoughtfully. "Tell me exactly what you want—and what you have done to get it."

"I want one million dollars for a year—just one year. As you know, I bank with the Canadian National; but they won't carry me any longer."

"Have you told them what you have told me."

Parkinson nodded. "Yes, exactly."

"I'm surprised that they carried you so long."

"Look here," said Parkinson desperately; "I've all the common stock of the Canada Midland; I control the Ontario Land and Trust Company; I have three thousand acres just outside Yorkton. I've borrowed money on all this, certainly, but not within several millions of its real value. What's happening to-day in Canada is only a phase, it's not an epoch. It's a temporary let-up—we've only stopped to get our breath. In a year we will look back at this and laugh. Think of the west—two hundred million bushels of grain and the chapter just opened. The country can't go back. It simply can't."

The paralytic's clear eyes scanned this agitated face. Parkinson, it appeared, exemplified much that had been moving in Robbins' mind for months. The assurance that lacked poise, the confidence, untempered with experience, the broad generalities that would not stand business analysis—were not all these typical of a spirit that was beginning to evidence itself in Canada under the guise of energy and progress. "I'm afraid I hardly agree with you about it's not being an epoch," he said slowly. "I'm inclined to think it is. It has every ear-mark

of a period of national re-adjustment. We've been going too fast—I've thought so for the last two years. Next year, you say, we will look back and laugh. Well, my friend, there will be no next year for me; but I don't think that others will look back and laugh. I think they will have decided that a slower pace is better for the country. People will have learned that there is no privation in doing without things they can't pay for."

His calm acceptance of the inevitable left Parkinson wondering. He had a flush of shame at breaking into this man's tragedy with his own dilemma.

"Don't mind anything I say about myself," continued Robbins intuitively. "Everything's all right as far as I'm concerned. Life has been very good to me. Now, shall I speak frankly about your affairs?"

Parkinson nodded. He was in desperate need. He had one hope that this man might put him on his feet as a last crowning benefaction.

Robbins beckoned. "Come over closer—I can't come to you. There"—he put his hand on Parkinson's arm—"that's better. Now just go back twenty-five years, and imagine you're still in my office, and let an old man ramble away to a young ambitious friend."

Parkinson nodded again. His eyes were moist. He felt curiously like a penitent boy.

"I can't do what you ask," said the paralytic gently. "It wouldn't be fair to others. If I were to withdraw support elsewhere the result would be unthinkable. I've tried to dig deep and honestly, and the harvest is good. There are many depending

on that harvest. You say you only want the money for a year, till Canada gets into her stride again, as you put it. That won't be in a year, and then it won't be the same stride—but an infinitely more enduring, if perhaps a slower one.

Parkinson looked out of the window. He could not meet those eyes. The whispers of ruin were growing louder within him. Then Robbins' voice came in again.

"I know it is hard, but I advise you to face it. Remember always that it is not you, but the scheme that fails. If I were in your place I would make a frank statement to my creditors. It will be hard going for a while—but you are a young man yet. And, after all, Parkinson, men like you contribute greatly to the country. Your reverses are severe; but you are an inevitably necessary part of us. You see things before the rest of us see them, then you go ahead and capitalise your expectations. Often the smash comes. That's unavoidable. But afterwards—don't forget this—other men come along and pick the possibilities and probabilities out of the fragments of your dream and build them up into huge, successful undertakings. But the dream was yours—remember that. You pay for it—but—the dream was worth it.

Parkinson grasped the truth of it. But those inward whisperings had swelled into clamorous shoutings. He could find no comfort in being called a prophet. "Then you won't, you can't do anything," he said thickly. He moistened his lips. They had become suddenly dry and hot.

The older man shook his head. "It would be

only a drop. Your bucket is too big. There is not a man or institution I know in Canada who would come to what you call your rescue. It wouldn't be wise, and, frankly, my dear fellow, it would not be to your own interest. From what you tell me yourself the thing is past mending. I have not much longer here, Parkinson, but somehow I would be happier if you took the only course and came out in the open and called your creditors. And I think you would be happier, too. You've already tackled things just as difficult."

Parkinson rose and walked up and down the room, chin on chest, hands twisting restlessly behind him. The paralytic's bright gaze followed him every minute. Presently Parkinson turned and took Robbins' thin, nerveless hand. He stammered for words, his face suddenly full of blood, his eyes protruding. He said something, an incomprehensible jumble, in which words jockeyed each other without sequence. Then he went quickly out. "Home—drive slow."

He stumbled into a corner of his motor car. Robbins was right, damnably right. He knew it. Every additional reverse of the last few months pointed the inexorable truth of those gentle words. What about facing it out? His brain darted hither and thither questioning some alternative. There was none. He knew that too. Then pride spoke—the pride he had pampered and fed ever since things began to come his way. Could he undo the work of years, and say to the rest of Yorkton: "I was a fool—forgive me." Yorkton would only sneer, and reply he was too long in finding it out. Then, too,

there would be the marketing of his possessions. He could never stand that. Into his weary mind came thankfulness that he had never married. That was something. There would be no family back-slaps. And, gradually, through all this self-torture, Parkinson perceived that there was an essential part of himself that he had really never tested—his courage. What he had taken for courage was only recklessness—undirected by reason. Now, when he called on it—this real thing—there was no response. He was not brave enough to contemplate humiliation—and once that had established itself, there was only one thing to do.

He questioned how to do it; then thought of aconite. He had read about aconite a year or so before. He had been keenly interested in its astonishingly deadly action. First the paralysis of nerve centres. Then the short interregnum of perfect consciousness, though the body itself had ceased to vibrate with the mysterious communications of life. Lastly the swift attack on the cardiac area, to which the heart capitulated after a moment's futile struggle.

Parkinson leaned forward and put his mouth to the speaking tube. The motor swerved and stopped at the nearest chemist's shop.

Half an hour later Blantyre's telephone rang furiously. He put the receiver to his ear. At the other end a voice was whimpering with fear. "For God's sake come over quickly—Mr. Parkinson is dying."

He jumped into his car and drove recklessly. In a few moments he was at Parkinson's door. A

man-servant was waiting on the steps. He raced into the house in front of Blantyre. "This way, sir."

Parkinson was lying on a lounge. His jaw had dropped; his eyes were half-open, his breathing was very faint. Blantyre tore open his coat and put his ear to the fluttering heart. There was nothing else to guide him. He worked feverishly over the dying man. Once Parkinson opened his eyes wide and looked up. He could not speak, but he knew what Blantyre was trying to do.

"What did you take, tell me, quick?" Parkinson's mouth twisted. He tried to say that that was his affair. He was perfectly conscious. The spirit poised for a moment ere it took flight.

Blantyre gave him mustard and hot water—then with the man-servant, spent precious minutes over artificial respiration.

But suddenly Parkinson grew limp. His eyes closed. He looked as if he were asleep.

Blantyre heard a quick step and glanced up. Stephen Ellison came in and knelt over the motionless body. "What was it?" he said sharply.

"I don't know. I couldn't find out. He was almost past help when I got here."

Stephen turned to the man servant. "Where was Mr. Parkinson to-day?"

"I'll find out, sir." Great tears were running down his face. Parkinson had been a generous master.

He came back in a moment. "The chauffeur took him to Mr. Hobbins' house and he stopped at a chemist's on the way home—that's all."

Stephen's glance rested for a moment on the still face. Parkinson was dead now. He wondered what was behind all this. He had heard rumours, but only rumours. His gaze met Blantyre's, then roved about the room. "You heard that. He stopped at the chemist's."

"Yes, but——"

"Have you searched? There must be something here." Stephen's eyes were darting into every corner of the room. I say—what's that?" He pointed beneath Parkinson's desk.

Blantyre picked up a small white box. On the cover was a chemist's name, underneath "Aconite, five gr." "By God," he said slowly, then looked at Stephen. A sudden silence pervaded the place. The man-servant was whimpering in the hall. Parkinson lay on the floor, his face grey and distorted, his body crumpled, with finger-tips sunk stiffly into palms. Across him Ellison stared at Blantyre. He did not speak, but there was that in the compelling gaze that Blantyre understood, and for which he had no words in answer. Twenty minutes ago there had been a chance for Parkinson—more than a chance if Blantyre had only known. Ellison's eyes were shouting at him. "Digitalis—digitalis." That was it. There was digitalis in his bag and a hypodermic. Ellison must have guessed that. Why were those eyes so accusing. What right had Ellison to look at him like that. "Well," he said stiffly, "I'm afraid there's nothing more to be done."

Ellison surveyed the prostrate form, then slowly glance travelled to Blantyre. Again and again

had arisen the recurrent sensation that somewhere they had met before. Now, something in these sloping shoulders and the suggestion of hardness in this lean face demanded identification. It all drifted back. The gardens of the Villa d'Este—Stella's white dress in the dusk—the road to Cernobbio—the sharp step in the night—the glow of the lighted match—and—in the reflection of sheltering hands—those thin lips sucking at a briar pipe. Followed the plunge into darkness—the expiring ruddy spark—that quick continuing step.

His breath stopped for an instant. Then, in one poignant flush—he saw this man meeting and claiming Stella. He found it strangely hard to speak. Blantyre's eyes still challenged him. "I may have missed a chance," they said defiantly, "but we all do that. You are bound to silence. You know it. I know it."

Ellison's face was very grave. "No. There's nothing more to be done—till the inquest." He had a ghastly feeling that Parkinson ought to be alive. There were a thousand things he wanted to say. He was curiously near Stella in this silent, intimate opposition to her husband. Picturing Blantyre's return to her, he felt choked and wanted to get out in the air. Blantyre looked saturnine and possessive, but through this ran a querulous thread of dissatisfaction—something more than mere distaste. To Ellison he seemed never to fit in, and this made him wonder all the more—what about Stella's side of it?

And Blantyre, driving slowly home, was conscious that into his own brain had been dropped a seed that

would yield but bitter fruit. He knew what Ellison thought. Across Parkinson's body he had seemed to stare like an accusing judge, and Parkinson himself, prone and deathlike, had been there between them; his gradually stiffening body exemplifying what sort of a general practitioner was Brian Blantyre. But, he reflected savagely, Parkinson had been so damned anxious to die!

PART II

I

STEPHEN ELLISON stood for more in the life of Yorkton than his modesty would ever have admitted. To his natural activity was added a delicacy of perception, a certain gentle niceness of mind, which is generally the traditional heritage of long-established years.

His professional interpretations were, above all, merciful. Susceptible himself to a degree, he was, nevertheless, unswayed in his judgments by the varying temperaments of others, and it was this power of personal disassociation, allied to his innate tenderness of heart, that contributed more than anything else to his success. He was very human, supremely fair and naturally analytical. As a student he had been tortured by the horror of blood. The bright stream inoculated him with fear and shuddering. But this was gradually lost in wonderment at the mechanism of the mortal frame. Its marvellous complexity amazed him. There grew a reverence for so mysterious a thing. The knife, the saw and the chisel were potent and merciful, but he had conceived a vast respect for the self-healing powers of the human body. He was strongly opposed to operating without absolute necessity. In this he differed from some of his associates.

After Stella's marriage he had turned to his pro-

fession for more companionship than ever. He had seen very little of her, but was too much a part of Yorkton not to have picked up remarks that made him wonder. Was she happy? Before the Parkinson affair he had met Blantyre several times—once at a medical dinner, where he had seemed distant and difficult. Ellison had searched his face, looking for some expression of those attributes he felt Stella would demand and lean upon, but Blantyre had not impressed him. Then he had imagined them together, but could get no farther than that. It left him despondent and full of sudden, cold resentment.

And after the Parkinson affair, his mind had been in continuous and unwonted tumult. Across the suicide's body there had been the revelation of another Blantyre menacing and prophetic, burned now forever in Ellison's brain. And he dared not think too much about Stella.

He tried to crowd all this out with other interests. Like most other men, he gave away much of his time. Some of his best work was gratuitous. He alone knew how much. Yorkton philanthropies made insistent, dominant demands on his profession, and Ellison had a continuous and inside view of these activities. Of many he approved heartily. Others made him question their actuating motives. They seemed phases in social progress, hostages to conscience—temporary concessions to mental vagaries. And Ellison, though not religious in the accepted sense, had a broader interpretation of life than many professed adherents. The bodies of the poor were continually before him. This made him question

much that was called philanthropy. He found in them the expression of a want that charity was only beginning to recognise. The cathedral chimes often drifted to his ear in the dwellings of the poverty-stricken. He wondered what the voice of the vast edifice meant to them. He surveyed well-dressed Sunday processions. Infinitely remote these, from the submerged tenth, to whom Sunday only meant the inability to earn a day's wage.

Then there was the case of Timmins the teamster. That struck deep. Timmins got what is called religion, and forthwith eased his wrinkled conscience. There were two women in the Timmins' house, one old and feeble—his wife's mother, the other, younger, a stronger frame, a more pleasing body, his reputed wife. There were also seven children. But when Timmins got religion he took bland unction to his soul, and the truth came out in a confessional burst of smug, self-righteousness. He had decided to lead a new life. The old woman was really his wife. The younger woman, who had toiled for twelve years beside him, was indeed the mother of his children, but no wife. Thus Timmins put it, and in the light of his new knowledge, washed his hands of the helpmate and her brood. Then he stood up, free, salved, having made his soul's peace, and daubed his comrade and the offspring of his own cowardly body with an undying stain. To some people Timmins was saved. To Ellison he was irretrievably damned.

Another thing hurt. It seemed, when he went to church, that religious functions accentuated the differences they were supposed to minimise. Their

immaculate crowds exhaled a certain self-sufficiency. The music, the lights, the soft glory of stained windows, the modulated amble of the service, removed these prosperous congregations to an infinitely greater distance from their suffering surroundings than did the business of the week. From Monday to Saturday the labourer was in truth the man on whom they all depended for the utilities of their comfortable lives. But on Sunday, the labourer dropped out of sight.

It was not the existence of this separating gulf. Ellison accepted this as inevitable. But it was that in these helpless, untutored minds were implanted undying desires and smouldering ambitions they could never realise—the appetite without the food. And in this he curiously resembled Blantyre, except that in Ellison the contrast engendered no bitterness. He had in truth mastered the secret of life—the communicable love of created things.

He knew what Stella thought about it all. He had seen her moving mercifully through the shadows of darkened lives, but the vision had been poignant. He knew that he should never love any one else. There were dreadful moments when the hunger of his soul seemed to gnaw steadily and remorselessly. He wondered what there was in existence to appease it. The psychologist in him glimpsed her kindred spirit. The man in him was fanned into revolt at the thought of Blantyre. The lover in him was plunged into spiritual isolation. But of all this nothing appeared on the surface.

He had not many close friends. Few strong men have. Among the few was Robbins. By this time

Robbins was very near the end, but his lamp was burning all the brighter. Ellison was often drawn there. This penultimate sweetness of spirit fascinated him. Many men felt it, and left their affairs to talk to Robbins and share in this transitory radiance. Of them all Robbins liked Ellison the best. He used to look at him and think that this was the kind who would make Canada. And Ellison used to gaze at the strong, kindly eyes of the paralytic and say to himself that to this kind of man Canada owed what she was.

Robbins had lived in Yorkton for fifty years; had seen it emerge from a domain of family estates bordering a Victorian lakeside town, into a tumultuous city swarming with hundreds of thousands. Always he had felt that good was in store for the country. He had noted with amused satisfaction the changing English attitude toward Canadians. No longer mere Colonials, the latter now loomed up charged with hitherto undreamed importance. Single-handed they could feed the motherland. But would they? He talked about it to Ellison. There had been exploratory Canadian missions from England of late. Well-known men were coming over in increasing numbers, ostensibly to see Canada, actually to try and determine how Canadians felt about England and the Empire. The greatest London newspaper had for its special correspondent a prominent Canadian journalist. There was also the Round Table circle and the Oxford Movement. These suffered from exclusiveness. They permeated small circles, but had not reached the people at large.

Ellison had been talking this over with Robbins. The question came up—what did Canadians really feel about the future?

"We don't know what to feel," he said thoughtfully. "I met Marvin yesterday. He's been going into this thing for years. It's had a curious result in him, personally. He affects English mannerisms and speech. It's the same way with most of them. They sympathise with British traditions and cultivate British mannerisms. They want to impress certain views on the country, and, in their attempt, differentiate themselves. Take Marvin, for instance. He's not English, and has almost ceased to be Canadian. He isn't even a compromise."

Robbins laughed. "Don't judge Canada by Marvin. Personally I think the solution does not lie in Yorkton or any other city. It lies in the country. We do the talking, but the farmer does the thinking. There's one thing—we're not a military nation, and we need military training and discipline—it's the only thing to give us national manners, which we lack. But in the long run, the West is going to swing Canada, the fellows who grow the wheat." He looked at Ellison curiously, "Why don't you go in for politics?"

"I can't afford it. If I did, I think I would be a Socialist member."

"Probably you would—of the right kind. We need them." His voice dropped. "That suggests something I've had in my mind for a long time. I wonder if you would help?"

"I would like to help, sir. What is it?"

"I've been thinking for the last few years that

life has been very good to me. This last trouble does not affect the truth of that. I've had about all life has to give. There are plenty of places to put the money, but that does not quite satisfy me. Now your profession lets you into the inner lives of people; into places I could never reach. You ought to know what is most needed in Canada to-day. My idea is to pick out something that would have a racial significance and make coming generations stronger, better equipped for the battle of life."

Stephen was profoundly moved. Robbins, stepping imperceptibly into the grave, flung his prophetic vision into the coming years. His own trembling existence was put away. "Have you thought of anything, sir?"

"Yes. I'll tell you in a moment, but first I want to say why I thought of it. It's on account of life's handicaps. They have stared at me for fifty years. People talk about all men having an equal chance. It's puerile rubbish. I have been extraordinarily impressed by the inequality of things, fortune, birth, ability, environment, health, manner—everything that colours and makes life what it is. Now what ultimate chance has the ordinary poor man, born in ordinary surroundings with ordinary capacities. None—except to end as he began. Genius, ability, the power to do and to rise, are the accident of birth, and also, as much as anything, so is health." He raised a wasted hand and regarded it for a moment. "That hand reminds me, not of paralysis but consumption—the biggest, most hopeless handicap of this country or any other."

"Then you——"

Robbins nodded. "Yes, that's it, consumption. I want to help."

"It's a tremendous undertaking. Something is being done now. But the expense is very great."

The paralytic mentioned a huge sum. "I can put that in a trust fund."

It took Ellison's breath, so huge was it. "Nothing is impossible," he stammered, "if——"

"The money side of it is the only one possible to me. I'll not have more than enough time to arrange that. Now let me put the rest very briefly. I want to put it into the hands of a board. I can trust men and women who have seen these things themselves and know where and when help is needed. I've watched you for a long time, Ellison—longer than you think. I want you to help suggest the members of that board. Now, think it over. It's a big thing, bigger, I expect, than either of us dream. It will take the best that's in you, and a great deal of your time. Don't let my name appear, you understand. Come and see me in a day or two. I'm told I'm safe for a month yet. Good-bye. God bless you."

Stephen took his hand and turned to the door. He was rather breathless. How petty had seemed his own protest in the face of this. Robbins' voice caught him on the threshold.

"Ellison, one minute. I want to make a suggestion about one membership. Don't you think Mrs. Blantyre should be on that board? I've a great respect for that girl's ability and views. She often comes here to talk to me."

The unwitting shaft struck home. The carrying out of Robbins' wish seemed suddenly portentous.

"She would be excellent," he answered slowly. "Do you wish me to ask her?"

"No. I'll see her soon; but I'm glad you think well of it."

A few days later Robbins sent for him again. "I've seen Mrs. Blantyre," he said contentedly. "She objected for a while, then finally consented."

Ellison nodded.

"I don't want to poke into other people's affairs," he continued thoughtfully, "but there was something in the way she finally promised."

"Was there?" said Stephen with diffidence. He was wondering how the Robbins Trust was going to work with himself.

"Yes, there was. Ultimately, it seemed to me, she looked at it as a sort of loop-hole, at least that's what I got from her expression. One gets curious ideas sometimes." He looked at Ellison. "You've known her a long time, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you marry her?" said Robbins abruptly. "Don't be vexed with me. Somehow I've always thought of you two together. It would have been infinitely better from all I hear, than——" he hesitated.

Stephen flushed with a resentment that died at its birth. Robbins was too palpably his friend. Within this moribund body the brain was working swiftly with ultimate introspection. He wanted to be angry, but over Robbins' chair seemed to swim the nimbus of immortality. He would soon be—where?

"I did ask her," he said slowly.

"Forgive me, I'm sorry." Robbins tried to sit up straight and fell back with a sigh that was half a groan. "I should not have spoken; and I've made it more difficult for you over this board."

Stephen was thinking rapidly. It would be infinitely hard for him to be so near her. He shrank instinctively from this voluntary crucifixion. Then he looked at Robbins. The paralytic's eyes were fixed on him, reading his struggle, word for word. And behind the eyes Stephen sensed the magnitude of Robbins' project. From this cripple was streaming the power and love that must, in the end transform the world. In its radiance his own heart seemed submerged and saturated. He felt suddenly small.

"No," he answered steadily. "You've not made it difficult for me. I would not have it otherwise."

He went home, moved by a multitude of new emotions. In one flash his horizon had widened. He faced new circumstances, in which Stella was brought nearer than ever before. He wondered whether he could see it all through.

