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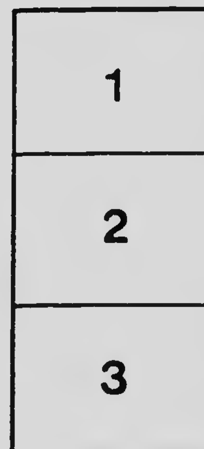

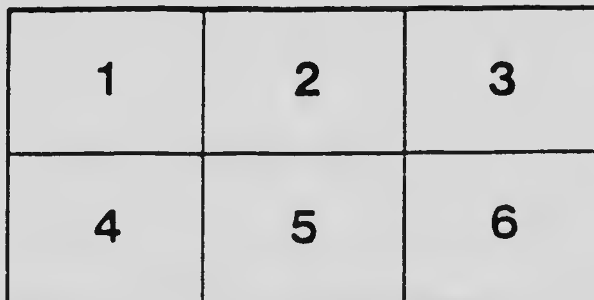

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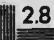

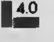

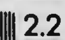

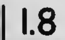

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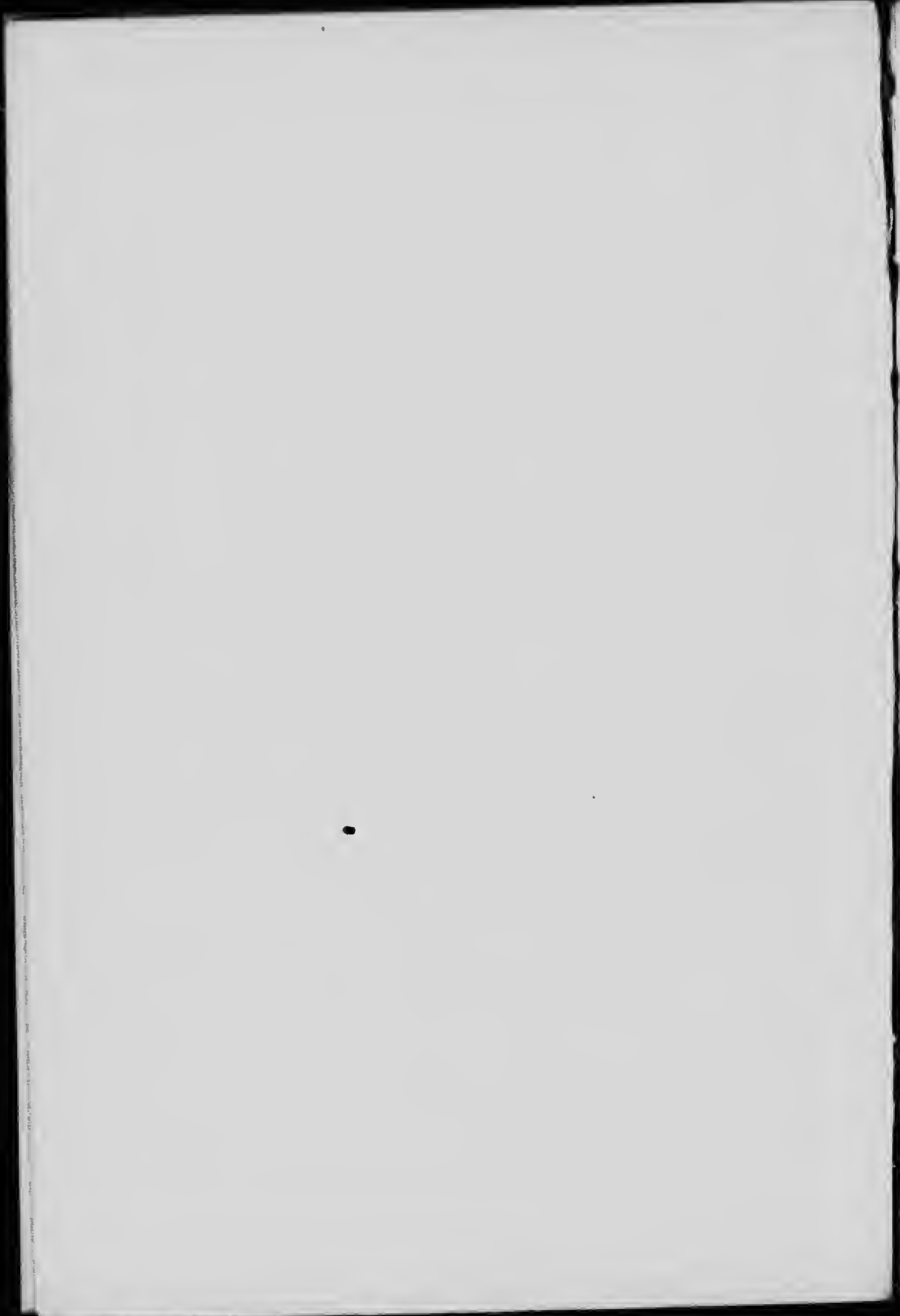

THE SHINING HEIGHTS

BY

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"THE DAUGHTER OF BRAHMA," "THE NATIVE BORN,"
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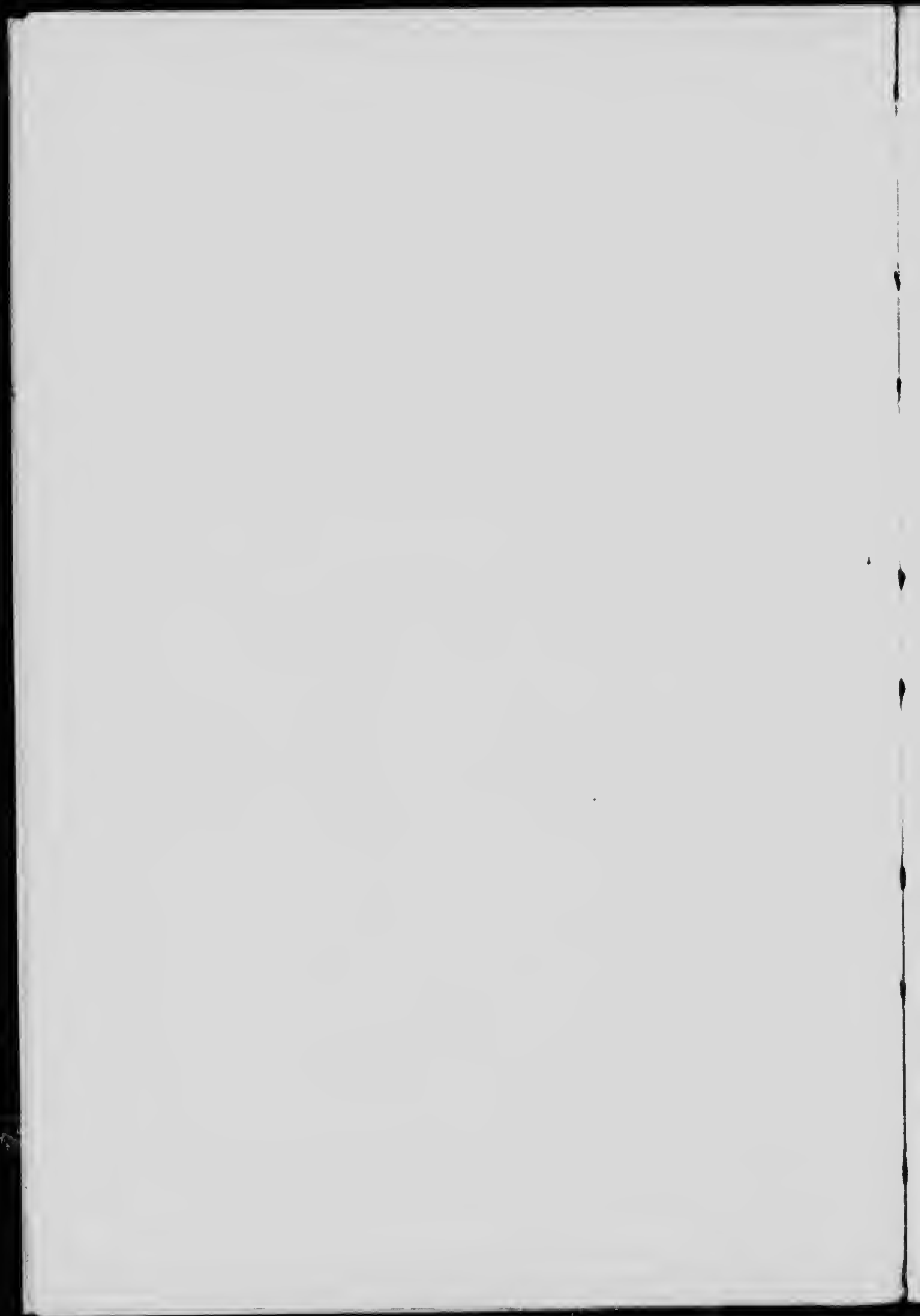

THE SHINING HEIGHTS

PART I

BEFORE THE STORM

PROLOGUE

I

DURING the long non-stop journey from Southampton to Waterloo they were something more than a diversion. They acted as a stimulus—or an irritant, according to the temperament of the observer, and in either case they were irresistibly and quite unconsciously magnetic. Even the stout, sickly looking man bunched in his corner turned petulant, hyptonised eyes persistently in their direction. His *vis-à-vis*, who peeped out of her furs like an elderly grey mouse, was frankly absorbed in them. She began to weave a romance about their unknown personalities, and—as time wore on and she grew tired and depressed—a tragedy.

She was getting old ; and to age, with its hard-won resignation, youth, with its passionate credulity and quixotic protest, is always a little tragic.

At any rate, they were not to be ignored. The peculiar, unrefreshing slumber with which the dust and smoke laden atmosphere of a railway carriage drugs its occupants fled before them. It was not that they were in any way ostentatious. They were very quiet, and apparently unconscious of any one but themselves. But they had the vivid fascination of a bright light and the quickening power of a clean north wind, and were as innocent as the elements of their own charm.

The little old lady could not take her eyes off them. She wondered what the man was talking about, and wished brazenly that she could catch a word or two of his eager sentences. But though he talked rapidly it was in an undertone which the monotonous rumble of the train smothered to a formless murmur. Was he making love to his companion? It seemed unlikely. They had not known each other twelve hours before—of that the old lady, who remembered them both on board the Channel steamer, was quite certain. Yet she remembered also—and this knowledge dated back to her own youth—that where love is concerned twelve hours may be as good as twelve years—or twelve minutes, for that matter. And he was obviously tremendously in earnest.

He leant forward, one elbow on his knee, and with his right hand made occasional illustrative little gestures that were at once vivid and very English. One felt that in a crisis of emotion he could not have made them. His face was in shadow, but the hand came into the circle of lamplight and gave his observer an absurd pleasure. It was a fine hand—strong and brown and supple—expressive in every movement. From time to time it went up to his fair hair and rumpled it boyishly. It seemed in some curious way to illuminate the rest of him, to reveal something fundamental which otherwise might have escaped definite recognition, something nervous and intensely living. It induced the old lady to think him good-looking, whereas in reality he was simply well-made. His body, even in that stooping attitude, had the unconscious grace of perfect health and balance. It did not matter that his clothes were worn carelessly and tended to shabbiness. They fitted him willy-nilly; and, since he was seated in a first-class carriage, their shabbiness indicated rather indifference than need, and only added to the characteristic forcefulness of the man.

For some minutes he had talked earnestly and almost uninterruptedly. Once only his companion had thrown in a brief question. Her face, shaded by an ungloved hand, had flushed a little, and then, as he answered, resumed its expression of grave attention. She was very young, not more than three-and-twenty, but the immaturity of her years hid itself beneath the gracious confidence which is born of wealth and freedom. It was not difficult to recognise the signs of wealth. The subdued eleganco of

her dress, the valuable furs thrown carelessly on the seat beside her, but chiefly the indescribable air of having always possessed these things—all this spoke for itself.

The old lady in the corner who studied her shyly thought her very lovely but vaguely disturbing—almost alarming. Her youth was so royal in its fearlessness, so touching in its frank self-reliance. The little old lady and her generation had not known its like. It frightened her. She tried to imagine herself, forty years back, seated in front of this utter stranger looking at him so straightly, meeting his passionate earnestness with such steady, untroubled eyes. The very thought of it brought a blush to her faded cheeks. Yes, things had changed. Youth had swept on like a whirlwind. She did not know whether the pang that went through her was of regret or envy.

But she wished she knew what the man was saying. It was impossible to imagine that any but the one immortal topic could absorb these two so deeply. And yet they knew nothing of each other, and the girl was so young, in spite of her courage, so ignorant of life. . . .

The old lady sighed anxiously. She felt troubled—absurdly responsible. . . .

Suddenly the brakes gripped. The express, like a living thing checked in full flight, shuddered along its length and then sullenly, reluctantly yielded. With a final groan the insistent clank and rumble passed into an expectant silence in which the man's voice sounded clearly.

" You see—the organism, the germ if you like, must be found again in the circulation. If it isn't there you can't be sure—it may be causal or only resultant. You haven't proved anything either way. These conditions are known as Koch's postulates. I suppose it sounds as dull as ditch-water, doesn't it ? "

A smile flickered across her grave face.

" *Is* ditch-water dull ? "

He laughed.

" Well—no—it's about the liveliest thing I know. That was a rotten metaphor. But you understand what I mean. The things I've been talking about don't sound exactly romantic—'cultures' and incubators and microscopes and all that. You wouldn't think they'd make every day of my life an adventure. But they do. Of cosure, like most things, it's sheer drudgery most of the time. But

underneath all that there's the thrill. You never know what the day is going to bring you. The very hour when you feel the sheer grind of it has knocked all the inspiration out of you—just then you may stumble over what you've been tracking down for weeks and months. And then there's no one in heaven or on earth you'd change places with—not God Almighty Himself. . . ."

She nodded earnestly.

"Yes, I can understand that quite well. One has to fight for something or other—something one believes in. One has to have one's adventure. In the old days, I suppose, they went on Crusades, or quested after the Holy Grail—that sort of thing seemed most worth while to them. Now it's science and—and microbes——"

"'Bugs,' in the vernacular," he corrected solemnly.

The old lady sighed again. She did not understand. She ought to have felt relieved, and instead she felt confused and dispirited and very old—or very young—she did not know quite which. But she could not shake off the fascination of these two strange beings.

Somewhere ahead of them a whistle wailed warningly and with a little jerk the express resumed its course, but slowly, with a kind of stateliness as though conscious that it was making its entry into the great world. The girl turned her head and gazed out of the grimy window. They were now well within the London radius, and the sickly lights below the viaduct cut ragged holes in the darkness through which she caught glimpses of a mysterious, sodden world—houses that looked like pinched and dirty faces smeared with tears, deserted yards, streets dimly intersecting the night and filled with specks that crawled in and out of the obscurity or bunched together sinisterly over some invisible attraction. But farther away the lights had an odd, repellent beauty. They seemed to be whirling about the train in a vast circle, to appear and disappear in a fantastic dance. The girl's eyes grew troubled as she watched them. They reminded her of something which the man had described to her—phosphorescent miasm floating over a stagnant, evil pool.

Suddenly she turned to him.

"I should like to take a broom and sweep it clean!" she said.

"That's what we're out to do," he answered—"each of in his own way."

"I wish your way didn't mean more suffering—innocent suffering."

He shook his fair head stubbornly.

"Most suffering is innocent. In any case, we've no choice. Some one's got to bear the brunt for the sake of the rest. It's damnably cruel, but that's the way of it—and it would be idiotic to put the burden on those who would feel it most." He was silent, watching her half-averted face. "You think that cowardly. But it's not cowardice. Look here, if you knew that you could save thousands by your own death—a hideous, lingering death, if you like—wouldn't you be glad to die?"

She started a little. A deep colour crept into her cheeks. She did not answer immediately. Her eyes, fixed intently on his face, were filled with a kind of surprise.

"Yes—of course."

"Of course. So would I. So would ninety-nine people out of a hundred. We're a far finer lot than we know."

"Perhaps we just say things like that," she said uneasily.

"Some of us have proved it," he retorted. "You or I may prove it to-morrow."

She did not answer. The express, feeling its way through the vast web of intersecting lines, ran proudly into the glare and bustle of the station. The neighbouring carriage disgorged a confusion of flurried passengers and unwieldy baggage into the corridor, where they were rescued a minute later by taciturn, omnipotent gentlemen in corduroy.

But the old lady sat quietly in her corner. As the man got up he glanced at her, and in that second she received an impression of intense, light-coloured eyes, fiery and yet aloof and preoccupied in their expression. She had the feeling that, though they looked at her, they did not really see her—that their vision was turned inwards on something of enduring and supreme significance. They were not pleasing. Their intensity was too much a part of the uncompromising, unconciliatory features. Even the fine, dominating brow repelled rather than attracted by its declaration of unbendable independence. It was nearly a brutal face. But the mouth saved him. The mouth, indeed, was in the nature of a betrayal, revealing an ability to suffer which the rest of the face stubbornly denied.

So much the old lady gathered in that second. Then her

romance-weaving about the two strangers was brought to an abrupt end by an obsequious but determined footman, who, having discovered her, manœuvred her and her belongings out of the carriage into a waiting limousine and thus out of their lives.

The girl, standing on the platform beside her travelling companion, looked after her, and laughed.

"Do you know, I think that old lady was quite worried about us," she said. "I think she had an idea you were trying to persuade me to elope."

"I suppose a woman's mind can't help running on that sort of thing," he answered. He had carried out her travelling case for her as a matter of course, but without graciousness, and now he stood beside her, half frowning, impatient to be gone. The journey was over. His interest in her had come automatically to an end.

"What do you know about a woman's mind?" she asked.

"Nothing. I haven't had time—and I never shall have time——" He wanted to add that a crowded and noisy station was not the place for such a discussion, but he caught a glimpse of her profile, and the idea that she was still laughing—secretly to herself—momentarily disconcerted him. In that moment, too, he noted for the first time the wave of russet gold hair which escaped from the close-fitting fur cap. Its warm colour against the tired pallor of her clear skin gave him a faint but arresting pleasure. He hoped suddenly that she would not make some banal and obvious remark to close their acquaintanceship. If she had said, "Well, it's been so interesting," he would have hated her for as long as he remembered her—which would not be long.

She looked round at him. She was quite serious now.

"Your name's Harding, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes—Peter Harding."

"I thought so. I saw it on your labels. If ever you stumble over something big I shall know who it is. Well—good-bye, Peter Harding."

"Good-bye."

The frank, strong pressure of her small hand reinforced his momentary pleasure in her. But he forgot to raise his hat, and it was only when she had disappeared in the straggling, eddying crowd that he realised that, in return, he had not asked her name.

II

Five minutes later he had forgotten her altogether. As his taxi carried him smoothly out over Westminster Bridge his thoughts reverted to the white-haired, round-shouldered man who had driven with him to the Paris station the night before. That was in itself an honour. But for Harding the honour had no value. He did not think about it. He only recalled the old scientist's words, weighing them with the exactitude of a man who is setting out on a great adventure, and can afford no fancy calculations with his equipment.

"Yes—you have done well, Monsieur Harding. Those classifications now—invaluable. Some of us will have to look to our laurels. I hope great things for you. You have patience—that is the essential foundation for one's building. Most of us can build the foundation well enough. But the building itself—ah, yes, that is another matter. For the building one must have imagination—the genuine intuition which springs without reasoning straight to the truth. And you have imagination—perhaps genius. Who can tell?"

And then in his quick, Gallic way he had kissed his companion on either cheek.

Peter Harding nodded to himself. Yes, old Jénot knew what he was talking about. He never talked idly—never flattered. And that about the imagination was true, and had its odd confirmation in his present conduct. It had been a sudden flash of that elusive, untamable side of his intellect which had driven him from his work, had made him throw aside a task nearing triumphant completion and sent him back to England after five years of unregretted absence. It had made him reasonlessly afraid.

The taxi turned up Whitehall and gathered speed in the wide, clear thoroughfare. Harding, with his chin resting on his hand, gazed out indifferently. At night-time this side of London had always seemed dead to him, as though the absent official mind left a soulless and unwieldy corpse to await its revivifying return. But later on, as they climbed the Haymarket, an unwilling emotion awoke in him. It was as though the five years—time itself—had been wiped out. He had gone on, the world had gone on, but London remained unchanging. It did not matter that here and

there she had touched up a wrinkle, daubed paint on her furrowed cheek, and added a netting of tubes and motor-buses to her grimy and fashionless attire. She was the same wicked old harridan who welcomed a man back with a careless nod and a wink as though he had never left her and her rights over him had never been disputed. It did not matter how he came back to her—in tatters, or loaded with honours, or stout with ill-gotten pelf. There was his place waiting for him; he just dropped into it and no questions asked. An evil old woman, hoary and wrinkled with sin, but a man who had once loved her loved her for all time; to him she would always be the only woman. and sooner or later he would come back to her if it was from the ends of the earth.

So the indifference in Peter Harding's eyes warmed first to recognition and then to pleasure. He welcomed Piccadilly. with its rakish frivolity. After all, it was a kind of home-coming, though the word "home" had little or no meaning for him. He belonged here. Some secret, invisible lien of sympathy united him to all this brick and mortar even more than to the men and women who crowded past under the garish lights. He began to realise that those five Paris years had been spent in exile. He had admired passionately. had believed himself welded into one with the people and with their life. Their city had seemed as much his as theirs. But now he knew that he had been an alien. a guest, who had always worn his best clothes among them.

This return was like slipping into an old coat.

He began to be thankful for the absurd impulse that had brought him back. Its absurdity was more apparent to him now. The uneasiness which had gnawed at his mind throughout the journey subsided as he drew nearer to its alleviation. All the same, he had no regrets. He would pitch his tent here—work perhaps for a time at the Lister and then set up for himself and complete the cycle of investigations which he had planned. As his taxi slipped out northwards through quiet, old-fashioned roads, his mind, freed from an unusual emotion, began to busy itself methodically with the future.

"Is this the place, sir?"

Harding was already on the pavement.

"Right. Wait though, will you? I'm not expected. I may want to go to an hotel."

He went up the familiar gravel path. Here again

emotion touched him, uneasy, reasonless. The squat, dark-faced house held no kindly memories for him. It had seen hard, querulous days, full of purposeless wrangling and petulant recriminations. But now it had a forlorn, pitiful look. He felt towards it as towards an enemy who had grown old and weak and helpless.

A shabby manservant answered his summons. The light in the narrow hall had been turned down so that the two men peered uncertainly at each other through the obscurity. Harding had one foot on the step. His question was a mere formality.

"Dr. Harding?"

"Dr. Harding—oh no, sir."

"I haven't made a mistake? This is No. 14?"

"Yes, sir. No. 14. But Dr. Harding doesn't live here now."

"When did he leave?"

"Four years ago."

Harding stepped back. The premonition which had obsessed him seemed at once justified and more ridiculous. For no apparent reason his memory returned to the last angry scene which had driven him out of the house and finally out of England. Some childish quarrel—about his collars.

"But I write to this address. Dr. Harding's letters are stamped with it."

"Yes, sir. I forward all Dr. Harding's letters. Dr. Harding made an arrangement with me. I was his valet in the old days, sir, and I came back into his service five years ago. My present master, who took me on when the doctor left, makes no objection to the arrangement." He waited a moment, and then added courteously: "I'm afraid that's all I can tell you, sir."

Harding did not move.

"If you forward his letters you know where he lives. . . ."

"Yes, sir. But I have orders to tell no one. . . . ."

"That's absurd. I am Dr. Harding's son. I have a right to know."

"His son, sir?"

"Yes, I have just returned from Paris. . . ."

The old man nodded eagerly.

"Yes—the letters from France—I remember them——"

"I came back because I had an idea that something was

wrong. What is wrong ? If you know you must tell me at once. . . ."

"If you please, sir, things have been wrong for a long time. They began to go wrong five years ago. It was then I came back into his service. There was that trouble with the doctor's patients—you remember, no doubt, sir ?"

Harding had half turned and stood with his face to the darkness.

"I never even heard of it."

"Well, sir, if he didn't tell you, you couldn't very well know. It didn't get into the papers, though there was terrible trouble. I didn't understand the ins and outs of it, but it seemed that the doctor had tried an experiment on one of his patients—a lady—a Mrs. Bryce—and the lady died. Other medical gentlemen were called in. I heard they were very severe—and in the end the doctor had to go. But he fought hard, sir—he fought till the time came when he never got a call except from accidents like and strangers who didn't know. It broke him, though he never said a word. Just sat up in his laboratory brooding over all those queer things he liked so." The old man paused again, his bird-like head a little on one side trying to catch a glimpse of the averted face. "And then he went away, sir."

"Where did he go ?"

"I promised——"

"Never mind that. Where did he go ? You'd better tell me at once. I shall find out anyhow, and you're wasting time. I have reason to believe that things are critical."

The man had shrunk under the arbitrary tone. Now he drew up his thin, shabbily uniformed figure to a certain dignity.

"I'd do anything to help the doctor, sir, and if you think it's right I'll tell you gladly: 14, Belairs Alley—that's the address. I—I ventured to set out to have a look at it once, sir; but I'm an old man, sir, and it was too far —away on the other side of the river somewhere. . . ."

"Thanks."

Peter Harding turned and ran down the steps. The old servant followed waveringly. This hard, resolute young man had frightened and troubled him. It was as though a rough wind had brushed aside the little misty romance which had gathered round the figure of his master. There had never been any other romance in his life; no other

chance to be loyal or devoted. And now this stranger, this son, had come to remind him of all he had forgotten—the ruthlessness, the hard words, the unrelenting will. Only the best had been remembered—the hidden best which an inarticulate faith had sought and found and treasured.

The tears came into the weak eyes.

"If I could do anything, sir—I should be glad to know—just a postcard perhaps—ten years' service before you were born, sir. I knew your mother—a lovely gracious lady. . . ."

"Yes, yes—come and explain to the driver, will you?"

The driver expressed ignorance as to Belairs Alley, but a sufficient willingness to discover it. The door slammed again, and the subdued purr of the engines roughened to a rasping clamour as the taxi turned in the narrow road. At the last moment Harding let down the window.

"What is your name?"

"Ashley, sir—Thomas Ashley."

"Very well—I will let you know."

It was now past ten o'clock. The evening traffic was over, and the great exodus from the theatres had not yet set in. Thus the taxi had a clear road and sped smoothly first westwards and then, diverging, turned into the narrow gateway of the city, over London Bridge, and thus into another world.

For here the background of sordid darkness, the lurid bursts of light, the teeming, purposeless crowds and their naïve display of crude appetites and acquiescent misery was not of the west, but of the east. There were memories of the Bazaar in the pungent odours and in the raucous shoutings from the lamplit barrows with their chaotic merchandise, in the mingling of restlessness and passive fatalism. In the daytime the place and its inhabitants would slip on their mask—be decorous, well-ordered, English; but now they were themselves—no pretence, no sham, but only naked poverty, crowned and unchallenged, and in its train a dreary, gyrating court of vice and bestiality and wretchedness.

Between this world and its neighbour there was the river, an implacable frontier, guarding western sanctity, with here and there a bridge as a no-man's land of transition.

"If some sort of catastrophe overwhelmed them would they meet on common ground at last?" Harding speculated. "Or would it be just the bottom dog's chance to

pay back ?" He tried to consider the probabilities dispassionately, but for once his disciplined mind revolted.

The taxi, compelled to pick its way through the aimless Saturday night's crowd, had dropped to a crawl, and the slow progress added to his increasing unrest. Once they stopped altogether in order to glean further information concerning Belairs Alley, and then, a taxi being in the nature of a spy from that other country, at best a suspicious alien, a little group collected about them, half helpful, half mistrustful.

"Wot's the nob want with Belairs Halley ?" seemed to express a general feeling.

Harding sat well back in his corner, his hands clenched, his brain clouded by an extraordinary rush of passion. It was more than unrest. He wanted to strike these bunches of sickly faces, evil-mouthed, weak-chinned, unsteady-eyed, which clustered around his window. He loathed them. He loathed their patience, their resignation, their silly, grinning acceptance of their own ugliness.

"Why don't they burn their hovels ?" he thought savagely. "Why don't they shoot us, and get themselves shot, and give their children a chance ?"

The hatred was like a pain. He could isolate it, but not master it. He was thankful when the taxi drew up against the curb with an air of accomplished duty.

The driver jerked open the door.

"This is the place, sir. Can't go no farther. There ain't no road. It ain't very inviting, I must say."

"No. Well, I don't want you to wait. Here's a sovereign. Take my luggage to the Welbeck. Tell them I'm coming on. You can keep the change."

The man glanced oddly at the black, forbidding slit between the houses and then up at his late employer's face.

"Bit trustful like, ain't yer, sir ?"

Harding smiled faintly.

"Not so much as you might suppose. I've got your number and something here." He touched his hip pocket. "I shall come out all right."

"On top, sir—*I don't* think !" the man agreed flatteringly.

There was a lamp at the entrance to Belairs Alley. It threw a pale yellow patch on the uneven pavement, but the rest of the passage seemed on that account to fall into deeper obscurity. There was no one about—no sign of human habitation. Harding counted the shadowy doors.

The fourteenth came last of all. There was no bell, no knocker. The rotten panels groaned under his imperative knuckles but evoked no response. He struck again, and then there was a sound of slippered feet on creaking stairs and the rattling of a bolt.

The door opened sleepily and revealed a girl wrapped in some dirty garment that might once have played a part as kimono in an expensive wardrobe. The light from a cheap bracket-lamp nailed to the side-wall made an unsuitable halo of the present owner's tousled flaxen hair. Her face was in shadow, but even so had a small impertinent prettiness—the look of a fawn peering out of a yellow gorse-bush.

She yawned elaborately.

"Well, Jimmy, this is nice of you! Fancy your coming all this way to give me an early call. Come right in, and 'ave a cup of tea or anything else you fancy. For Gawd's sake don't be shy."

Harding accepted her satirical invitation gravely.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you. Does a Dr. Harding live here?"

"'Arding? That's the chap on the fourth floor. I don't know about 'is being a doctor. 'E's queer, if that's wot you mean."

"Not exactly. But I want to see him."

"Oh you do? Well, it's lucky for you you didn't turn up 'alf an hour ago. You could have knocked your head off before any one 'd blinked an eyelid. There's not a soul in this place that's not boozy 'cept me, and I've just come back from the Chiswick—fourth girl in the beauty ballet. Ever seen me dance, Albert?"

"No—never."

She pirouetted wildly and finished up with an exaggerated posture and a wink.

"'Ow's that?"

"Wonderful. But I want to see Dr. Harding at once. I'm his son."

"Oh, yer are, are yer?" She regarded him critically, half resentfully. "Wot's it feel like to 'ave a beautiful creetur like you for a son and not enough to keep your belly quiet? Well, it ain't my business." She shrugged her shoulders. "Any'ow, I'm glad there's some one to walk behind the 'earse," she added.

She made an effort to reach the lamp, but it was too high

for her. Harding unhooked it and handed it to her with a slight inclination. She flushed up.

"Real Johnny, aren't yer?"

"I don't know. Would you mind leading the way?"

"Got cheek enough to start a business, anyhow," she commented indignantly. But she began the ascent of the narrow, carpetless stairs. The lamp threw queer shadows about them both. Her feet, in the down-trodden slippers, made a soft, mouse-like pit-pat. They were well shaped feet, small and slender, with delicate ankles. The pink heels peeped prettily in and out of their dirty coverings.

They climbed the four flights steadily without speaking. The closed doors on each landing had a sinister air as though behind them were hidden ugly and threatening secrets. The fourth flight was little more than a ladder. At the top the girl stopped and glanced back. The light was in her face now and showed up the black rings under her eyes, the pinched lines about the firm, impertinent mouth. She looked oddly changed. Her expression had lost its gamin familiarity and was subdued and half frightened.

"'Ere, you go in front, will you? I've got the jumps. Ill folk make me feel all over the shop, and 'e's mighty bad. And at this 'eathen hour and all. . . ."

He took the lamp from her and opened the door. Though he was not thinking of her he felt that she came in with him, keeping close to his side. For a moment neither of them moved. The light which at first spread to the farthest corners of the attic slowly converged, and, as though fascinated, settled in one straight shaft upon the lonely, dominating figure.

Harding felt the girl's hand clutch at his arm. Her hard little fingers gripped him in a spasm of sick terror.

"Gawd——! 'e's gone this time."

He did not answer. He believed that she was right. That colourless, unfamiliar thing propped upright against the dirty pillows could not be living. It did not even seem to be dead. It was like an effigy of death, the face carved with some tense, impenetrable thought. Only the eyes, under the bony brows, held a hint of life in their blank sockets. They seemed to stare out darkly . . . to hold some vision beyond the light which poured down on their closed, unflinching lids. A single blanket covered the figure to the waist. It was worn threadbare, and yet the

limbs beneath scarcely showed their outline. On the edge of the bed was a thick pile of manuscript, neatly ordered. One fleshless hand rested flat upon it in an austere gesture of authority.

It had been very still. Now a sound arose. It was like a subdued movement—the rustle of branches in a breath of wind. They did not know whence it came. But suddenly the girl's hand went to her mouth, smothering a scream. Harding turned to her. Without a word he pushed her out on to the landing and closed the door on her.

The eyes were open.

Harding placed the lamp on the only chair. He crossed over to the bed and knelt down so that the face of the dying man was on a level with his own. He waited. Presently the eyes withdrew themselves from their vision. They sought his, but their light had grown dim, and they were full of a vague perplexity and anger.

"Peter—come back—what the devil for?"

"I didn't know myself till now. You might have sent for me."

"I didn't want you—I don't want you."

Even now they clashed. And yet in the clash they had laid hold of one another. They were like wrestlers who might have loved and were doomed to perpetual conflict.

"Well, I've come back anyhow. And I'm going to get you out of this."

"Are you? Feet foremost, eh?"

"I know something of what's happened——"

"Do you? the impertinence! Leave me alone."

"I've seen Ashley. . . ."

A glint of laughter passed over the livid face.

"Damn him—the old fool."

"I suppose you quarrelled with me to get me out of the mess?"

There was no immediate answer, but the shrunken figure drew itself up a little. The gaunt, aquiline features, worn free from material passion, lost something of their immobility and became living and warm with the last flicker of life.

"There wasn't enough for both—my income gone—one of us had to go under. No infernal sentimentality about it—I was finished—old—discredited— you had to be kept clear of the wreck because——" He paused a minute, the free hand plucking at the blanket as though it sought after

the failing words. His voice had a bell-like, unearthly clearness. "They've hounded me here, Peter. They've hounded better men. Old Mrs. Bryce—she was a sportswoman—game right through. She couldn't have lived unless I saved her—but it was an experiment—it failed—somehow hurried things. She didn't care. 'Carry on!' she said, right at the last. But the others—it was their chance, and they wanted their pound of flesh—I knew—and so you went——"

"You treated me like a silly child. . . ."

The eyes narrowed, concentrating their sight.

"Don't prove to me you're a fool. It was a necessity. You were young. You had to start clear. Not that they'll spare you. They'll give tongue fast enough when they get wind of you. Don't funk them. A man throws down his challenge—let him stick to it and no whining. Fight 'em, Peter. Don't mind where they hit you. If a man has faith the end is good—in this dirty hovel *I* tell you—the end is good." The hand rested more firmly on the manuscript; the voice gathered for a last effort. "My defence—justification—is here. I've trained you—you're clever in your way. And you'll be just. If you have faith—carry on—Peter. . . ."

Harding nodded.

"If I believe I'll stick to it."

"If you believe you'll have to. . . ." The squared chin dropped. As though ashamed he rallied, turning the dying eyes on his son's face. "You've changed—stiffened—that's to the good. There used to be something——" Suddenly he lifted his hand, pointing at Harding's neck in a burst of rage. "Those damned collars—loathly, puppy-dog collars. Didn't I tell you—if ever I saw you in them again I'd kick you out?"

Harding stared back stolidly.

"I don't care. I like them."

"You—infernal—mule——" The hand wavered. Slowly and finally it came to rest again upon the manuscript. And now it was clenched in unbroken, indomitable defiance. . . .

III

Harding came out on to the landing. His own shadow, cut out of the oblong patch of lighted doorway, fell aslant

the stairs and the small figure that crouched there with its head buried in its arms as though hiding from an invisible terror. Only when she looked up with a smothered gasp he saw her face—a white smudge in the darkness.

"My father has just died," he said in an undertone.

Her eyes sought past him into the quiet attic. They were wide and haunted-looking.

"Oh Gawd!—what are we going to do?"

"Nothing. There's nothing we can do to-night."

"Where are you going?"

"I shall try and get back to my hotel."

"You ain't—you ain't going to leave me alone—with that?"

He looked at her curiously.

"Are you afraid of dead people?"

"It ain't fear exactly. Death's queer—we don't know nothink——" Her eyes went back fascinated to the light. "*'E* knows right enough now, though. 'E ain't one of us no more."

He nodded.

"Very well. If you feel like that I'll stay. Is there any room I could have?"

"Room? Gawd love us! Wouldn't you like a boodwar while you're about it, Tommy?" She paused, peering up at him from under her long lashes. For an instant her small face fell into lines of cynical audacity, but behind that mask there was a childish appeal—a quivering, scarcely controlled panic.

"Wot about my little cubby-'ole, 'Erb?"

He looked at her gravely.

"I'm afraid that's not going to help much. I can't have you sleeping on the stairs, can I? But I can stay in my father's room. I shan't be afraid. Good-night."

He turned and she rose up swiftly as though he had struck her. A rage which engulfed her awe of what lay beyond him shook her slender body from head to foot.

"Well, you're a cool party, aren't you? Wot cher take me for? Too good to breathe the same air with the likes of me, eh? Nasty, stuck-up beast! I 'ate you——"

He shut the door quietly in her face.

For a moment she stood there thunderstruck. Then she cursed him shrilly. But there was no answer. She could hear him moving about the room, and then everything grew still. She wavered. The silence and the utter dark-

ness daunted her. She faced it truculently. But suddenly her nerve failed. She turned to escape, and instead slipped down against the wall, hiding her face, crying dully and helplessly like a distraught child.

Presently even the sound of her crying sank under the eerie quiet. She scarcely moved. Twice a dry, choking little cough escaped her, and each time she drew closer to the wall, shrinking as from an aroused and resentful Terror.

The hours wore on. Overhead a skylight took on a ghostly outline. It grew clearer, and where there had been formless darkness there was twilight and shadow. The girl stirred and lifted her head. The Terror had vanished, and she stretched her aching limbs and presently got up, patted her tousled hair, and drew the kimono about her in graceful respectability. She held herself jauntily with her head up, and pulled a face as though at her previous fear. Then she turned the handle of the closed door and went in.

It was quite light now. The lamp burning on the table by the open window looked sick and wan with vigil. Over the roofs the sky caught fire and smouldered like a kindling furnace. The room itself was full of its sober reflection, which spread on in a rising tide up to the bed against the wall.

The girl glanced shylyat the still thing that layso straight and rigid. She held away from it, and crept on tip-toe to the man seated at the table with his back towards her. He did not seem to hear her. The fair, massive head rested on his hand. She saw that he was reading. Even as she touched him he turned over a loose sheet of closely written paper and laid it methodically to its fellows.

Then he looked up at her.

For a moment she stared back in silence. He seemed older. The bones of his face stood out sharply as though the flesh had been tightened. His eyes were red-rimmed, and their intensity dulled with exhaustion.

"Aren't you afraid any more?" he asked in a thick undertone.

She shook her head.

"In daylight I'm a lion. Bit dusty last night wasn't I? Well, I 'as my bad moments, like the rest of us, and I 'ates being misunderstood. What 'ad me last night was sheer funk—wanted some one to 'old me hand and all that—see?"

"Yes—and I ought to have seen then. I apologise."

She grinned.

"Oh, don't mention it, Arthur. All serene though—eh, wot?"

"All serene, of course."

She stood with her hand on his shoulder, looking down at the manuscript before him.

"Been reading all night? Novel, eh?"

"A sort of one."

"I like 'em 'appy. Does that end 'appy?"

"I—don't know. It isn't finished yet."

"Are *you* going to finish it?"

"Yes."

She reflected a moment.

"Queer—us talking, with 'im there, quiet like as though 'e might 'ear."

Harding got up stiffly. He went over to the bed and stood looking down at its quiet occupant. The girl followed him uncertainly, as a young and timid animal approaches something unknown. She laid her hand on Harding's arm in simple comradeship.

"Pals, were you, Charley?"

"No. We didn't get on well. It's different now."

"Of course it is. It don't matter being sorry when they're gone. It won't bring 'em back. Peaceful, ain't 'e? I always 'eard they were like that. Whatever 'e knows now it can't be bad noos."

Harding did not answer. She pressed his arm. "Come orf it, 'Enry! You're done in, that's wot you are. 'Ere, you wait downstairs till I get on me glad rags and we'll 'ave a cup of corfee somewhere. You'll want all your strength, old man."

He was still looking at the dead face.

"Yes, that's true——"

"Of course it is. There's not much your old mother can't tell you. Come on! You don't need to be ashamed of me. I'm a respectable woman in me odd moments."

He yielded passively to her gentle insistence. On the other side of the dread door she drew a deep breath and shook herself like a small impertinent sparrow throwing out its ruffled feathers. "That's better. Now I can introduce myself like a lady. Cissie de Valincourt is my name—'Arris for short."

He looked down at her vaguely. And then the mobile, painfully compressed mouth relaxed.

"You're very decent to me. You look done to death yourself. I heard you coughing in the night. I'm afraid it's been rough on you."

"Oh well, one doesn't 'ave a funeral every day in the year. Don't you worry, 'Erbert."

"You're a good sort."

She winked back at him.

"And you're another, Albert Edward. It ain't every gentleman I drinks my morning corfee with, you can bet your boots on that. Come on!"

PART II

AFTERMATH

CHAPTER I

I

THE house peered out of the sea-fog like an old whimsical faced gnome. It is a curious fact that even in these days, when gnomes are at a discount, and are actually denied existence, they are still as familiar to the ordinary mortal as motor-buses. One has a distinct picture of them—grey-bearded, bright-eyed old gentlemen, inconspicuously yet cheerfully attired, never below or above a certain venerable age and apparently enjoying the mixed blessing of an unlimited earthly career.

The house answered to this description. It was squat and spruce, and its grey stone walls looked as though they had weathered the Atlantic storms for a thousand years and more, and were prepared to weather them for another thousand at least. Even in the drenching mist which rolled up from the west in woolly clouds its eyes had a good-humoured twinkle. The weather made no difference to it. It turned up its coat collar and pulled down its grey cap over its eaves. It allowed the rain to trickle down its face and off the edge of its nose with an air of—" Well, it's good for the complexion, anyhow." It seemed, in fact, to possess a whole-hearted and quite imperturbable optimism.

It wore a little garden in front—like a child's pinafore. A double row of tall fuchsia bushes kept martial guard over the flagged pathway. On either hand was a patch of bright green lawn cut out in places into queer-shaped flower-beds that were evidently meant to represent something definite, but somehow didn't. In the summer, warm-coloured, old-fashioned flowers glowed in their

borders, but now the spring occupied them with her daintier following of primroses and violets, and even a daffodil or two, though the latter held their heads sadly as though the strong winds and driving mists were too much for their sensitive and poetic temperament.