II

YORKTON society did itself very well in entertaining, and such an opportunity as Stella's marriage was not to be neglected. She shared the bridal fate of being snatched from her home when she least wanted to leave it. Mrs. Sturtridge's bridge party was one of the functions. She anticipated with

mingled feelings of amusement and diffidence. These gatherings were something more than merely entertainments. Men spoke of them quizzically, but inwardly surrendered when their own wives displayed that prophetic restlessness which usually preceded them. Ostensibly the motive power was hospitality. Actually it was a balancing of social accounts, an intense effort paid for with the inertia of exhaustion. The reward was the clearing up of social arrears. Mrs. Sturtridge's visiting list was left with nebulous sensations of being once more in debt.

Stella found herself wedged into a medley of smart frocks and jewels. Gold bags, comfortably lined, seemed a feature of the earnest bridge player. She encountered a soft succession of feminine kisses that carried, in transitory touch, suggestions of scented powder, smooth velvety skins and the faint fragrance of after-luncheon cigarettes. There was an exchange of compliments, easily made, and instantly forgotten, a dressing-room atmosphere, almost affectionate, but with an undercurrent prophetically business like. There were matters in hand. There was just a little too much of everything. Mrs. Sturtridge's preparations were quite perfect. This was universally recognised. It suggested nothing of the domestic tribulations that gave it birth. There was no question of how it was managed on Sturtridge's fluctuating income. The necessary touch of prodigality was sufficiently in evidence to push its drab sequence into the background. The hostess was living up to the unwritten law of her set. Sturtridge himself accepted the situation cheerfully.

Stella played well, but not with that nervous energy which is born of the determination to win. She was inwardly amused at the rapidity with which tables were found and partners instantly scanned and classified. Beside her was Mrs. Pethick—a tall, thin woman, with a long, lean face and restless, prehensile lips. She was accounted the best player in Yorkton. With cards in her hands, she was transformed from an acidulated, social aspirant into something terrible and relentless. No mercy was asked or given. Stella looked at her, and felt happily helpless. Across the room sat Mrs. Clay-Stewart, politely bored. In another corner Miss Paxton was losing tricks with painstaking regularity. In between were groups of women, already oblivious to the social side of Mrs. Sturtridge's entertainment. They breathed of skill, instinct, annoyance, satisfaction and determination. They were, for the time, remote from all that had been done for them. Beautifully gowned, many of them had the suggestion of nakedness which is the climax of a minimum of material and a maximum of skill. Their clothing seemed accessory after the fact. Much jewellery glittered, with here and there an aggregation in which old family treasures were crowded into one sparkling symposium. The universal attempt was to look young—girlish. Fashion demanded long, smooth supple lines, and secured them, sometimes with tortured smiles. To be buxom was heinous, but it was a crime to be fat. Mrs. Sturtridge re-appeared for tea. She had been resting in her own sitting-room, a hostess being unnecessary. The prospering phalanx greeted this interruption with subdued

impatience. From the tea-room could be seen tables that held on unswerving. Other women came in, and Stella was the centre of an interested group that surveyed her rapidly and stored away conclusions for future exchange.

Of this she was perfectly aware, but these, after all, were the people on whom her husband's practice depended. There was a middle course of compromise. She did not make the mistake of appraising others on the evidence of an afternoon. Blantyre would have written down this as a gathering of the empty-headed.

Bridge was resumed with a rustle of silk, the flash of polished finger nails and an abrupt ceasing of high-pitched, level voices. This ultimate silence was tense. In it, woman was revealed, matched, not against man whom she did not fear, but against her own keen, intuitive sex. There was a swift anticipation of her moves, a deft balancing of skill, and this, with a swift interchange of expression, evidenced and readable by women alone. Ordinary and even good players fell away rapidly. The afternoon focussed in a succession of individual bouts, from which Mrs. Pethick emerged victorious. She received a silver bowl with relieved gratification. The award was witnessed with an approval worn, by this time, rather thin. It was currently reported that Mrs. Pethick's drawing-room was thus furnished. The general hum was tributary to Mrs. Sturtridge's charming taste, rather than Mrs. Pethick's too long continued success. The latter assumed at once an affectionate amiability. The sharp lines faded from her face. She was very tired, but very happy.

Suggestions of other things drifted through the gaily-plumed flock, suggestions of homes, husband and children. A shimmering, bustling, scented tide descended the Sturtridge steps to a long line of motor cars. There were welcome visions of tea-gowns, loose hair, soft slippers, and for a little the benison of silence. And sub-consciously there was a promise of to-morrow, when could be discussed everything these swift roving eyes had absorbed.

In that throbbing solitude which succeeds a crowd Mrs. Sturtridge stood and scanned her empty rooms. She knew that all was well, but would have given anything to know what people thought.

A man, hitherto invisible, appeared from upper regions. "Well, how did it go?"

"A perfect success," she said sharply. "I am tired out."

Mrs. Sturtridge's account was more than balanced. She was ahead of the game.

Blantyre listened that evening to Stella's amused description. It made him impatient. He could not have praised society without condemning it. "Pure waste of time," he said acidly.

She laughed. "I agree with you perfectly, but how is one to get out of it? Some of these people are my oldest friends."

"Then I don't think much of your friends."

"Brian, don't be unreasonable."

"You agree that it is a waste of time?"

"Yes, but it's a change. You seem to think that people spend their lives at bridge. They don't, at least, only Mrs. Pethick, and, besides——"

"Well?"

"I'm thinking of you."

"While at bridge?"

"Yes. Don't you see that these are the people who make your practice. We can't both object to meeting them. If I declined, then it would make it much harder for you. Can't you trust me that far?" The mother in her put aside his coldness. She longed that he should take her in his arms.

But Blantyre had a fixed idea that society wasted most of its time. He was critical without being constructive. "Why don't you get hold of something that counts. Forget about my practice. Half the people only think they are sick. They don't want me anyway. They want a man like Matthews who will fall in with all their nonsense and charge them for it. There's just one thing to kill a good practice as I see it."

"What is that?"

"The truth. It would shut half the doors in Yorkton against me."

"Brian——"

"Let's try the truth, you and I, just for once," he said diffidently. "I wasn't made for a practice in Yorkton or any other city. I see that now. It's taken six months and a good deal of money to prove it."

"Don't talk like that, dearest. You make me miserable. Come, it's late." In spite of all he filled her life—utterly. She wondered why, now, in the face of all this, she should yearn for him.

He shook his head. "I'll be up presently."

Followed an hour's unprofitable retrospect. Then he went upstairs quietly, thinking her asleep.

"Brian."

He entered quietly. Stella had been reading and waiting. The lamp stood close beside the bed. Its shaded light fell across her as she lay and looked up at him. Blantyre stood and wondered. Something in him burst its shell for an instant, to regard this exquisite inhabitant of an intimate kingdom. Her arms and neck were bare. Her nightdress had fallen low and left the divine dome of her smooth and rounded breast. On the pillow her hair was loose in great golden-brown waves. Her body was slack and extended in long supple curves. A potent creation, transfused with love and slow, delicious fire. Blantyre stared. "She is very beautiful," he thought, and marvelled at himself for thinking it. Her eyes were deep and luminous. He tried to read them. Then suddenly some new Blantyre said—"She is yours—yours."

At this the blood coursed faster in his veins. He grew very pale and stooped over her. It seemed that within him something had broken and set his spirit free. He had only felt it once before.

She put out her arms. To such a gesture have men surrendered since the world began. "I've been waiting a long time, dearest, I could not get to sleep without you."

For an unforgettable moment he sensed the poignant craving of mate for mate.

Thus while he listened to the quick throb of her heart. Then through the open windows drifted the muffled hum of the city—the voice that even in the midnight watches is never utterly silent. And with that distant murmur there wakened in Blantyre

other voices, answering and querulous. This sleeping invisible hive breathed of everything he wanted to forget. To-morrow and the next day and the next he would be drawn into it. He would, as always, be expected to ignore everything of himself, except that which made his services acceptable to others. He would have to explore human territory that had no interest for him, and be drawn into the very warp of lives that offered nothing to his imagination. If he could have doctored patients without seeing, touching or speaking to them, he would have been infinitely happier. The fact that they were alive and suffering meant nothing, save in those grimy abodes where the stark anguish of the labourer moved him to some primordial sense of the brotherhood of pain.

Even in the very arms of love, the protest was alive. The male in him had flashed into an instant of passionate response. But behind this, the old Blantyre moved, untouched. The man in him looked, hesitated and turned away. He was infinitely distant from her. The vacant spaces of the sea seemed to call to him. There at least his vision had been free. He wondered why he had left it. From what long withered root had sprung this wayward strain. He had bolstered himself up with promises of ease and independence and companionship—and above all with promises of love. All these had come and left him cold. He had probed into other people's lives. He had seen the burden and fruit of love and passion. There was no intimate secret that had not been uncovered to his profession. Before him husbands, wives and lovers

had been stricken by its poignant sequences and uplifted by its joys. But all this had been apart from Blantyre. He saw the reflection in the sky, but had not found the wondrous flame itself.

III

STELLA woke from troubled dreams. Brian had stalked through them, changing continually into grim, unfamiliar shapes. When she opened her eyes she was afraid of him.

Then came Robbins' note. "Can you come and see me."

She welcomed this. It meant an hour in peace, with the harbour lights of Robbins' gentle spirit. But that morning the frailty of his appearance filled her with sad reflection. His wife listened while he talked. Her prophetic eyes never left his face.

Stella's heart beat faster as he unfolded his beneficent scheme. The magnitude of it amazed her. He had thought of everything. She did not guess he had been thinking of it for years. When he came to her part she did not, at first, understand him.

"I have many reasons for this, my dear. A board of trustees needs enthusiasm—something to withstand public apathy and criticism. You have it. Also I have every confidence in your sympathies. They are infectious. You've said a good many things here that you've forgotten, but I've remembered."

She shook her head. "You mean that I'm to

have executive work? I'd love it—but could I do it?"

"You could help—like the rest. You feel—that's why I want you. You love Canada—that's another reason. Your judgment only needs experience and that will come. As to the other ladies, I'm leaving all that to Ellison."

"To whom?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Stephen Ellison is to be in general charge. He's been noble about it. The result is I'm very happy."

"Doctor Ellison?" she hesitated.

"Yes." He looked at her keenly. "I asked him about you. He said he would not have it otherwise. He—he told me that—well, I know about it, but surely that doesn't make any difference now. Would it be right that it should?"

She met his eyes steadily. Her brain was aflame with quick prophetic searching and a sudden sensing that this moment was notable in her life. Robbins' pallid face seemed visibly to recede further into gathering shadows. She, too, grasped at his weak tenancy. It was impressed that she must contribute instantly to the peace of his remaining hours. Then there were Brian's criticisms. This would answer them forever.

"I have no right to refuse," she said slowly. "I don't think any one has, in such a case, no matter what may have happened. But I can do so little. Mr. Robbins, you do me a great honour, and," she smiled anxiously, "you rather frighten me."

"I'd much sooner you'd put it that way than any other," he answered contentedly. "Now there's

just one thing. You don't think your husband will object?"

"Why should he?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, he shouldn't. But young husbands——" he laughed. "You know more about them than I do."

She remembered last night. "He will be delighted. I know he will."

"I'm very glad of that. Now, in a general way, your duties won't be heavy. I want women like you to be the nerves of the committee. Let the men do the heavy work—they're made for it. Get into people's hearts through their lives. You will pay for it. Often it will cause you pain—but it's worth it all and more. Above all things, my dear, feel. You women have a thousand perceptions that we haven't. Don't expect too much gratitude—benefits are soon forgotten. The work's the thing. Well—how an old man does ramble. But I'm rather full of it. I hope we'll have another talk soon, though one can never tell," he added significantly. "Kiss me, my dear. You remind me of your mother to-day."

Stella stooped over him. Her eyes were full of tears. "I'm not worthy," she said indistinctly.

He looked at her affectionately—seeming to look through stars and moonlight. "Who is worthy?" he whispered. "God bless you."

The question assailed her on the way home. She was greatly moved and very humble. This wider vision made her feel more than ever a living, sensitive part of the world. That was what Robbins wanted her to feel. Then she thought of Blantyre. This was

something that would stand up against his criticisms. It fortified her.

She waited impatiently for his return and told him everything. The telling of it brought the colour to her cheeks and a tender light into her eyes. But gradually, unfolding the far sweep of the movement, her voice failed. With a sickness at heart she realised that Brian was unmoved. He sat motionless, and—was there anything forbidding in his face?

"And you promised to join this committee?"

"Yes, of course. It was a great honour. Surely you don't object?"

"Does Ellison know it?"

"Yes, he must by this time. Mr. Robbins was going to let him know at once. Brian, why do you look at me like that?"

Blantyre felt coldly interrogative. He wondered what fate was pushing Ellison in where he was not wanted. He visioned a board meeting with Ellison beside his wife.

"I object."

Her protest flamed. "Brian, what do you mean?"

"I object to your joining any committee without consulting me. Also I object to Ellison."

He paused, leaving her breathless. He had been putting things together—the hundred and one snatches of conversation by which a man knows—without the flat, incontrovertible statement. The memory of Ellison's accusing eyes pricked him on.

"You had better tell Mr. Robbins you find it impossible."

"You are cruel—and utterly unfair. What right

have you to——" she stopped, her breast heaving, her whole body tense.

"Every right. The right you gave me yourself. I tell you I won't have it."

Stella grew very white. She was finding it hard to exist in this appalling period. "And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall tell him myself."

"You'll tell him," she repeated faintly. "You—my husband."

He regarded her keenly. "How long is it since you saw Ellison?"

"I don't know. Several weeks. Why?"

"How well do you know him?"

"I've known him all my life. Brian, why do you look——"

"Anything else?"

"What do you mean?" She was trembling.

"Did he ever make love to you?" said Blantyre acidly.

"Never in his life." Her eyes streamed with revolt.

"Never asked you to marry him," he persisted.

Stella grew very faint. Now, when she wanted to lean upon her husband utterly, he was battering down every sacred wall—this man who had knelt beside her in the hush of the garden. "Brian, you have no right to talk like that."

"So he did ask you."

Stephen flashed into her thoughts; gentle, considerate, chivalrous. Then she looked at Brian. To what could she appeal in this metallic being.

"You insist?" Her eyes were very bright.

He nodded dominantly. He wanted to know

everything about the man whose gaze was so condemning.

"Then yes—he did."

"When—where?" he said savagely.

Stella stared at him. She felt a sudden flood of loyalty to Stephen. She did not love him, had never loved him, but now he was strangely nearer to her than her own husband.

"In the gardens of the Villa d'Este," she answered slowly.

Blantyre caught his breath. "Was it the same day?"

"Yes," she replied faintly, "the same day."

"Then I met him on the road." He spoke roughly. Ellison had no right to be there. First he had thrust himself into Blantyre's professional life. He knew too much about the Parkinson matter. He probably might not have saved Parkinson himself, but still he knew. Then he wanted Stella for his damned committee. There was a stopper on that. Now an old story came out. He had been after Stella, but—he had not got her. Blantyre scored there.

He looked curiously at his wife. She was still staring at him with something inscrutable in her eyes. She seemed to be peering through, at something behind him that riveted her gaze. Suddenly she turned and went out. He heard her slowly mount the stairs, then the door of her room closed.

He sat and thought, moodily. Things were bad enough before this. The taste had nearly gone out of life. There were too many things to put up with. Doctoring in a city had taken on the guise of

professional cajoleries, for which people were taught to be ready to pay. It practically amounted to hedging, day after day, with folk who couldn't stand the truth. Then there was Parkinson. If Parkinson had gone smash and wanted to die—why shouldn't he. What was the point in dragging back to earth a man who had made up his mind he had had more than enough of it. There was Ellison. Blantyre stopped protesting, just for a moment, to think out Ellison. That brought in Stella. Would they make a good pair? He had cut him out. He wondered why. Did Ellison still love Stella? Blantyre felt no resentment at this self query. It seemed rather to be Ellison's deserts that he did not get her. There was a certain savage satisfaction in that. Then he tried to think how all this would end. It baffled him.

He heard Stella's voice upstairs, and went, mechanically. From within her room he heard sobbing. She did not answer when he spoke, though the sobs ceased for an instant. He turned the handle of her door. It was locked.

IV

STELLA sent for Stephen. This gave her confused sensations. It would be the first time since her marriage that he had entered her house. But it was only fair to tell him herself. She was divided between a growing sense of insecurity and a resentment that now threatened even her love. She had not allowed herself to think much of Stephen; but

Brian forced him into her mind. The latter was unwittingly drawing an unprofitable parallel.

She got word that he would come in before noon. When he did arrive he was very pale. It gave her new emotions. "I wanted to see you about Mr. Robbins," she began. It all felt like a sudden renewal of former days. She wondered what she should have said first; then leaned on his understanding.

He looked at her with compassion. "You haven't heard?" He was very grave.

"No? What has happened?"

"Mr. Robbins died early this morning," he said slowly.

Her gaze was full of shocked apprehension. Their eyes streamed into each other—the gulf was bridged. "Died—this morning." Her heart seemed to hesitate and stop.

"I was with him," he continued gently. "It didn't seem like death. It was too beautiful—like a tired body going to sleep. He was very happy about everything, and had done all he wanted to. Financial arrangements were all complete. He talked a good deal about you."

"About me?" The tears were running down her cheeks.

"Yes. He was very contented with everything—especially your part of it."

Stella could not speak. She had over-powering sensations of the terrific meaning of life. Its inevitable sequences crushed her. She was drawn and absorbed into its intricate folds. Through the mist that enveloped her, Stephen looked like a

passionless tower of refuge. She wanted to run to him, for she was beginning to be afraid of love, and wavered between its exaltation and its pain. Robbins had slipped away. All was now clear in that contented mind, but almost as the breath left his valiant body her part of his dream was to be broken. For an instant she had strange thoughts of Brian.

Suddenly she flashed into revolt. It seemed a dreadful thing to violate this promise to a dead man at the crook of Brian's finger. Long ago she had subconsciously joined herself to the general scheme of life. She had bestowed on Brian her body and her love, but there was in Stella a fine, searching mentality that was apart from love and not to be bestowed on any one. It was her own—absolutely. This part of her lived in spiritual freedom, untouched by emotion. It was a definite attribute—poised high, even above passion itself.

Blantyre had never realised this. There were phases of Stella that puzzled and vexed him. In which he seemed to have no part; they left him, as it were, on one side, but said nevertheless, "You can join me if you will, but only as a kindred spirit in search of what I seek." It was the consciousness of some far destiny. Now it vividly appeared that Brian meant her to flout this destiny.

"I did want to speak to you," she said slowly, "but it doesn't matter now. Mr. Robbins' death has changed it." There was a ring of decision in her tones.

He looked at her curiously. She wondered how far his intuition would carry him, but

nothing in Stephen's face betrayed his thoughts. His expression might mean everything or nothing. Then he began to talk about Robbins and the project. Nothing he said involved Blantyre or even suggested him. But she was conscious that their conversation circled around her husband, that he was visible from every standpoint, and, to a degree, coloured their phrases with a studied impersonality.

The more Ellison unfolded the scheme, the more she was fascinated. He had travelled much in Canada. He knew what ravages consumption had made in a population generally supposed to be strong and healthy. She began to see it as it really was—a national handicap. She had helped in a small degree already. Woman had valiantly tackled this prodigious task, then paused, appalled with the immensity of it. But Robbins now seemed the touchstone to success. Ellison had left out the money part of it, and this—taken for granted—impressed her all the more. It made her want to go out at once and gather in these pallid folk.

Stephen caught fire from her enthusiasm. He himself was infinitely drawn to those invisible millions being slowly forged into nationhood across three thousand miles of territory. This would let him into their lives as never before. He looked at Stella. They were, for the moment, fused together in one tremendous emprise. Then he felt suddenly despondent and went away wondering how much she understood.

Stella, charged with new ambition, waited for Blantyre's return. Her horizon had infinitely widened. But some inward part of herself, the part

she would never surrender, warned her that this was the time to go on record. She was beginning to question why one should have to fight for peace and happiness. It appeared that married life involved too much compromise, too much yielding. She glimpsed the fact that the Stella on whom, at the last, she always depended, was not the Stella she had bestowed on her husband.

She rehearsed what she would say. When Blantyre came in the rehearsal seemed futile. She told him of Robbins' death. He took that so quietly that it shocked her.

"How did you know?"

"Doctor Ellison told me." Then she added, "I had sent for him."

His brows lifted. "You sent for him?"

"Yes, to tell him that I had decided not to go on the board."

Blantyre nodded, "That's quite right."

"But, Brian, I didn't tell him. I couldn't."

"You couldn't! Why?" He was like a puzzled inquisitor.

"Mr. Robbins was dead. I promised him the day before he died."

"What has that to do with it?" His face was hardening.

"Everything," she revolted. "And, after all, I had a perfect right to promise."

"Oh, had you."

"Yes. What I promised was mine to give—not yours!" She gathered her forces desperately.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that there's a part of myself that I want

to keep alive. It has nothing to do with love, Brian, but it is what love lives on. Don't you understand?" She was suffering. It seemed a dreadful thing to combat him.

"No, I don't. I was taught to believe that wives consulted their husbands—that is, more or less," he added cynically.

"You're not fair, Brian!"

"Are you?"

"I'm trying to be, but you make it hard." She searched his face for something to appeal to; but he seemed infinitely removed, having cast off every tender link. An inward self was shouting at her that now she must speak and keep her soul free.