For ten years the Rev. Felix Bayard had lived in the grey-faced house. Twice daily in those ten years he had walked down the narrow lane which led up to the wicket gate of his home, and each time he had a feeling that the high stone hedges on either hand, with their waving crest of feathery tamarisks, were there to escort him solemnly to his great and wonderful possession. And each time that he came in sight of the sober walls, and the twinkling windows, and the lawns with their confetti of flowers, it was as though a warm stream were set free and flowed round his heart and sometimes rose even to his eyes. . . .

Behind those ten years there was a time when he had lived and worked in a London suburb—a purgatory of small red-brick villas and stunted trees and shrivelled souls, all trying pitifully to be something fine and prosperous—and in those days he had dreamed of a quiet old house, well out of sight of the church—he was very particular on that point—and well within sight and hearing of the sea. He had built it very carefully and tenderly, piling up stone on stone in his leisure hours so that when he found it, in the flesh as it were, he was less surprised than overwhelmed with the never-ending joy of a creator. For in his heart of hearts he was quite sure he had dreamed it into existence. It was too exactly right for a mere coincidence. For instance, even from the top windows the square tower of the church was not visible; to the west the sand-dunes rolled down in grassy, flower-strewn waves to the rocky shore, and at all times he could hear the voice of the sea from his study window. Sometimes its song was low-pitched and drowsy, and sometimes it was a booming war-song of assault and menace; but always it was there to lure him from his sermon out into the open.

On this particular morning he was thinking of the sea with more than usual persistency, having obviously just come out of it. Indeed, if the truth must be told, the vicar of St. Maro looked at that moment none too respectable. His thick white hair stood on end and waved in the breeze, giving his round, weather-tanned face a look of child-like irresponsibility. His collar was clerical, but limp and

shapeless, and the rest of his attire an odd medley of indigent black and tattered homespun. The whole was saturated. His beloved Atlantic squelched out of his boots, and his trousers clung to his legs and swished musically as he walked.

So long as he was well out of sight of the house he carried himself with the free and easy swing of complete self-satisfaction; but at the gate he obviously wavered, and, on being hailed, turned with unfeigned alacrity.

"Oh, hullo, Polglase—I didn't see you through the mist. 'Morning!"

"Mornin', sir."

The man touched his cap and lifted himself heavily from the pile of loose slate on which he had been seated limply across the road. "I just come along to see if I might have a word with you," he explained, and added, his eyes tactfully avoiding the vicar, "but maybe, you be in a hurry, sir?"

The vicar glanced in the direction of the bright green door at the other end of the path.

"No, I'm not in a hurry at all. Won't you come in?—though I'm afraid you must have got horribly wet, waiting for me."

"It don't matter, sir. And I won't come in, thank 'ee. I was on me way t' shop and I thought I'd like to look in and tell 'ee—mother's heard from Tom."

The vicar, who had been rubbing his wet face with his handkerchief, paused to consider.

"Oh yes—Tom—your elder brother—I remember him. He went away before the—er——"

"During it, sir. Went to America. He's done well for himself, it seems. And now he's coming home."

The vicar resumed his rubbing.

"H'm, good business man, anyhow. Knows how to eat his cake and have it too. What do your people say?"

"Not much, sir. Father won't open his mouth. Mother just laughed—sort of savage like. 'He'll set no foot in this house,' she said. But I don't know. She was that set on Tom—I wasn't nowhere 'gainst him."

There was a short silence. The vicar, having finished with his face, endeavoured to tug the clerical collar into a semblance of its former self. Young Polglase meantime shifted his position so that he could lean his shoulder against the wall. Standing tired him. He was quite

young, and his short, broadly built figure suggested an unusual strength. But his movements were those of an old, enfeebled man. Between that which he had evidently been and that which he had become there was no hiatus, no sign of gradual decay. The blow, of whatever its nature, had been swift and withering as a stroke of lightning.

There was a young oak in the Pothcorn Valley which came into the vicar's mind at that moment. In its full youth it had been seared and broken by one short hour of devastating storm. The gaping wound in its side had roughly healed but the promise of a splendid maturity was gone for ever. The vicar never saw its heroic burgeoning without wonder. He felt that there should be something tragic about its ruin—just as there should be something tragic about Young Polglase. But, oddly enough, neither of them was in the least tragic. The oak carried its early green so gaily. And on Young Polglase's swarthy Celtic face there was constant serenity and content.

The collar having proved limply obdurate, the vicar performed a radical operation. He stuffed the rag into his trouser pocket.

"What do you feel about it yourself?" he asked.

"I can't say I feel much either way, sir. It don't seem to affect me. I remember, when I was a mere lad, an ugly wreck we had off Viking's Cove. The seas ran high as the rocks, and the life-boat didn't stand to have much of a chance. There was a job getting volunteers. I remember what I thought about them as stood on the shore and watched us put off. It just went through me like a flash. 'Dirty dogs!' I thought. I didn't think much after that, though. The old boat turned turtle and I went down and under till I thought I could never come up no more. But I did. We got to shore—all of us but one man—and we righted the old tub and set off again. In the end we made the wreck and took off every living soul—ten hours it cost us. When I come back I didn't think no more of them as had stayed behind—didn't even call 'em names. Some of the old folk felt mighty bad about them, but we who had done the work felt nought. They didn't belong no more—I can't explain it—they just didn't belong. . . ."

The vicar nodded.

"Yes, I know. It would be better if Tom stayed where he was."

"He don't belong neither." Young Polglase reflected heavily.

The green door at the end of the p[illegible]pened at this juncture, and a rotund, elderly personage wrapped in an immense apron appeared against the dark background of the hall. She said nothing, but with arms folded surveyed the vicar with baleful intensity. The Rev. Felix Bayard ignored her, but his manner became more hurried.

"Well, if I can be of any help let me know. I'll be coming down to 'Roads End' this evening, and I'll look in and see your people. We'll talk it over."

"Thank you, sir."

The vicar walked up between the fuchsias with truculent deliberation, but he appeared to make no impression on the Apron.

"Now, sir, didn't I say it'd 'appen?" she demanded. "Didn't I say to Miss Bobby only yesterday morning—'One of these days 'e'll do it, as sure as fate.' And it's 'appened. Fell in, now, didn't you?"

The vicar sat down on the step and removed his squelching boots.

"I don't deny it, Maggie. Under the circumstances, it would be ridiculous to attempt to deny it. I may add that I don't care. It was a wonderful specimen, right under my very nose. If I hadn't slipped I should have got it easily. It was a misfortune, but, looking back, I can say honestly that if I had to live my life over again I should not act differently. It was a most exquisite specimen."

"Dirty bits of weed!" The Apron commented scornfully.

The vicar gathered himself up with his boots under one arm.

"You've no soul, Maggie—no spirit of adventure. You miss the true beauty of life. At the present moment, for instance, you cannot see beyond the fact that I am late for breakfast."

"Noomonia, that's what you'll get," the Apron interrupted bitterly. "And oo's going to look after you then, I'd like to know?"

The vicar was spared an answer. A tall, heavily built woman came out of the dining-room and without ceremony took the outraged Maggie by the shoulders and shook her.

"You leave my father alone, you old bully. And

father, please go upstairs and change your things at once. I don't know which of you is the biggest nuisance."

Having thus impartially quelled them both, she returned to the dining-room and tranquilly resumed her breakfast.

Ten minutes later the vicar made a dignified reappearance with smooth hair, dry clothes, and an urbane, somewhat ostentatious cheerfulness such as has been known to accompany a troubled conscience. He was immediately followed by Maggie, whose manner of serving him with fresh tea and a boiled egg was admirably expressive of strongly repressed eloquence. No reference was made to the previous incident. At her end of the table Genifer Bayard kept solemn silence until such time as their indignant retainer had beaten a temporary retreat.

"Keith's coming," she then announced.

The vicar smiled and tapped his egg affectionately.

"I knew that, anyhow," he retorted.

"Did you? How? You weren't in for the post."

"No, my dear, I was not. A man of subtlety like myself does not need such a coarse and obvious clue to lead him to his conclusion. In the first instance, I observed that you had on your best blouse. In the second, you saved me from Maggie, and you only do that when you are feeling really kindly towards my sex. The whole tendency of our age," Bayard continued with conviction, "is for women to band together. It is a beautiful and wonderful thing, but there are moments when it is uncomfortable. I hope Keith—by the way, what train did you say he was coming by?"

"He travelled last night. I shall meet the 11.30."

"Of course." The vicar reversed his empty egg-shell in its cup and regarded the result contentedly. It was a little joke he played on Maggie with a regularity which might have palled on another temperament. But to Maggie it was always supremely funny, and called forth an unvarying response. "We'll keep it for 'is supper, won't we, miss?" At which they would all laugh. On this occasion the joke was to serve as a peace-offering.

"I expect you two will be getting married one of these days," the vicar continued suddenly.

"Yes, I expect so."

She met his interrogating glance with happy, contented eyes in which there was no flicker of embarrassment. They smiled at each other, and the absurd likeness between

them came out into sharper prominence. Unfortunately, the Rev. Felix Bayard, as translated into female form by his daughter, was not beautiful. No one had even called her good-looking. She was too big, too robust. Her feet and hands might have belonged to a young man, and her wrists and shoulders to an athlete. Her mouth was too wide. When she smiled she looked like a jolly boy. The short, curly hair added to her boyishness, which a stranger saw most clearly at first glance and then gradually forgot. For it was only superficial. In reality her strength, her bigness, were profoundly feminine. She was one of those deep-breasted, fine-limbed women who stand closest to nature in her mood of summer-day serenity in which all men are her beloved children. Her eyes were warm and full of an unalterable kindness. You could not think a mean thought whilst they looked at you. It was not possible to be hopeless or bitter in her presence. She radiated a security, a breadth, and generosity which linked all men to her and to each other in kindly brotherhood.

So that though no one called her beautiful no one ever thought of her as ugly.

She had been born in the days of the red brick villas when Felix Bayard had been busy building the grey house on the Cornish cliffs, and, with his mind full of knightly romance, he had christened her Genifer. But occasionally the Genifer sank to Bobby—for short, as the vicar lucidly explained.

Now as he looked at her a childish distress crept into his round face.

"My dear, I don't want to worry you. I see how happy you are, and I wouldn't for the world have it otherwise. But what *is* to become of me? I can't be left alone and unprotected with Maggie. I can hardly hold my own as it is. If you weren't here she'd throw my collection into the dust-bin."

"I am sure of it," Genifer agreed seriously, "but then you're not going to be left. It would be a crime to leave anything so helpless. Keith and I have settled all that. We shall live down here. Keith will never be strong enough to go back to his old job, and so he is going to turn his energies on to 'Roads End.' You see, it won't be like a stranger interfering. A lot of his men are there and they adored him—old Polglase, for instance; he

doesn't say much, but I don't believe he ever sees Keith without remembering that night in Flanders when Keith stuck to him. . . ."

"Of course." The vicar helped himself to toast with renewed cheerfulness. "It's a very nice idea. We three will make Roads End such a paradise that my promises for the next world will sound flat by comparison. My dear, I have an idea—you two could take Lone Point; it's big, but it's much better to start with a big house than to be always moving——"

She came over to him and stood behind him, rumpling his hair.

"You are such a wise, far-sighted person, aren't you? And so all-knowing; no wonder you're a clergyman. I suppose, dear, there's no one in St. Maro except you who doesn't know that Lone Point was let weeks ago. It's been the talk of the village."

The vicar threw down his napkin in disgust.

"Let? How abominable! Somebody ought to tell them the house is haunted. I hate strangers. What's their name?"

"Harding—either sister and brother or husband and wife—I don't know which."

"H'm. They may be Church of England for all you know. They *may* even come to church." The vicar's voice grew plaintive. "My dear, I shall have to pull myself together—I may have to write decent sermons——"

"It's high time," she interposed severely.

The vicar smiled. He produced a briar pipe from one pocket and a pouch from the other. His expression was full of peaceful benignity.

"My dear, what's the good of sermons? Who wants them? Does anybody believe a word I say? I don't. Everybody knows I'm talking through my hat. Look at the sun coming through the mist! Isn't that finer than all the talk in the world? Let a man go to nature for his sermons, that's what I say."

"Which means you haven't written yours," she hinted.

The vicar ignored her.

"I think I'll just take a turn by the shore," he remarked casually. "It may give me an idea. . . ."

His daughter turned from the window where she had been standing. She cleared her throat gruffly, squared her shoulders, stuck out her elbows, and assumed that heavy

swagger familiar to all students of the London police force.

"Now then, we've heard that story before. You come along with me. . . ."

She caught him firmly above the elbow, and the vicar squealed.

"Don't! You're hurting my arm, you horrid brute."

"You come along quiet then."

She led him in solemn official silence across the hall to his study, pushed him in and locked the door. Evidently the comedy sprang from some past experience, for there was a reminiscent smile in Genifer Bayard's eyes as, having placed her parent in custody, she proceeded upstairs to her own room. There she forgot him. She rummaged out various old straw hats from a cupboard and, choosing the least dilapidated, assumed it, first at one angle, and then at another. Finally she gave it up in despair, rumpled up her short curls, and made a face at the reflection in the glass.

"You're a fright, my dear," she remarked aloud. "And what he sees in you God only knows."

Nevertheless, she went down stairs singing—and her voice, though she sang flat, had a rich full quality—and only paused a moment at the study door.

"No. 35, have you arrived at that point when you can truthfully say, 'And now, dearly beloved brethren'?"

There was no answer—only a sound of serene and happy breathing. She locked the door again and relentlessly went on her way.

II

Genifer saw her the moment she came on to the platform, and she continued to see her to the exclusion of every one else until the girl, conscious, perhaps, of the brazen stare, turned and met it steadily, but without offence. Whereat the offender had the grace to blush a brick-red and look in the opposite direction.

Not that Genifer was really ashamed. Strangers were rare at St. Maro, and St. Maro was small, and its station-platform minute, so that a new-comer was a legitimate startling object of interest. Most people who came to the village for the first time recognised the fact, and accepted their notoriety with due meekness. They knew—or they

soon found out—that they were aliens, whose eventual citizenship depended on their own behaviour. As a consequence, for some weeks at least, they were diffident and painfully self-conscious.

But this girl held herself indifferently and carelessly. There was nothing arrogant about her. She simply did not seem to realise that the little group awaiting the morning train could not take their eyes off her. It was as though she were quite alone—or, worse still, as though St. Maro were just any other ordinary place of habitation.

And then she was beautiful, and carried her beauty with a rare simplicity. Perhaps because it was so fine a thing, so free from the power of time and circumstance, she neither troubled to display nor shield it. She was hatless, stockingless, coatless. The sun which had fought its way through the mist flowed down gently on to the deep, red-gold hair and on the white skin which it had not yet warmed from a town delicacy. Her bare feet were thrust into old tennis-shoes—symbolic of the casual unconventionality of her whole appearance. Neither the white cotton blouse, open at the neck, nor the rough tweed skirt was fashionable or even decently new. The skirt was frankly shabby. None the less, her clothes possessed the undefinable quality which clings to a well-cut garment to its last hour, and she herself added to them a little of her own unconscious grace.

"I believe she might even carry off my best dress," Genifer reflected, half rueful, half fascinated.

It was then that the stranger turned to her. A breath of wind lifted the hair from the broad low forehead, and in that moment Genifer received a new impression of something not only beautiful but strong and fearless and very young. There was nothing indifferent or casual in the eyes that met hers from under the fine brows. They were full of purpose and eagerness, passionately living and yet passionless, like the eyes of a child looking out into the world with desire and wonder but without knowledge.

Genifer turned quickly away, her heart warmed by the pure and ardent admiration which women, and especially plain women, feel for real beauty; but half hidden beneath her pleasure was another vague emotion. She was a little frightened—she did not quite know why. She told herself that all physical perfection is a little frightening. It is so rare—much rarer than virtue—half mysterious. It

separates its owner from the rest of mankind, lifting him or her among the gods. Yet that natural awe did not explain all she felt. She had an unclear perception of change. Other people came and went in St. Maro—summer birds of passage who left no mark on the close, self-contained little world. But this girl was different. She had come to live among them. She would bring change—even if she wished to she would not be able to leave them as she found them.

"Train just coming round the bend, mum." The little station-master nodded slyly to Genifer as he bustled past, and she nodded and smiled back at him. A general excited stir shook the little groups into separate parts, which wandered about the platform with aimless animation. Though it happened every day of the year, the arrival of the London train never quite lost its thrill. Even the station-master, who should have been thoroughly blasé by this time, had an air of crisis and solemnity. One sensed behind his official reticence a suspense—a sort of "You never know, perhaps I shan't be able to bring it off this time" feeling.

The fact that St. Maro was the terminus, and that a mile farther on lay the open sea, added to the importance and romance of the moment. It was not just a place which people passed on their way to somewhere else. It was the end—the goal—the land of promise to which all the other stations were just stepping-stones. Or, at any rate, that was how St. Maro looked at it.

Genifer, meanwhile, had taken up her post near the exit to the station. But for once her calculations miscarried. There was no sign of Keith Earnshaw in the first exodus from the stuffy old-fashioned carriages, and, as she stood looking eagerly about her, her eyes were drawn back to the girl whom she had already named in her mind though without prefix. She saw a tall man in a grey overcoat go up to her. He lifted his hat, and they shook hands in friendly yet formal greeting. She caught one or two of his sentences—curt, business-like phrases. It was impossible that they should be husband and wife—or brother and sister, for that matter. They were altogether too punctilious—too indifferent.

"Perhaps he's only a guest," Genifer hazarded to herself. Then, for a moment, she forgot them. Earnshaw had sprung apparently from nowhere, and had taken her by

her broad shoulders and brazenly kissed her. If theirs was not the orthodox custom of engaged couples it offended no one. They were St. Maro folk, and one of the advantages of St. Maro citizenship was that the citizen could do what he liked, whilst the poor aliens, even on their best behaviour, had hard work to keep in grace. Moreover, there would have been more than one pair of disappointed eyes had Keith Earnshaw been a shade more polished and a corresponding shade less ardent.

"Well, dear, going strong?"

She smiled back at him. Tall as he was their eyes were almost on a level.

"Strong and bouncing as ever. How's yourself?"

"Jolly happy, anyhow."

He tucked her arm through his and they made their way towards the station-master, who, with admirable dexterity, had descended the social ladder and was now accepting tickets, his expression that peculiar blend of indifference and triumph which distinguishes the quick-change artist after his most difficult feat.

As they stood waiting for the slow-going crowd to pass under his inspection Genifer caught a last glimpse of the Hardings. She saw the girl turn and look intently at Earnshaw and then make some comment to her companion, who glanced in their direction with a brief nod of assent.

Earnshaw had also witnessed their open interest in himself. As he took his place beside Genifer in the dilapidated victoria which served St. Maro alternately as fashionable vehicle and fish-barrow, he laughed rather grimly.

"I'm afraid I gave those two a bad turn," he remarked, tucking the rug over her knees. "They looked as though they'd seen the devil—or anything else of an equally unpleasantly interesting description."

Under the cover of the rug she laid her hand on his and held it. There was something wonderfully sure and comradely about the touch of her hand. If the man had smarted for an instant, the pain passed under that steadfast clasp.

"My dear, I expect they've heard who you are and what you are. They couldn't be here a day and not know——"

"Bosh. People forget quickly—the Lord be praised for that. Who are they, anyhow? It's early for visitors, isn't it?"

"Their name's Harding, I think, though what relation they are to each other I don't know. I had supposed they were husband and wife, but they seem so—so indifferent."

"Married people are like that, dear innocent," Earnshaw stated solemnly. "You wait till we've had a few years of each other——"

She rewarded his masculine facetiousness with a contented, rather absent smile.

"Anyhow, they're not visitors—they're emigrants. They're taken Lone Point."

He turned quickly.

"Oh, the deuce they have! And who gave them permission? Rotten bad taste, I call it—butting in like that!"

"That's how father feels about it. Only it's worse for him. You see, they may come to church. You know how he hates that. He'll have to think out a real intelligent sermon, with a beginning and a middle and an end. His only hope is that they may be chapelites."

They both laughed.

"I've had my eye on Lone Point," Earnshaw complained. "Never mind, we'll build for ourselves, and board on Felix in the interval."

The victoria had by this time shaken off its dreams of better days and was trundling sleepily down the narrow, cobbled street, past the gay little harbour where red-sailed fishing-smacks danced lightly under the chaperonage of disgruntled looking coasters—stout, black-dressed old ladies who leant heavily against their moorings and groaned and creaked and grumbled amongst themselves—and then up the steep hill on the crest of which it stopped as suddenly as it had started. But apparently it knew its business, for as soon as Genifer and her companion had scrambled out, without comment on either side, the amazing vehicle jerked itself awake again, and, turning down the tamarisk-guarded lane which led to the vicarage, vanished magically from sight.

Its late occupants crossed the opposite stile into the meadowland and there stood silent a moment, hand in hand like children, looking out seawards. Unromantic though they were, they had never been able to pass this spot lightly, and now it had come to possess a significance for them that was almost superstitious in its quality. The first recognition of their love, though not its acknowledg-

ment, had come to them here—one day when the sea had been a white immensity of foam and the west wind, sweeping over the barren fields, had beaten against them, driving them closer to each other. They had not spoken, but then for the first time their friendship had turned its face to them, and they had known it for all it was.

Here, too, the happiness of their meetings after long separation had always found the first full expression. The bustle of the little station fell away from them, and left the still content which was the very essence of their love. Each time the world before them had been different, as they themselves had been different, and yet for ever it was the same, living, changing, abidingly beautiful.