"Have you forgotten everything, Brian? Does a woman give herself so completely that she has nothing left of her own? I have tried to do my best. You are vexed because there is more sacrifice in a city practice than you imagined. I've seen it for months. But don't you think my life is affected too. I live in the shadow of your practice. I am coloured by it and am always conscious of it. I live at the telephone for it. The whole house hangs on your arrangements and even my friends begin to look like possible patients."

"Anything else?" he said coldly.

"Yes, more than I can tell you. The sacrifices are not all yours. It's not been easy to be what I thought you wanted me to be—what would help most—and," she put it desperately, "that's why you're not fair. I was very proud to promise Mr. Robbins to go on the board. I thought you would be pleased too."

" You know what I thought about it and you gave me your word."

Her eyes shone. " You gave me your word too, in London, when we were married, Brian."

" I was never keen about Canada," he parried. " You arranged that. I don't like a city life—if this is a city," he added contemptuously.

Stella felt as though he had struck her between the eyes. She had an agonising sense of the futility of love. To grapple with him thus was like searing her very soul. But now he had reached in her that which had never been called into action before—the love of home. For an instant she had an overwhelming desire to pour herself out in protest. Then, with equal swiftness came a glimpse of that joyless future which every word made more and more forbidding. She poised, thus, between the flame of indignation and the cold white ashes of depression.

" I can't fight, Brian; it hurts too much. Don't blame Canada or any one here, and," she said gently, " we don't ask any more than we are ready to give. I think you've seen that." Then a sudden trembling seized her and she left him.

Blantyre stalked up and down the surgery. This was only another touch to cumulative sequences that were steadily setting him against time and place alike. Here and there were individuals whom he picked out as possible companions — men like Dynock, who had something of tradition and reserve about them, and certain stable ideas of good form. But for the most part he was not attracted. He went about armed with comparison and criticism,

and found but little that appealed in manners and custom. Professionally he was politely negative. But always, beneath this cloak of indifference, he experienced a certain blending of contempt and pity that things were as they were. There was no attempt to see if this aspiring race was not the natural product of its setting, no willingness to defer to the constructive energy that was transforming a continent. If Canadians joked about an archaic British custom his lip curled at their ignorance, but he had swerved no whit from his own insular rigidity to conform to this more plastic sphere.

With Blantyre all this had reacted in a super-emphasis of his own nationality. He was more reserved, more pronouncedly English than ever before. And he was curiously comforted in reflecting that Canadians, after all, did not understand the English. This gave him a sense of personal privacy.

All of which, to Canadians, was nothing new. The yearly tide had by this time been classified —Canada being no longer merely a bourne for younger sons. Such men as Blantyre were, perforce, swallowed, but not digested. Canadian affection for the mother country was no longer imperilled by the vagaries of her emissaries. There were, scattered through the Dominion, Englishmen who had come to this land of promise to grasp a brighter future than promised at home. Most were absorbed and assimilated. Some yielded not at all; frankly used the present as a means for future return to more congenial surroundings, and maintained an attitude of critical compromise. They did not hesitate to use Canadians as occasion offered, but mentally segre-

gated them as being by birth and untraditional origin a later and unanointed race. Such men licked their comparative lips over every evidence of what they termed colonial commercial shiftiness or lack of form. London papers might ring with accusations of political corruption, but no echo of it found lodgement in their expatriated intelligence. They were stunned with the obliquity of Canadian interpretation. Canadians saw, smiled, perhaps swore, and hurried on. The man in the street was not forgetful of the magnificent burden that England had carried for centuries; but he was also aware that Canada now towered high in the Imperial circle. One man put it thus: "I went to school in England. When people heard I was a Canadian they said, 'Oh, it's very cold there, isn't it?' I went back five years later and was asked to leave a parcel for a man the next time I passed Calgary. Five years later I was invited to have a drink, and then I was pumped about C.P.R. shares. Later still, people went so far as to take me down to the country for a week end. Then I knew I had arrived."

And, behind all this, Canadians were questioning themselves, "What of the future?"

V

In August they went to the Dynocks in Muskoka. Stella had spent youthful summers there, but this was the first time Brian had penetrated Canada beyond Yorkton. At the end of every June the fortunate ones of the city trekked north. There was

a closing of town houses and a paternal transition to country clubs for the ensuing two months. Yorkton residential streets took on an aspect of closed blinds and aged perceptibly. Blantyre felt happily curious about their visit. It seemed to promise a freedom to which he was beginning to be a stranger.

The scene changed on the northward journey. The flat plains of southern Ontario yielded gradually to a broken country in which ribs of ancient rock thrust up their rounded surface, polished smooth by the passage of prehistoric glaciers. The train thundered through tangled woods, scarred with the ravages of bush fires, that left a grim desolation of black, dead timber. Blantyre had visions of lakes that swept by, rimmed with green and flashing in the sun. And everywhere through this wilderness Canadians had come to play. Passengers descended to be gathered into waiting groups of straight, supple, brown-skinned youth.

The Dynocks met them at one of these stations—coatless, hatless and tanned.

"We're delighted to see you," said their hostess heartily. "Now, Dr. Blantyre, you're going to get Canada at her best."

In five minutes they were in the launch heading down Lake Joseph. The train panted up-hill and disappeared in the forest. Other launches set out after them, till the water was furrowed with streaks of foam.

Stella lay back in a wicker chair, and laughed happily. "I've been wanting to get Brian here for ever so long. You and I will have to educate him to the woods."

Mrs. Dynock glanced at Blantyre. He was sitting forward with her husband, drinking in this exquisite revelation. "He doesn't look very fit, Stella; he's too thin."

"It's the city work."

"Well," said Mrs. Dynock cheerfully, "he'll forget that here."

Presently the *Wayfarer* doubled in behind an island and they had the lake to themselves. Blantyre was captivated. It was a solitude of rock, wood and water. Pine trees thrust up irregularly into the sky line, soaring jaggedly above the velvet tops of the lesser timber. This timber marched everywhere to the abrupt shores, in a dense tangle of cedar, birch and silvery poplar.

The Dynock house overhung the shore. It was low and rambling, with a brown roof that melted softly into the cloistered tree-trunks behind. In front it extended into a glorified boat-house. Through this ran two lanes of water, in one of which were moored canoes and skiffs. The other was the harbour of the *Wayfarer*. Around the house ran a covered verandah, dotted with hammocks and wicker chairs. It was all very simple. Blantyre thought he had never seen anything more individually attractive. At the back of the house a wire emerged from the forest and entered an upper window.

The *Wayfarer* ran smoothly on. Then Dynock shut off the power, and she glided into the boat-house. A man in overalls appeared and shouldered the luggage. Stella vanished with Mrs. Dynock, and Brian stood staring from the verandah.

Dynock pointed: "We own out to that bay and about a quarter of a mile back into the woods. I got the place years ago very cheaply. The house cost very little. We have all we really need for three months—then we lock it up till next year. Jolly place, isn't it?"

"It's immense," said Brian. He was beginning to breathe more deeply in this odorous air. The silence of the place was bringing back countless, suggestive memories, and this combination of simplicity and comfort gave him a new interpretation of Canadian life—one he seemed to have missed in Yorkton. "What do you do here?"

"Read, loaf, sail, smoke, fish and dream," said Dynock contentedly. "Sounds good, doesn't it?"

Blantyre laughed. "Very good. Many visitors?"

Dynock shook his head. "No. One doesn't want many. We get letters and papers every day, dress to suit ourselves, and abominate style."

They ate on the verandah—comfortable, informal meals, at which they waited on each other. Mrs. Dynock was an excellent housekeeper.

The days were full of effortless wanderings. Blantyre learned to handle a canoe so easily that Stella was proud of him. She felt anew the first restful, safe sensation that his physical strength had given her. The Dynocks were very understanding. There was neither rule nor routine in their establishment, and this was balm to Brian. Together they explored the neighbourhood. Muskoka was long famous. Summer tourists journeyed thither from far in the United States. A later generation had enlarged on the old simple life of

those Canadians who had known and loved this paradise since earlier days. Millionaires bought islands and decorated them with villas that flaunted garishly in the beauty of their setting. Maids, butlers and valets were not unknown where, a few years before, the silent Indian paddled to the boat-house with his string of black bass. Hydroplanes hurtled through the lagoons where the wild duck marshalled her young. But still—so vast was the extent of this watery maze—there was many a quiet haven, unsullied and unvexed.

Here Canadians found their natural air. The breath of the woods roused in them all the strong freedom of their race. Children played in and on the water with an amphibious content, and tiny arms wielded skillfully the paddle and the oar. City men grew brown and sinewy in this gigantic playground. At every week-end there was an influx —burdened with domestic offerings. Then a scattering of laden motor boats, skiffs, and canoes. Always, over this region, rested the benign influence of endless leagues of cedar-scented solitude. It fortified and encouraged. It seemed a vast nursery for a deep-lunged nation.

Stella yielded herself happily. Responsive to this beauty she felt drawn to Brian by a thousand occult bonds. Together they explored fairyland, guiding their canoe into hidden nooks where it seemed that everything that might disturb the soul had been put away. She was touched by the glamour of these intimate silences. The breathless hush of woods and water invited every expression of love.

Blantyre realised again that she was very beautiful. Her oval face, just touched with the sun, was alive with piquant charm, and her eyes full of the mysterious light and shadow of the lake. Her arms and neck were perfectly rounded, her breast seemed to harbour every potent attraction. Something drew them nearer to each other, till the magic of the wilderness roused him to old, reiterant self-questions. He realised that it was impossible for the Dynocks or any one else to imagine that they were not perfectly happy together. Night after night, with Stella asleep beside him, he gazed out of their window across the moon-silvered lake, trying to determine why these moments left him cold. He wanted to feel, to yield, to respond. He was touched here by the completeness of Stella's trust—by the magnitude of his endowment. If they could always live here and thus, away from grind and routine, it would be different. Here, at least, a man could call his soul his own. He wanted to play fair, and did the best he could. Outwardly he was something more than attentive and appreciative. And Blantyre, at his best, had a peculiar charm; a certain tactful, straightforward chivalry, through which his spiritual unrest was never apparent. And this was uppermost for the rest of their visit.

The days slipped away peacefully. Stella felt that she had got much nearer to Mrs. Dynock's angular, kindly individuality. The Dynocks had achieved that place in life to which she aspired for Brian and herself. They were clean-cut and established. She wondered what mutual and temperamental sacrifices they had made. She thought

them both unemotional and free from the imaginative periods that so often affected herself—also she liked Mrs. Dynock's bluntness.

"You know we didn't really fall in love till after we were married," said the latter one afternoon on the verandah. "I suppose the reason was we had known each other all our lives and run in and out of each other's houses ever since we were old enough to run. Peter's people and mine were historic friends. And," she laughed, "it seemed to be understood that we should marry. I'm glad it was."

Stella wanted to ask how much one could trust the first whisperings of love, and whether emotion was a costly and terrible thing. She glanced at her companion. There were no sentimental doubts in that sturdy mind. "We only knew each other a few weeks," she said blushing, "but—it was different—in so many ways. It seemed that everything else must be put aside. I felt——" she hesitated.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Dynock gently.

"I felt that it was the only thing; that I had been waiting for it all my life. It was stronger than myself." She paused, then added, "I wanted to help. The last few years had been pointless. I didn't seem to be able to do much by myself and I was full of dreams."

"Are they coming true—now?"

Stella's lip trembled. "I don't know," she faltered. "Sometimes I think so, then something happens." She looked at the elder woman affectionately. "This is the happiest week for a long time. Brian is more like his real self. It makes me wonder whether the purchase of Dr. Matthews'

practice was a good thing; any routine seems so hard."

"Does he like children?" said Mrs. Dynock abruptly.

"In a general way, yes, but," she coloured, "he does not want a child yet. Though it would make me very happy," she concluded wistfully.

"I'm sorry for that. I think it's the way out for both of you. Peter and I have longed for a child, but," she shook her head, "no such luck. So I am driven to organising charities and children's hospitals, while Peter manages the estate, gets me out of financial troubles, and plays golf. There they are now; really, Stella, that cold-blooded husband of yours is very good looking."

They spent the evening on the lake, drifting in and out of luminous shadows through which the noiseless craft threaded a liquid way. The Dynock canoes were white. They looked ghost-like, slipping past the breathless shores. Blantyre took Mrs. Dynock. She studied him attentively, lying back in the cushions and trailing her fingers through the brown water. Physically he was attractive and very much alive. He had a litheness of strength that compelled her admiration, and, she thought, a niceness of reserve, suggesting that in an emergency he would be very much a man. She queried what was behind this. Then, remembering Stella's face, she wondered if there was any essential part of him that was not yet alive.

"I'm so glad you both came," she said contentedly. "You know Stella is a very old friend of ours."

He laid his paddle across the thwarts and watched the shining drops hurry down its edge. "It was very good of you—and it came just at the right time."

"Why?"

"I was beginning to wonder," he said frankly, "if I should ever learn to enjoy myself happily, carelessly. It's something I've always envied in other people, and often attempted myself without any particular success."

"What is it?" she queried, "self-consciousness?"

"I don't know. I suppose it is, and, perhaps tradition."

"How could it be tradition?"

"It sounds odd, I know, but tradition reminds one of differences. That's what I feel, broadly speaking. My people haven't had anything but themselves for years. They made themselves into a kind of close corporation, and, possibly, as I see it now, we tried to consider other people unnecessary to us. We were never what they call in the United States good mixers. We were, in a way, just as proud of not having things as most others are of having them."

"You have a good deal now, if I may say so."

"That's just it. I am always conscious of that, and, if you understand, I'd like to forget it occasionally. I'm trying to get used to the things Stella has been used to all her life. It sounds as if it ought to be easy, especially with her, but," he hesitated, "sometimes I feel as if the transition were too abrupt for a man like myself."

She had a sudden desire to push Blantyre out of

his own mind. "Why not look at it another way? You're really very fortunate. Some of the nicest men in Canada have aspired to Stella, and we often wondered why she didn't marry. She's very clever and beautiful, and has more good friends than any one I know. More than that she has one very rare quality, which, of course, you have felt. I don't know how to describe it myself except to say that she appeals. Whenever she talks to me I have a curious ecstatic sensation that it's Stella's soul that is doing the talking. I don't suggest that she isn't full of the natural joy of life, because she is—it's perfectly evident. But behind all that there's a certain spiritual distinction and invitation, and—to me—that's a wonderful and unusual charm. I wish I had it. It makes one want to be in touch and do things for her. Don't you think so—that is, if you don't mind my explaining your own wife to you," she concluded apologetically.

Blantyre pondered. This blunt women with the strong face and square chin was calmly thrusting home truths that for months he had evasively ignored. She was absolutely fair. Then just at the moment when he was perhaps more nearly than ever before admitting and accepting them, he swerved automatically into the grooved channel of his old illusion.

"No. I'm glad you said it—there's no reason you shouldn't. As a matter of fact whatever difficulty there is, is all with myself. I led a limited life for years. I saw a good deal of the world, of course, but it wasn't educative. The sea became empty and unresponsive. I became weary of its

silences, and wanted to get away and hack out something on my own. I didn't really appreciate what that meant. I had always worked for a company, and my duties were narrow and defined. They left most of the time to myself—too much. I didn't reckon that a private practice meant that in one sense I would have to forget myself—as a general thing."

Mrs. Dynock was silent and disappointed. She had really said much more than she had meant to say and, it seemed, had now come round to that negative point from which they started. She was wondering how to reply when the other canoe swam toward them wraith-like out of the dusk. The frail shells touched and lay together side by side.

Dynock glanced at his wife. Then Brian met Stella's eyes. An extraordinary thought flashed through him. Were they each in the wrong boat for life? Would this blunt, strong woman have been a firmer anchorage than the exquisite delicacy of Stella? Would Stella have have found in Dynock some ordered, unquestioning quality to which he himself was stranger?

They paddled voicelessly homeward, lost in the enchantment of night. The canoes slipped along the shore. Their slender hulls moved slowly on, floating across the maze of mirrored forest that spread abroad on the glass-like surface. Behind them, long ripples stole to the land, ripples that shook the reflected foliage into a trembling and distorted wilderness.

Far down the lake sounded the faint staccato of a motor boat. They listened till she came nearer.

Her quick explosions rattled viciously. Presently they caught her scurrying up like a gigantic yellow lizard of prodigious speed—a narrow mahogany shell—sides as thin as paper—nickel-plated fittings and a gleaming crystal wind-shield. Her knife-like bows were lifted nearly clear of the dark water. She was splitting it. Two sharp curving ridges of foam rose high on either side of her, streamed hissing past her shining frame and broadened out on the lake in a vast tossing arrow-headed wave. So fast she came that she appeared to snore along on the surface of the water, and not in it. The exhaust of her six throbbing cylinders pealed like rifle shots. In a moment she was abreast—then shot ahead with a waving of handkerchiefs.

Blantyre stared after the racer. She skidded round an island in a cloud of spray, but still her high-pitched drone sounded across the tree tops.

"Steady," said Dynock warningly. "Sit tight."

One arm of the arrow-headed wave reached them. The canoes dipped sharply and lurched to the lift of it. Then it passed on and broke heavily against the precipitous shore. They caught the crash of it ripping far down along the rocks that everywhere bounded the water's edge.

"Rotten, isn't it," frowned Dynock.

His wife laughed. "Five millions at twenty-five miles an hour. We're getting rather too much of it now. Our American friends have a pace of their own, but I don't think it suits Muskoka—it certainly doesn't suit me."

That night Blantyre swam far out into the lake. The water had a peculiar softness. He lay on his

back and looked up. The sky was full of stars, the air sweet with the untainted freshness of the forest. The dark line of the land was picked out with twinkling points—he could see lanterns moving through the woods and the pale glimmer of lighted tents. A long way off there was a camp fire and he made out tiny figures moving around it. Voices sounded and died away in this purple immensity. Across the silence came the shred of a song. The depth beneath him seemed full of hollow caves that were lined with dusky, peaceful couches, where a man might rest unvexed. Once he sank, quietly and deliberately, till, with a booming in his ears he struck quickly to the surface—gasping. Then he noted the lamp lit in Stella's window and distinguished her figure, elbows on the sill. She, too, was staring into the night.

He floated across the strip of moonlight that stretched like a flat, silver ribbon to the cottage. Stella saw his head, a dark spot on this gleaming streak, and waved her hand. He drifted luxuriously—yielding to the cool caress of these soft brown waters that embraced and soothed him till he was full of keen physical delight. Stella called to him, and he had a curious idea that it was always thus—that her voice would always call him from something he wanted to be or do. Then, with sudden compunction, he turned on his side and struck shoreward with a swift overhand stroke.

VI

LATER that week came the Muskoka regatta. The Dynock's launch started early, collecting passengers from cottages in the vicinity. Nearly every one brought a boat or canoe. In an hour, the *Wayfarer*, trailing a dozen smaller craft, swung into a narrow channel that led to a larger lake.

The Dynock's friends were Yorktonians. Blantyre knew most of them. The Yorkton merchant or lawyer here appeared in different guise. He was brown, bright-eyed, care-free. He dressed in flannels and invariably wore white canvas shoes. The Yorkton matron had surrendered to the same beneficent regime, and her brood scattered daily through the wilderness, active, self-reliant and joyous.

The regatta was held off the Imperial, a great modern hotel, sprawling across a rocky eminence that dominated the central sweep of a larger lake. Approaching it, Blantyre saw that the distance was dotted with boats. Here the transient inhabitants of Muskoka were displayed in every variety. The sedate jockeyed with the gay—age hobnobbed with youth—the glittering racer nosed in between battered dinghies and slim canoes—white passenger steamers lay with banked fires in the background, their decks swarming. It seemed strange that this throng could have been gathered from the cottages dotted at random around these blue vistas.

The competitions were keen and varied. Blantyre was particularly interested in the canoe

events, in which young Canada was at its best. A good canoe man seemed to merge into his craft and make it a living portion of himself. It quivered and responded to his slightest touch. The finish of these races was exciting—the light shells leaping along the surface under quick, vicious strokes, crumpling a smother of foam under a thin, delicate forefoot. The motor-boat races sounded like an infantry engagement. The shimmering plain was torn to pieces in this contest—this orgy of raucous power in which the most costly machines swept home victorious. Blantyre could only see a cloud of spray, from which a bright bow projected. Behind came a mound of water that threatened to roll over and engulf the half-buried racer. The regatta finished with the sail boats, heading back like a flock of gulls on the last leg of a long triangle. They had been nursing the shifting winds for two hours and now crept smoothly and delicately homewards, with the dying breath of a sunset breeze gathered into the slow curves of their great white wings.

Stella watched them contentedly. "That," she said, "is the real Muskoka—the one I like."

"Is there another?" said Brian curiously.

Mrs. Dynock laughed. "Peter, Dr. Blantyre wants to know if there's another Muskoka."

Dynock lit his pipe and pointed up the hill to the long, irregular roofs of the Imperial. "There is—worse luck. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, rather. Would you mind?"

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Dynock energetically. "I don't think you have seen Muskoka without it."

They dined in a long hall that paralleled one of

the wide verandahs. It was, to all intent, a metropolitan service. Parties in evening dress were dotted about. From the rotunda came the strains of an orchestra Perspiring waiters navigated nervously between small tables, bearing aloft trays covered with a multitude of china dishes. These anxious voyages terminated with the delivery of a battery of plates and a galaxy of semi-tepid dainties. The rattle of them allied with the chatter of high-pitched voices for tonal supremacy over the music. The saloon was brilliant with electric light. Champagne corks popped irregularly. The head waiter chewed gum.