And to-day it greeted them with its youth. The early mist had broken and the sunlight painted each furrow and lonely tree and the long bars of grim stone wall in shadowy violet against the undulating sweep of field and dune. The arid flatness and stillness of the winter had gone. There was movement everywhere—a subdued, mysterious activity. In the sparkling atmosphere the rich brown earth seemed to stir softly with its first tremulous breath of awakening. And beyond was the sea—a smooth, glittering floor of polished sapphire.

Keith Earnshaw greeted the familiar landmarks with a short, satisfied sigh.

"Seems to mean well with us, eh?"

"It always has meant well with us," she answered.

But as she strolled on in silence she wondered a little because, after all, she was not quite happy. There was something vaguely troubling in all this young, fearless life. It challenged so much—in its way was so ruthless, and yet again ignorant and pathetically unguarded. Summer had the strength of triumphant survival, and autumn the resignation of timely death, but this rebirth had only its gallant, clear-eyed youth.

And suddenly, without apparent reason, Genifer remembered the girl who had looked at her so straightly on the St. Maro platform.

"I don't think I've ever seen any one so beautiful," she declared abruptly—"at least no one so satisfactorily beautiful——"

"As me?" Earnshaw inquired, ungrammatical and mocking.

She pressed his arm.

"No—your beauty is, of course, incomparable. I was thinking of that Mrs. Harding—if she is Mrs. Harding. The sea made me remember her—I don't know why. Surely you noticed her, Keith?"

"I don't think I saw any one but you."

She laughed with half-restored gaiety.

"Well, that's one way of referring to my bulk, anyhow. But, Keith, when I see any one like that it does puzzle me why you ever look at me again—seriously now!"

"And whenever I see a man with the face that God gave him, and not a jerry-built hotch-potch like mine, it does puzzle me that you ever managed to look at me at all."

She stood stock still.

"Why do you talk like that?" she demanded.

"Because I want you to marry me—soon, as soon as ever we can manage it. But first you've to look the facts in the face—literally. It's no good being sentimental about it, and I'm so sickeningly afraid you may have been just a bit sentimental—sorry and all that——"

"I'm not sorry for you," she interrupted.

"No—and I'm not sorry for myself. I—I suppose secretly I'm rather pleased about it. It's a comfort for a dull, middling sort of chap like me to look in his shaving-glass every morning and be reminded that, for one half-hour of his existence, he lived at top pressure, so to speak. But that's my own private satisfaction. It wouldn't comfort any one else looking at me. And, if you marry me, you'll have to look at me every blessed day of your life."

"Not a single holiday?" she put in quizzically.

"Not one. I shan't let you out of my sight. I shall hang round your neck like a mill-stone. I shan't be able to help myself. You're that sort of woman. A fellow gets to depend on you till he's like a deserted kid without you. Just think of it all! It's all very well now. There's a bit of glamour left. But in a year or two people will turn round when they see us and ask themselves how any woman could bring herself to marry that dreadful-looking crock."

"They're much more likely to ask themselves how any man could choose a woman who looks like an overgrown school-boy," she retorted, rumpling up her short hair with an impatient hand. "Let's cry quits, Keith—my curls against your scars."

He looked round at her with warm eyes.

"But I like your curls. They're a reminder. Not that I'm likely to forget the morning I woke up and found you gone. 'Where's my nurse?' I asked, grumpy as you please. 'Down with fever through nursing you, my son,' said the little V.A.D. person with the red cheeks. I tell you, I did some thinking after that—I did really."

"I can remember worrying about you—even in my delirium," she went on eagerly. "I was so positive no one could do your dressings as I did. Sometimes I think I must have been jealous."

"You—jealous?" He shook his head with mock dolefulness. "Oh, Jenny, dear, that's a very tempting morsel you've offered me, but I'm afraid I'm too old to swallow it. You're too jolly sane for romantic idiocies of that sort."

"Am I?"

"Rather. Besides—though I'd love to think there was a crowd of beautiful, adoring females fighting over my fragments, it can't be done. Imagination won't run to it. Even with the full glamour on, the little V.A.D. person didn't think much of what there was of me—and I don't blame her, poor kid."

She took him by the arm and shook him.

"I believe you *are* sorry for yourself, Keith—or rather, you want me to be sorry for you and weep over you. It's the spring, of course. Horribly sentimental—yes, you are. As to glamour! Gracious, man, what glamour can there be between two people whose first recollection of each other is in a hospital ward—the man swearing as horribly as his bandages would let him and the woman trying to feed him with a baby's bottle?" She threw back her round curly head in a jolly laugh. But in the next breath she had grown deadly serious. "Keith, don't talk any more of my not seeing you as you are. I do see you as you are—just one of thousands. Remember that, old fellow. As long as you live there'll be millions to keep you company. All our generation is scarred—or ought to be." She pointed down towards the cluster of houses lying in the hollow of the hill beneath them. "Look at Roads End. It's a wee place, but it's a bit of the only world that matters—our world. It's not sad or terrible—it's splendid. And anybody who doesn't belong to it is an outsider. That's how we feel about it,

whether we say anything or not. But you and I do belong in our different ways—and it's something to be thankful for—not to moan over."

He put his arm over her shoulder. His eyes twinkled. "You know, you're rather a comforting sort of person. I do hope, after all, that you'll see your way to marrying me."

"I see it with horrible distinctness," she retorted darkly.

So they came to Roads End. Old Polglase, leaning over his gate and staring at nothing in particular, saw them first. He shouted and waved his pipe, and Earnshaw waved back and uttered a prolonged war-whoop. Whereat in a second, as it seemed, the little gardens which surrounded the grey stone houses in an oasis of green lawn and red fuchsia, awoke from their drowsy quiet. Men, women, children, imperturbable cats and effusive dogs straggled out of the open doors or sprang mysteriously from nowhere. There was nothing in the nature of a demonstration—merely an exchange of casual nods and flippant greetings such as pass between old friends at pains to conceal the slightest vestige of emotion. The womenfolk stood on their doorsteps, arms akimbo, their offspring, slightly abashed, under their lee; but the men, following old Polglase's example, lounged down to their gates and leant against them with an air of having enjoyed that occupation from time immemorial. They were of all ages. Some of them were little more than boys, others almost old men. They were as different as their gardens, and, like their gardens, they bore each other an odd resemblance. There was something distinctive, separate about them, and yet it was not easy to lay finger on the real point of their affinity. Each had been struck down in his full strength, and sometimes in his full youth, maimed for all time. That much was obvious, for though the blow had fallen variously the scar was never hidden. But their affinity was not of misfortune. It was of rarer stuff. They had not withered—therein lay the great clause of their brotherhood. Their roots had struck deeper, and out of the grim soil drew up a stubborn, smiling serenity. They had withstood the worst and come through, and no other storm would ever shake them again. That inarticulate knowledge bound their diversities into a subtle likeness.

Old Polglase held open the gate. After that one out-

burst of enthusiasm his tanned, heavily lined face had stiffened into its normal expression of stolid indifference.

"Just come, sir?"

"An hour ago. Thought I'd look in for a moment on my way."

"Stayin' long?"

"Well, I'm not going as long as I have to go alone, anyhow."

By this time the gates had opened. Casually, as if by accident, a little group had gathered, and a slow appreciative smile included Genifer in its friendly understanding. She nodded frankly.

"Yes, we're getting married this time. But we're sticking to the family, never fear."

"That's good. I dunno what would come to us without 'ee." Old Polglase's earth-soiled fingers chose out a cigarette from the proffered case. "That there rubbin' and punchin' what she does at poor Thomas is sure wonderful," he went on with the complacent patronage of the male for a rather astonishing specimen of an astonishing, not wholly responsible sex.

"I'll stick it right enough," she assured him bluffly.

The cigarette-case went the round. A friendly odour of tobacco mingled with the fragrance of the flowers and the sweet wet soil.

"Any news?"

"Not to speak of, sir." The old face hardened for an instant as though at some secret reservation. "Maybe you've heard as Lone Point is took?"

Earnshaw nodded.

"We've just seen the owner. Harding's the name, I believe."

"There was a Harding at Festubert," one of the young men put in. He became suddenly embarrassed and spat viciously to cover his confusion—"V.C. or something. Maybe it's the same."

"Let's hope it. We don't want no strangers poking round."

"Family's exclusive, eh?"

"For sure." Old Polglase nodded solemnly. "But if it's him, sir, we ought to do somethin'—somethin' friendly. There's a bit of a do at the club next week. P'raps if you was to drop the hint, sir, that he'd be welcome like. . . ?"

"I could do that easily. He'll be flattered."

"Right, sir. Come on and have a look at t' potatoes. Comin' on fine, they are, and the lettuces too—Hi, Maggie, you bring out that last lot for the Capting——"

But at that moment Genifer clutched at Earnshaw's sleeve.

"Keith—for goodness' sake—I'd forgotten father! The poor dear—I shut him up with his sermon two hours ago. Something terrible may have happened."

Polglase's grim features relaxed into a sardonic smile.

"For sure—he's a fine man t' vicar," he remarked. "When it comes t' managin' t' boat in a dirty sea there's none like him; but his sermons are a sad trouble to us all."

Genifer waited for no more. But whatever vision of an outraged and indignant parent hunted her flying footsteps it was not justified by the reality. A drowsy peace enveloped the grey-faced vicarage. The study door was still locked. But the study itself was empty. A few blank sheets of sermon paper lay scattered on the floor and on one of them was a scrawled something that looked like the beginning of a text.

"Children, obey your——"

Evidently the vicar's memory had failed him.

The study window was wide open. On the flower-bed ten feet beneath were two deep impressions and a suspicious blurr. The vicar had left no other trace.

But from where they stood, looking at each other in laughing consternation, they could hear the voice of his siren, murmuring drowsily to herself, and the song of a lark mounting exultantly into the morning blue.

CHAPTER II

I

THE monkey turned its head and looked at Harding. Its golden-brown eyes were wistfully contemplative, and even a little mournful, as though it had already found life out as a rather poor sort of joke and was only kept going in mischief by an indomitable sense of duty. In the same spirit it accepted the proffered nut and cracked it, gazing absently out of the window whilst Harding took the disengaged, babylike hand in his and with gentle decision rubbed back the fur just beneath the elbow.

"Come, Hanuman, you don't really mind, do you? It's all in the day's work, you know, and in a good cause."

The monkey dropped its nut. It watched the dainty glittering scalpel as it scraped lightly over the bared flesh, but made no protest. It seemed to take a curiously detached interest in the whole proceeding. As the first drop of blood oozed through on to the clean blade it winced and made a chattering sound grotesquely like the comments of an irate old gentleman whose toes have been trodden upon, but made no attempt at escape or retaliation. Harding laid the knife on the glass tray beside him, rubbed over the grazed skin with disinfectant, and offered a second nut.

"That's all for to-day, Hanuman."

The monkey sprang at one bound from the table on to the sill, where, nut in hand, it resumed its wide-eyed watch on the jagged cove whose narrow, hungry-looking jaws seemed to gape open almost beneath the window. The tide was creeping in. It had already eaten up the yellow tongue of sand. Now one by one the bared, threatening fangs of rock which had seemed unconquerable dwindled and went down into the smooth depths. The subtle, pitiless advance held Hanuman enthralled. He scarcely moved, but sat there like a figure of his divine namesake,

only once or twice revealing ordinary mortality by an absent-minded scratch.

Harding forgot his companion. He scraped the spot of blood from the scalpel on to a smoke-coloured porcelain square, and, adding a drop of some gelatinous liquid, covered it with a thin piece of glass and sat down to his microscope. Hitherto he had worked rapidly but without haste, as a surgeon works to whom every movement and every minute is valuable and significant. Now he sat so still that he as well as Hanuman might have passed for an image graven in an attitude of very different but equally tense absorption. The only visible life was in Harding's hands. Almost imperceptibly they played with the fine adjustment or shifted the glass square under the lens. They were amazingly steady. The whole strength of the man's hunched-up body seemed to be concentrated in those big, shapely hands—concentrated and so absolutely mastered that it could be restrained as now to a touch as light as a woman's. But there was something mechanical and unfeeling in this relentless precision. For that moment, at least, the set, impassive face bent over the microscope had no human significance. The forehead masked the control centres whence the hands received their direction. It was part of a machine constructed for a single purpose, obeying immutable laws, oblivious to every emotional appeal—a very strong and delicate instrument.

Presently Harding sat back. His hands sank to the table—lightly as though they were still under sharp nervous restraint—and lay there clenched in an attitude of dogged accomplishment. Without actual change of expression the tensity of his face passed, and for the first time certain lines showed themselves. They marked fatigue and some constantly working, well-mastered passion—the furnace which gave to the machine its mobility and strength.

But the spell was broken. Hanuman awoke from his amazed contemplation of natural phenomena and scratched himself, this time with zest and appreciation. At the same moment the door opened. The man took no notice of either happening. Even when Lillah Harding came over to the window and picked up the chattering, indignant monkey he did not look up or betray any consciousness of her presence. For a moment she occupied herself with the task of reducing Hanuman to a state of comparative

amiability, and then her eyes sought the man's face, studying it with a quiet, rather detached interest.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

A spark of amusement burnt up in her grey eyes.

"I knew you'd agree. I suppose you don't realise that it's afternoon—late afternoon, in fact. I came up to ask if you wanted tea. Do you?"

"Tea—? No, thanks. Good Lord, four o'clock. I've been here since seven."

"I know—and nothing to eat. You won't do good work if you go on like that. I'll send up something."

"Thanks."

They relapsed into silence. The intruder swung herself with a careless freedom on to the window-sill, dangling the bare legs which showed sunburnt and slenderly young and strong from under the rough tweed skirt. She still held Hanuman, who with a very human craving for commiseration rubbed at his injured fore-arm and chattered volubly. Lillah Harding examined the faint scar. A sudden stillness came over her. When Harding spoke again she did not look up but went on stroking the wound with a gentle, thoughtful finger.

"I don't think I'll have anything, after all," he said curtly. "I'll wait till supper. There's something I want to finish before dusk. Time's so confoundedly short."

"Yes. I suppose it all depends on what you're doing with it. But I didn't know time mattered much to you."

He laughed.

"Didn't you?"

"Well—time itself, perhaps. But not dates and hours —not the arbitrary divisions we give to it. I mean——" She hesitated, and now she looked up at him half smiling and with a faint deepening of colour. "I've just remembered—this is a sort of anniversary. Seven years ago to-day we met for the first time."

"Really? Oh, yes, I do remember that. It was the night my father died. But what made you keep track of it?"

"I don't know. It made some sort of impression on me—our talk—and things generally. I had been worrying a good deal as to what I was going to do with myself. Of course I realised that I had more power than most people—and yet not enough. There was so much to be done. I

had to choose. You gave me the beginning of an idea." She considered him gravely. "Besides, you interested me. I had never met any one so interesting and so rude."

His face was wry with reluctant amusement and controlled impatience.

"Any more memories?" he asked.

"Just one. You won't think much of it—it's the merest coincidence. But exactly a year after we met again—in that funny little Soho restaurant. You told me what was happening, and I asked you to marry me. I think that was sufficiently important to be remembered, anyhow."

"Quite," he agreed. "As a coincidence, it is certainly rather remarkable." He rested his head on his hand, shading his eyes from the light and readjusting the microscope with careful, loving fingers. "So that was six years ago. I'm rather glad you've been interested enough to keep the reckoning, because to-day——" He broke off and then went on in a changed tone: "Six years may be a long time. As you say, it depends on what one is doing. It's been a mere breathing-space as far as I am concerned; but I dare say you are pretty sick of it. It's not much of a life for a woman." He glanced at her, and his brief scrutiny was half satirical, half curious. "Bored and lonely, aren't you?"

She put Hanuman gently from her. Very seriously she turned her face to the window as though the bleak cove beneath, filled now and lined with a white, softly rising and falling line of foam, gave her an answer.

"I was lonely and—and not happy in New York," she said simply. "Out there the whole thing seemed unreal, rather—I don't know how to express it—rather absurd and exaggerated. I lost touch with my own faith. But this is different. It's home. Here nothing is absurd—everything is possible." She hesitated, and then added, more to herself than to him: "And I could never be lonely here."

Either he did not hear or he had ceased to be interested. He got up, and an abrupt gesture ordered her to take his place.

"It seems that this is our lucky day," he said, with his short, unwilling laugh. "Look at this!"

She obeyed him. A sudden eagerness swept her out of her pensive retrospection, but her hands were as steady,

as dexterous as his own. Swiftly she altered the adjustment to her need and then sat still—tensely still.

Harding took no notice of her. He would have seemed wholly indifferent but for the fine moisture which had gathered between his brows to betray a difficult self-repression. For one instant, indeed, he had been tempted to explain—to hurry her on to an understanding of what that drop of blood might signify, but the impulse had passed. In its place came a vague resentment and impatience. He dreaded her comments, the inevitable questions, the inevitable phrases. In dogged silence he waited, and there was no sound save when Hanuman, who had been deceived by an empty nutshell, flung it against the window-pane with a spiteful violence.

Lillah did not change her position.

"It's just as you described it." There was a little halt between each word as though her mind were too deeply occupied for easy speech.

Harding frowned with the half-amused annoyance of a man who has caught himself in error.

"You take it very quietly. I supposed you would be surprised—pleased even."

"I am pleased. Why should I be surprised? It's what you told me to expect."

"I told you——! What faith!"

"If I had faith enough to marry you, I had faith enough for anything, Mr. Harding!"

He smiled a rather sardonic appreciation.

"Of course. I should have thought of that."

She got up. With both hands she pushed back the hair from her forehead, showing the clear white skin where the sun and wind had spared it. The impulsive movement was free and happy and almost exultant. It arrested Harding's attention. So she felt it, after all, in spite of her coolness. And how little she heeded her own beauty. For in his odd moments he realised that she was beautiful, though the fact did not interest him.

"You're satisfied, aren't you?"

He nodded.

"So far. Nothing is certain until the final success. There are points which no amount of previous experimenting can really settle. But I am justified in going ahead—I shall start the first injections. No time has been wasted. The good food and air were a necessary

preliminary. By the way I am going up to London next week. Newton's have a microscope I want. It's a matter of fifty pounds. Make out a cheque direct to them."

"Why must you do things like that ?" she asked with generous eagerness. "Why won't you be independent of me as I wish ? as is your right ?"

His heavily moulded face hardened.

"No. It is not necessary. As you know, I have no compunction in asking you for what I need. We're partners in this concern. You have supplied the means."

"And you the brains," she put in quizzically.

"Yes."

"—— and Hanuman the suffering."

She turned to the little monkey, who was solemnly engaged in an hereditary pastime and offering him her finger. He clutched hold of it and looked up at her with his golden, wistful eyes. "Poor Hanuman!"

In the silence that followed she knew that something had happened. She had said something—what it was she did not know—but the change that it had effected was so definite as to be almost physical. She turned and caught a glimpse of Harding's face. It was too swift a vision for her to read his expression. He bent his head instantly, and, taking out the glass square from under the lens, placed it in a bowl of disinfectant. But she saw that his hand had lost its absolute steadiness.

"Please go now," he said roughly. "I can't work with you here."

"I'm sorry. I ought not to have stayed. Thanks for showing me those results. . . ."

"It was my duty to do so," he muttered.

"Thanks for doing it [illegible]," she returned with grave sincerity. He did no[illegible]er. "I'll clear out now. Tell me if there is any [illegible] way I can help you."

"See that those foo[illegible]ve their windows open and keep them open. They shut them every time my back is turned. One would think they wanted to die."

"I'll see to it now."

He did not thank her. She glanced at him from the door whither she had beaten a good-humoured retreat. His brutal rudeness had not hurt her or touched her happy confidence. Something in their relationship shielded them from each other. But she was still puzzled. His back was turned. He was not working—she knew in-

tuitively that he was not thinking of his work. He stood there, stolidly upright, his hands thrust hard into the pockets of his coat, his figure cut black and dominating against the light.

And yet it was Hanuman who dominated—that small, pathetic object grown suddenly so still, who peered up at the bigger shadow and waited in wistful resignation and foreknowledge.

II

Harding had judged correctly. The windows were closed, and a blazing fire added intolerable heat to the close, confined air. Without speaking, Lillah crossed over to the casement and flung all three windows open to the sea wind, which raced joyfully in and out again, like some willing, boisterous servant, bearing with it the room's sickly exhaustion.

Then Lillah Harding turned. She shook with a young, passionate anger.

"You're not fair," she said. "You don't play the game. Mr. Harding spends his life trying to save you, and you scheme to thwart him. It's mean and treacherous and silly." She swept the little circle, seeking to encounter eyes that dropped and shifted instantly. "You came here of your own free will," she went on. "That doesn't absolve you from doing your share. And you shall do it. Either that or you go. There are hundreds of others to take your place—others who will be decent and loyal and grateful."

She waited for them to speak, but there was no answer. Only after she had gone and they had seen the shadow of her lithe young figure pass down the garden path they fidgeted, relaxing into easier positions. The woman with the yellow wig and hollow, badly painted cheeks, crouched closer to the fire and tittered.

"Mrs. Harding takes a high hand, doesn't she?" she remarked. "One would think we were here on charity. I suppose having succeeded in getting people of our position to come here has gone to her head. Really, there are times when I feel I can't endure it—when I shall speak out. But then, again——" The narrow, pointed shoulders under the lace scarf hunched themselves in a shrug, "I

tell myself that I only know these people professionally, as it were. I am not responsible for their manners. I am here to get well—after that our account is settled. *Il faut souffrir pour être bien portant.*" She threw in the French morsel with another titter, and the rheumy, heavy-lidded eyes peered round, measuring her effect. Then the titter passed almost without transition into a dry, horrible cough, and she dabbed her red lips with a lace handkerchief which subsequently she examined closely.

There were three other people in the room. On the sofa beneath the window a young man lay stretched out at full length. He was tall, so thin that his clothes revealed rather than concealed the pitifully covered skeleton. A lock of limp black hair hung over his forehead, lending his sallow, hatchet-shaped face a faun-like look of sardonic malice. He shifted his position a little so that the last speaker came within his range of vision and studied her deliberately, his black eyes shining.

"You're absolutely right, Mrs. Felicia," he said in a husky voice. "Absolutely. It's disgraceful the way you're treated. It's different for us men, isn't it, your Reverence? but a woman so gently nurtured, brought up in the lap of luxury and refinement—that she should be spoken to in such a tone—ordered about, positively threatened—no, it's too much. Mrs. Felicia, one of these days my chivalrous Celtic blood will boil over, and then——"

"Please, Mr. Tillett! I can't bear violence in any form. It makes me shrink. And *not* Felicia, Mr. Tillett; Mrs. Newman, if you don't mind. In this—this undesirable intimacy we must endeavour to maintain the ordinary decencies of society."

Stephen Tillett grinned.

"Devilish hard on a fellow, isn't she, your Reverence?"

The shabby, black-coated figure in the basket chair wriggled discontentedly. With extraordinary precision the Rev. Silas Modrow placed the tips of his fingers together, separated them, and brought them back again, repeating the movement with monotonous regularity as though it were some form of incantation. His finger-nails were dirty and the hands tinted with that peculiar greyness which marks a long-standing compromise between soap and inclination.

"It is our duty to make Mrs. Newman's stay here as tolerable as possible," he asserted solemnly. "We should

respect her susceptibilities, Mr. Tillett. We must remember what she is accustomed to. Compare this poor room with what, no doubt, are her normal surroundings. These white-washed walls and cheap chintzes, comfortless chairs and bare boards—what sort of home is it for a woman who comes straight from all that wealth and position can give her? All the more reason, Mr. Tillett, why we should not add to her discomfort by any discourtesy or undesired familiarity.

The young man on the sofa fell back with a laugh.

"Your eloquence must have made you irreplaceable at your last job, your Reverence," he said. "Where were you when this—this break-down—reached you from heaven—on the way to Canterbury—eh?"

"Scarcely so far, Mr. Tillett." He rubbed the scrubby grey side-whiskers with an irritable tremulousness. "Still, there were people who hinted at things—I don't say there wasn't an idea about that in a short time—" he sighed. "Well, for the present, that is over. God's will be done."

He glanced across at the woman opposite. For an instant they measured each other furtively.

Mrs. Newman bowed her head.

"We have all had to give up something, Mr. Modrow—you perhaps a bishopric, I my place in society, Mr. Tillett his—his——"

"Gold-mine," the young man put in obligingly.

"Well, let us all hope that it is not in vain. It would be hard, indeed, if this discomfort—not to mention the expense——"

"Ah, the expense!" Modrow showed the wrinkled palms of his hands in a gesture of despair. "My dear lady, you can hardly realise the claims that a clergyman has to meet. And now, to have to add a weekly expenditure of ten guineas——"

"Eleven," she corrected. "At least I pay eleven. There were certain little comforts that I insisted on."

"Ten guineas here and a monthly bonus of a 5*s.* share in the gold-mine." Tillett asserted on his own behalf. He burst out laughing again. "God's will costs a pretty penny, doesn't it, your Reverence?"

An uneasy silence answered him. Each time that he laughed—and he had a trick of laughing as though at some secret jest of his own—the Rev. Silas Modrow pursed his lips and the sunken eyes peered over their unhealthy pouches

at the painted face of his companion the other side of the hearth. And her heavy-lidded eyes peered back questioningly. They seemed to ask each other, "What is he laughing at? Do *you* know?"

The little woman seated on the far side of the room well away from the fire spoke presently. Hitherto no one had noticed her. She was so small and colourless that she melted into the shadows which had begun their journey up the white walls. Her head had been bent over some needlework, but now she looked up and her withered face shone with a kind of eagerness.

"I—I feel as though I ought to tell you," she began huskily. "You don't know how good Mr. Harding is. You talked rather as though he cared only for money, but. indeed, he isn't like that. He makes you pay a lot because you are rich, important people. But he has not asked me for a penny. Indeed, I could not give it him. I am very poor. In the good days I was a dressmaker. Ever so many customers came to me. I had begun to lay by even. Then there was the war, and everything went—my health, too. I was on my way to the hospital when Mr. Harding found me." She paused, and her head was bowed over her work again. "He was very good to me," she whispered.

The exhausted, timid voice seemed to be more disconcerting than Stephen Tillett's laughter. Mrs. Newman plucked at her lace shawl, drawing it tighter across her narrow chest, and the painted lips twitched in the effort to formulate words that would not come. It was the clergyman who spoke first. He leant forward smiling and washing the knuckly hands with unexpected fervour.

"We must certainly credit Mr. Harding with this—er—apparent good-nature," he said. "At the same time you realise, Miss Jones, I am sure, that you are not here for nothing. It is—er—we who are paying for you. In fact, if I may say so, the charity is more ours than his. Not that I grudge it—indeed, no. I am merely explaining the matter to you. Moreover, Mr. Harding needs us. We must remember that point. Our support—our co-operation—is essential to him. We are not merely guests, paying guests; we are here as martyrs to science. On our sacrifice—yes, I say sacrifice advisedly—depends the future of the human race. It is the consciousness of this truth which keeps me here in—er—most painful exile. If we live

if we pass through the ordeal, a scourge will have been swept from the world. If we die"—he squared his shoulders —"then we have given our lives for our fellow creatures. 'Greater love hath no man——'"

Mrs. Newman interrupted him shrilly.

"I'm sure I don't want to be unpleasant," she said; "I don't want to be hard on people less fortunate than myself. But I think Mr. Harding ought to have told us. I think he ought to have explained." She tossed her head. "One has a natural objection to paying for a first-class ticket when one's compartment is stuffed with third-class passengers."

Stephen Tillett, who had been lying flat on his back, staring at the ceiling, sprang up. He waved his long arms above his head.

"Even with all the windows open this room stinks!" he shouted, and went out slamming the door after him.

The Rev. Silas Modrow overtook him at the garden gate. The soiled fingers plucked at the young man's shabby sleeve.

"Going to the village, Mr. Tillett?"

"Yes."

Modrow blinked up at the sallow, contemptuous face. Cunning, cautious significance and pomposity blended in that wavering scrutiny.

"I wonder if you'd oblige me, Mr. Tillett—I am—er—too exhausted to go myself. I'll give you the money this evening—I will really. Just the smallest quantity in the world. It's against my custom—but these open windows —Mr. Harding has no conception of my delicacy—I need a stimulant—just half a bottle—I assure you, my dear fellow——"

Tillett threw off the twitching hold.

"I've enough to do drinking myself to death," he jeered. "I'll not have you on my hands. Get your own tipple, and be damned to you, my holy friend!"

He went on down the rough track which led along the cliff, shaking with laughter.

III

It was Earnshaw who saw him first, and, by a gentle pressure on the arm linked in his own, he drew Genifer's attention to the lank figure. It had turned off the path

into the sandy road and was striding inland, its ill-fitting clothes flapping about the long limbs, the dank hair flowing back with a grotesque resemblance to the feathery tamarisk which streamed in the wind from the summit of the stone hedges on either hand. From that distance the vision was merely absurd, and Genifer laughed.

"My dear, what is it and where does it come from?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know. I thought perhaps it might be our prospective host, in which case"—insidiously he altered their direction so that they too left the path and began the gentle descent towards the cliff-edge—"in which case I should sit down in some lonely, romantic spot and dream of you until you come back. My health is not what it was, Genifer, and if I came in contact with a fellow suffering from vegetarianism or a conscience I should catch the disease, you would break off the engagement, and my heart would be broken."

She interrupted him firmly.

"Keith, it wasn't Mr. Harding. I've seen him and I know. He is a big man—rather soldierly-looking. That must be a guest."

"Well, I don't want to meet any one who has guests like that."

"But you promised. What will father say—poor father who is so submerged in parochial duties that he has to send us as deputies?"

Earnshaw gave way gracefully at the knees, and in spite of her efforts to support him, slid down on to the short, springy grass and stretched himself at full length.

"Jenny, darling, your father is the noblest, dearest humbug on God's earth. At this moment he is pottering about some salubrious cave looking for specimens. The souls which he should be shepherding might be rollicking down the primrose path at this very moment for all he knows or cares. No, Genifer, I am not going to be sacrificed on such an altar. I am going to lie here and if you are a true woman you'll stick to me."

For a moment she stood irresolute, looking down at him. All his banter had not blinded her keen eyes to the pallor which had spread over the poor disfigured face, hiding in part the white, irregular lines of the old scars. His eyes were closed, and in sheer exhaustion his arms were flung out limply, the hands open. Whatever memory,

whatever thought that stillness awoke in her, it lashed the blood into her cheeks. Without a word she crouched down beside him and drew his head on to her lap. He smiled up at her.

"Dear old girl! It's like old times to see you from this point of view. It was the first thing I saw after that rotten grenade got me. And jolly glad I was to see it, I can tell you."

"I shall always spoil you, Keith," she said, with an unsteady laugh. "It's utterly against my principles, and I shall take it out of our sons, if ever we have any. But with you I can't help myself. To me you'll always be No. 55, a most interesting case, not on any account to be thwarted, because his temperature goes up."

"That makes me out a pretty weakling, doesn't it?"

She disdained to answer. Perhaps, indeed, she could not. Her mouth was finely contemptuous, but her eyes shone down on his warm with a compassion that was not pity. One hand passed lightly over his forehead. It was a big hand, brown and muscular as a man's; but its strength was a great gentleness. One could not think it could ever have been used meanly or cruelly—or other than in protecting generous help.

The man looked at it and kissed it.

"Dear!" he murmured drowsily. "Dear Genifer!"

She sat very still, watching over him, thinking he slept. But after that first moment of sweet relief from pain his exhaustion passed. A change came over him. He felt himself strangely and wonderfully alive. Every faculty stripped off the muffling weariness; his senses, alert and quivering, received a thousand new intoxicating impressions. It was as though after long months a frozen, pent-up spring had leapt from its source and flowed along its old bed between green flowering pastures, under warm skies and laughing sunshine.

He did not move, scarcely breathed, lest the glory of it should leave him. From where he lay his half-opened eyes could see the undulating sweep of land rolling down from the stone barriers which guarded the hidden fields to the cliff-edge. In a month it would all be a burning emerald, but now the thrift was there, a sea of thrift whose waves changed from pale coral to the tenderest rose, and covered even the grim Cornish walls in a flood of sweetness. It poured on undaunted over the rocky cliff,

gathering in deep pools of colour in the harsh, spray-washed fastnesses where no other thing would grow. To Earnshaw it seemed to fill the world—to rise up and melt into the glowing clouds which hung flushed and still in the suspense of evening.

He could only hear the sea. It sounded close beneath them, a subterranean voice, murmuring mysterious incantations. And at every ninth word the voice grew louder, and laughed a low gurgling laugh of invitation and fell away into a brief waiting silence.

To Earnshaw's stirring fancy it seemed that a subconscious self received and understood the message. And, as he listened, an immense tenderness swept him, a wave of emotion strong and life-giving and limitless as the sunlight breaking out over a barren world, calling up the sap in the dead branches and the sleeping seed in the chill earth. He did not seek the source or object of this love. It seemed all-embracing, utterly desireless save for the old thing—the need to be alone. He did not analyse it. He was too happy.

He lifted himself on his elbow.

"I'll climb down on to the ledge and see if I can lay hold of some prehistoric fossil for our errant parent," he said gaily. "We must do something to propitiate him. Wait for me!"

She nodded. She did not ask if he was strong enough or offer her companionship, the ability to let people have their own way being, perhaps, her greatest talent. She remained quietly where she was, watching him as he dropped out of sight below the frontier where the pale rose of the thrift ended and the sombre, glowing sky began.

At first the descent was easy, the verge of each seeming precipice only a step down on to a lower, flower-spread platform. Even the rock itself was cut into broad steps, as though it had been once part of a giant's stairway now battered and decayed. And where they ceased, Earnshaw's desire carried him on, sliding from ledge to ledge till the last was reached, awash already, a narrow foot-hold on the edge of the world. For from thence there was nothing visible but sea and sky. Close to where he stood the water was already black and the thin fringe of foam gleamed like a streak of light in darkness. The voice was no longer a murmur. It sounded loud and clear and cold.

How long he stood there he did not know. He had a feeling as though time and life stood still—that he himself was suspended between the past and something that was yet to come. It was only when a breath of chill wind brushed past him that he turned to go.

He had been gazing into light and the sudden change to the grey towering shadow was like the clutch of a cold hand on his heart. In the descent it had seemed different—a mass of broken rock piled loosely boulder on boulder. Now it was a grim whole, furrowed and fretted, but of one stupendous, unbroken unity.

He climbed the first twenty feet, carried up by the sheer impossibility of recognising his danger. Then suddenly he stood still, his feet on a thin ledge of rock, his hands over his head, the fingers sliding helplessly over a smooth, unbroken surface. Then even that groping stopped. He remained motionless, his body pressed against the rock, clinging to it by every agonised muscle. And behind him there was something dragging at him—a force that was withering his will, whispering voicelessly—"Let go—give in—drop——"

His heart beat no faster. He could think quite clearly. He knew that three feet above him was the first broad ledge and safety. But he could not move. He was paralysed. The link between brain and body had snapped. His courage, his mind, stood by helplessly, saw how his body cringed and broke beneath its instinctive terror.

Then, just as it yielded and swayed out into the void, a hand gripped him. It was more than its strength that held him—the firm, cool touch sent life flooding back through his empty veins. It stung him awake, so that in an instant his free hand had sought and found the support which in its panic it had missed and with a scrambling rush he was up and standing breathless by his rescuer's side.

He looked at her and laughed to cover his shamefacedness.

"Thanks ever so much. If you hadn't played Deus ex Machina so neatly I should have been all in, in every sense of the word. I wonder, how did you come to be there just at that critical moment. Was it just my luck or—— ?"

"It is the cormorants you ought to thank," she answered gravely. "They are building a nest just below on a crag,

and I come every day and see how they are getting on. One has to lie down flat and peer over. That is how I came to see you."

"And I *was* making a fool of myself too!"

"Since you didn't succeed in making a corpse of yourself, it doesn't matter," she retorted, and her eyes smiled though her lips were still serious.

"But it's a bad beginning to an acquaintanceship," he protested.

She laughed outright.

"It was very nearly the end, wasn't it?"

"No. It couldn't have been. You can't have an end unless you have a beginning. And we haven't begun. We haven't even started now—properly speaking. To make the thing legal we ought to have an introduction. Permit me to present myself—Earnshaw—Keith Earnshaw."

"I know your name," she interrupted quickly. Her eyes were on his face and traced the disfiguring lines with a child-like unconsciousness. He had long since grown accustomed to scrutiny—to the veiled glance, the brief stare changed instantly into hasty indifference. But this serene directness was a new thing. It did not hurt him. For there was neither horror nor pity in her regard, but only wonder and a kind of awe. "I saw you first on the station yesterday," she went on, "and of course I knew who you were at once."

She did not tell him her own name. But hers, too, needed no telling. "The sea made me remember her," Geoffer had said, and he knew now what she had meant. For somehow this stranger, this alien belonged here. The fire of the westering sun was in her hair and her eyes were of the sea, deep and calm, simple and inscrutable. She was part of all the colour and life, only more vivid, more living. The endless heights of sea and land, the glowing sky, and the faerie craft seemed to have grown paler because of her. Against the grim, grey wall of cliff she shone like a flame.

Earnshaw's pulse beat steady and slow. The unrest, that flood of nameless feeling which had surged upon him, flowed smoothly now like a deep, broad-breasted river. He was strangely happy.

"And I know who you are," he said. "You are our new neighbour at Lone Point."

He fancied that her expression changed—that a shadow passed over its serenity. It was as though he had reminded her of some grave thing that she had forgotten.

"Yes," she answered. "I am Lillah Harding."

Then quickly, abruptly she turned, and, with light, sure steps climbed from rock to rock, out-pacing him so that for a moment she stood above him, a sharp-cut silhouette against the sky. He had an idea that she would have gone on and left him without ceremony; but there was Genifer to deal with—Genifer, who had partly seen, and partly guessed, a rather terrifying Genifer, hiding weak feeling behind a hot and royal indignation.

"So that's your gratitude, Keith Earnshaw!" she opened fiercely. "I give three months of irreplaceable life and irreplaceable hair to make a presentable man of you, and there you go, over rocks and down precipices like a limpet that can't cling. Yes, I saw; I was miles away. I was as helpless as though I were in another world and about as happy."

She turned impetuously, and suddenly her mock anger was gone, and her eyes were warm behind their dimness. "I can't thank you, Mrs. Harding. You see, such as he is, I'm going to marry him and so—and so I am naturally a little upset and awfully, awfully grateful. Keith Earnshaw, where would you be now if some woman hadn't always been at hand to pull you out of your scrapes, I should like to know!"

"Not here, anyhow!" he admitted with a mock ruefulness.

But he was amusedly aware that now that he was safe he had ceased to interest, and that, according to custom, the two women were intent on each other—"coming together over his head"—as he expressed it to himself. Genifer in her big, warm-hearted way had taken both the stranger's hands in hers. There was something so confident and maternal about her that, by contrast, Lillah Harding seemed almost a child—a shame-faced, uneasy boy caught in a good deed.

"Mr. Earnshaw would have managed quite well without me," she said. "It was just nerves. If one stops to think it always happens. I know because it has happened to me." She withdrew her hands from Genifer's clasp. "I must be getting home," she added curtly.

Yet she lingered, looking at the other woman with a kind of wistfulness. And Genifer held her ground.

"Then we're coming with you. You see, we're ecclesiastical dignitaries—deputies from the vicarage. My name is Genifer Bayard—at present—and my father is the vicar. He wanted to call on you and your husband himself, but he was so—so overwhelmed with parish work"—at this point Genifer resolutely avoided Earnshaw's eye—"that we've come instead to welcome you both to St. Maro, and we'd like to do it thoroughly, if we may."

"Besides which, I have a message for your husband," Earnshaw put in. "I promised to deliver it, and if you knew me better you'd know my promises are worth a lot more than my nerve."

He looked at her with twinkling solemnity, and to do him justice it must be admitted that he had, in fact, completely forgotten his recent irresponsible attitude towards his task. His disinclination had vanished, leaving no trace; but, in addition, he was piqued by Mrs. Harding's attitude. Suddenly she seemed to have withdrawn herself from them. Something proud and almost hostile had crept into her bearing.

"Mr. Harding is busy," she said. "I doubt whether he will see you. We—we are not accustomed to visitors. We came here to be alone." And then all at once she flushed up vividly, very beautifully. "I don't want to seem churlish—I can't explain; but please come, if you really want to."

"But if you'd rather we didn't?"

"Oh no, no. Please come!"

They followed her in silence. The evident struggle between instinctive hospitality and a painful reluctance had discomfited them and they were glad when, at an abrupt inland twist of the cliff, they came in sight of Lone Point, rising up out of the thrift like a rugged spur of rock from a twilight sea. But it was not the Lone Point they knew. The old wrecker's home, shunned and dreaded even by the romanceless trippers, had been their secret possession, peopled by their own creations. They had imagined its miscreant owner—a gentleman in his way—a man of taste and with a sense of fitness. For, when the game was up and the excise men clamoured at his door, he had hanged himself from his own rafters. The thought that he still lived here, prowling the shores or at night

showing his false beacon from the upper window, had no terrors for them. The place's sinister aloofness drew their imagination, awoke a kind of sympathy. They thought of it as some one friendless and deserted, a sour, hard-bitten old fellow, steeped in memories of rollicking wicked days; not whining now that they were over, but with his back to the wall, fighting the lone fight to the last.

Now it was just a house—some strangers' home.

Like the vicarage and all true Cornish dwellings, it was of grey stone, one storied, hard-featured, built to fling back the fiercest hurricane that ever swept the Atlantic. But between Lone Point and the vicarage there was all the magic difference that divides a grim, neglected servant from a beloved woman.

At the gate of the untended garden Peter Harding stood talking to Mrs. Felicia Newman. He spoke quietly, but his tone carried, and its cold fierceness struck an instant responding dislike from Earnshaw's instinct. Before he had seen Harding's face he hated it. He hated the powerful figure in the surgeon's coat. And with equally little reason he pitied the wizened, golden-wigged woman who, making no protest, slunk away into the shadow of the house.

A minute later they had met, had learnt each other's names, and shaken hands with the relentless civility of civilised people. But there the power of custom stopped. Harding did not move from his place at the gate. He seemed to be there doggedly on guard, barring their way, defying them.

"I am sorry," he said in answer to Genifer's explanation. "I am afraid you've wasted your time. We shall give the vicar very little satisfaction. We are not church people."

At which, unexpectedly, Genifer sighed with relief.

"Poor father! If he had only known! He does so dread people coming to church. It means he has to write a real sermon instead of cribbing out of Robertson. You see, he has only about three parishioners, and they're very old and deaf. Most of the natives are chapel folk. Father and the minister divide the real parish work between them."

Harding glanced at her with a faint, unwilling smile.

"Your father must be an interesting man. I dislike most clergymen. Perhaps one day we shall meet. Not yet though."

His abruptness, the oddness of his speech, silenced Genifer.