Stella picked out the Sturtridges in a far corner. They nodded back and Sturtridge raised his glass. His face was red with sunburn. His wife wore a very low gown and her large white bosom looked chalk-like beside his rubicund cheeks.

Meantime the centre of the rotunda had been cleared. Around its walls were the hotel offices, and booths and counters, where New York magazines, chocolate and factory-made Indian products were for sale. On one side was the place of business of an enterprising stockbroker, that added the ultimate metropolitan atmosphere. Beside it a group of fourteen-year-old boys were playing poker to throbbing ragtime.

But these emporiums were now flanked with rows of chairs that filled rapidly. Here and there Blantyre saw women dressed to a point beyond the extreme of fashion. It was palpable that everything available in the way of ornament had been donned for this summer climax. The very white-

ness of their skins was eloquent of successful campaigns against any touch of sun. The full prodigality of their figures betrayed no touch of healthful exercise. Diamonds flashed. Ospreys trembled above powder and paint. A few large men, smoking cigars, moved near them, complacently surveying these lethargic beings, these satisfactory evidences of worldly progress.

Presently the orchestra swung into a popular air, and dancing began. Blantyre stared. The turkey trot had just invaded Canada. It had a strangle hold on the Imperial. He saw large women grasped firmly, and bent into unaccustomed curves. Fat men were divided between this new exhilaration and a general ignorance of what to do with their feet. Ponderous couples backed into quieter eddies of the stream and exchanged educational vagaries. Here and there a younger pair swayed gracefully in lissom abandon. But for the most part it was a variegated show, from which breathless women detached themselves and sank helpless into wicker chairs, while men sheered off out of danger to mop their dripping brows. From the audience came a constant strained clamour of strident voices that clashed in mid-air with the wail of fiddles and the clear call of flutes. There was a catchiness in the music, a certain bacchanalian fling in the figures of the dance, that set young blood beating fast and roused a long forgotten ambition in older and stiffer frames.

Stella stood watching with the rest, then her eyes wandered to Brian's face. It was full of undisguised astonishment. She slipped her arm into his and

together they turned through the wide glass doors, out on to the broad verandah. Instantly there was a divine silence, broken only by the wind that whispered through the maples and the long, cool lisp of the lake against its sleeping shores. The air was sweet, the water was flat and brilliant—like a moon-smitten shield. Through the windows they could see the dancers, but now the music was inaudible, and they seem galvanised into queer unpremeditated actions and postures that flouted this exquisite setting. Blantyre thought that though it was perhaps very natural and none of his affair, yet it was terrifically out of place.

He laughed later, when, as the *Wayfarer* turned homeward, Dynock asked him what he thought of it. Dynock took it all rather seriously, but his wife was amused. "We've really no right to criticise," she said, cheerfully. "I believe that many of these people look forward to this a year ahead, and that everything is concentrated for them in one glorious fortnight. I think it means scraping and saving for a long time. And after all, they get just as much out of it as we do out of the cottage."

Blantyre was silent. He sympathised with Dynock.

The *Wayfarer* swept past a rocky knoll that shouldered up out of deep water. Three pine trees rose from the grey moss that covered it. In the moonlight they resembled an ancient sentinel trinity. "To-morrow," said Dynock, contentedly, "we'll lunch there."

And when to-morrow came, Blantyre lay on his back in the gray moss and peered up through the green tracery of pine needles. The sky was of

purest blue. It seemed infinitely high, and across its dome small white clouds were drifting lazily. The scenes of last evening had vanished utterly. They had no place beneath this placid heaven.

The silence wooed him into retrospect. A year ago he was the ship's doctor, playing a small, protesting game single-handed. Now he was joined to this determined, successful march of a new country. A year ago he was unloved—he could have dropped out and hardly been missed. Now whatever there was of comfort and companionship was his, utterly. He looked long and silently at Stella. She and Mrs. Dynock were laying a white cloth on the moss. It seemed that for this hour there were no others to be thought of, but just these four, and that the rest of an invisible humanity was tributary to their needs. At that moment Blantyre wanted to forget himself. There was something poignant in the sweetness of these transitory days. This wilderness had brought him nearer Stella than even their own intimate dual existence, more near than when she slept beside him. Then he looked at Dynock, and wondered how it would feel to have a temperament unshaken by storm and revolt, to have a life so ordered, so akin to one's own desires, that it entailed no personal individual struggle.

The memory of that day lived long. It was a communion with sweet, unsullied things. They made tea over a camp fire, and Dynock carefully extinguished the last spark. Blantyre liked a certain loving care they both showed for these natural beauties. Their canoes turned homeward

at sunset, and he dwelt lingeringly on the soft, firm pressure of the water against his paddle blade. A haze crept up in the north as they neared the cottage, and he caught a sharp acrid whiff.

"Bush fires," said Dynock. He seemed to take it very quietly. "The country is dried up. Hardly any rain this summer."

The haze increased, till the sun went down in an angry murkiness.

At breakfast, next morning, Muskoka had vanished. Land and water were wrapped in an impenetrable cloud. The acrid smell was stronger. Their eyes smarted, and they could taste the smoke.

Blantyre hardly liked to leave them in this threatening atmosphere, and it did not seem that any steamer could find them.

Mrs. Dynock laughed. "There's no danger. The fire is perhaps a hundred miles away."

Shortly they heard the steamer's whistle. She loomed up huge and ghostly, close to the wharf. They said good-bye. Brian and Stella had each a curious sensation that this was the end of an interregnum. Stella herself had been deaf to Mrs. Dynock's urgings that she, at any rate, should stay on. She could not contemplate Brian alone in Yorkton. Her love demanded that she keep close to his querulous spirit. Now they both sensed that this last fortnight had been a perfect thing they had carved sharply out of an imperfect companionship, and that they were going back to do what they could with the rest of their joint material.

The steamer backed away from the edge of the wharf that instantly vanished. The Dynocks were

swallowed up in obscurity. Here and there the lift of a hill showed indistinctly through the smoke, but for the most part the steamer ploughed confidently along an invisible course, guided by some infallible sixth sense of location in the pilot's brain. She stopped at times and gently drew in to other wharfs that jumped at her out of utter indistinction. More passengers embarked. Then she sheered off again into the flat, unwrinkled lake, like a phantom ship traversing uncharted and mysterious waters.

Three hours of this. At last, from directly ahead, came the whistle of a locomotive, and the steamer drew into her destination. Blantyre had seen salt water navigation at its best, but never had he seen such skill as this. He conceived a new respect for the inland pilot.

From the train windows he could catch sparks of fire along the right-of-way as they speeded south. Here and there, knots of men, blackened and stained—the fire fighters—stood beside the track. The smoke lifted and he had glimpses of the lakes. Now they spoke with a new invitation. He was loathe to leave them.

They stopped at the last Muskoka station. The door opened and Stephen Ellison entered, brown and smiling. Stella flushed at the sight of him.

"How d'ye do," he said cheerfullv. "Had a good time? I heard you were at the Dynocks."

"Delightful. We didn't know you were up here."

Stephen glanced at Blantyre. This was the first time he had met them together. "Yes, been here a week. Too busy to get away this winter, so came

up to pick out some sites for cottages for consumptives."

Blantyre looked up. In spite of himself he was interested. "Yes? Why?"

"Oh, your wife wasn't at the last meeting of the Robbins' Trust. We missed her. We decided the first thing was to get going very informally. So we are starting that way—sending people up here to live out of doors. There'll be another meeting in a week. I hope Mrs. Blantyre will be able to come. It's important."

Stella hesitated. She had a swift hope that some sudden impulse of Brian would straighten their difficult course. "I hope I will," she said. There was a thread of appeal in it, but Blantyre sat motionless and unresponsive. "Won't you sit with us?" She had a swift embarrassment at her husband's diffidence.

Ellison's expression betrayed nothing. He might have seen, and he might not. She could not guess. "Thanks, no. I have a lot of traps."

He went into the next car. Stella turned. Her eyes were bright, her lips parted. "Brian," she said tumultuously, "can't you really trust me that far?"

But Blantyre only stared out of the window at the flying woods. They were still picked out, here and there, with small points of flame. The bush fires were working south, and it seemed to him, that, even before he left them, the forest was beginning to be alive with every restless, unhappy prophetic sense that only waited his return to the city to spring into unprofitable life in his own brain

VII

THAT autumn Canada emerged from the throes of a political campaign that left it breathless. Blantyre was no politician, but when Renton asked them both to dine with him at the Yorkton Club on the night of the elections, he accepted with a quizzical sensation that he would see what Canadian politics amounted to.

In Renton's party were also the Clay-Stewarts and Mauret, one of the leaders of the French Nationalists, to whom had been entrusted the task of whipping his western compatriots into line.

Renton himself was now Conservative. The question of reciprocity had moved him across from a life-long attachment to the Liberal party. Blantyre listened intently while he argued with Mauret.

"You're going out," he laughed. "Your scheme's half baked. The country wasn't ready for it. The whole thing is ill considered."

It was early in the evening. The club had filled up. Many dinners were being given, but they were only secondary matters. The whole throng was nervously expectant for the first return. Unsuppressed excitement was visible everywhere.

"What do you want?" said Mauret. He was a large suave man, with black hair and large white hands that seemed almost in their expressive activity to form part of his speech. "Canada has been looking for many years for better trade relations." He transfixed an oyster and held it up.

" Why should this cost you more because it grew on the other side of an imaginary line? "

At this they all laughed. Mauret swallowed his oyster and went on, " You wave the flag; you say, No, we will pay the duty on our imported oysters and thereby remain British to the core. Frankly, *mon ami*, I do not understand."

Clay-Stewart nodded. " Really, Renton, don't you think it has been rather overdone, this loyalty cry? "

Renton shrugged his shoulders. " I don't know, perhaps it has, but, at the bottom there's always this: we don't at the present time need reciprocity. The other fellow does. Our conditions are, economically speaking, better than his. Furthermore, when two elderly gentlemen pack their bags and go to Washington without consulting the country, and undertake to re-arrange our fiscal policy, things are coming rather too fast. That's why I changed. Where do you really think your people stand in this in Quebec, Mauret? "

" I think that," he hesitated, " with us it is not a matter of loyalty at all. We are too busy on the St. Lawrence growing vegetables. To the south there is a good market. You will find our policy in the cabbage patch. As to the rest of Canada, between ourselves, it is this way. Do what you like but don't tax us too much, and don't touch our cabbage patch."

He turned to Blantyre. " You are a newcomer, let me explain. The Frenchman in Canada is not political while he remains on the farm. It is a good life there and enough. Our politicians are born in the law schools of Montreal and Quebec. Then

come restlessness and a desire to—what shall I say?—have a hand in affairs. Our Church is only political in religious affairs when her standing or interests are in danger."

"What about the West?" asked Blantyre.

"Demand of our host," smiled Mauret. "The branch offices of his bank are everywhere."

"I don't know," said Renton thoughtfully. "It's a good deal of a question. British Columbia does not want her logs towed to the States. She wants to manufacture them at home. I think British Columbia will decide against reciprocity."

"And the prairie country?" put in Stella. She felt drawn irresistibly into the tension of these uncertain hours. They were waiting for a nation to speak.

"The prairie provinces, the wheat country! Ah! that's different. They want free wheat, and there are thousands of American farmers there, long-headed fellows who sold worked-out farms in Ohio and Illinois, and came over here to virgin soil they got for a song. They are American yet, and will be for a long time."

"And the United States are unanimous for this?" asked Blantyre.

Mauret shook his black head. "Ah no! The President has troubles like the Premier, and if we lose he defeats his own project. Not we, here in Canada."

"Why?"

"Picture to yourself a vast genial man, a judge, not a politician, a man who is politically improvident, but sincere—always sincere. He is a

Republican President. Yes, but he is not deaf to the cry that to live is too expensive for many people. He sees a neighbour land, Canada. That land produces the best wheat, the best pine timber, the best fish, the best barley—so many things his people want. So he moves toward these; but, ah! he is opposed—yes, at home. By whom? The manufacturer—the high tariff man—who has grown fat behind the wall of Monsieur M'Kinley. So he calls to his aid those of the party in opposition who agree with him. More than this, he is too carried away, *il parle de trop*, and his words are shouted here by those who say it is an enemy of Canada who speaks. He has his troubles, yes, many." He shrugged a pair of broad shoulders. "*Bien*, Stewart, you man of the world, speak."

"I have a queer feeling that there's going to be an upheaval in some direction," said Clay-Stewart slowly. "The flag waving has been overdone. I agree with that; but still it all depends on the people to whom it's waved. I don't know whether Canadians are sentimental or not, but this is the first clean-cut question, involving anything remotely racial, that they've had put to them for a long time. Now, you know, people in the mass are given to sentimental orgies, and there's no saying what they will do."

"This isn't a matter of sentiment," put in Renton quickly. "We hold that the thing is not properly worked out. The Ministers admitted that in the House. The other side had been digging into it for three years."

"Yes, I know," persisted Clay-Stewart, "but I

speak of the man on the street, not you. With him it is sentiment, not reason. And his sentiment has been fanned into flame by things said in the States that were better left unsaid. Now," he added, impressively, "I think you will carry the day, but," here he spoke slowly and very carefully, "you will carry it by bringing into action forces which may later on drive you unwillingly into a course of which your reason does not approve. You can work your man on the street into a frenzy, sometimes, but believe me that Imperialism hasn't reached the back of his head yet—tho' it probably will."

Blantyre listened curiously. It seemed to him that these men were tremendously in earnest. He tried to feel that all this meant something to himself. Stella was leaning forward, tense with interest, infinitely more a part of it than he was. But to Blantyre it was somehow unimportant as to how Colonials decided their affairs. The ultimate court of appeal was, he thought, in England. Then he remembered a leader in the *Times*. The *Times* had taken the affair rather seriously. He said so to Mauret.

"Ah! no, not so," replied the Frenchman. "With you it is a family affair. Australia, New Zealand, the Cape—they all look at you."

"Imperialism never worried your people, Mauret," laughed Renton. "And, Clay-Stewart is quite right. It hasn't really reached us yet. We feel an obligation, and want to discharge it, but the average man wants to get some more railways and bridges built before he thinks imperially."

"How is it all going to come out?" said Blantyre abruptly. "In the long run, I mean—a republic?"

Clay-Stewart shook his head. "I don't think so. We practically have one already. An imperial parliament wouldn't work, as I see it. Canadian representatives would sit for six months, and of these perhaps three days would be on Colonial affairs. No, we are very well as we are."

"And national defence?" queried Blantyre again.

The three glanced at each other and laughed. "That's a sore spot," said Renton. "Especially for us. Mauret and his friends wanted to build a navy in Canada, but we wouldn't trust them with the money, and wouldn't let them. But, the man on the street wanted to do the right thing, apart from politics, and," he added, sympathetically, "he's going to."

Blantyre pondered. The whole thing seemed at loose ends. These men spoke of England with a certain affection, but, nevertheless, lightly. Mauret's people, who had lived for centuries under the Union Jack, took it all very much for granted. Renton himself did not deny that the loyalty cry had been raised to disguise the strengthened fortification of the protected manufacturer. The western farmer wanted free entry for his wheat into the United States, and the Pacific coast lumberman prophesied his own ruin if the farmers' demands were satisfied. And beneath it all ran the question, "What did the man on the street feel about England?"

Stella had been waiting and watching. She had a curious sensation that here, at least, Brian could, if he would, see and touch a vital

process. If there were anything in him that could respond to his new atmosphere, this should draw him out. She had learned never to expect him to be emotional, but now it seemed that the whole frame-work of Canadian national life was visibly throbbing before him. Would no kindred pulse in him throb its answer.

At the far end of the room a man entered. His face was red, his eyes bright with excitement. He held up a sheet of paper. Instantly every one seemed to see him, and conversation ceased abruptly. He read out the first returns in a high-pitched, cracked voice. They were all from Yorkton, and all gave huge Conservative majorites. There was a buzz of excitement that broke into a cheer. The political sympathies of Yorkton Club were evident.

"What do you think of that?" said Renton, watching Mauret's changing countenance.

"That?—bah! that's nothing. What do you expect from a manufacturing city that has been terrified by a spectre of free trade."

Clay-Stewart waited intently. He had studied affairs carefully and impersonally. Also he had memories of Yorkton streets on the day of the Ladysmith relief.

The red-faced man appeared again. This time the paper was shaking in his hand. "The Ministers of Finance and Militia are beaten in Nova Scotia," he called.

There went a shout up at that. The Minister of Finance was one of the two elderly gentlemen who had gone to Washington and come home with reciprocity in a handbag. Now the nation was

beginning to talk. First the Atlantic coast, then westward with the sun to the Pacific.

By this time the returns were coming in fast. "The Opposition gains fourteen seats in Quebec," roared the red-faced man.

Mauret threw out his hands in despair. "And that," he said, angrily, "is because one fool of a Government member had his house painted by Government employees with official paint. Ah! You did well with that paint, my friend! Every *habitant* objects to losing his paint, but, no! he does not object to reciprocity because," he laughed, "he cannot understand it."

"Manitoba declares a majority of six seats against the Government," announced the perspiring herald. "Saskatchewan and Alberta fifteen to two in support of the Government."

"Ah!" said Clay-Stewart, "there you get it. That's free wheat talking now. The Opposition leader was very honest to you about it. He told them he was against it; but," he added, "they'll get it ultimately."

Then came a pause in the announcements. Meanwhile the Yorkton Club was walking about, slapping shoulders and shaking hands, every moment more boisterously exhilarated. The Government was overthrown, and seven Ministers had gone down to defeat. Lastly came British Columbia for the Opposition.

"They keep their logs," laughed Renton; then he turned to the Frenchman. "Where does your Nationalist leader stand in this?"

"Personally he's against reciprocity—he thinks

it not of the constitution. As for his party, who can say? Now he has no longer any balance of power after this *débâcle.*"

Blantyre listened keenly. He was wondering what the rest of Yorkton would be like when the staidness of the Yorkton Club surrendered to this gradually increasing uproar. A little later they went into town in Renton's car. The streets were crowded. They had to get out and walk. Before reaching the business centre they were swallowed up in a shouting, cheering multitude. In front of the newspaper offices the pavement was packed with a vast crowd. It stared up, white-faced, at enormous lantern slide figures cast upon a white background hung from the windows of opposite buildings. Belated returns were still coming in, and a deep roar saluted each Opposition gain.

Bands were playing. They swung periodically into the magnificant chords of Lavallees' national anthem, and carried a brobdingnagian chorus with them. Well-known oppositionists appeared on balconies. They were greeted with cheers and shouted themselves hoarse in inaudible congratulation. Messages from political leaders were flung on the screen and replaced swiftly with portraits and caricatures. To all this the mob responded with deep-lunged iteration. Around the corner was the office of a government newspaper. Here also was a white screen, but the lantern slides only flung out occasional grim admissions of defeat. The crowd beneath was smaller and very silent. That night every one appeared to be on the winning side.

And beneath all this it was evident that the

shouting, the cheering, the buzzing ardour of these close-shouldering throngs was the long, pent-up expression of some vital emotion. It was triumphant emotion, not triumphant reason that was abroad that night. The question of exchange of natural products was lost in the question of what did the man on the street think about England. He had been asked it years before. His answer was befogged in political juggling. But now he came out to speak for himself. Many a Liberal gulped down the Conservative axiom that a vote for reciprocity was a vote against the Empire, and forthwith added his own personal protest to the maelstrom of revulsion that was sweeping the country. But through it all ran a new voice—the first national voice that had ever been heard in Canada. Right or wrong, win or lose, the man on the street had made up his mind. Party differences were wiped out. What was a cent more or less on sugar and bacon compared to the British Empire.

VIII

In December the Committee of the Robbins Trust went to Muskoka on a trip of inspection. Brian had made little comment. By this time he seemed to have retired into a morose seclusion, from which he critically surveyed a life that yielded no interest. His practice went on with uncompromising sameness. As to the Robbins Trust he now neither approved nor objected.

Stella had a curious sense of release when the

train left Yorkton. This shocked her. She felt almost traitorous. Mrs. Dynock was on board, and Stella sat in comforting nearness.

Ellison was full of the work. He had been spending half his time in Muskoka for months, and already the first units of a long, pallid procession had turned to these life-saving regions. He talked, happy and confident. The train swung on northward through white fields, till gradually the fertile country fell behind and they entered the snow-laden woods. Stella somehow felt it difficult to think about the Robbins Trust. She yielded to a sense of unreality, in which Stephen's voice was the only real thing.

Presently she heard Mrs. Dynock. "You know all this means that Stephen's practice will suffer. I think he's fine about it."

There was something familiar to Stella in the thought of a practice suffering, but also something incongruous.

"He's been working very hard," she said impersonally.

Mrs. Dynock nodded. "Too hard for a single man. He ought to be married."

Stella looked out of the window and did not speak.

"I once believed that you two would make a very good pair," went on Mrs. Dynock lightly. "That is, till you brought back that handsome husband of yours. And I have an idea that Stephen is desperately lonely. That's why he's working himself to death. Do you see much of him now?"

Stella shook her head. "No, not much, except on the Board."

Mrs. Dynock glanced at her shrewdly. She had her own ideas of Blantyre. Beneath her angular exterior was an extraordinary susceptibility and perception. Her manner flouted the possession of any elusive, delicate intuition, but her very armour deceived most those who knew her best. She was taken for a blunt, direct, outspoken woman. Only Dynock knew better. For Stella she had an affection both sisterly and maternal.

" You know this is going to be a huge thing. It frightens me sometimes. And what I like about Stephen is his faith—in us, in himself, and in the whole country; and," she added thoughtfully, " he's a tender man too."

Stella hesitated. She had an extraordinary suggestion that all Mrs. Dynock was saying about Stephen was launched as well in criticism of Brian. She had come at last to that point in the struggle when it ceased to bind her comparative vision. Up till now she had seen only her duty, a duty that already was grievously burdening her love. If, more than this, she should yield to that imagination which she had hitherto bound and stifled, what labours might not be laid upon her. She dared not think too much. She dared only hope and struggle on. The Robbins Trust had opened a new garden for her mind, but a garden in which there was a walk closed to her for ever. Now she wanted only to see straight ahead, without any turning into a path that might woo her soul to poignant dreams. Just now, somehow, she could not talk about Stephen.

" I've been comparing this visit with my last one to Muskoka," she said slowly. " Then it was all life

and movement and pleasure, and now," she stammered, " it seems like a fight between life and death."

" That's exactly what it is," replied Mrs. Dynock energetically: " a splendid fight. That's why I like it."

Stella looked at her pathetically. " I wish I could feel it less. I'm trying now to nerve myself, there's so much about it that hurts."

" That," said Mrs. Dynock cheerfully, " is because you feel without knowing. When you know it will be different. Look at Stephen. He feels and knows."

She looked. Stephen was talking rapidly to others of the Board. His glance was alight with enthusiasm. He met death day by day, but no shadow had fallen on his broad, smooth brow. His mouth was firm, sensitive and delicate. His eyes, more than anything, caught and held one. Dark and very luminous, they were full of changing light and shade. They seemed successively wise, dominant, confident and appealing—the eyes of a man who had seen far below the surface of life and grasped at underlying motives and influences. His atmosphere was that of one who knew neither fatigue nor defeat, and was poised, ready and resourceful against whatever might befall. Robbins had laid a great burden on young shoulders, but Robbins had a rare, prophetic wisdom.

Later, driving through the white and sparkling woods, they came upon Stephen's work. The Robbins cottages were perched upon a sloping bank that dipped to the broad, flat plain of a frozen lake. Behind was the forest, every tree and stump laden

with grotesque crowns and hummocks of snow. The air was keen and tingling, and, through its sharp purity, distant objects stood out clean-cut and distinct. Above the sky seemed intensely blue and high. The cottages were grouped irregularly around a central hall. Each had large windows and a broad verandah facing the lake, across which a winter road wound toward the dark line of opposing wilderness.

And within Stella found no circle of drab despair. These consumptives were cheerful and hopeful. Stephen was welcomed with evident affection. He seemed to stimulate that sanguine gleam which is at once the strength and despair of the white death. The interior of the cottages was flooded with light and air. The verandahs were populated with wrapped figures in steamer chairs. It gave Stella visions of the *Harmonic*.

"You see," said Stephen to a cluster of the Committee. "The secret of the cure is light and air. Also there's something in this atmosphere that is very beneficial. It's partly the altitude and partly the woods. So far as we can discover, there's practically no consumption in Muskoka. So we persuade the patients to live out of doors—and sleep out also. The whole thing depends upon getting hold of them soon enough." He turned to Stella. "There's a boy here who wants to see you," he said, lowering his voice. "He went to your husband some months ago."

They crossed to another cottage, along a path shovelled through the deep snow. It gave her a strange sensation to see Stephen tramping ahead. Yorkton seemed a million miles away. They stopped

for a moment in the tiny hall. "He's not in very good shape, and needs all the encouragement he can get," said Stephen with his hand at the door.

A moment later she sat beside a cot, looking down at a lad who stared back with wide, brilliant eyes. His face was very thin and had hectic patches of colour over the cheek bones.

"I know Doctor Blantyre," he began with the direct simplicity of a spirit for which there is only one question in life. "I called on him last June. So when I heard you were coming up I thought perhaps you would see me."

"Did you go to consult my husband?"

He nodded. "Yes, I wanted to get life insurance, and he was examining for the company. I didn't know I was ill till then," he added quietly. "Dr. Blantyre was very kind. Then I called him up again, but he was too busy, and I didn't like to bother him any more."

Stella caught her breath. Could a man be too busy to try and strengthen this dwindling frame. Then she rallied to Brian's defence. "I don't think he could have understood or known how ill you were."

"Perhaps not," he said diffidently. It was too late now, and the look in Stella's face soothed him.

"Is there anything I can do. I would like to be of use." She spoke very gently.

He turned to her with a glance of ineffable content. "No, thank you, it's all arranged now. You see, what was worrying me was not myself, but my wife and boy."

Her eyes opened wider. This boy, and married! Then at the edge of the woods she saw a great mound

of snow slip from a green and clinging branch. It fell in a soundless cloud, absorbed instantly into the deep fleecy blanket that covered the silent earth. It suggested the boy's life, sliding soundlessly away from his white and wraith-like body. The thought broadened till it embraced the whole army of consumptives for whose sake Robbins had glorified the evening of his days. It was an appalling thing to listen thus, as the weak voice went on—

"But I'm not worrying now. Dr. Ellison has arranged everything and got my wife a position in Yorkton. He says I'm going to get well, but——"

"You are, you must get well." Stella's heart went out in a burst of sympathy.

"Doctors always say that, but," his gaze met hers with deep-rooted wisdom, "you see—I know. When people are like me they have other means of knowing. I can't explain it, but other voices come, especially at night when everything is quiet. Then Dr. Ellison tells me in the morning that I'm going to get well, but he knows I've nothing to get well with. However," he smiled pathetically, "I'd much sooner have him say it."

The door opened. Stephen entered and stood beside the cot, smiling down at the white-faced boy, whose hand went out seeking a friendly grip. He seemed in that action to be a member of some doomed and pallid procession, and to reach across to the strong hand of a sturdy, untainted onlooker.

Stephen glanced at them both. He felt swiftly thankful that Stella was there. Her presence softened the grim sequence of these waiting hours. He knew that they were only waiting—that the lad

had come too late, and he knew also that the same knowledge burned in the boy's brain.

" Better? " he demanded cheerfully.

" Yes," replied the lad, " much better to-day." There was not a cloud in his omniscient eyes.

" You ought to be, with Mrs. Blantyre to talk to. I think you're a very lucky fellow."

The lad nodded, but did not speak. It was sometimes hard to move aside out of shadows that would come creeping across the floor.

" He's been telling me about his wife and son," said Stella. She looked at Stephen with a proud respect.

His gaze streamed back into her own. He had a a sudden revelation of an awakening soul — one that rose and grasped strongly at new processes and meaning. He sensed prophetically that this would go on and on, that Stella's spirit would expand into new and divine beauty. And always — and this struck at his heart—he would be on the border of her life. In unending struggle he would continually see, but never touch or taste. He would have helped to create that which would mock him with new and unapproachable charm—a companionship for which he would pay with seasons of unutterable longing.

And Stella, meeting that gaze, felt surging within her that which up till now she had fearfully evaded. A slow re-adjustment had been at work, but she had sealed her soul's eyes with promises of better things to come, with prophesies that Brian's difficult spirit would soften into something more lovable and more loving. To this end she had sacrificed many

a silent resolution and much of maidenly pride. But it seemed that, however she struggled, Brian became more difficult and diffident, till now life had flattened out into a negative and acrid round of compromise. He was starving her soul. She had thrust away the thought that this was the price of impulse and ignorance. There still remained with her the glamour of the gardens of Villa d'Este, but it seemed that her love had choked out whatever charm and distinction had at first characterised her husband. This was the deepest cut—her love had failed.

Now, this retrospect was dominated by the figure of Stephen. Why did he stand there—the epitome of all she had looked for in vain in Blantyre? Here, close at hand, but infinitely removed, was the man who would, if she had only known, have led her into paths of happiness. The thought engulfed her. In this swift revelation was revealed the profundity of life, as a lifting fog reveals the ocean. Love was well-nigh dead, and in its place there was only a forbidden flower.

She returned to Yorkton numb with this discovery. She fought with it, and threw herself arduously into the routine of a city doctor's wife, endeavouring to cloud the keenness of her thought. She strained to find something in Brian that would, if only for a little while, make life a little easier. But her sharpened vision pierced the mirage of her own devising and saw behind it the idol with feet of clay.

IX

BLANTYRE'S telephone sounded sharply and Matthew's voice came in. He wanted Blantyre to drop in and see him that afternoon.

It was a long time since he had given much thought to Matthews. For a few months following the purchase of the practice he had seen a good deal of him, receiving, from day to day, records of various patients. Then they had drifted apart. There was nothing in Matthew's smug personality to attract Blantyre.

But of late there had been periods, gradually more recurrent, when the surgery in the house on the hill was undisturbed by the advent of any patient. Noted by both, it had been mentioned by neither Stella nor Brian. He had at first welcomed the cessation, but now it began to touch his pride. There were unspoken questions in Stella's eyes that he had taken no trouble to answer. Now this message of Matthews aroused others that he would like to answer for himself.

He found Matthews as of old, pink and portly. For him there had been a season of satisfied repose, broken, toward the last, by gratifying and reiterated requests from former patients that he should again visit them. These he had at first put aside with a certain pleasurable recognition of his own altruistic interpretations. He had sold his practice and transferred his patients. But more recently, these demands had taken on an insistent colour that he did not know how to neglect. His holiday had lost

its pristine charm. He was good for work yet, and a younger man than he had thought. And, finally, oscillating between the ambition to don again his irresistible bedside manner and an irritating sense of obligation to the man to whom he had sold his practice—he sent for Blantyre.

" I'm in a difficult position," he said, with a touch of magnanimity. " It's rather gratifying—but also rather embarrassing." He mentioned some names —all of people whom Brian had visited professionally. " They want me to come and see them. I told them, of course, the arrangement between us, but——" he flushed slightly and pressed his smooth finger tips together.

" Well," put in Blantyre abruptly.

" May I speak quite candidly, without reserve? "

Blantyre nodded. " Please." He thought he knew what Matthews was going to say.

" I feel a certain pride, which is, perhaps—er—pardonable. I had no idea that people were really so attached to me. And, even now, if you say so," he glanced blandly at Brian, " I will of course decline to visit any one whose name is on the list I gave you. You see, my dear fellow, I want to live up to the spirit of our agreement."

Blantyre scanned him silently. Matthews was sitting back, with an aspect of pleasurable confidence. He was as smug as ever. His gestures and attitudes bespoke a renewed satisfaction with his own point of view. He was palpably stirred at the vision of himself engaging again in that superficial round which had entailed so little labour and drain on his silky temperament.

There came to Blantyre a sudden conviction that if this was the sort of man people wanted, by all means let them have him. Why stand between platitude and the public. Then he thrilled with a sudden contempt that he fought against till subdued.

"Your sentiments do you great credit," he said evenly. "I would be the last to object to your visiting any one on that list." He hesitated, wondering inwardly what any patient could see in Matthews.

"That's very handsome of you. I would, of course, have you in for consultation as often as possible."

Blantyre's lip twitched. "I expect that will be hardly necessary. As a matter of fact, I will be very glad to be relieved of so of my former patients."

Matthews glanced at him in surprise. "Really —if you will allow me—that's a very unusual thing to say."

"Is it?"

"Yes, from my point of view, very. Patients are, for most doctors, rather hard to get nowadays."

"And, once got, the policy is to hang on to them?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well," said Blantyre, "that's not my policy. If it were," he interjected cynically, "I don't believe you and I would be talking now."

Matthews suddenly got very red. "Since you put it that way, I don't believe we would," he answered with a touch of dignity.

Blantyre laughed. "Good for you, Matthews;

that's just what I wanted to get at. Now, man to man, tell me honestly. What have my patients been saying to you about me?"

The older man started, then settled back further in his chair. "To me—nothing. Do you think I would have encouraged that sort of thing?"

"No, certainly not encouraged it, but," Blantyre looked at him shrewdly "there are things we can't help getting. Come o t with "

Matthews rose in su gitation nd paced the room. His face was layground f changing colour, his hands twis rvou ly tog-ther behind his back. "Really, Bl re, yo put me in a very awkward place. I can ny that things have been said that I could not elp hearing, though, on my word, I never encouraged ther " He stopped in his short, mincing walk. "Do ou nt to know the rouble, frankly, as between rselves?"

ian nodded. He already knew the trouble, but had a curious desire to e ow Matthews would put it.

"Your patient said Ma ws slowly, "that is, the ones who have asked m to come back to them, don't think that you are ry much interested in them—er—very sympath

"I'm not, in some of the ," put in Blantyre coldly.

Matthews looked at him amazed. "That is an extraordinary admission. Under those circumstances you can hardly blame them for wanting some one else."

"I don't."

The older man hurried on as though nettled by

this frankness. "To put it briefly, the feeling is that you don't take their ailments very seriously, and that, I need hardly say, is inexcusable from a professional point of view."

Blantyre felt a breath of respect for the man's courage. He was a time-server, a modulator, a compromiser, but he was saying difficult things in a way that, for the moment, thrust his own shallowness into the background. He regarded him with a new interest.

"All you say is true, for the most part, but on one basis only. I'm not interested or sympathetic with some patients, and these, as a matter of fact, are not patients, but fools."

"Isn't a fool a patient?" said Matthews suddenly.

Blantyre shook his head. "I can't see it that way. I can't be sympathetic with a woman whose God is social prominence or a man who elevates his belly to the same altar."

"Don't you think you're digging rather deep?" Matthews stopped in his walk. "Eliminate the indiscreet—retain the unfortunate—and how many have you left?"

"Does that matter?"

"It matters a lot when it's a question of bread and butter. My dear fellow, it's just as I told you a year ago. If a man sends for a doctor and is willing to pay for his services, he has a perfect right to them. It's not for us to sort out the fools."

"Then wouldn't you tell a man he was making a fool of himself?"

"God forbid."

Blantyre hung on. He had admitted his own

shortcomings. Now he was trying to establish some other interpretation of his profession "Wouldn't it be a good thing sometimes if you did?"

"Seldom, very seldom. Now and again a physician reaches a point when he can say exactly what he thinks. That's very rarely, and it's never safe otherwise."

"And the alternative?"

"Is to keep your feelings to yourself and your advice for other people. Think what you like and feel what you like, but evidence nothing but sympathy and understanding, whether," he hesitated, "you have it or not, and that," he added, "establishes the atmosphere that must exist between doctor and patient. You think I go too far. I see you do, but I would suggest that you consider it in the light of the visit you have been kind enough to make."

Blantyre surveyed him quizzically. Every rounded line attested that Matthews had successfully synchronised himself with the ways of the world. He had had for sale that which was wanted in the market. He had filled a comfortable niche in the minds of those who knew him. He had always played safe. He had a mental poise which, for all his shallowness, had served his purposes perfectly well. People wanted him, and they did not want Blantyre. Falling in line with what Blantyre considered the subterfuges of the profession, Matthews was guarded by the rank and file, who, however they might interpret his views, marched with him shoulder to shoulder.

A maid knocked. Dr. Ellison was at the door.

Matthews looked inquiringly at Blantyre, who nodded, with a queer sensation that the medical trinity was now complete. He had not seen Ellison for months, and focussed him against Matthews. There came a suggestion that he did not want to be like the one nor know how to be like the other.

Later, Matthews swung the conversation. "Blantyre and I have been talking ethics."

Stephen laughed. "I've been too busy to think about ethics." He was disinclined to risk a difference with Stella's husband.

"I'm trying to determine when is a patient not a patient," put in Blantyre. "Matthews' point is that any one who calls a doctor is a patient, and I can't see it."

Stephen recognised delicate ground. He too was not unaware of Blantyre's dwindling practice. He had long ago estimated Matthews, but that was none of his affair. Now he drew away impersonally. Blantyre looked truculent and defiant—Matthews more than usually unctuous.

"What do you think?" persisted Blantyre.

"A patient is one whom you can help."

"And if you can't help?"

Stephen looked up suddenly. "Is there any one who doesn't need it at some time?"

"But I'm talking of medical help."

"I'm not, but of any help, medical or mental, that a doctor can give."

Matthews nodded contentedly. "That's the broad view of it."

Ellison looked irritated, but went on thoughtfully.

"It's a mission of mercy—we all know that, and I feel that you can't always put mercy in a bottle or a pill. It's just as much a point of view—an attitude of mind, and I'm often oppressed by the thought of how much people trust a doctor."

"It's tremendous. Isn't it? I don't understand it myself," said Matthews.

Stephen glanced at him with non-committal eyes. "It's enough to impress one tremendously, and ought to call for the best we have to give. There's a terrific pathos about the way we are entrusted with life and death. It must be desperately hard sometimes for people to accept results, as they generally do, without question."

"Isn't that ignorance?" put in Blantyre bluntly. Then in a flash he remembered the Parkinson affair. "They don't know anything about our mistakes," he added daringly, and stared defiantly at Ellison.

"Would you have them know?" Stephen's expression was baffling. "Don't you think it better to go on doing just the best we can. Would existence be tolerable for you," here he shot a lightning glance at Brian, "if you were blamed for losing a life? No! Balance up the lives we save with those we fail to save. That's our record. You speak of the ignorance of the public. That's the basis of their trust, I admit; but it's magnificent and pathetic just the same. It's unpardonable to utilise it—to play upon it."

Blantyre's face changed—his lips were compressed. Once again he stood opposite Ellison with Parkinson's stiffening body between them. Ellison had said to balance up the lives saved and lost—then to

go by the result. A vision of Baxter Street swam back. That was a credit item. Now he knew that in Ellison's mind the Parkinson matter was buried for ever. He was sheltered by the professional secrecy on which Matthews relied so constantly. This gave him an uncomfortable sense of kinship with Matthews.

" That doesn't altogether reach it," he said, with a touch of bitterness. " Here in Yorkton, and everywhere else, for that matter, the profession is overrun with men who ought not to be in it. They use it simply to make money. You go about putting their mistakes right—when it's not too late—and yet your lips are sealed. You may differ—you probably do, but "—here Blantyre spoke with a slow, almost savage emphasis—" you must not show it, you've got to uphold them. You dare not shake the public's confidence in the brotherhood by any display of uncertainty with any member of it. Don't you see? Once you are a doctor you join hands with the man you know is absolutely unfit to be a doctor. But—he is your brother-in-arms."

Matthews shook his head vigorously, but Ellison met the question squarely, his blue eyes deep in thought. " I can only speak for myself. We can't prevent the other man being a doctor if he wants to, and, in the long run, he does much more good than harm. It's all a matter of the personal equation. If you can help, go ahead. There are traitors in every army. But if our standard of honour did not satisfy the public we would very soon hear it. Don't you think that men who face birth and death and the most intimate things of

life have a good deal to live and work for. It isn't what we know that appals me—it's what we don't know. I never operate without feeling reverence. That would make a good motto for all of us—reverence."

He paused, glanced at the others and laughed. "You shouldn't raise such topics in working hours. I must be off."

Blantyre watched him get into his car and dart away—then he turned to Matthews. "There goes an idealist. Do what you like with my patients. Good-bye."

His homeward thoughts were bitter. Matthews, whom he despised, had out-manœuvred him. People wanted bedside modulations and not the truth. It was hard to confess himself unacceptable. He felt now that there was some Gordian knot which, once cut, would release him to the world. With this came the forced admission that Ellison was beating him on his own ground. He would have given a good deal to know just how much Stella and Ellison meant to each other, to what extent the Board meetings of the Robbins Trust were a clearing-house for a kinship of which he was becoming uncomfortably conscious. If Ellison were not at the top of the tree, if he had meant nothing to Stella, Blantyre would have liked him. The reflection seemed grotesque—incongruous—it followed him home.

And Ellison was turning over contrasts. It struck him that if Matthews and Blantyre could have fused together they would have been an admirable product. He did not think often about Blantyre. It always ended in visions of Stella that

filled him with poignant hunger. It shook his faith in the wisdom of creation—this prodigal waste of her divinity. If Stella had been only unattainable there would have been less sting in it, but Blantyre's advantage roused him to physical revolt. So much the more reason, he concluded, to fling himself headlong into work.

Matthews relapsed into gratifying reflections. He had sold his practice. Now it was voluntarily returned and with the purchaser's consent. That in itself was very good. But he had as well an inward glow, remembering that this happy denouement was simply due to Blantyre's disregard of his counsel. It fortified his mind. He even pondered whether he had not put his own interpretations on too low a plane, and asked himself if what he had considered a good business policy was not something higher and finer and more altruistic.

X

Months went by. Blantyre found himself gradually shifting from the remnant of Matthews' practice to one less profitable, but more grim and realistic. The brusque directness of his manner, that found no acceptance in gentle circles, established a certain outlet in the poorer regions of Yorkton. The transition excited in him a feeling of satisfaction that he evidenced not at all. It appeared that in the drab realm of poverty he could let himself go. Here there was not wisdom enough to breed criticism, and always he was conscious that it was not any

quality of sympathy that led him to the slums, not any sense of the brotherhood of man, but the knowledge that here he stood out from his surroundings, a personage of power and distinction. More than this, he felt that the poor obeyed him unquestioningly. There was no conflict with social aspirations, nothing to disturb the inflexible routine he imposed. No pity was aroused in him, but he answered to the kinship of pain in a stark, unadorned theatre of life.