It was Earnshaw who took up the attack. Throughout, Harding had regarded him steadily, and those intense, penetrating eyes made him ill at ease. There was something in them that he seemed to have felt before—a kind of passionate curiosity.

"I'd better get on with my message," he began hurriedly. "At least it's a sort of invitation. Nothing very swagger. It's Roads End annual beanfeast, you know. They want you both to turn up."

"Who are 'they,' and what or where is Roads End?"

Earnshaw laughed awkwardly.

"I thought every one knew. It's a colony—you know—disabled men. I have some of my own fellows there—and so occupy a sort of privileged position among them. They sent me as deputy."

"Why to me?"

Earnshaw straightened. He was at a loss to understand himself. He was hot all over. Underneath the simple affair something horrible was going on. His own words had a double significance over which he had no control.

"Well—you're a new-comer for one thing—and then—well, one of the men had an idea he knew you—there was a Harding at Festubert—V.C. or something of that sort—it was natural they should want to welcome you."

"I was not at Festubert."

"I'm sorry. Of course, the chances were that it was another fellow of the same name—perhaps a relation."

"I had no relations in that battle. My father was killed elsewhere."

"Well, it doesn't matter. You're welcome, all the same. And you might run up against some one." He paused without knowing why. Harding had turned away from him and the profile, which Earnshaw saw for the first time, was somewhat unexpected. It was not what the full face had promised. It was dogged, but not obstinate. The lines of the short nose and full, sensitive mouth were idealistic rather than brutal. The height of the brow lent the whole head a certain majesty. It was as though Earnshaw saw the man from a new standpoint. And yet his dislike never wavered. "Do you know—I have an idea we've met before," he went on abruptly. "You look as though you knew me, but one ran across such a crowd of people in the old days, and I've got a brute of a memory——"

"I don't think we've met before, Mr. Earnshaw."

"Well, anyhow, we wish you'd both come."

It was then he noticed the hands clenched on the top bar of the gate. They were white, bloodless with the savageness of their grip.

"I wish to God you would leave me alone," Harding ground out. "I came here to be alone."

Earnshaw's anger caught fire. He answered hotly:

"I suppose Mrs. Harding can come if she chooses?"

He had thought of her all the time. He had not looked at her. Deliberately he had kept his eyes from hers. But he felt her standing there—aloof, and grave, as though all this had been foreseen.

"Mrs. Harding does as she chooses, of course."

She did something then that Earnshaw knew by instinct she had never done before. She came and laid her slim, brown hand on the man's big white one.

"Mr. Harding and I stick together," she said with a proud, unsteady smile.

"Perhaps your friends——"

It was Peter Harding who answered.

"We have no friends. The people you see here are my patients"—his face was ugly at that moment—"my experiments."

"I beg your pardon—is it Dr. Harding, then?"

"No, not Dr. Harding."

A minute later it was over. They had parted, they scarcely knew how, with the barest formality, and Earnshaw was striding fiercely away into the gloom. He was not conscious now of fatigue. He blazed with anger—with an unformed, yet increasing pity. All that was chivalrous in him had risen in arms. And he hated. For the first time in his life he hated bitterly.

Genifer kept to his side. She did not speak, and he was grateful for her silence.

It was night when they reached the vicarage. The study windows shone warmly, seeking the darkness for them like two friendly eyes. Their reflection lit up the emerald lawn with its quaint, sporadic bursts of flower-bed and the red, martial fuschia. Genifer and her companion stood still for a moment. The silence between them had lasted too long. It had become painful.

"There's tragedy of some sort at Lone Point, Keith."

"I know. One seems to breathe it. Poor girl!"

"I was thinking of him."

He laughed shortly.

"That Kaffir!"

He went on, stifling a rush of that uncontrollable dislike which we sometimes feel for those whom we love best.

CHAPTER III

THE Rev. Felix Bayard came in late for a lunch and in a state of mind which the Apron described aptly but disrespectfully as "a bit off." That is to say, he was not actually boiling. He simmered, giving vent to occasional harmless puffs of steam which relieved him and hurt no one.

A good many things had occurred to upset him. There was Roads End to begin with. When Roads End held its yearly orgy there was always feud and usually bloodshed. For Roads End was not a garden suburb. There was nothing heavenly or even particularly elevated about it. If it had a soul, it was blissfully unconscious of the fact. It had no Browning Society or Mutual Improvement League. The inmates did not all love each other. From time to time unpleasantnesses occurred, when the whole community had to be called in to restore order. In a word, though it was a little world to itself, it bore the big outside world a strong family resemblance.

"Human nature is really an extraordinary business," the vicar soliloquised over his cold chop. "Now there's Tibbs and Polglase—young Polglase, of course. I have it from a witness that, when they were both wounded in the same scrap, Tibbs refused to be carried off the field until they could take his pal with him. It was the stretcher-bearer who told me—half an hour afterwards, so he had no time to embellish—and he said Tibbs's language was the most blood-curdling thing he'd heard. And now"—the vicar pointed his fork at Earnshaw as though to prod his attention—"now, just because Polglase's mongrel has eaten Tibbs's chicken and Polglase won't own to it, they're not on speaking terms. It would be bad enough at any time, but now it's heart-breaking. They both have angelic voices, and I'd counted on them for a duet at the 'chantong,' as they call it. In fact, I've had a dreadful time of it with them both. Then there's Eastman. Stood

up to his neck in water for five days and came out smiling. Now his roof leaks and you'd think he was going to die of ten separate diseases in a week. What do you make of it, Keith ?"

Earnshaw knocked out the contents of his briar on to the fender.

"Looks as though most heroes were mortals," he suggested.

"Or most mortals heroes," improved the vicar, brightening suddenly.

"Are you going to eat your chop or can I clear it away ?" the Apron inquired.

The vicar intimated that it could be cleared away without any loss to himself.

"I don't know what portion of what animal a chop is," he said, "but I can affirm that yesterday it was gambolling in Stevens's meadow. Maggie, tell Stevens—or his wife, for I don't imagine Stevens counts for much—that if she doesn't hang her meat longer I'll hang her or him or somebody without scruple."

"I wouldn't lower myself to speak to 'er," the Apron declared decisively.

"Eh ?"

"No, I wouldn't. A nasty, back-bitin', swolien' 'eaded 'ussy. No lady. That's wot I told 'er to 'er face. When it comes to callin' names," concluded the Apron with sombre triumph, "I can 'old me own with anything that breathes."

The vicar held up his hands.

"Another feud! Now we shall get no meat until I've apologised. Upon my word, everybody seems to be in somebody else's hair. Which reminds me—there was a brawl outside the Green Man last night, Keith."

Earnshaw waved aside the drowsy smoke with which he had enveloped himself.

"That's something new, isn't it ?"

"Yes, it is. And I won't have it. It's all very well—our people take a drop too much by accident, as it were, and there's no harm done. But this fellow—a regular drunken rowdy—a stranger, of course—somebody from Lone Point, they told me."

"If it's one of Harding's guests I can believe anything," Earnshaw interrupted, and his lazy, contented drawl sharpened. "I don't know Mr. Harding's business

here," he added grimly, "but I thoroughly disapprove of it."

Bayard forgot to finish his lunch, burrowed in his pocket for his own disreputable pipe, and mutely indicated a desire for matches.

"Well, I don't know—I've nothing against the fellow. He's queer, but then most of us are queer: only, as we're usually queer in batches, it doesn't show up much. I've not met him and I don't wish to meet him. He doesn't worry me on Sundays, so that's one point in his favour. And his wife——" The vicar stopped puffing, and fell into a dreamy reminiscence. "Keith, dear fellow, I sometimes feel that a poet was lost in me. I have such an extraordinary sensitive soul where beauty is concerned. I saw Mrs. Harding half an hour ago. She was swimming across Wrecker's Cove—you know what a current there is there, and a strong sea running too—swimming like a young lioness. (Do lionesses swim, I wonder?) When she got to my side she climbed up on to the rocks and stood there in the sun with her arms stretched above her head gazing out to sea like some triumphant young Naiad. Afterwards—when she'd dived in again—it occurred to me that I shouldn't have watched, but really it was so charming—Aphrodite arising from the waves—or was it Venus, Keith?"

"Both, I think, sir."

"Thank you. There is so little of that sort of thing in my business, Keith, that one forgets one's classical allusions. Anyway, it was quite beautiful. 'We praise thee, O Lord!' I said to myself. Because it always seems to me that a healthy, beautiful body is as much a glorification of God as a healthy, beautiful soul, don't you?"

"Yes, I do." Earnshaw got up. "And I have an idea that Mrs. Harding has both," he said, with a little catch in his breath.

"H'm—I dare say. The one thing often leads to the other." Suddenly the vicar remembered his former indignation. "But I won't have brawling," he blazed, rumpling his white hair with both hands. "I won't have any London Jackanapes turning my public-house into a drinking hell. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall go to Mr. Harding and tell him what I think of the whole business."

"Then take Maggie with you," Earnshaw suggested

with a chuckle. "She's worth two of us at that game, sir." He strolled to the open window. "I think I'll just fetch Genifer for a swim before tea," he added casually. "Talking of it is like talking of water to a man with a desert thirst. Coming too, sir ?"

"What, with an infernal sermon ahead of me? Go away, Satan!"

Earnshaw went. He found Genifer in the kitchen garden, her sleeves rolled up from the strong arms, her face flushed and hot with exertion, an hysterically enraged hen gurgling and fluttering between her hands.

"Suspected case of diphtheria. No, Keith, I'm afraid it's no go. Business first. But I'll meet you, honour bright."

"Mind you do, then! I hate being neglected like this."

Her good-humoured brown eyes flashed over him.

"You're a baby, dear, and I won't encourage you."

So, with a towel wound round his neck and a cheerful whistle on his lips, he set off alone. There was a strong wind off the land, an east wind that sent the rain and the clouds scudding away beyond the horizon and whipped the smooth surface of the sea into legions of horses that pranced and raced over their green course and leapt the hidden barriers of rock with a splendid toss of their long white manes. The sky sparkled like a dome of crystal, and the wind was like new wine, sweet and strong and intoxicating.

There was no place along that stretch of rugged coast that Earnshaw did not know by heart. He knew each cove, each bay, and all their treacheries. He knew where the deadly currents lurked, waiting to suck their victims out beyond hope of help; he knew the caves with their fairy colours, and mysterious pools which no man had ever fathomed; in the dark he could find and skirt the sinisterly gaping maws of the great blow-holes which in storm-time boiled and seethed like a witches' cauldron.

He knew that, of all, Wrecker's Cove was the most treacherous.

Yet he chose it deliberately. He swam it as she had done, feeling the devilish suck of the tide on his limbs, thinking of the woman who had fought her way across, and wondering at her strength and courage. Afterwards he stood where the waves broke. He let the great walls of shining water break over him, bear him down, and cast

him out on to the yellow sand. Or he held his ground and laughed their strength to scorn.

"Come on, you!" he shouted at them. "Send your biggest, and let's see who's the better man!"

He felt like a boy—like a young god. For there is no prouder happiness on earth than to stand in the sun and wind—where the water breaks, to face the onrush, and leap upon its back and ride magnificently, to battle through and feel life and health blaze up under the stinging blows. Some such exultation of struggle must Jacob have felt when he wrestled with God and did prevail.

Earnshaw looked back on the self that had cringed and broken before an imagined danger with a kind of wonder. He was different now. Youth had been given back to him. He dressed quickly and then sought out the place which had seen his failure, the self-same ledge. He looked up at the jagged wall of the precipice and found that it had no menace for him. It shone with rainbow colours in the golden sunshine.

And in a minute, easily, like an athlete, he swung himself up over the thwarting boss of rock where he had clung in the agony of death, up into safety.

He did not know whether or not he had expected to find her there. He was not conscious of having thought about it at all. Yet he felt no surprise, no definite emotion. Only, in a minute, his restless desire for action had gone. He was peacefully content, and a little weary, like a man who has travelled a long way and come to his journey's end.

"Were you so sure I should be there to pull you up?" she asked wickedly.

"I didn't think you'd be there."

"Then wasn't it rather foolish?"

"Not a bit." She made room for him, but he remained where he was, his feet dangling over the edge. "That's the way one has to beat funk," he explained.

"Oh, but it wasn't funk!"

"Yes it was. There are all sorts of names and excuses for the thing. You and your friends and relations call it 'nerves,' or extreme sensibility, and as long as you damage no one but yourself other people will swallow it all right. But if you fail to jump after a drowning septuagenarian or refuse to fling yourself in front of a run-away steam roller—why, then, it's funk pure and simple. Anyhow,

there's not much to choose between the two forms. They melt into each other."

"There are very few people who aren't afraid," she said.

"The best *are* afraid, I know—I've seen an awful lot of that sort of thing——" He paused stupidly. Afterwards he remembered that moment under her eyes as something wonderful and tenderly laughable. She was so serious, so honest, for all her glowing womanhood so much a child. He thought involuntarily of a ten-year-old boy to whom he had once told his soldier's adventures. Then he had seen the same look. The boy had hung on his words. The eyes had never left his face. But they did not see the ugliness, the scars and withered muscles, but only the splendour and valour which they stood for.

"There's only one cure for funk," Earnshaw blundered on, and he felt how the hot blood flooded his poor face. "If you jib at a water-jump you've got to take yourself by the scruff of the neck, and drag yourself back to it, time after time, until you can go over without a flinch. If you shirk you're lost. The day will come when you'll do something really low-down. One cowardice begets another. It's like a law of nature."

"Is that why you climbed up here?"

"Yes."

She nodded seriously, but for a moment he seemed to have passed out of her thoughts. The clear grey eyes released him and gazed intently out to sea as though some strange pageant passed over the horizon. Her red-brown hair hung loose. It was almost dry now, and the wind caught it and blew it back against the rock, where it spread out like a shining aureole. Her bare, sunburnt arms were clasped about her knees, and the stockingless feet, sunburnt too, and slender and beautiful as a Diana's, peeped out from under the worn tweed skirt. Earnshaw studied her shyly. He thought how fine was the carriage of the head on that young neck. And the velvet skin, brown and smooth as a healthy child's, with just that lovable whiteness above the black, arched brows!

"If I were a painter I should paint you as you are now," he thought to himself—"and I should call it 'Life.'"

And then he saw her towel and bathing-dress spread out to dry, and had the grace to laugh. She turned at once, smiling in ready sympathy.

"It was only a silly fancy," he explained—"one of those

things that make you thankful that there's not more thought-reading than there is. I was really thinking of something quite different. It's been in my mind for some days, though it didn't occur to me when it should have done. Do you know you risked your life that time you hiked me up? I might have remained brainless and held on and pulled you over."

"Yes, that did occur to me," she said quite simply.

"And yet you—you went ahead?"

"Why, of course."

"I don't see any 'of course' about it," he objected. "People don't go about risking their lives for total strangers——"

"How can *you* say that?" she flamed up.

"Oh, I know—in war—yes——"

"No—no, in peace!" The red blood glowed under the tan. A fine enthusiasm quivered at the corners of the curved mouth. And yet she spoke with restraint—a certain dignity of knowledge. "Every day it is done, Mr. Earnshaw—surely you know that—people giving their lives for total strangers—not dying, perhaps, but sacrificing health and happiness and love. Don't you think well enough of humanity to believe that?"

She was like a fire at which a man might kindle his faith—his rarest dream.

"God knows I do," Earnshaw answered back. He trembled a little. She was so living, so vivid. The veneer of good-humoured cynicism under which men bury their youth's vaulting beliefs and hopes melted before her. "One says such silly things, out of sheer habit," he muttered incoherently.

They were silent for a time, not looking at each other, both a little moved, they did not quite know why. It was as though their generalities covered something intimate and personal. Presently she leant forward and her hand touched his arm.

"Please don't sit there. It looks so dangerous!"

"What's it matter?" he answered, childishly eager to be reassured.

"That's foolish. Besides, I don't make a hobby of rescuing stranded youths. And, if you do as I ask, I'll show you something."

He scrambled immediately to her side and she mutely enjoined caution.

"Now lie flat on your tummy and look over!"

He obeyed again.

"I don't see anything," he grumbled.

"Yes, you do. On that ledge there—allow me to introduce you—Mr. Earnshaw—Mrs. Cormorant and family—at least we hope so."

It was a precarious ledge—so narrow and slanting that, as Earnshaw remarked, no intelligent parent not intent on infanticide could have chosen such a spot.

"That's all you know," she retorted. "The wind never gets to that corner. If *you* chose the site you'd be blown into the sea in the first gale. Now, look—this is an object-lesson for you!"

At that moment the long black neck which Earnshaw could just distinguish rising out of the rough nest developed a body. There was a flutter of wings, and another ebony personage whom Lillah Harding presented as Mr. Cormorant arrived from nowhere in particular and perched himself apparently on nothing. Then there was a pause in the proceedings. If there was any communication between husband and wife it entirely escaped their observers, and yet evidently some sort of agreement had been arrived at, for Mrs. Cormorant arose with dignity, stalked forth, and, having surveyed the prospect with an air of tranquil consideration, swung herself into space. Whereat her husband graciously and, as a matter of course, assumed her responsibilities.

"You see—the matrimonial ideal," Lillah Harding whispered rather breathlessly, for their position made conversation difficult. "Share and share alike, and no prejudice."

"I've taken it to heart, never fear," Earnshaw laughed, and righted himself. "Where's she gone, do you suppose?"

"I don't profess to know. It may be she's off to get her lunch or she may be calling on a neighbour. Anyhow, she won't be back for an hour or more."

"Good for her. I'll tell Genifer that I'm attending a sort of school for husbands. It'll cheer her up no end."

"I suppose——" she hesitated, overtaken by a sudden shyness. "I suppose you'll be married soon, won't you?"

"Oh, yes—as soon as we can get a roof to cover our heads. It's rather a difficult business round here. You see, we'd counted on Lone Point. We never thought anybody

would have the nerve to face Red Rover on his midnight prowls."

She turned impulsively.

"Then you must hate us!"

"Hate you!" he did not know quite what hot denial rushed to his lips. Instinctively he held back and added simply: "We're not so silly and unjust. Besides—it must be difficult to hate you."

"A grea many people hate us," she answered. A faint severity hardened her eyes. She had thrust aside his honest praise of her, and in a flash of memory he saw her go up to her husband and lay her hand on his. He knew that she had meant him to remember and for a moment he was sore and hurt as an unjustly rebuffed child. And then she went on gently, with a healing warmth and kindness in her low voice. "You will be very happy, Mr. Earnshaw. There are some people who radiate strength and help and goodness of heart, aren't there? They laugh with us, they make the worst that happens to be bearable, and even fine; they sweep away our sordid little bothers with their big broom. They go all the way with us. Miss Bayard is like that."

He looked at her wonderingly, touched and pleased and vaguely sad.

"She's all that and more, Mrs. Harding. I have good reason to know. But you've only seen her once—twice at most."

"That doesn't matter. You see, I'm like an omnivorous book-worm who only gets a book now and then to devour. People are my books. I see very few of them—and I've learnt to read quickly—when it's a good book—greedily."

"That sounds so—so lonely," he ventured.

She shook her head, smiling.

"Oh no, but I am not lonely. Are you lonely here?"

"No." He thought for a moment. "I suppose if one is with the person one loves, a desert island is populous enough."

"Yes, I suppose so."

She was looking out to sea again, not sadly, but with the rather wistful questioning of a child.

And in an instant the chill that had gathered about Earnshaw's heart had melted. He made an eager gesture of appeal.

"But this isn't a desert island, Mrs. Harding. You

mustn't treat it as such. It's a little world to itself, and you can't hold aloof from us—not when we want you so much. Won't you come to-night? The fellows will be so proud and pleased—and Genifer and the vicar and I"—he faltered and added hurriedly—"It will do you good to see them, Mrs. Harding. If men and women are books to you, then it will read to you like a glorious little epic."

"I know." She got up suddenly and stood, tall and straight, against the rock. "I know. But I can't come. Not to-night. One day things may be different." She held out her hand. "And yet I'm glad you've asked me. I feel now you're not angry."

"Good friends aren't angry with each other," he answered boldly. "And we are friends." He paid no heed to her gravity. He held her hand warmly and firmly in his. "That's settled then. Do come with me now. Genifer is waiting for me somewhere on the cliffs, and we'll ratify our treaty."

But she drew back.

"No—I want to stay here. My husband returns from town to-night, and when it is dusk I shall go and meet him."

"Alone? I wish you wouldn't. Even natives who know every line and trick of the coast have lost their lives at night."

"I am not afraid," she interrupted almost sternly.

"That means good-bye!" he retorted, laughing and unabashed. "Well—for to-day, then!"

So he returned as he had come, alone. But on the headland Genifer waited for him—big Genifer, who looked so small and solitary against the great, wind-swept sky. He went up to her noiselessly and put his arm over her shoulder and kissed her. The blood still sang in his veins. He felt amazingly, madly young. She looked round at him with a tender amusement, and, as though she had spoken, he nodded and rubbed his cool cheek against hers.

"Eh, it's fine to be alive, Jenny! Isn't it splendid—all this sea and wind and sun? It's strong and healthy and good. Do you know—I've never told you before—but until to-day I've been sort of dead—as though something in me had been stunned—killed even. But to-day it's alive again. I can see things as they are—not grey and dead—but full of colour and living. I'm part of them—

I'm not a miserable ghost standing on one side any more. I belong. I've come back. . . ."

"As I knew you would one day," she interrupted gravely. Something in her voice made him falter in his egotistical confession.

"Aren't you happy, Genifer?"

"Dear—very, very happy. I think I shall always be able to laugh when you laugh, Keith." Then in her old, vigorous, unsentimental way she drew his arm through hers. "And now—having kept me waiting for an hour—perhaps you'll let me have my tea."