There were seasons when he tried honestly to modulate an attitude that was now growing on him like the shirt of Nessus. In these moments his troubled, restless spirit sounded the depths. It seemed that he was surrounded by those who led a normal life full of natural ease and balance. And yet always, just as he was about to emerge from his bristling palisade, there arose some irritating circumstance, some fretful cynical offshoot that drove him back to comfortless cover. In these periods he would have submitted to any mental operation to gain respite. He knew what he would have liked to do or say. It was only what other people were doing and saying. But he never quite realised that in remembering many things he could not forget himself. His mental nerves projected, raw and unprotected. They were rubbed and jostled by a thousand untoward influences and he did not know how to pull them in.

He tried to hang all this on insular nationality and traditional antecedents, for here, in a new country, the unexpected arrived every day and precedent seemed a byword. But this was flouted by the sight of other Englishmen, no less traditional,

laying aside precedent and becoming absorbed in the throbbing life of the Dominion. He even heard of men who for years anticipated a return to the motherland, and then found its ordered sequences had lost their charm and interest.

To Stella he was strangely impersonal. He had an idea that from the first she had tried to wean him from independence and freedom, and what she offered in exchange was tasteless. He had a curious sensation that circles which, at first, had willingly received him had now become indifferent to his presence. They suffered him for Stella's sake. He noted with grim resentment that conversation lagged at his approach.

Stella moved silently through this awakening. She had given herself utterly. Every delicate, intimate quality had been offered to Blantyre. There arose a dull sense of the ineffectiveness of love, and the world began to shake beneath her feet. She struggled with pride. At first she had loved too much to have time to remember pride. Now it was touched into life. She must speak not only for herself, but for every woman. This resolution had been made a hundred times, but she shrank—because of money. Had she been poor, she could have appealed with strenuous force. Having money and position she could not go with empty hands, and it seemed grievous to admit that what she longed for most was a matter of indifference to her husband.

In the background moved Stephen Ellison. She noted him with clear, understanding eyes. He was spending himself without reward. She did not yet love him, being too over-burdened with the effort to

keep alive that other flickering flame. But Stephen appealed irresistibly to that high ambition to which Brian had become blind. What he was doing, what he wanted to do, invited all her powers.

It was hard to speak, Brian met her eyes so indifferently.

"Do you think it's quite fair?" She wanted to reach his honour.

"As fair for you as for me. From what you say we seem to be getting the same thing out of it."

She flushed. "Is there anything I could have done to help that"—she hesitated—"I haven't."

He looked at her with a gleam of candour. "No, nothing—you've done everything."

"Can't we begin over again?" There was an unaccustomed glow in her breast.

"I'm sorry. We both made mistakes—you in marrying me and I in tackling a city practice."

"You can drown the past, Brain, if you will." She sensed what he had not said, and pinned her hope on it.

Blantyre paused. He realised suddenly that he lacked some spiritual element with which to interpret her. He could not understand this craving for a readjustment. She had asked him to be fair. He would—if he could.

"And if one did drown the past—what then?"

"Need you ask?"

He shook his head. "It's no use. I'm a square peg in a round hole. I don't fit."

There was no anger in it. This made her strangely helpless. She seemed at once to be struggling not for peace or happiness, but for love itself.

"It's just as well you brought this up," he continued slowly. "You see," he added, glancing at her swiftly, "I should never have come to Yorkton or any city. It's just as well to be honest about it."

"What did bring you to Yorkton, Brian?" She felt a tightness round her heart.

"You," he replied bluntly. "And it's owing to you and your efforts that I've found out. The blame is mine. But if I had not felt your wishes behind me, driving me further and further into something unnatural, things would not be as they are."

"Why did you ask me to marry you?" she whispered.

He still stared fixedly. She seemed the epitome of all that any man could desire—any man but himself. He, too, had a glimpse of this terrific human waste. Now her question thrust him back to the garden of the Villa d'Este and revived every self-searching admission he had then experienced. This finale, as well, was of his own devising.

"It was a mistake," he said slowly, "for both of us."

Her eyes were full of suffering. "Do you feel that, Brian?"

He nodded. At that moment he could not meet her glance, but had an inward relief that at last the truth had been said and he had said it. "It sounds bitter, but I don't mean it that way. I'm sorry if I have appeared thankless. There's much more here than I ever had before, but I can't taste it because there's something left out of me that you want in return. I'd like to give it. Other men do—I can't. But," he added with a flush, "I'm not ungrateful."

Her soul recoiled. He acknowledged the debt and had nothing wherewith to pay. He might have been speaking from another planet, so deadening was the finality of it. Her spirit swiftly withdrew, mistily releasing the bonds that held him to her. But still there remained that ineffable link between the woman who has squandered and the man who has taken all that body and heart have to give. She became sister to the betrayed who clings to the seducer because he has robbed her of everything. The dream and the glory had vanished—instead there were only horrible visions.

"Have you thought of the future?"

"I have thought of everything. I'm no part of this life. From a distance it seemed attractive, but I didn't know myself. I loathe a city and am choked in a crowd. I was best where I was, after all. I see that now. I've tried to see the thing through. It's no use. The practice has gone to pieces. I might get on in the east side, but I don't want Matthews' patients."

"What do you want, Brian?" She was very pale, her eyes full of shadows.

Silence fell, throbbing and potent. Deep in his own soul he knew the answer and shrank from the blow. He did not wish to wound. For the rest of their lives he would always be incomplete, a man who had tried and failed, who had fallen in with the march of other men and found he could not keep step. Now he wanted freedom to lose himself.

"Is it fair to take everything a woman has and give nothing?" she went on with a thread of scorn in her voice. "Do you try to punish me because I

was able to love, even though I was not loved? Have you thought what must be in the heart of one who hears that she has loved in vain? Was what I brought not good enough? "

" I criticise myself, not you," he said coldly.

" Would a man of honour have waited till now? "

The blood rushed to his temples. He visioned a new Stella who held her head high and seemed to look down on him. He recognised a new quality of pride and strength. This had been at work for him. Now it opposed him with a strange virility and pushed him into a corner where he began to grope.

" It is not a question of honour," he expostulated.

" Is there no honour in love? " Her voice seemed old and weary. " Did you only want to experiment with me—with what I had—then tell me that the experiment was not successful. What follows the experiment, Brian? "

Her eyes were unnaturally bright. She was armed to combat him, emerging from the defences of her sex, animated with spiritual revolt. He had surveyed the future with an indifference, born of the belief that it would be like the past, barren and unprofitable. Blantyre had little to lose.

But Stella refused to surrender her share of the joy of life. She heard a myriad voices to which he was deaf, her communicative soul being at one with the universe whose mysterious tide flowed through her. Now she was aghast at the sequences of an impulse she had called love. Was all this a part of that far destiny, the consciousness of which lay deep—deeper than even this storm of emotion could reach. She gazed at him in silent demand.

"I thought I could make you happy," he said with a touch of feeling. "The difficulty is not here, in this house, it's there." He swept his arm toward the far-flung roofs of Yorkton. "I'm expected to be a part of all that—I can't. I antagonise when I mean to be friendly. The fact that people are alive means nothing to me, because what interest I have seems to be in things rather than in people. And, worse than that, I have a kink. I can't help it—I've always known it. Don't you see—there's no part of me that I can work with to produce what you want. I'd like to produce it for myself." He looked up with a sudden, brooding misery in his hawk-like face. "That's why I don't want a child. It—it might be like me. And that would never do," he added almost quizzically.

She quivered beneath this thrust, so bitter was the ache in her childless breast. It was a hideous thing that motherhood should wait on him.

"I only expected what you promised," she said proudly. "Everything would have come with that. But I've done enough. There is a part of me you've never had. It isn't love—for I offered that—it's what grows out of love. It isn't born, and no woman can give it suddenly. It's the place in my heart—the cloister that would have been yours, yours only. I have tried, you don't know how I have tried, to hold you close to me and help. But I only betrayed and cheapened myself. I thought that marriage was beautiful—a sacrament—I see now that only some are like that."

"Do you want to separate?" he interjected.

She turned on him scornfully. "Pride did not

die with love No. I'm not necessary to you, you've made that plain, but there's one thing you did give—your name. I must carry that always."

He looked at her curiously, with no desire to inflict on her anything she shrank from. It seemed more ghastly to go on with it indefinitely than to terminate it suddenly. He felt none of love's burdens. No part of him was anchored here or anywhere else. He had given no hostages.

" There's another way to end it." He spoke very quietly.

She questioned, her lips parted.

" Divorce? "

The thing was out now, after haunting his mind for months. " Where were the grounds," he had asked himself, then realised that that part of it was easy. It would be worth anything to be free again.

Her eyes flashed with contempt. She tried to speak, but found no words, her own mind not being of this fibre. Brian had sunk immeasurably. She could only see in him the man who had trampled on her very soul.

" I did not think you were a coward," she said slowly, staring at him.

He stiffened at the taunt. Stella, watching him intently, became suddenly conscious that he had changed. Now he looked threatening, with cold, grey, level eyes and thin compressed lips. His face was older. It had lost its quick flexibility of expression, and hardened into a sinister leanness of line. The narrow visage, the slope of the shoulders, the whole acquiline contour of the man suggest a hawk, poised for flight, peering out from hooded remoteness.

And yet, for all of this, he looked very much a man. He suggested potentialities and incisive strength.

"You think I am a coward?" he repeated slowly.

She did not answer, but her gaze clung to him desperately. In that interchange their naked souls met and opposed. She saw him, stripped of the glamour love had lent him, ineffectual, a man of protest, Blantyre the alien.

Thus for a tense moment. Then, turning to the door, she looked back at him sadly. "What else can I think?"

XI

BLANTYRE sat staring into the fire. Already he felt mentally divorced from her and facing a world of new, quick, insistent questions that must be answered now, at once. He was instantly alone in this house of his, so much alone that it was only to decide what to do. Heat and argument were succeeded by an impersonal iciness, unapproachable by any outward thing. In this chilled calm he suddenly accepted the fact that there was nothing he wanted that he himself could not forthwith provide. Position—money—the ties of family—all fell away leaving him cold and unfettered. His profession, with its ethics, its mannerisms, its scientific subterfuges, its plausible modulation, appeared to him to be slowly strangling every process of his spirit. And, yielding to this transition, he heard very distinctly a voice—calling—calling from some remote distance. A familiar thing this voice, full of pauses and lapses,

echoing and confused with murmur and thunder and throbbing cavities. It gradually enveloped him, drowning mind and spirit alike; ancient, memorial, and not to be put away. Then suddenly he recognised it as the voice of the sea.

He made no attempt at answer or question. The thing answered itself. So, with a certain dreamlike sequence he straightened the papers on his desk and went upstairs.

At Stella's door he paused for a moment. She was moving about. He could hear her step cross and recross the room. He had no inclination to enter—not a single fibre in him roused itself. So on to his own room. Here, methodically, he put things into a bag, taking only such as lay near his hand, with no care of circumstance. He was not conscious that he might need what he left, being too enfranchised to forecast anything except alien skies and empty spaces. Lastly, to the small safe in the corner of his dressing-room. A grim satisfaction this. A bank had once seemed an absurdity to a ship's doctor with a few notes in a locker drawer, and now, always, he had had money in the house. He took, carefully, one hundred pounds—exactly the amount in his possession the day of his marriage. Then with an indefinable curiosity he opened the case in which Stella kept her jewels. The dull fire of rubies gleamed voluptuously—insensate things that shimmered with suggestions of a passion that flamed once and then expired in ashes. Now the chill of them spoke with something of kinship to an icy current that was engulfing him. So back to his surgery, again passing Stella's door. He had walled

in this kingdom of hers, and when the last stone settled on the coping the builder was left outside. He wondered for a moment whether he had overlooked any process by which he could beat down the wall and enter in again. Then he shivered and grew colder—the sea was calling louder.

At the front door he paused. His patients! This damned profession of his would not lie quiet. He went back to the surgery and rapidly ran over the list. It was not long. A case of typhoid he could do nothing for, as yet—Hendrick's gout; Hendrick could arrange that with his own stomach—a child with a fractured tibia. These were all, except those indispositions at which he had always privately sneered. But, a sop to duty, he scribbled for a moment. Then, very quietly, he let himself out.

It was nine o'clock. The city stretched far, with dwindling rows of patched reflection from ordered ranks of electric lights. He walked straight south. In half an hour he was traversing the Yorkton Ghetto —streets swarming with small, round black-eyed Hebrew children, doorways lined with large women drinking in the coolness of night with slow, languid respiration. So, on to the station, where with an unwonted quickening of some long dormant sense he heard his own voice asking in metallic tones for a ticket to Montreal. It seemed, ere the asking, that this was, after all, the only place to go to—this gateway to the sea. He stood off, as it were, to witness the purchase of his own release.

He was not unimpressed at the tall, straight figure, the thin compressed lips, the grey gleam of the eyes that fronted the wicket; for, at the moment,

he was transposed into a man whom he saw do all these things.

The night express swung out a few minutes later. Blantyre watched the city lights from the rear platform of the sleeping car; pipe in teeth, chin thrust out, brows pulled down, hands deep in pockets, his lean figure swaying as the train rocked with gathering speed. Somewhere—he could not pick it out—in that maze was the house that had been his home. But had it? A part of him had no habitation. Neither could he feel that any essential fraction of himself was left in Yorkton. Rather did this migration take on, more and more, the form of a spiritual sortie, by which he would rescue alive that remnant of the old Blantyre he had mistakenly endeavoured to live down and metamorphose. This quick rush through the singing air, this rhythmical passage over clicking joints was already getting into his blood. Then, when the city lights had quite died away, he climbed into his berth and instantly fell asleep.

At Montreal, in the early morning, he went straight to the docks. The river side had been astir since daybreak. Leaning on the rail of the long terrace that overlooks the river front, he absorbed familiar sights. His nostrils expanded to the sharp and subtle odours of deep-sea tramps and merchantmen. And, staring and remembering, scale after scale of city life fell away. Was it he, Blantyre, who had deserted the magic and mystery of this for fleshpots and a woman?

Below and beyond him a maze of masts soared above the tumult. Canada was emptying her store-

houses. He had a dim conception of what all this must ultimately mean. But Blantyre had struck no root into Canada. He had nothing to offer but indifferent service, nothing to find except that he himself was too manacled by tradition to contribute, nothing to leave behind save the memory of a misfit.

A large freighter lay immediately opposite. The gang plank was out, the blue Peter aloft, a wisp of steam trailing lazily from her lifting safety-valve. He walked toward her mechanically, not caring where she was bound. At the foot of the gang plank he asked an officer.

"Coastwise to Rio, sir, sailing at once." Then, eyeing his questioner curiously, "Good ship, sir."

"Passengers?" said Blantyre briefly.

"Take twenty-five, but won't get them this trip."

"Right—thank you."

The officer looked after him up the gangway. Half an hour since Blantyre reached Montreal harbour, but already the indefinable change had commenced. With faint, almost imperceptible influences the sea was claiming her own. He yielded to them in the very swing of his walk and a certain physical lift and buoyancy.

The *Voltic* was short, broad and squat. She was frankly built by the foot, and her length terminated with her purchaser's credit. Her stern and poop were high, but she was cut away amidships till her stained funnel and battered bridge rose like a wind-swept turret from her uncouth waist. Blantyre stalked through the chaos of her deck. From the *Harmonic's* shining rail he had looked down in many

a harbour on such ships as these. He had watched them bunting a slow progress through mid-winter seas of the grey Atlantic. And always they had seemed to him to be more akin to the sea itself than the magnificent liners that swept proudly past them. The *Voltic* would steam into strange and beautiful ports he had never visited. She would loiter through tropic scenes and send her anchor crashing through coral beds. She was bound for the land of forgetfulness.

For the first day or two he was divided between the promise of this Nirvana and the slow succession of reminiscent scenes. In Quebec they had swung gaily in a high-wheeled caleche through the narrow streets. Along the long shores of Anticosti they had talked of many things, and he had been lost in wonderment at his own good fortune. The gates of Belle Isle roused in him an echo of such sensations as a man might have when he discovered love and life together.

The *Voltic's* passenger list was small. Two commercial travellers, a large fat man on his way to Rio to buy coffee, a younger son—bound irrevocably to join the legion of younger sons seeking oblivion in forgotten ports, and a small frail woman who was joining her engineering husband, up country, in Brazil. The woman had a lean, wistful boy, palpably consumptive.

Blantyre surveyed them indifferently. The face of the younger son might have been a part of the old transatlantic procession. One day he heard a voice at his elbow.

"I say, haven't we met before?"

He looked coolly into the weak face and pale blue eyes. "No, I don't think so."

"Well, do you know I'm sure we have. I can't remember names, but I hardly ever forget a face."

"Where?"

"On the—Gad—what's the name of that boat! Oh, the *Harmonic*. I crossed on her three years ago, and——"

"Sorry—I've never been on the *Harmonic* in my life."

The younger son stared again. "That's funny, there was a man on board exactly like you. He was, oh—I know now—he was the ship's doctor."

Blantyre's face was a blank. "If you will be kind enough to look at the passenger list," he said acidly, "you will see that my name is Peters. Good-morning."

It was quite enough. The others, thrown together for a month in this iron box and anxious to talk, left him severely alone. His methodical habits, all the insignia that the sea sets upon her own, told his fellow-passengers that the plunges of the *Voltic* were no new thing to him. But they wrote Peters down as surly and incommunicable—a misfit.

Days went by. He could not read. Often he could not think because there was too much to think of. His mind seemed to work most smoothly when he lay awake at night, listening to the chug-chug of the *Voltic's* slow propeller. Always the same sequence brought him to the same conclusion. He had jutted out into the stream in unbending opposition to its natural current. From this

distance, the diffident pose of Renton, the off-hand materialism of Sturtridge and the exclusiveness of Dynock all seemed absorbed into a multi-coloured pattern of life, and he, blind to the larger scheme, had stood off on one side finding fault with individual threads and knots. As to Stella he had strange promptings—physical rather than mental. He had rent the sacred bond, but there were parts of himself over which Blantyre had no control. Against all this he put the very qualities that had attracted him. Her youth, her beauty, the charm and physical appeal of her, these would speak in time to other men as they had spoken to him. He could not persuade himself that her wound would never heal. He anticipated that her thoughts of him would, by and by, be put away, and, having lived his memory down, she would again find the world as bright as it had seemed from the garden of the Villa d'Este. And — there was always Stephen Ellison.

XII

To Stella, leaving the surgery, it seemed that the foundations of life were shaken. She groped for elusive things. This man had eaten the sacrament of life with her, but now everything had changed shape and meaning. Old memories came back, linked with odd twists and diffidences to mock her.

Blantyre's step sounded outside, paused and went precisely on. Her mind flashed back to the quick sequence of engagement and marriage. She hesi-

tated, dry-lipped. Had she—had she made things too easy for Blantyre? Her pride, her love, flickered and recoiled. On her dressing-table Brian looked up from a silver frame. She studied it with strange intentness. It was taken in uniform. The narrow face, the cold eyes, the mouth that hesitated between sensitiveness and cynicism, the well-groomed isolation of the figure, all struck her with a sense of something imminent and forbidding. She threw herelf on the bed in a sudden passion of tears.

Followed a sleepless night. In the morning she went again to the surgery. It might be that the mood had passed. This was his consultation hour, but his surgery was empty. On the desk was a message.

"Dear Matthews, I'm called out of town. Please look after the following." Then came a short list of patients.

The stiff angular writing swam before her eyes. "Called away—where—by what?" She had begun to accept his revulsions. But always before this he had hung about—palpably fighting himself. And always, heretofore, even in the unhappiest moments, there had been gleams, querulous flashes of inconsistent, quixotic humour. On these she had pinned her hope. Now he was probably miles out on a country road, walking desperately, slashing with a stick, flinging out his physical self. To-night he would return—a queer disconnected weary mixture of penitence and protest.

She busied herself, thus comforted. In the afternoon Mrs. Dynock called. She had two seats for the symphony. Would Stella come?

After all, why not? Must Brian's awakening always be welcomed with setting aside of self? It seemed very clear while she was dressing. She went to the safe for a jewel, and, lingering over these exquisite responsive things, saw that the money had disappeared.

Instantly the light was obscured in conflicting emotions. She knew what was there, approximately. Brian had once joked that his patrimony never seemed to diminish. Now it had vanished with grim portent.

She felt strangely weak; her brain was charged with tortured retrospect. What part had she taken in this? The past year unrolled itself, vivid now with monitory prophecy that focussed in the scene of yesterday. She hovered over it. Her spirit darted, picking out incidents, phrases and moods —half-forgotten things suddenly pregnant with new meaning. And opposed to these there were poignant memories of rare and intimate seasons when the crust of Brian had fallen away and she had rested in his embrace, the woman loved of man. Always in such moments he had appeared to open some new and hidden recess—always she had said —" this is the real Brian." Now, because he was inconsequent she trusted in his return.

Meantime, there was much to do. She went at once to Matthews. Her face was an exquisite mask.

His suavity soothed her. Whatever Matthews lacked, he had poise.

" A rest will do him good," he said smoothly. " He's not over-worked, but, if I may say so, is apt to take his work too hard. He's probably quite

right to stay away till he's thoroughly fit." He bent forward. "May I speak as the friend of your husband?"

She nodded, feeling suddenly faint.

"Could you persuade him, do you think, to reflect sometimes that he's a nervous, high-strung individual? If he would, it would help him enormously. I'm afraid he feels as if all the ethics of the profession were hung around his own neck. He is anxious when there's no cause for anxiety. He does not rely enough on the atmosphere of his calling." Matthews was conscious that he had spoken rather well.

Stella's mind flashed back to the day when Brian had called Matthews an opportunist, a time-server. She scanned him now, untouched and untroubled, guarded by complacency, remote from any temperamental storm. He seemed to have picked his way placidly through life—sorting out the things he wanted. She protested inwardly at his security, then remembered that he could do much now. He must do it.

"My husband left this list and—asked me to give it to you."

Matthews looked at it contentedly. The names, all of them, had been transferred to Blantyre two years ago. The gods in their courses were smiling that Blantyre's wife should bring them back. He knew that now he would keep them always. It was a comforting prospect—this revival of his bedside manner. He could afford to be generous.

"It will be a peculiar pleasure to fill a temporary gap, especially for your husband." He looked at

her shrewdly. "How long do you expect him to be away?"

"Only a few days," she lied bravely.

"I suppose one could reach him in case of necessity?" Matthews' face was a blank. He might have known everything or nothing.

"I—I expect to hear from him to-morrow."

Matthews ran over the list. "There's nothing here to recall him. No—I'm sure he's done a very wise thing, and if I can be of any other use you'll let me know, won't you?"

He saw her to the door, blandly attentive She was filled with revolt. The shadow of her husband was over everything, and now that he had vanished she was even more bound than in his comfortless presence. She protested against a scheme of life that sucked her in till she was only the helpless reflection of circumstances she had not created. This was a side of marriage that leaped at her out of the dark. Her physical surrender now seemed grotesque and tragic—her mental burden hideous.

That afternoon she went to a meeting of the Robbins Trust and sat next Mary Dynock. At first it all seemed unreal. How little these people knew of personal suffering. Would the knife in her own breast never cease twisting. Mary Dynock was keen, practical, very much to the point. Stephen carried the meeting along with infectious enthusiasm. Stella was dully conscious of how much had been done and wondered whether she had actually had a part in it—things seemed to have been happening outside, without touching her.

Mrs. Dynock, after the meeting, carried her off. If Doctor Blantyre was out of town why not dine with them?

Stella went passively. It was all part of the new game. Also she did not want to go home—yet. She shunned those uncompromising reminders.

Dynock left them in front of the fire, and his wife began to talk about Stephen and the Robbins Trust. Her voice seemed to come in from a long distance. Stella remembered their last talk in Muskoka. Ages had passed since then. There Brian had seemed a normal man, had yielded to the unction of the wilderness. Now she became suddenly fearful lest the very intensity of her thoughts make them audible. Here was Mary Dynock, unswayed, untortured, unvexed, building happiness out of her passionless progress to old age. Mary had wide sympathies, but had she the terrific capacity for suffering that Stella herself now experienced! If the older woman had ever drunk the cup Stella would have thrown herself on that breast for help and comfort. But now she felt kindred only to the hopeless.

The sensation followed her home. In her own room it assailed her, to be answered in the darkness of night. She had given herself joyously to a sacrament of love. It was but her own love that glorified. This was the swift revelation. Their bond was only of words and symbols and bodily desire. It was spiritually illicit. This crushed her. It worked backward like a murky stain to the very springs of life. All night she lay staring into the gloom with aching eyes, while slow fires of

resentment burned in her breast. And yet, Brian, the deserter, was still her husband.

Days passed in drab succession with no signs of Blantyre. Matthews mercifully did not ask for him. Stella wrote a cablegram to Catherine Innes and tore it up in a flood of shame. Her own circle apparently noted nothing. She got many invitations, invariably accepting and carrying things off with a marvellous simulation. Once Stephen Ellison took her in to dinner, and again she had a swift intuitive flash that his impersonal manner concealed an uncanny knowledge. Farther than that she could not pierce. He was extraordinarily gentle, a manner that stopped just short of tenderness.

At the end of a fortnight, she was distraught, and begged Sarah Struthers to come and stay with her. The choice was the outcome of a nervous analysis in which she concluded that Sarah would understand without being too comparative. And Sarah, with a swift glance into Stella's face, came forthwith.

After another week the thread broke and Stella went to Mary Dynock, who heard her with a wave of sympathy. Nothing this strong-faced woman might have thought appeared in her eyes, but she seemed transfigured with pity. The recital left Stella weak and humbled. She clung to Mary Dynock as to one who had saved her own soul and now offered harbour to others.

"I don't know what to do," she concluded. "Brian may be dead. I'm afraid to ask—alone."

"May I tell Peter? He will understand—he understands most things."

Stella nodded and waited till Dynock came in and took her hand. "You'll let me help." He spoke as though he were her father.

She told him what she knew—but little. He thought for a time, then rose suddenly. "There's only one thing to do."

"Yes." She was surprised there was anything.

"Employ a detective agency. You mustn't mind that. It's a matter of business, and," he hesitated, "they don't talk."

She reached home hours later, trembling with repulsion. The detective had been smoothly courteous, a master, evidently, in such affairs. He had taken everything for granted. It was, of course, a temporary aberration. There were curious questions about Blantyre's previous interests and mode of life. These it appeared foreshadowed the course he was most likely to take. Photographs were asked for. All Stella's answers were noted and filed on a printed form that seemed to have been devised for just such cases. It was more difficult, they said, to get results after so much time had elapsed. If Mrs. Blantyre had only acted sooner. They would, however, get to work at once.

It was all loathsome. She was dragged into touch with criminals and the dark things of life. Dynock had taken it all very coolly. He was wise enough not to be too compassionate.

That evening, meeting Sarah's glance, she felt as if her thoughts must be visible. But Sarah's eyes wandered. She had a touch of rare despondency. Stella talked ineffectually. They seemed strangely [illegible]ntless together, lacking some normal complement.

Presently Sarah looked across the table, her face was alive with a sudden grim irony.

"You're looking for a husband, Stella, aren't you?"

Stella nodded convulsively. It was an unspeakable relief that Sarah knew.

"Well," said Sarah, almost savagely. "So am I. I'm sick and tired of work."

XIII

THE *Voltic* slipped peacefully through the Lesser Antilles, cleared from Trinidad and faced the long South Atlantic swells on the Rio stretch. Blantyre had settled down to an impeccable solitude. He now read a little and smoked constantly. He absorbed what the *Voltic* offered for absorption and forgot it. Always he was aware of the contrast between this disreputable galleon and the stateliness of a Cunarder. The crew were the sweepings of the port of Montreal. He had discovered that the chief engineer carried a revolver.

The *Voltic* was lifting to a north-east gale, when, one night, half-way between Bahia and Rio, he was awakened by the violent pitching of the vessel. He knew at once that she had encountered a tremendous sea. The waves were hitting her like battering rams. She listed sharply and trembled from end to end. Then he heard a crash and a rush of water down the companion.

He dressed with difficulty but carefully, because this elemental strife seemed to invest him with the

dignity, the responsibility of a ship's officer. He conceived a certain contempt for the *Voltic* and her marine shortcomings, and visualised all that was happening in every grimy corner of her. Then he climbed to the deck.

The *Voltic* was broadside to the sweep of the wind. She was in the trough of the sea and lolling over like a drunken man. Her funnel was warped and twisted from some tremendous impact. The windward side of the bridge was bent out of shape. He climbed up and, through the flying spume, could see the captain pulling desperately at engine-room signals. At that moment the slow throb of the labouring propellers ceased. Instinctively he regained the deck and forced his way to the windward rail that now towered high in air. It was all he could do to reach it. He stared eastward.

The sea was like a black counterpane ribbed with snow-white ridges. Between the ridges the surface was almost flattened by terrific wind pressure. He could distinguish bodies of water whipped up and driven in long, level streaming lines. Mingled with these came the wave crests, nipped off ere they could reach full height in a wallowing tumble of whistling foam. Over this chaos flew the clouds, torn into shreds and incredibly rapid. Above the clouds, that seemed barely to clear the tumult of the sea, he could distinguish nothing but the blackness of an invisible dome. There were no stars. The sky seemed to have settled down to enclose the *Voltic* and screen her from the rest of the world. And underneath, the sea was waking to still more stupendous life. The turmoil of this unrest was

penetrating deeper and deeper. Blantyre had seen the monstrous waves that sometimes rear themselves on the South Atlantic, but never had he known such fury as this.

He fought his way to the cabin again and, in the darkness that now engulfed the interior of the *Voltic*, put on his heaviest clothing. The vessel lay inert, far over on her starboard side, and trembled violently beneath a steady, relentless pounding. This time it was more difficult to reach her deck. The passages were transformed into racing sluiceways. People were huddled in the companion housing—the small frail woman clinging to the stair rail, with one arm round her boy. At the sight of Blantyre something of hope came into her eyes. He put his mouth to her ear.

"Stay where you are. I'll come back for you."

The *Voltic's* deck was a chaos of splintered wood, twisted iron work and tangled wire rope. Half her funnel had gone overboard and her port rail was now level with the sea. A crowd of stokers were swarming from below, darting like terror-stricken ants from the blackness of the stokehole. They had lost all sense except that of peril. Between them and the port lifeboats stood the chief with drawn revolver. Sailors were working desperately at the davits. Blantyre crawled toward them. He could not see either the captain or the first officer. Then he realised that the bridge had been carried clean away.

There came a rush from the stokers. He heard the chief's revolver twice before he went down. The rush reached the boats. Some began hacking at the falls and one end of a boat dropped swiftly.

Instantly the stokers swarmed on to her, and, as they swarmed, a wall of water leaped across the vessel. Then Blantyre saw an empty boat skidding to leeward and the foam-flecked water around her was dotted with the heads of men.

A strange hollow came in the cyclone. The shriek of the wind fell to a whisper. It was as though the fury of the gale had blown itself out. In the silence that followed he heard the groaning of the black hull as it lifted brokenly and heavily. All semblance of authority on the *Voltic* had vanished. He worked steadily and methodically. Climbing back to the companion he put life-belts on the woman and the boy. Then, in the litter of the purser's office he found a flask. That was all there was time to do. He dared not go below again.

The other passengers did not occur to him at all. The two commercial travellers were not visible, but the fat coffee buyer was fumbling with a wallet, transferring it nervously from one pocket to another. He plucked at Blantyre's arm and tried to say something, but Blantyre pushed him away.

From windward came a long roar. A black cloud rushed swiftly down on the doomed *Voltic*, so black that it seemed hewn out of ebony. Then with one plunge the tornado emptied its ultimate strength. Blantyre gripped the woman with one hand. Her own arms were twined round the boy. He knew that even death would not loosen that immortal grasp. Clinging to the rail of the companion housing, he worked his way aft till they were clear of the trembling woodwork. Lower sank the *Voltic*. A great wave lifted out of the cloud and moved on

them unbroken. Beneath it the *Voltic* quivered once, then settled down—down—down. With a smashing of timber the wave passed on.

Blantyre filled his lungs to bursting and let go the rail. They were lifted smoothly and swiftly. He twisted his free hand into the woman's waistbelt.

For a moment he was conscious only of moving with inconceivable velocity. All sounds died away. He felt thankful it was all over. Then he came to the surface, swallowing air and water. Here, in the lee of the disappearing *Voltic*, the sea was comparatively calm. It was littered with wreckage. The woman and the boy were beside him—the lad still held in that desperate grip. She was choking for air. The boy was conscious and making ineffectual movements with arms and legs.

From the yeasty surface a face bobbed up, as if shot suddenly from below, the face of the fat coffee buyer. He thrust out an arm, grasped the woman's life-belt and, thrusting her down, lifted himself shoulder high. Then, in an agony of fear, he tried to put his knee over it. The life-belt dipped. Blantyre saw the woman's terrified eyes level with the water. His long hand took the fat man by the hair. Still he held on. Blantyre struck him in the face savagely, then, filling his lungs again, drove both thumbs into the round white throat. They sank together—it seemed for miles. The big legs twined round him and the fat hands plucked at his unyielding wrist, but Blantyre sank and sank deeper and deeper, his body turned to steel. Down in an emerald cavern the fat man became limp and soft. Blantyre, with bursting lungs and roaring

ears, mounted to the surface. He came up close to the others. The woman was holding the edge of one of the *Voltic's* hatchways, the boy was already on it and trying to pull her up. Within reach of Blantyre another hatchway was floating. He pushed it over to them, and gradually worked it under the first one. Climbing carefully on, he jerked the flask out of his pocket, gave it to the little woman and fainted.

The next thing he knew was that the sun's red rim was above the horizon. The wind had ceased. Mountains of water still came sliding out of the east, but their surface was glass, of a brilliant violet hue. The raft rose slowly to these great summits and then slid as slowly into long, hollow lanes, flanked by tremendous undulations. He could see perhaps five miles, and then not at all. Around them was the flotsam of the *Voltic*, but no voice hailed them in this solitude. The clouds looked infinitely high, the horizon dreadfully distant. The water that chuckled through the grating of the hatchway was without bounds or bottom.

The little woman sat with the boy's head in her lap. He was asleep. Her head bent over him, then she looked at Blantyre. Her eyes were full of weariness and fortitude. "Thank God—and you, sir—are you better now?"

He stretched his stiffened joints. "I'm all right. What about you and the lad?"

"We'll do, sir." The raft climbed a summit and she stared about. "Will it be long before we are picked up?"

The boy moaned in his exhaustion. She pulled

him closer to her thin breast, and waited for the answer.

"No," said Blantyre, "we'll be picked up soon. We are on the regular highway."

"Where is the other man, sir?"

"What man?"

"The man who tried to get this, sir? She put her hand on the lifebelt.

"Drowned," said Blantyre grimly, "and I say, for God's sake don't call me sir any more."

She stared at him for a moment—then understood. "It does make a difference, doesn't it?" she answered slowly.

"Now, if you can go to sleep," said Blantyre, "I'll take this watch."

Four days later a cargo steamer bound from Rio to Montreal encountered some of the *Voltic* wreckage. Running through this at half speed, the lookout sighted a large hatchway with three people on it. Two figures were lying down, apparently asleep. A man was standing, signalling with both arms and a piece of white cloth. A boat was lowered and raced to the raft. The woman and the boy were conscious, but very weak. The man was apparently crazy with thirst and very violent. Finally they got him into the boat. The woman and boy yielded to treatment at once but the man struggled fiercely and talked unintelligibly After some hours he collapsed. He was identified later by the others as Mr. Peters, a passenger from Montreal. There was no name on his clothing, but he wore a belt containing a considerable sum of money.

XIV

A FEW weeks later Stephen was called to Montreal to operate on a case in the city hospital. It was a delicate undertaking, and he was glad to get it over. Leaving the operating room, he walked through the wards—keenly interested in this familiar epitome of suffering. He dropped into professional talk with his companion.

They turned into one of the public wards. The surgeon nodded toward a bed with a screen around it. "That's a peculiar case. Here about ten days. Man picked up on a raft—one of the *Voltic* passengers."

Stephen didn't remember the *Voltic* incident.

"She was lost somewhere off South America. Only three were saved. A woman and boy and this chap. He's about right now. But the curious thing is he won't tell us anything, evidently a gentleman—his name is Peters. Like to see him?"

"No, I don't think so—unless——" He stopped, having a curious sensation. "Yes—all right."

The surgeon stepped in between the screen—"Here's a gentleman to see you."

From the pillow a thin face stared up at Ellison—so thin and wan that it looked like a framework, over which a yellowish brown parchment was drawn and stretched tight. The cheek bones stood out sharp and white, the eyes grey and brilliant, moved restlessly in sunken sockets. One transparent hand lay on the pillow close to the short brown hair.

Beneath the bedclothes the emaciated form was outlined with angular distinction.

Stephen stared, with something rising in his throat. The grey eyes held him riveted and motionless.

The surgeon touched Stephen's arm. "I must leave you for a moment. You will find me in the next ward."

Stephen scarcely heard him. A hammer was beating inside his brain.

"Well," said Blantyre slowly. He looked a pale, desperate thing, at bay at last. "What do you think of it?"

He appeared irresistible in weakness. Stephen still stared at him. It did not occur to ask the why and wherefore of all this. "He's paid for it, paid for it!" he said to himself. Then he thought of Stella. He must telegraph, no, telephone at once. He was curiously at a loss what to say to Blantyre.

The latter still scanned him, intuitively and silently, palpably projecting himself into Ellison's brain. "I'm here and helpless," he seemed to say; "but beware of what you do." He thrust a hand between cheek and pillow. "It's your move, Ellison."

Stephen felt suddenly infinitely sorry. "What do you want me to do?" He stooped over him.

Blantyre shrunk a little into the bed. "Nothing —leave me alone."

"I can't do that," he replied gently.

"No? Well, perhaps you can't." He moistened his lips. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to take you home," said Stephen slowly.

The sick man looked at him curiously. "Want to take me home? You!" he repeated weakly.

"Yes, home, to-night if you can stand it." He put a hand on Blantyre's shoulder. "Don't you see—it's the only thing."

"How much do they—does any one know?" There was a patch of colour in his cheek.

"Nothing is known, absolutely nothing. You"—he hesitated—"you are Peters to every one."

"Except yourself."

Ellison nodded.

Blantyre poised himself on a sharp elbow. "Once more," he said bitterly, "you are the only one who knows."

Instantly Stephen read this tortured brain. The wraith of Parkinson swayed between them. He had a glimpse of the useless self-crucifixion on which Blantyre had been impaling himself. It moved him greatly.

"No one in Yorkton knows anything about this," he replied impressively. "No one need ever know. To them you have been away for six weeks. You'll be at home again to-morrow if you will let me take you. Now, may I telephone your wife?"

Blantyre's fingers closed on his wrist. They felt like steel wire. "No—for God's sake don't—sit down—let me think."

He sat very still and breathless. Blantyre put his hand across his eyes. Below it, Ellison could see the mouth working uncertainly. The place was quiet, save for the slip of the nurses' feet as they passed up and down the corridor, and the moans of a woman recovering from an anæsthetic in an

adjoining room. In this throbbing period Ellison reflected grimly on the fate that laid so poignant a burden on his own shoulders. There was nothing else for it. But Blantyre was the final destruction of a dream that had been daily growing more and more beautiful and tender. He pulled himself up short. Had he wanted this man to disappear for ever? He was suddenly afraid of his inmost self.

Then came Blantyre's voice, like a voice from the grave—as indeed it was—the grave of hope. "It seems queer that it should be you," he said, "you of all men. But perhaps you're right, and, since you know, there's only one thing to do. But," he went on with an insistent thread in his weak tones, "only on one condition—you don't send word."

"Is that fair?" put in Stephen abruptly.

"Perhaps not, but I've reasons." He sat up, his lean body bending forward, his eyes searching Ellison's face. "I'll come, if I have your word you'll say nothing before we reach Yorkton. Don't put this down to a weak brain. Mine is perfectly clear. I was never more in earnest in my life. My God, you don't know how earnest I am."

Ellison thought rapidly. He was dealing with a querulous spirit poised half-way between penitence and fear. Whatever he had of tact and self-effacement was now to be put to work. He visioned their arrival in Yorkton, and Stella's eyes—but all that must take care of itself.

"It will be just as you wish." He put out his hand. "You have my word for it. You will come to-night, and you are still Peters here in the hospital."

Blantyre nodded. "Can you manage that?"

"They know me. They won't ask questions. Now for an hour or two, good-bye. I'll make arrangements, and," he added, with a shadow of a smile, "don't worry, Peters; save yourself all you can."

The grey eyes caught him again as he turned away. They were full of a proud appeal. "You've got me now," they said, "but, for God's sake, be careful." The suggestion followed him, dogged him for the rest of the day.

At nine o'clock he had Blantyre in a private compartment in the Yorkton express. Things had gone very smoothly in the hospital. The management were glad to be relieved of Peters. Ellison, they understood, knew something of his people. It was all very fortunate.

And Blantyre, lying in his berth, was drowned in memories when the rumble of the wheels commenced beneath him. Every clicking rail joint had its reminder. He felt now, in the swaying of the train, that he was being carried back, willy-nilly, just because he could not imagine where else to go. The sea had cast him up as none of hers. There was no peace for him in her passionless breast. And out of this nebulous something, to which he was being impotently whirled, Stella came forward to meet him. He could not get it out of his head that she was continually telling him to be comfortable, that he ought to be comfortable. He admitted this, tried his best, and failed utterly. So after all, what was the use of trying over again. Then he looked across at Ellison. He had been reading but had put down his book, and was now staring out of the

window at passing lights, chin in hand, face close to the glass. It suddenly struck Blantyre what a good-looking fellow he was. He had thought him rather weak before, but now he seemed to have changed, and to know exactly what to do—always—and that was what Blantyre could not work out for himself. Then he felt lonely. He was considering how Stella would take it.

"Ellison."

Stephen turned quickly. "Yes. I thought you were asleep."

"No, I can't sleep. I'm all right though. When do we get in?"

"At seven o'clock."

Blantyre was silent for a moment. He was thinking of next morning. "I say," he put in suddenly, "will you give me an opinion?"

"Professionally?"

"Yes, very."

"Certainly, what is it?"

"It's the case of a man," began Blantyre slowly, "who had certain hereditary instincts, and also half-baked ambitions. He didn't know enough or care enough to ask if one suited the other. He drifted into a profession through lack of knowledge of other professions, and after he got into it found that his instincts revolted. The profession didn't suit him. Now the point is, would he be justified in throwing over that occupation. You see, others were involved. If he did throw it over it would break one woman's heart, and if he didn't, it would hardly be fair to the profession; it would lower it in other people's eyes.

"What else could your man do?" Ellison was still looking into the external night.