CHAPTER IV

IT was an ugly thing to have happened. The little manager, who did not look in the least like a manager, being addicted neither to large cigars, diamond rings, nor shiny top-hats, felt not merely perturbed but aggrieved. He considered that she might have "kept the colours flying," as he expressed it, for another five minutes, in which case, had she collapsed behind the scenes, on the street, anywhere in fact but in the very midst of the Beauty Chorus, at its most overwhelmingly beautiful and seductive moment, he would have been full of sympathy. For he was a good sort, a family man with a suburban reputation, a kind heart, a home-temper which might have belonged to a tame mouse, and was only transformed into frightfulness within the precincts of the Chester Music Hall, and then only under provocation.

But this was provocation.

"Haven't I always done the decent by you?" he demanded pathetically and for about the fourth time in five minutes. "Haven't I kept you on when every other self-respecting boss would have dropped you overboard without a twinge? 'Aven't you 'ad nights off when I've 'ad to stick the old grandmother in front, though what she looked like 'Eaven only knows." In moments of intense excitement his 'h's' basely deserted him. "'Aven't I let you go on when you was more like a corpse at a funeral than first girl in a Beauty Chorus? 'Aven't I, now?"

The girl, hunched up on the battered horse-hair sofa, removed her handkerchief from her lips and waved it with languid facetiousness.

"You 'ave, Claude, you 'ave. Real 'eavy father, that's wot you're to this angel child. . . ."

"And look how you've rounded on me!"

"I 'aven't rounded on you. Bless the man! Do you think I like bustin' myself publicly? Do you think it's

funny, bumping your 'ead against the footlights? No, Clifford, I went down because if it 'ad been to save the bloomin' Empire I couldn't 'ave gone another second. I 'adn't an 'igh kick left in me." She uncoiled herself, put her feet gingerly to the ground as though she were not quite sure how they would take it, and patted her disordered hair. "The truth is, uncle, it's time I 'ad my benefit and 'ooked it. Too long 'ave I cast the blight of my incomparable loveliness over my less fortunate sisters. I know 'ow you feel. It's a nasty blow for the old show; but, after all, a lady must consider her complexion, and mine's going green in this 'ere atmosphere. No, dear boy, it's no use going down on your knees. Was that fifty quid a week you whispered? If you was to make it a 'undred and a dook thrown in I wouldn't look at it." She got up, swaying unsteadily, and held out a thin hand. "So long, old chap. Don't take it so 'ard. You've been a real sport, and when I'm doin' jigs to the angels I'll put in a good word for you—straight, I will." For an instant the flow of irresponsible chatter failed her. She looked vaguely round the shabby green room, finally discovered the large be-flowered hat on the table, and jammed it on her head. She coughed a little and cursed eloquently.

The little manager sighed.

"I had great hopes of you, Cissie," he said. "Great hopes. You've got the right stuff in you. It's your health that's wrong."

"There's a fly in everybody's pint of milk," she interrupted. She recovered her breath, and with a little swagger she strolled across to the door. On the way she passed him and patted him on his bald head. "Don't you let your wife see you've been cryin', Albert," she recommended pertly. "She'll want to know why, and it might be awkward. So long!"

"Where are you off to?"

She made him a bob curtsy.

"To the family estate, dear boy—six foot by two and no taxes."

"Damn you! Don't be so nasty. It's not as bad as that. Here, have—'ave you got any money?"

"Rolling in it, Cuthbert. Even with *my* hexpensive tastes it 'as been impossible for me to dissipate my trooly tre-mendous salary." She cut short his stuttering, shame-faced offer with a laugh. "Oh go hon, Johnnie, don't be an ass."

But from the half closed door she glanced back at him. "I always did say you was a rotten bad manager," she remarked indistinctly. "Too much soul or something. Ought to 'ave gone into the Church. But you're a gent, and I'm sorry to leave the old show, and—and—oh well, love to the girls."

She went out, slamming the door violently.

It was only after she had walked an interminable distance that she realised that the little man had not been quite so soulful as she had supposed. He did, as a matter of fact, owe her a week's salary. But she was too tired to go back for it. She was too tired to think, too tired to sit down, too tired to want. All that she could do was to go on and on relentlessly, and hope for some blind power to come and strike her down and put an end to her. She jostled people and was jostled. Somebody whose face she did not see loudly suspected her of being drunk, a suspicion which struck her as being extremely funny. She would have liked to answer back, but nothing suitable occurred to her, and it was impossible to stand still. If she stood still the spell which kept her going would be broken, and there would be another "scene." She was vaguely of an opinion that one scene an evening was enough. To faint in the midst of a Beauty Chorus savours of romance; to faint in the streets suggests crowds, policemen, stretchers, hospitals, and the horrors generally.

So she kept on.

It was ten o'clock. The Beauty Chorus came on early, and she had disgraced herself almost at once. The streets surged with people who had apparently no other object in life except to bump against her and throw her out of her course. And every time they bumped she righted herself with greater difficulty, like a water-logged ship in a heavy sea.

In fact, the spell was breaking. Presently it broke altogether, and she came to anchor against a lamp-post. It was not romantic, but she was past finding any humour in the situation. She had an indistinct vision of something large and shadowy which loomed over her—a policeman, she supposed.

"After all, they 'ave their uses," she considered apathetically, and waited for the marching orders which must lead at once to the vulgar climax. But nothing happened. The shadow addressed her, and, though she could not

what it said, the tone was so unexpected that she recovered a little. For a moment she stared up uncomprehendingly, painfully puzzled, then she gasped:

"Lor!" she said. "Lor, if it ain't Albert Edward!"

He nodded, but apparently he had said all he meant to say. He took her by the arm, and, without a word, escorted her across the road and into a cheap Italian restaurant. Even then he maintained silence. He did not ask whether she wanted anything to eat or what she would have. He ignored her and gave his orders. Among other things a large bottle of red wine was set before them and his first obvious acknowledgment of her presence was to keep her full glass out of reach until the third course was passed. She was inclined to resent his interference, but an insidious warmth and comfort, a genial sense of well-being had begun to steal over her, and she looked across at him with a shy, friendly grin.

"Fancy your remembering me, Cully!"

"You're connected in my mind with the best cup of coffee I've had in this country," he explained. "I couldn't forget you."

"Whenever I've thought of you I've thought of corpses," she retorted.

He laughed.

"How jolly! I hope you didn't think of me often. Have another cutlet?"

"Don't mind if I do. Lor', but it's good to feel you've got a waistbelt again." She ate hungrily for a minute or two. But the first savageness of her need had passed, and between mouthfuls she considered him gravely. "Seven years, Albert, and what a seven years! Like a nasty dream, eh?"

"Yes. Have I changed much?"

She thought a moment.

"You 'ave and you 'aven't. You look like you did that morning—but not like you did when I first set eyes on you. *Then* you was just a boy—and a cool one at that."

"And now I'm old, eh?"

"Not old—but you've 'ad a bad time, 'aven't you? like the rest of us. *That* don't make a man old, but it makes 'im different."

"I see." He filled up her glass. "You were always a bit of a philosopher, Cissie. You've been up against it too. You're different."

"Oh, I know—ugly as sin. And you should 'ear me cough! Consumption—that's my ticket." She said it with a kind of grim complacency. "'Consumption!' says I to the Doctor, 'Consumption of what?' 'Lungs,' says 'e. 'Oh,' says I. 'I thought you meant I'd been 'avin' too much to eat.' And he never even saw the joke. Fat 'ead, 'e was."

Harding seemed not to have heard. He was looking at her intently. Under the lamp light her face had been scarcely human in its appalling pallor, out of which the painted lips had shone like a wound. It had seemed a grotesque mask of tragedy. Now a hesitating colour was in her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled. Presently the colour and light would be feverish, but for the moment she wore a deceptive air of health.

"It was a good joke," Harding said absent-mindedly, "and the doctor was certainly a fool. You've been half-starved."

"That's it, 'Enry. A dancer 'as to 'ave 'er vittles. And in those days I couldn't 'ave 'em. Every mortal thing three times wot it was except my screw. Well, it's done now, I might have 'ad a solo and I've got the boot. No use whining—'ere's to you, dear boy." They chinked glasses and she drank with a luxurious pleasure and smacked her lips. "I did think of you a lot," she began again unexpectedly. "Thinking of corpses did it, I suppose. Every time I saw the casualty lists I thought, 'Well, I wonder if Albert Edward's passed in his checks this time.' But I never found you."

"I wasn't there" he said.

"Came through all neat and tidy like, eh?"

"I wasn't there at all." He leant forward, his arms on the table, his penetrating eyes on hers. He was very cool, and yet a little excited, like a man watching an experiment. "I skipped over to America—just in time."

They remained watching each other for a full minute. The girl did not flinch under his merciless, cynical stare. But she herself changed. The reckless good-humour passed into gravity—sadness even. She could play the mountebank finely in the face of her own life and death, but this was different. It was something bigger than herself. It enveloped her with a kind of dignity.

"Well—my boy went," she said at last. "'E wouldn't 'ave 'ad me if 'e 'adn't. Not that I judge no one. But

I couldn't live with a fellow I couldn't understand, and I couldn't 'ave understood 'im if 'e'd 'ung back. But he went all right. Poor devil—and 'e didn't get me neither. 'E was killed in 'is first day." She had made a little bread pellet and now she flicked it nervously across the table. "But I don't judge no one. It ain't my business. If we was a bit less conscientious about other folks' souls, there'd be a sight less trouble in this world, I reckon."

"Then you don't judge me?"

"No, I don't. You know best what you've done."

"Yes, by God, I do."

He drew his breath sharply between his teeth and sat back. He had not touched his wine, and yet for a minute he looked like a man who has drunk heavily. His face had flushed to the fair, disordered hair. His eyes were too bright, the light in them almost red—and his hand shook. It was only for a minute. The deadly precision and power which had made him seem so old, so passionless, had loosed its grip and suddenly he was young, vulnerable, queerly, terribly vulnerable.

But she did not look at him.

The waiter had brou ht the sweets and she turned her attention to them with an unabated good-will.

"Well, I did think I was fit to bust," she remarked, "but it's a queer thing, Erb—you can blow yourself out with a porter steak or anything else you fancy, but there's always a corner for an ice or a chocolate cream. Ever noticed it?"

"No," he said. "No, never."

She looked up at him queerly.

"Remember that novel you was going to finish?"

"Novel?" He stared stupidly, and then nodded with sudden recollection. "Yes, I remember."

"Did you finish it?"

"I've been working at it."

"All this time?"

"Yes."

"Was it that you were doing, instead of——?"

He nodded.

"Yes."

"Queer. I wonder—was it worth all that."

"Yes."

He was himself again—the indomitable, invulnerable self. The monosyllables came like sharp blows.

"Well, every one 'is fancy." She put her hat straight, tilted her glass over her short, pretty nose so that no drop should escape her, and got up. "I've 'ad a rare feast, Albert Edward. A fairy in a pantomime couldn't have done me 'ansomer. I reckon I had a foot and three toes in the grave when you came along, and now I believe I could kick your hat off the rack without a squirm. Thank you, dear boy. Send me a copy of your novel when it comes along. Park Lane 'll always find me."

"Wait a minute!" His tone was so peremptory that she sat down again, staring at him. "You said just now you had one foot in the grave. It's true, you know."

"Lor! Albert, bit straight-to-the-point-like, aren't you?"

"Never mind that. You've got pluck enough. Besides, I'm going to save you—pull you right out of the grave—set you on your feet again, well and strong, so that you can dance your solo-dance till you're too old."

"Say, Johnny, are you a doctor?"

"No, I'm not. I'm a quack—a liar—a humbug. Ask any one who knows and that's what they'll tell you. But I can and will cure you—not a patched-up business, so that you'll crack up at the first east wind—the real thing, Cissie."

She gaped at him, fascinated. It was not so much his words as the man himself that fascinated her. His hands lay clenched on the table, and glancing at them she thrilled. They were so strong—so living. She felt that if she had touched them at that moment they would have poured their strength into her. But, like a true Cockney, she expressed her feeling by a little sceptical giggle.

"You don't promise much, do you, dear boy? Queer now—I can remember your father went on just like that. I took 'im 'is breakfast sometimes, and 'e used to talk for as long as I'd let 'im—all about 'ow 'e was goin' to save the world—'undreds and thousands of people wot would 'ave to die if 'e didn't—and their kids—Lor', a bit wobbly in his 'ead, 'e was."

"He was right." The man's low voice crushed her flippant chatter into silence. "He could have done it. He knew that he could do it. And he had to die himself. The men who should have stood by him saw to that. They drove him from his profession, persecuted him with their damnable laughter, sent him into poverty—because

he had made mistakes—trampled on their silly prejudices—wouldn't speak their Shibboleths. You know how he died. You know what he left me——"

A light of comprehension dawned on her face.

"The book, d'you mean?"

"Yes."

"'Ave you finished it?"

"Yes—I've finished it."

Her mind was so constructed that her first definite thought concerned his appearance. "Really fine," she thought him just then—not handsome, but fine. He overawed her. She liked it—not because of any Victorian humility, but because she was ill and sick people crave for strength in others as a drunkard craves for stimulants. The next minute her shrewdness was awake and busy.

"Seems to me if I thought it all over for a day or two I might begin to understand a bit," she reflected. "I might begin to understand *you*, Albert Edward."

He took no notice of her. He was busy writing on an envelope which he subsequently stuffed with a banknote and pushed across the table.

"There, that'll tell you what to do. I'll meet you at the station. Damn the money, girl. You can pay me back when you're Prima Ballerina at the Empire."

She grinned at him.

"This comes of 'avin' been to America, I suppose. 'Ustle, they call it, don't they?"

"I believe so."

"Supposin'—supposin'——" The wistfulness of her white face betrayed how deeply hope had stirred beneath her assumption of indifference. "Supposin' it don't come off, Johnny—supposin' it's all a mistake——"

He looked at her. He was quite motionless for a moment.

"It will come off. It must. It's impossible that——" He got up hurriedly. It was as though he threw off a cold, arresting hand and pushed on again. "There, get home as quick as you can. And to-morrow buy yourself warm clothes. You'll need them. You'll be turned out all weathers."

"And chaperones, Charley?" She peeped up at him from under the wide, flopping hat. Her eyes were malicious. "I 'opes you're providing plenty of them. I remembers 'ow worry particular you was on hetiquette."

"I'm married," he explained briefly.

"Lor'—married—! You never mentioned it."
"I never thought about it."
"Well—you are a queer bird, and no error."
They were out in the street again. A little awkwardness descended upon them—the difficult finding of the last word which haunts most leave-takings. She looked up at him. "But I like you," she said. "I don't believe you're a rotter. And you're good to a fellow wot's down on 'is luck. Good-bye, Albert Ed. You can——"
"I can what?"
Her half averted face was wry with pain.
"I was goin' to say you can kiss me if you like to. I'd forgot—I ain't wot I was—nobody wants to kiss a fright. So long, old chap."
Suddenly he bent down. His lips touched her cheek.
"In six months you'll have all the stalls on their knees for a smile," he said, and laughed. "Good night, Miss de Vauncourt."
He lifted his hat. But long after he had disappeared she stood there staring alternately after him and at the envelope in her hand. And all at once to her own utter amazement and disgust, she began to cry.

II

The spark gleamed for a moment longer on the black shore of the horizon, and then was gone. Suddenly night came. For a long time it had waited, brooding amidst its eastern legions, and now, as though at a signal, it strode victoriously down the hills to the water's edge and up the shimmering path of light which had led to the world's end, blotting out the gold with its sable footsteps.
A chill breath came over the sea. It blew against the clouds which had hung like quaintly shaped Chinese lanterns from a dome of amber and jade and rose. They, too, faded and went out. The dome grew loftier: its apex lost itself in a mist of violet. Where the lanterns had hung there were now candles, lit slowly one by one as though by some shadowy old verger, wandering through a vast cathedral at evensong.
Harding stood on the hill-crest looking seawards. The roar of traffic, the monotonous jar and rumble of the long journey which had walled him in, guarding him from himself, melted like a far-off, tumultuous dream. It was

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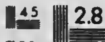

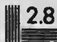

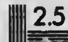

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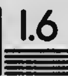

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so still that he could hear the grass rustle in the little sighs of wind, and the whirr of a bird, rising suddenly from its nest, sounded loud and mysterious. The deep primeval voice of the sea sang broodingly to the night. It was part of the stillness—the dark background on which was painted every stir and whisper.

The last gleam of daylight had gone, yet the broad outline of things remained visible. For the darkness had its own radiance. It threw a luminous purple veil over sea and sky and land, and where the giant rocks towered up the purple deepened, and the sea, darkest of all and flecked with dancing phosphorescent ghosts, merged softly into the pale amethyst of the shore.

Away to the north a red eye kept watch. It winked monotonously, and its ceaseless, whirling movement was garish and unreal in the solemn hush. But there was no sleep anywhere. The dreams that hung in the stillness were waking dreams of that which was coming from the nethermost ends of the earth. The long grasses and the lights in the high dome quivered with them.

Something living came up from behind the blurred line of the cliff. It moved quickly and soundlessly, like a wraith blown before the wind. Only when it was quite close to him the man gazing absently seawards turned and saw and recognised the face shining white and transparent out of a cloud of hair.

"Lillah!" he muttered under his breath.

He had not expected her, not thought of her. Her reality in this shadowy world startled him into the rare use of her name. She had not heard him. She looked up at him. Her eyes were too dark to read. "I meant to come and meet you," she said, "but I fell asleep on the rocks. I was just going home. I—I did not think you would come down here."

"It was a sudden fancy," he explained. His gaze had gone back to the sea. "I have never been here before."

"I know. I have often wondered. You didn't seem to care——"

"I have had no time to care. To-night I was very tired. I felt it would do me good—I don't know why."

She nodded grave understanding.

"I think, for us, it is like a place of miracles. If we were very ill it could make us well—in our souls, at least."

"Who do you mean by 'we'?"

"Those who belong to it—English people." She paused and then asked shyly: "There was a god, wasn't there, who, when he touched his mother-earth, grew strong again. We—we must be like that."

He smiled faintly but did not answer, and after a moment she glanced up at him again, with a quiet interrogation. "You came here to be alone, didn't you? I didn't mean to bother you. I'll go on home."

"No, I am glad you came." He held out his hand as though to keep her back. "You don't disturb me. You are not real at all—just a kobold. I don't want to go back yet. Walk on a little with me. Surely the moon rises to-night?"

"Yes—in half an hour. Can't you feel how everything waits for her?"

"Does it? Perhaps. I have no imagination. I don't feel things."

"It's not imagination," she interrupted gently. "It's true. That's why we are both talking so quietly. We're waiting, with everything else. It's like the coming of a great queen. She has come here for thousands of years. So many of us have waited for her. That makes it more wonderful."

Her voice faded into a dreaming silence. They walked on together, and her footsteps made no sound. He did not look at her, yet he was curiously aware of her. Because she was unreal she came closer to him. He saw her more clearly than he had ever done before. He felt that the wind was in her hair and blew it back from the white, uplifted face.

And she, in her turn, wondered, because his voice had been hushed and he had been strangely gentle.

Suddenly he spoke again and with something of his old abruptness.

"You told me, the other day, that you were not lonely here. Yet you were lonely and unhappy in New York. In New York you had crowds of friends—here there is no one."

"There are so many people here that I shall never get to know them all," she answered. "In New York there were only shadows. But there are my own people—all the thousands who have lived and died here——"

"That is all fancy," he interrupted but without contempt.

"It is real to me."

They had changed their direction and were walking down the slope towards the cliff's edge.

"Where are you taking me to?" he asked.

"To the Encampment."

"What is that?"

"Old fortifications. There are others along the coast. Most of them are built facing inland. They must have been made by the invaders to protect their landing-place. But these are different. They face the sea—lines of trenches so deep and strong that the winds and rains of all these centuries have not filled them in. The men who made them were fighting for their own soil. Look!" She laid one hand on his arm and in the brightening light he could see that which she indicated—deep circular lines on the paler surface of the cliff, their sweep broken by grim gaps where the coast had cracked into a narrow, treacherous rift. "You see—the ground has gone there. We can't tell any more what it was really like. In those days the land stretched out to sea for another mile or more. We can't be sure—we only know that men fought here and gave their lives. We have found their bones and old strange weapons."

He drew her gently down beside him into the shelter of some rising ground.

"Let us stay a little. It—interests me. Do you often come here?"

"At evening—yes. Or at night when the moon rises. Then I see them—those strange men. I have grown to know their faces. They are wild and terrible—and yet—somehow I seem to have known them always—they do not frighten me."

"You child!" he said under his breath.

"Is it so childish? We don't know anything about life and death, do we? Science and religion talk but they don't really know. Each one of us has to build for himself. And I have built like the rest. And one belief I have—it is that the souls of men who have fought and given their lives for their soil come back to it. I do not know whether it is the souls themselves or only their shadows—but something of them comes back and keeps guard."

"There must be many of them," he interrupted—"whole armies."

"Yes—thousands upon thousands—but here, perhaps, there are fewest of all. There were not many battles here. It was long ago when these men fought. We shall never know their names, or those they drove back into their ships. Yet they are there still. We have forgotten, but they have never forgotten."

"Do you see them now?"

"Not now. Wait——"

Her voice passed with the last sigh of the wind. The stillness that drifted down from the stars on to sea and land deepened. The song of the sea was hushed. Then from beneath the rim of the world the light brightened —poured over. Heralds and men-at-arms, fair ladies and all the gallant show of magic chivalry rose in that silver van. They came down the glittering carpet flung across the sea for them and she whom they escorted on her long journey rose up majestically among the stars who waned before her, towards her place in the high heaven. The whole world murmured and sang of her. The wind woke from its trance and stirred among the long grasses. The water which had lain still and dark under the purple mist shimmered like a burnished coat of mail.