"Nothing."

"Was he dependent on his profession?"

"In honour, yes; actually—no."

"And what you call his instincts defeated him?"

"Professionally, yes. The point is, Ellison, that he didn't feel. God knows he wanted to, but there was a kink in him. He found himself doing and saying things that made him curse himself afterwards, and the damnable side of it was that he knew that under the same conditions he would do and say them again. He had no sheet anchor. He was not a part of human life. He didn't feel with it." He stretched a pair of long arms over his head. "What should such a man do? Chuck it?"

Ellison hesitated. This was hard to answer. Then his eyes caught a long scar just inside Blantyre's left elbow. "Hello—how did you get that? It's rather a nasty one—let me look at it."

Blantyre jerked down his sleeve. "It's nothing. We had no water on that infernal raft, and the woman was going crazy with thirst."

Ellison stared at him. "And this man you're talking about was not a part of human life," he said slowly. "He didn't feel with it!"

"Only temporarily," answered Blantyre with a rasp of decision. "He couldn't keep it up—wasn't built that way. Didn't want to make people suffer, but he did," he added pathetically. "Ellison, do you see any way out for him?"

"Would love not help him?" Ellison's voice sounded thin and distant.

Silence fell suddenly over them both. The train hurled through the darkness, and from below boomed the thunder of its roaring wheels. Across the compartment the eyes of the two met. Ellison shrank from the thought that to-morrow Blantyre's head would be held to Stella's breast—this alien to life and love, and that he himself of all men was bearing him thither.

And Blantyre, pricked into new self-questionings, saw in the rescuer all that he had weakly endeavoured to be, all that Stella wanted him to be. Now, he asked himself almost petulantly, why he was going back. How had Stella taken this desertion. He wanted to know, to talk about it. Then he looked again at Ellison. He had better not ask, because Ellison had thought that love would help. So it would—most men.

"It should, but supposing it didn't?" he added with a touch of wistfulness.

To this there was no answer. Ellison was marvelling how a man could experience this divine touch without responding. He was looking ahead for some beacon light to steer him through the loveless solitudes of life. He felt like a pilot passing harbour after harbour, in which other ships were moored, but in which there was no anchorage for him. He glanced at the lines on Blantyre's face. How he must have suffered, he thought.

The latter sat up in his berth, hands clasped over knees. "This is damn good of you, Ellison. Why do you do it?"

"I don't see that. It's the only thing to do."

Blantyre regarded him curiously. "I know why you do it—that night at Villa d'Este."

Stephen stared. He had put that away for ever. Now this sick man dragged it out. "Do you think that is quite fair?" he asked quietly.

"No, perhaps it is not, but——" he hesitated a moment, then blurted: "You're a better man than I am, Ellison."

"You'd do it yourself. You have done it—look at your arm."

Blantyre shook his head. "That's different, that was only a savage animal instinct to help. It was over in a moment. It's no use hedging. I ran away from the future. I funked it—I always have."

He was desperately unnerved, and wanted to talk. It was a punishing thing for Ellison, but the latter gave him his head. "Why," he said diffidently.

"I don't know, but I don't fit in. My people were all that way. The men cleared out as soon as possible, most of them into the Service. They rarely settled down anywhere, except that there's a Blantyre at the bottom of every ocean. It's the unknown that grips us. As soon as we know, we get tired of it. I should not have married. I admit that—even to you." He lit a cigarette and stared through the curling smoke. "You can see I am putting my cards on the table. I'm going back—why—I don't know, except that there's nowhere else to go—and to something that's much too good for me." He glanced sharply at Stephen. "You see, I admit that, also, but—in the long run—what's the use? I can't live that life with any success."

"Don't you owe anything to anybody?" put in Ellison abruptly. He was beginning to wonder why, after all, he was taking this man home.

Blantyre shrank back as if he had touched something in the dark. "Yes—a lot." His lips moved nervously. "And I have nothing to pay with."

He dropped on the pillow. He was very tired, and soon his eyes closed. Ellison watched while some of the weariness died out of the thin face. Then he turned out the light and settled in his seat. There would be no sleep for him that night. The train swayed on, and presently out of the darkness the invisible Blantyre began to talk in his dreams. Ellison, listening, had a curious sense of recurrence. Somewhere, in a previous existence, he had done just this same thing before, had listened to the clamour of these wheels, to just such a weak and rambling voice. In these shadows he saw the sinking *Voltic*, the fierce struggle for life, the tortured days beneath the pitiless sun of the Pacific. There were snatches about Stella, himself and Parkinson, all jumbled into a semi-coherent stripping of Blantyre's very soul. And Ellison, listening to the crash of these intimate walls, felt his mind flash with the consciousness that, for him, everything was now utterly changed. No more could he shield himself with work, always now he was welded into the lives of these two. He must exist with them, feel with them, suffer with them. He would be an attendant at a table where was spread the bread and wine of his soul's life, but there would be no crumb or drop for his own taking.

They reached Yorkton in the grey of the morn-

ing; Blantyre was white, but self-possessed. Ellison waited till the train was clear of passengers, then led him to a closed carriage. He gave the driver the address.

Blantyre started violently. "No—not there, wait a minute. I can't face it there." He turned to Ellison. "I'd sooner go home with her. Can't you understand?" He was trembling.

Stephen hesitated. "What do you want to do?" He felt like a thief trying to return stolen property.

"I'd sooner meet her somewhere else—anywhere else—then go home." As always, Blantyre wanted Stella to come to him.

"Will you drive home with me, and I'll get your wife?" stammered Ellison. It seemed ghastly, unearthly, inhuman, but he did not know what else to suggest.

Blantyre looked at him strangely. "Yes—thanks. That'll be much better. I say, Ellison, do you mind doing that?"

"No—I'm glad to do it." Stephen spoke steadily. He was glad, though this was the bitterest task of all. He would feel afterwards that he had gone as far as any man could go. He sensed that now. It fortified him.

Blantyre had curious sensations. It was the first time he had been in Ellison's house. They entered the surgery. "You won't be disturbed here. We'll have some coffee—and"—Stephen added under his breath—"then I'll go for your wife."

XV

STEPHEN got up. His face was drawn. Blantyre's cup rattled as he put it down. "Are you going?" he said shakily.

Stephen nodded, then stared keenly at Blantyre's gauntness. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Quite sure." Brian's eyes were sunk deep and full of shadows. He was keyed up, nevertheless, and had a touch of his old physical poise.

"We may not see much of each other after this," said Stephen slowly. Then he leaned forward across the desk and held out his hand. "Good-bye, Blantyre."

Blantyre walked unsteadily to the window and saw the car turn westward. He could not see Ellison's face.

Ellison steered automatically and without feeling the wheel. He seemed a puppet sitting in a shining machine that had orders from unseen powers to carry him inflexibly on to one last sacrifice. He faced it dumbly, like an ox. There was simply nothing else to be done.

Unconsciously he slacked speed till the car crawled. Why hurry the sacrifice? Then, in a sudden burst of revolt, he sensed that he and Stella were going to it together, chained for life in a hopeless disunion. For himself it was not unliveable. He could stick it out—he had already. But Stella was the living sacrifice. There was the deepest pain. Every lofty interpretation of his soul recoiled from this. Her delicate sweetness would be linked

again to a truculent nature that neither valued or understood. Her body, and at this he shivered, would be Blantyre's once more. Then he remembered that Blantyre always seemed cold.

By now his car was going so slowly that it nearly stopped. He set his teeth and put on speed. 'Twere better to have the thing over and done with.

The machine stopped at Stella's door and he got out slowly. Waiting in the morning room, he again visioned Blantyre. This was what he was returning to—this and Stella.

Presently she appeared, pale and very beautiful. The sight of her gave him a grim sense of finality, but why should fate, the surgeon, use such an exquisite instrument?

She glanced at him quickly. There was that in his face that sent her hand to her heart. "You have news, Stephen?"

"Yes." He took a long breath. "The best news." Something knocked in his brain and whispered that he lied. It was not the best news. Then he swiftly remembered that she had called him Stephen.

She was staring at him. Her lips were parted and her eyes luminous, but there were dark shadows beneath them. She seemed like a pallid flower of the night. "Where is he? Tell me—quickly—has he been ill?"

"He is at my house," said Stephen quietly, "waiting for you. Yes, he has been very ill, but there's no danger now."

"Why doesn't he come home?"

"He—he wanted you to come." Stephen

hesitated. "He's a good deal shaken and very nervous."

Again her eyes searched him. How much was there that Stephen had not told. He stood, pale like herself, but determined and self-possessed. Then she saw him wince and recover.

"Did Brian ask you to come here for me?" she said slowly.

Stephen nodded. It was hard to speak.

Still she stared at him. His face had a strange quality of spiritual beauty. This poignant service had invested him with something rare and lofty. She felt this, then grew suddenly weak and breathless.

"He asked—asked you?"

The blood rose to his cheeks. "I was glad to do it," he said simply, then told her more—of the discovery in Montreal and the journey home.

Her colour changed as she listened. Where was the resistless, imperative call for which she had waited all these tortured weeks. Her heart had, she thought, been on tiptoe to rush to Brian. Now that he was here again, she was dully conscious that some essential part of herself lagged stubbornly behind. She tried to picture this meeting—this reunion with one whom Fate had tossed back. She still looked at Stephen as though fascinated. The soul of the man shone out steadily and strongly. Came a swift and hideous conviction that she had grafted her living self to a dead tree, and beside it grew that through which she might have blossomed into life. Now, all Stephen's loyalty, all the tenderness of this mission spoke truly, and she knew at last

that she loved him. It was unspeakable that she should return to that which awaited her.

Ages seemed to pass in this terrific instant while she summoned her courage. It would never be anything but the same deadening struggle. The weight of coming years crushed her very soul in its contemplation.

Stephen was motionless. He too was in the grip of that which at this breathless moment was stronger than himself. He had not reckoned that the test would be so arduous. In this prophetic silence Stella seemed to put on a new and wistful beauty that moved him beyond words. It was deeper than that of flesh and blood. It was the revelation of the soul of the woman he loved. Had she weakened or protested, had her proud spirit broken, it could never have touched him like this. He was dissolved in sympathy. And all the time the invisible wall rose higher between them. He longed to take her in his arms and trample on every law.

Their eyes met in mutual farewell. After this there could not be anything else. They would meet and greet and perhaps dream. But always between them would come the alien.

Stella rose. "I will come in a moment." She left the room as in a trance. Her gaze was unseeing.

Stephen sat, plunged in fruitless thought. It would soon be over now. Blantyre would soon be here, in this room, alone with her, and he and the rest of the world would be locked out while Stella brought her alien back to health. His mind jumped to Blantyre, lean and hawk-like in his own surgery, waiting to have restored to him that which he did

not honour, but for which he himself would give his heart's blood.

Presently he heard her step and looked up. She was standing at the door. She was ready to go, but for a moment gazed at him fixedly. Her lips were quivering.

"Stephen, there is something I want to tell you."

His heart stopped. What was there she could say that he had not already lived?

"I want to thank you," she went on, bravely but uncertainly.

"Don't," he said. "Please don't."

"I must. I must say it now. I won't be able to again," she added with a catch in her breath.

"There is nothing to thank me for." His voice was very low.

She glanced at him strangely. "Stephen, dear friend, my best friend, I understand. Believe me—I do. Sometimes understanding comes when it's too late to be any use—to any one." A choking rose in her throat, but she went on unwavering. "Once you told me that you wanted to be my friend, to do anything you could for me, at any place or time. I've remembered that, and now——"

"Yes—and now——" he stammered, with a mute appeal in his eyes.

"It is what one cannot say. I ask you to believe that I understand." Her eyes streamed into his as they had across the consumptive's cot. "Our souls are uncovered now, Stephen, but my soul must be dumb."

His heart leaped riotously. Did she—could she share the hunger of his own breast? He had hoped

that she cared, but he had not dreamed that she could love. Again he wanted to take her in his arms and crush her to him, but Stella, pale and lovely, Stella with all her exquisite, petitionary charm, was never so unattainable as now. He realised that this was because she trusted him—had always trusted him.

"Stephen," she continued gently, "go on doing your splendid work for every one's sake—and my sake." Her hand stole to his arm and rested there, and, while his whole being quivered at her nearness, her voice seemed to reach him out of remote and echoing distance. "I want to feel that you are doing it. I won't be able to help now, so much. Perhaps it would be too hard—for us both," she whispered. "But your work will strengthen me. I shall find an answer to many things in that, and you—Stephen—my friend—will not fail."

He bent his head. He could not speak. Her hand still lay confidingly on his arm. He bent lower and raised it to his lips. "My lady, my dear, dear lady."

Thus—for a fraction of time. Then he went out, opened the door of his car and started the engine. "Quite ready?" he said.

XVI

BLANTYRE, alone in the surgery, stared moodily at books and bottles. Then he poured another cup of coffee and drank it greedily. It sent a glow through him and increased the action of his heart. He had thought so much through the night that now his brain lagged wearily. He gave up wondering how it was that he should have fallen into Ellison's merciful hands—Ellison of all men. There always seemed to be a curious Fate that shoved Ellison in. Ellison hadn't shoved himself in—it just happened, Blantyre recognised that. He had gone to bring Stella back. The irony of the thing was ghastly.

And now that Stella was coming, he became strangely breathless. The physical side of him was still weak, but he grew slowly aware of a tumult rising in his head. It seemed that things were happening over again, racing through his brain with terrific velocity; till one after another every long, dormant cell yielded something to this kaleidoscopic revelation. It began on the *Harmonic* with those first, forgotten promptings of self-interest. It unrolled itself again in the gardens of the Villa d'Este, when, even as Stella gave herself to his embrace, he experienced a triumphant sensation that the chains of circumstance were shattered at last. Then he dogged his own footsteps out to Canada. It seemed strange that he should have been dead to passion. So little had he been moved by the intimacy of life that Stella appeared almost as unmarried. He

was so mentally alien that he could recognise no development in her. Now, still unchanged, she was coming to him, still an alien, with the same unchangeable yoke. She would throw it across his shoulders, and then, with impregnable fidelity, ask him to begin all over again.

This opened up an interminable lane along which he plodded doggedly. The trouble was that, so far as he could see, it did not end anywhere. It was bordered with self-suppression and paved with compromise. Had there been any ultimate reward or solution the thing would have seemed more reasonable.

He walked unsteadily to the window and looked out. Ellison's house was on a curve in the street and he could see a long way. Rain was pelting down, the asphalt was glistening, the skies heavy and low. Farther up the road was the Dynock place, and, as he looked, Dynock came to the front door with his wife. He stooped over her before he started down the steps, then glanced across at Ellison's. Blantyre drew back involuntarily, and Dynock strode off after another puzzled look. Once he stopped, turned, and seemed about to come back, but after a moment's hesitation went on slowly and thoughtfully. Blantyre's eyes followed him. He began to wonder why Yorkton had not more men like Dynock, who seemed to have solved the problem of being able to keep to himself without being called critical.

Now he realised, with a start, that Stella would come at any instant. But still, it all seemed ghostly and unreal. Supposing—he caught his breath at

the thought—supposing she had had enough of it like himself, and did not come. That was a vividly new idea. There had not up till now been any question about it. But what if she were tired of this fruitless endeavour, this unprofitable league. Was it remotely possible that after all he might yet be free.

This fancy invigorated him, and he walked nervously up and down. That was it. He thought he heard the sea calling again, but this time with a more prophetic, more dominant voice. Then, abruptly, his stride ceased and he shook his head impatiently. The only reason it had not occurred to him was because such a solution was foreign to Stella. She was too full of persistence, of a high, proud ignorance of defeat. He searched his mind to remember if she had ever yielded, but could only picture upon seasons which now made his own stand seem cruel. No—she would go on fighting it out with the same unchanging hope, and weave round him more closely than ever those delicate tendrils he had so nearly severed for all time. He would be drawn again into the same choking round.

His eyes roved dully along Ellison's bookshelves and rested absently on a large brown volume. It was Woodman's monumental work on Toxicology. It had a familiar look and he took it down indifferently. The last time he had opened his own copy was the evening after Parkinson's death. Suddenly his glance contracted. "Ah, Parkinson was tired, too."

His face became set like marble, while his long, thin fingers turned the pages to the place something

told him he wanted. That was it. "Aconitine—symptoms—dose—etc." He remembered nearly every word.

Then he had a curious sensation of watching his own arm groping in Ellison's locker, taking out bottle after bottle and putting them carefully back, till it picked up a small flask of white powder marked "Aconitine." It seemed a natural thing to have thrown a pinch of it on the fire and marked its yellow flame. There came after that a suggestion that all was not complete. So he searched feverishly and found a vial of digitalis and a hypodermic needle. These he took to Ellison's desk, and placed in forbidding array. Now it was all arranged. There was only left to decide whether it was Blantyre or another Parkinson who sat and stared at bottled death and liquid salvation.

It seemed that he must have a few minutes to think. He listened nervously and went again to the window. There was no motor in sight.

He wanted to do the wise thing, the one that would pay in the long run. Life—the mere being alive—was of no particular value, but it had never yet been said that one of his people had funked it. There was that to consider. Furthermore, the only person who would really be affected was Stella, his sisters having married and settled down. So, putting his life in one hand and Stella in the other, he tried very hard to balance things up. The difficulty was that if he did live he had nothing more to offer Stella than what had been already offered, which was merely dust and ashes. If he did slide out now, she would take it very hard. But this

would not be so much for love's sake as because it meant the final shattering of ideals that he knew were already beginning to look very far off. He was coldly thankful that there was no child, but—the question jumped at him— would Stella be content to go through life childless? A door seemed to open suddenly and at an infinite distance he saw Stella. She was walking across a wide plain, alone. It appeared that she was looking for some one, because she stopped frequently and stared out under her hand. Presently, coming towards her, Blantyre saw a tiny figure that grew gradually larger and came running up to her. It was Ellison. Then, just before they met, the door closed.

All this was curiously quiet, but just as curiously reasonable. It was like looking through a telescope and getting a vision, voiceless, but perfect. It left him very much alone, just as on the raft, after the *Voltic* wreck, he had felt supremely alone when the woman and the boy were asleep. It had been a good act, that *Voltic* affair. He had had a grim satisfaction in the rescue of those two. Now he seemed to be on a raft again, but this time quite alone; and down below there were dusky, waiting couches, just as there were that night he swam so far out opposite Dynock's place in Muskoka. Again Stella was calling him back. He heard, clearly. But now he was too tired to swim to shore.

Loosening the glass stopper he poured out a tiny pyramid of white powder. It lay in his hand, crystalline and potent. There came a singing in his ears, and, in a sudden silence, the ticking of a clock

sounded like thunder. He did not remember just how he had come to this decision, but it was unquestionably very decent of Ellison to clear out and leave things so much to his guest's convenience. It would be awkward for Ellison that the guest should be picked up from the floor of that particular surgery. It was a curious use to put his house to, the first time he had ever entered it, but that, after all, was a minor matter—the talk of a few days—nothing more.

Now he seemed to have arrived at that point where everything had been thought out; so, throwing back his head, he jerked his palm with its tiny pyramid sharply against his mouth. Instantly came a tingling of tongue and palate, followed by constriction and soreness of the throat. He leaned over and ran a trembling finger down Woodman's article. "Yes, that was quite right. What a sound chap he was, this Woodman."

Soon, just as Woodman stated in the same paragraph, his lips became numb and he was conscious of a deadness creeping all over his body. Then through this shot fiery twitchings of labouring muscles that fought against the slowly spreading paralysis of the sensory nerves. He followed it all down the page. Soon his heart began to throb intermittently, and he felt cold and clammy.

At this something rushed toward him out of the dark. He knew that, because his mind was quite clear, and wiping the sweat out of his eyes, he saw the bottle of digitalis and the needle. Slowly his fingers closed over them. What an infernal fool he was, after all! The *Voltic* had upset him more than

he thought, and he suddenly shrank from a grinning face that leered across Ellison's desk.

Over the page, Woodman spoke of subcutaneous injections of digitalis—spoke quite confidently. So Blantyre steadied himself against an increasing giddiness, filled the syringe and jerked open his cuff. Then a voice whispered at him, and he recognised it in a flash as an entirely new voice. There were tears in it. Slowly, because of something he could not understand, his own eyes filled.

Instantly, at the salt touch on his sunken cheeks, he wanted to live. He must live now. He could weep, therefore, dear God, he could love. His whole struggling, panting being was swiftly and poignantly responsive. Even as he tasted death, the heart of Blantyre burst into life.

A sound from the street, a note from the horn of Ellison's car. Blantyre stayed the needle, just as its point was sinking and his finger flattened on the plunger. He got up and swayed across to the window, the hypodermic still in his hand. His lips were bloodless and spots were hopping across his eyes, but through the curtain he could see the car. Ellison had just got out and stood aside to let Stella pass into the house first. Her face was very white. She did not look up.

Blantyre's heart slowed till he gasped. It struck him with savage directness that these two looked as though they were man and wife. Between them was an unspoken link that sped home even to his own tottering brain. There came a queer idea that they looked well together. Blantyre, on the edge of eternity, poised with this for a fraction of time,

till, with one quizzical and tortured smile, he rose to that height which never before in his turbulent life he had endeavoured to scale.

"What a damned shame to spoil it," he said thickly.

He dropped the hypodermic carefully, set a numb heel on it, and ground it into the carpet. Then suddenly everything got very dark. Swaying uncertainly, he staggered over to the door, turned the key and pitched silently forward on his face.

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