Lillah touched the man beside her.

"Now I see them," she said quietly. "There—in that deep ridge—they are standing close together, man by man, looking seawards——"

"There are only shadows."

"I know—perhaps—but I see their faces. At first they were very dim. But for me they have grown as distinct as yours. There is a little man amongst them—rugged and unkempt and low-browed. But he has a merry look. His eyes laugh. He must have made the others laugh with him—in those days——"

"You have been too much alone," he said roughly. "You are full of absurd fancies. . . ."

"I know. Does it matter? Does it weary you?"

"No—no. Go on—tell me what you see. It is a night for fairy-tales."

In the moonlight her face was like a cameo—clean-cut and still and beautiful.

"There is one amongst them I see most clearly of all. He stands apart. He looks towards me and I know him. He is different from the rest—bigger and stronger—less fierce. His head is noble, and his eyes burn with a kind of

vision. The others watch him. They do not understand him because he sees things that are hidden from them. He has gone on—and they know and are afraid. Once they stoned him, but now he is the hero, the priest, and the seer. He has fought in great battles and bears terrible scars. He has delivered his people, and they have given him their faith and love."

"Did they love in those days?" he asked ironically.

"Yes—love was the first thing of all. The love of men and women first, and then the love of the land where they made their homes. They fought for it and for each other and love grew as they fought. And out of love came sacrifice."

The silence widened between them. She had sunk deep in her own dreams, and the man frowning out over the black and empty earthworks did not move.

"And this priest—this hero—you said you know him. Who is he?"

His question fell like a stone in a quiet pool. She awoke with a little start.

"I cannot tell you. I only know that he was the Deliverer—the patriot. They loved him and they sang of him—long after he had become a shadow—strange songs without melody. but with a rhythm like the beat of a drum—of his great deeds and of the land itself."

She broke off. Harding's hand was on her arm. The next minute he had released her and drawn back. But minutes afterwards she felt the grip of his fingers hot on her flesh.

"What is that?"

"I don't know."

She lifted her head and listened. She heard nothing but the wind, the dark sound of the water against the base of the cliff, and then the high, long-drawn-out wail of the shingle, sucked back by the tide. Then it came to her. It was so vague that it still seemed to her as though it was the wind singing. But little by little it grew louder, detaching itself from all other sound—and she recognised men's voices blended in a plaintive chorus. She glanced down at her companion. He was lying full length, his hands interlocked beneath his head, his face-up-turned to the sky. For a minute she did not speak. She wondered if the unearthly light made her own face as white, as drawn——

"It must be the men from Roads End. It is their night; Mr. Earnshaw told me."

He did not answer.

They were quite close now, and the chorus sounded rougher. Its sadness was broken by other voices calling to one another, and there was laughter and whistling. Still the song went on. She did not know what it was—some sentimental ballad from the Halls—but here in this place, amidst these sounds and lights, it had a troubling beauty, a wistful, nameless appeal that was not its own.

They came on round the head of the cliff and up the track leading inland. For a minute they gathered round the old earthwork—dark figures, unreal and shadowy as the fancies of the woman who watched them. Two or three who carried lanterns jumped down into the trench and their lights danced like fireflies against the black walls.

She heard Earnshaw's voice.

"I believe they could have taught even us something about digging, these old fellows."

More laughter. Then on again. And now the song was a jolly march, a half-forgotten favourite of the fighting days, with every note a memory. The whistling and laughter had stopped. They sang together in a splendid swinging chorus. And so they crested the rising ground and stood for a moment against the light, then dipped beneath the sky-line and were gone.

Lillah lifted her head. Her cheeks were wet, but she did not know that she was crying. The man lying back beside her turned over, resting on his elbows, his face hidden.

"Go back!" he said, scarcely above a whisper. "Please go back—for pity's sake. I don't want you here—I want to be alone—go back——"

She rose without a word. For a second she stood straight and tall beside him, and he could hear her quick, uneven breath. She did not speak to him. She turned, and the grass rustled faintly under her feet.

He waited.

The wind rose in a little gust and for a last time the marching song came down strong and clear to the sea's edge. Then wind and song faded.

But still Peter Harding lay there, with his face in the wet grass.

CHAPTER V

I

CHANGES had come to the world, but they were disappointing changes as far as the moralist was concerned. Even the prophets felt that in some obscure way they had been cheated. The violent moral and social revolutions which they had plainly descried hovering on the horizon waiting for their moment to fling themselves in the melting-pot had faded into mist. Social conditions, indeed, had scarcely moved. Universal brotherhood was not. Men who had rubbed shoulders in the face of death went back to their old places and knew each other no more. It was not exactly that they forgot or lost the respect won in those grim days. But, for all the immensity of the disaster which they had survived, the world and time moved on callously and men perforce moved with them. There could be no standing still, no brooding over graves, no clinging to ideals and conditions that were entirely transitory and now past and done with. If half the world had been wiped out, the other half would still have had to go on with its work, its pleasure, its loving and its hating. And, for the vast majority of men and women it had been easiest to go back to the old work, the old pleasure, the old love and the old hate. It was the degree and quality of the passion that had changed—not the passion itself. Enemies and lovers had learnt each other's strength and weakness. Workers had put a price on their work and on themselves. Pleasure, always divided in its kind, had divided more sharply still, sinking on the one hand to the lowest, coarsest frivolity, rising on the other to an æsthetic Renaissance of the arts. In both cases the supply coincided exactly with the demand.

The best categorical statement that the theorists could make concerning the change was that fundamentally there was no change at all. Men and conditions had merely developed rapidly on their own lines; cads, wasters, and

fools, after their hour of heroism, had come back to themselves to find their little stock of good exhausted and the abyss right at their feet. Silly, parasitical women, having made ammunition, went back to their so-called femininity and any fool anxious to be preyed on with a redoubled zest. Free women held together, and to their freedom, and the future. The truly noble, and those whose good had lain latent under adverse circumstance or superficial weakness, came back better and stronger. Great artists, musicians, poets, and those who loved them, had a new vision and a new song and a purer love, and those who had so cunningly feigned greatness and love came back naked to oblivion or shameless indifference. Of such it was said carelessly that they had changed. In reality they were merely themselves, stripped of disguise.

It was disappointing, and it damped the eloquence of bishops who had prophesied a world of Sauls.

There were exceptions—or at least apparent exceptions—though they too may have followed a secret path of logical development. And even as exceptions they were not satisfactory. Some of the Sauls took wrong turnings. The kind, good-natured, open-handed fellow returned hard, embittered and miserly; the callous brute became a sentimentalist and the blasphemer a revivalist. There was no rhyme or reason about them, and they were most satisfactorily explained by physicians who talked of shock and brain-cells and pathological change.

There were exceptio[illegible]oads End, and old Polglase was one of them. In [illegible]h he had been "wild," a dare-devil fellow, and [illegible]er. His early marriage had only partially sobered him, and when the time came he swaggered to the recruiting office and lied himself and his forty odd years into the New Army with as riotous a bearing as the youngest of them. He saw just one day's fighting. It wiped out half his regiment and sent him home with a smashed foot and the mind of a Cromwellian Ironside. Thereafter the "Green Man" and his old associates knew him no more. He had become a stern, hostile-tempered man, genial only with his old comrades, merciless to those who opposed him and his narrow, relentless code.

Some said, wisely enough, that his time had been too short. There had been no period of adjustment. In that one day he had only seen the horror and madness

and devilry of the thing, and he had come away with the poison in his blood and his judgment unbalanced. Others shrugged their shoulders knowingly. "Tom Polglase" was the name they gave to the man's twisted temper. But it was a name they never heard from the man himself.

Only to Earnshaw had Polglase ever shown the sullenly hidden growth which was eating at his mind. It had happened only once, and that in the first hour of an intolerable shame. Since then, by no sign or word had either man betrayed remembrance—Earnshaw had, in fact, almost forgotten, and it was with a kind of consternation that he received the second outburst. There had been no warning, no hint of unusual trouble. They had met by chance and were strolling up towards the little cluster of houses which, by reason of the emporium in their midst, was known to all but double-dyed strangers as "shop," and formed the main portion of St. Maro. They had talked casually of village happenings, and then abruptly Old Polglase had stopped short, leaning heavily on his stick and had blazed out like a madman.

"He is comin' home—my son's comin' home——" And as suddenly was silent. It was as though something evil which had possessed and tortured him had flung him free, leaving him shaken and exhausted. Earnshaw instinctively looked away from him. He knew how Polglase would loathe his own weakness.

"Have you just heard from him then?" he asked carelessly.

"'Twas two months ago we had his letter. From 'Merica. He was comin' back, he said. But I wouldn't believe it. A man who makes his fortune out there be no fool—but a man who comes back here—like Tom——" The name came out like a curse. Old Polglase straightened convulsively.

"'I tell 'ee,' says I then to t' wife, 'he'll be wise and stay where he is. He can buy himself a grand house and a fine carriage and good clothes. Here he's made nought for himself—*nought—nought*.'"

"Have you heard from him again?" Earnshaw interrupted quietly.

"Aye. This afternoon—a telegram. He's in Exeter—on his way down. He'll be here next week. He's drivin' down, sir, in his own car. A fine car 'tis—he wrote about it. He was bringin' it over. We don't make no cars

like that in the old country." He began to laugh. He made no sound, but his bowed shoulders shook with it. "He's gotten rich, has our Tom. A fine fellow. With a fat cigar in his mouth and a gold chain over his waistcoat. He's going to buy up St. Maro, sir. Pull down the old houses, build a new chapel and a nice little club for us old stay-at-homes. Fine days for Roads End, too! What about havin' our own public house, eh?—or anythin' else we've a fancy for, eh?—he's goin' to give us a rare time when he comes home—our Tom." He glanced up at Earnshaw and his eyes were small and wicked as a ferret's. "It'll be a grand sight to see our Tom drive up. But how do you think he'll look when he drives away?"

Earnshaw walked on. He had caught sight of Genifer and her father coming towards them and drew a smothered sigh of relief. This old man at his side was rather terrible. As a rule so curt and reticent of speech, he had now a suave and ugly fluency. His rough voice was soft. It had a curious purring quality, like that of a treacherous wild beast feigning good-humour.

"There must be no violence," Earnshaw said briefly.

"No, sir; oh dear no, sir. If you say it—there'll be no violence. But there be no paragraph in the Regulations which makes a man open his door to a stranger when he would lief keep it shut—eh, sir?"

Earnshaw shrugged his shoulders.

"I was not giving orders, Polglase. We are both private individuals now, and I spoke as a friend. You know that as well as I do."

"For sure, sir." The withered face twitched into a sneer. "Just for the moment, though, I wasn't sure of it."

Earnshaw strode on rapidly and left Polglase limping in the rear. The old man's insolence had excited his pity rather than his anger, for he knew that it sprang from a mind unbalanced by passion. But though it was true that their previous relationship had passed away there was still so much of its spirit left that there could be no quarrel between them. Both men knew it. It was not a question of prestige. It was a fact based on something infinitely more subtle than the difference in rank or birth. But it was as final as a law which cannot be broken without penalty. And Earnshaw had no wish to pay the penalty, and he knew that in a cooler moment, when it would be

too late, Polglase would curse himself for his own handiwork. For they were friends—queer, undemonstrative friends, divided by age and outlook and up-bringing, and linked together by the silent memory of one single day.

There was another reason for Earnshaw's sudden breaking off. Genifer and the vicar had stopped suddenly at the cross-roads around which were clustered the shop, the post-office, and the "Green Man," and one or two other stray cottages, and by their attitude Earnshaw judged that something was amiss. Genifer had her father firmly by the arm, and with his free hand the vicar gesticulated in evident indignation. A group of villagers who had been standing about listlessly, as though confronted with a situation altogether beyond the scope of their judgment, gathered round him, and as Earnshaw came up he caught the tail end of what must have been an almost eloquent tirade.

"It's that scallywag again, Keith," Genifer explained in a hurried aside. "He's in there—drunk as a lord and threatening the life of any one who lays hands on him. Father wants to go in and tackle him—a kind of exorcising of the devil business—but it will only end in a horrid row. You know what father is——"

"If no one else has the pluck," the vicar interrupted vigorously—"then it's my business. This is my parish—my public house. I am responsible. Please don't interfere, Genifer."

His daughter kept an unostentatious hold on his arm, whilst the nearest bystanders, more curious than indignant, exchanged a solemn wink of appreciation.

"There will be a fight," Genifer lamented; "father won't be able to help it. *What* happens to vicars who fight in public houses?"

Earnshaw was spared an answer. At that moment there issued from the rustic door of the "Green Man" the sound of angry altercation, the bang of an overturned table, and immediately after the form of mine host himself, shaking in every limb and as green as his own si n-board.

"He's got a revolver," he stut ered. "He was going to fire it at me. He's mad. For God's sake——"

Earnshaw went in without a word. He acted so quietly, so much as a matter of course that even the vicar had no time to assert his prior claim. Genifer had let go his arm. The whole scene was a little ridiculous—the trembling

landlord, the gaping bystanders, her own father, red-faced, with his white hair tousled like a school-boy's. And yet in that tidy, sober-looking inn it was suddenly so still.

She knew the look of danger well enough. In her time she had heard the near boom of the guns and the nearer rending crack of a bursting shell with the indifference of a veteran. She had known what it was to watch helpless by the side of a man she loved and feel his life slipping from her hold. And now for the first time she was stupidly afraid—in this sleepy Cornish village, because of a drunken man with a revolver. It was just because it was all so incongruous, so absurd.

"Good God!"

The little landlord had screamed out. But Genifer neither moved nor spoke. This time the revolver had gone off. The report, followed by the shivering of glass, jerked the onlookers from their state of detached interest into real alarm. But they were not given to rapid thinking, and it was the Rev. Felix Bayard, with an exclamation far from clerical, who bounded forward to the rescue. The prospect of a fight proved illusionary, however, for the next moment Earnshaw had made his reappearance and at the sight of him Genifer laughed. It was such an anti-climax. He looked across at her and laughed too, and displayed his booty. One hand held the revolver, the other was twisted firmly into the collar of Stephen Tillett's flopping coat. As soon as he had crossed the threshold Earnshaw released his captive, who promptly sprawled in the dust; the revolver he tossed up and caught with a boyish light-heartedness.

"That's all there is to *that!*" he remarked cheerfully. "I'm sorry, Tibbs, but the fellow missed me and hit your looking-glass. In fact, the parlour is in an unholy mess, and I'd send a whacking bill to Lone Point if I were you. But what we're to do with *him* I don't quite know. He can't stand straight."

The male element of the crowd instantly resumed its hand-in-pockets attitude and left the problem to the women-folk, who by now occupied all the doors and windows in the vicinity. Their suggestions were drastic, and ranged from the police-station at Orra to the nearest horse-pond. Their disgust at the lanky, shapeless figure spilled out in the road was genuine, and peculiarly free from the hypocrisy

which distinguishes most condemnation. Drunkenness was not unknown in St. Maro, but it was neither approved of nor cultivated. It just happened from time to time—accidentally, as one might say. Perhaps an evening was too hot or too cold, and the parlour of the Green Man too tempting. Or a domestic row and the subsequent drowning of bitterness explained it. But there had to be an explanation. This sodden, deliberate excess struck them as something alien and repellent—an importation from that dubious world outside which they already regarded with suspicion.

"I'd leave him where he lies," the little post-mistress declared warmly. "Let him crawl back as best he can. It'll teach him. We don't want them sort round here."

"Furriners!" her neighbour ejaculated. "And queer at that. I don't like the looks of any of them at Lone Point. The lady's a pretty face enough, but she's strange in her ways—Pixie-ledden I call her. Many's the night I've seen her wanderin' 'bout the cliffs with aught on her feet and her hair loose over her shoulders—lookin' out to sea as though she were waitin' for somethin'. Fair frightened me, she has."

"And her husband wot never goes nigh her." This from another quarter and in a mysterious undertone. "My Betty told me. She served there for a week. Like strangers to one another they are—never so much as a kiss."

"Oh, it's a queer life at Lone Point!"

Old Polglase stood on the outskirts of the ground and listened. His eyes were narrowed into a hard, crafty watchfulness.

"I know the sort," he muttered. "I know the look o' the breed. Blacklegs, all of them."

No one heeded him. The general attention was now centred on the sprawling figure in the middle of the road. Slowly and painfully Stephen Tillett had begun to drag himself to his knees. The long, black hair hung over his eyes and his face and clothes were soiled with dirt. He looked grotesque and pitiable, and Earnshaw, who stood beside him, instinctively held out a helping hand. He took it but failed to rise, and for a moment knelt blinking up through the lank hair in a ridiculous attitude of supplication.

"You—you've made me look—damn funny, haven't you,

Mr. Earnshaw? You—you arn't s-such a beauty yourself you know—t-though it isn't always a man's face that counts, eh? What about the Moor—How goes it?

> "'S-she—loved me—for the d-dangers I had pass'd,
> And—I l-loved her that she did p-pity them.'

Othello and Desdemona on—on the Cornish cliffs—or r-rather Iago and Desdemona with poor old Othello ro-rotting over his germs and not caring a d-damn——" He began to laugh in the fatuous, persistent way of the hopelessly intoxicated. "Here, get me back home, can't you?"

Then, coughing and hiccoughing, he collapsed again.

"I suppose it's our con—, our Christian duty," the vicar muttered. "We can't leave him here—it isn't safe." His round, good-natured face had grown rather pale. He did not look at Earnshaw, though he spoke to him. With considerable strength and dexterity he lifted the helpless man to his feet. "There—take the other arm, will you?"

Earnshaw obeyed. The little ripple of jeering laughter which greeted Tillett's first stagger died away. Tillett might be an object of derision, but Felix Bayard had his odd moments when he suddenly ceased to be their beloved joke and became impressive. He impressed them now. They watched him soberly as, with a bearing worthy of an ecclesiatical procession, he took the road towards Lone Point, his drunken burden hanging about his neck.

"A blackleg!" Old Polglase persisted between his teeth. "A dirty blackleg!"

Though he was accorded considerable licence in St. Maro the reiteration had become monotonous. His neighbour turned on him with a growl.

"And who be you callin' names?" he demanded. "Your precious Tom, maybe?"

"I have no Tom." The old man drove his stick into the soil as though it were some living and hated thing, then he broke out wildly. "And if I had—there be worse than he—he isn't the only one—that drunken toss-pot and t'other—him that gives him money to drink himself t' death."

Those nearest laughed, awkwardly, uncertainly.

"You've had your drop too, haven't 'ee, old chap?"

Old Polglase shrank under their laughter. He seemed suddenly to shrivel up—to grow very old, indeed. With-

out a word he thrust his way out of the little circle and went stumbling down the hill towards Roads End.

But Genifer had heard his last outburst in the same moment that she had seen Mrs. Harding standing on the outskirts of the crowd. How long she had been there, how much she had heard and seen, Genifer could not tell. She was about to speak, but as though she divined the intention Mrs. Harding turned and walked on quietly in the wake of the vicar and Earnshaw and their staggering charge. She had to run the gauntlet of the whole community who watched her, half curious, half hostile, but though she must have felt their antagonistic scrutiny she gave no sign. She carried herself with the free and happy ease of a child, her hands thrust into the pockets of her jersey, her head held gallantly, without defiance. So they had often seen her, walking alone on the cliffs, with her hair blowing in the wind, and the same odd, confident little smile about her lips.

"Pixie-ledden!" muttered the little post-mistress to herself; "pixie-ledden."

Genifer made no effort to follow her. She turned homewards, her heart heavy with a nameless trouble.

II

They were always watching one another. They watched more furtively when they were speaking of themselves as though their information were a secret medicine of uncertain efficacy. And they were intently interested in each other's health. Their own trouble seemed of secondary importance. They were unwilling, almost fractious under question, but hungrily persistent in questioning and almost passionately sympathetic. When Mrs. Felicia Newman coughed, as she did often enough, the Rev. Silas Modrow would look at her with overflowing pity.

"It's one of your bad days, I'm afraid. You've had a terrible number lately."

And she would look back, her dull eyes glittering appreciation of his stoicism.

"How kind of you to worry about me! But what is a trifling throat irritation every now and then in the daytime so long as one sleeps. But you—I hear you sometimes in the night—that terrible, racking cough—I feel

that it must surely shake you to pieces. If only it would get better!"

"It is better." He would throw out his narrow chest and tap it authoritatively with a soiled finger. "Ever since the injections began—wonderful fellow, Harding!—appetite, sleep, everything improved. Weight gone up two pounds in a fortnight. And it's weight that matters. Harding was saying only the other day, 'You'll be bothering your parishioners again in no time, my dear sir.' He is worried about you, though. I can see that. He's a hard, insensitive fellow, but he has a weakness, Mrs. Newman. Natural, I admit. 'A man's a man for a' that.'" Mr. Modrow would laugh heartily at his little jest. "I'm afraid he'd be better pleased if the scales turned in your favour instead of mine, dear lady; but I bear no malice."

Sometimes the "trifling irritation" silenced her. Then he would rub his hands and shake his head and exude an exuberant anxiety. At other times the last word in commiseration remained with her, and he would droop and become morose and fretful. They were only of equal temper when little Miss Jones coughed. It was, indeed, the one occasion when they bothered about her at all. But then their interest was overwhelming—perhaps a little sinister. They would stand and watch her like two patient, calculating old vultures.

On this particular afternoon she coughed more than usual. They were seated in the dishevelled garden which was beautiful in spite of itself—the untended lawn strewn with thrift and the rugged stone hedges waving their coral-blossomed tamarisk in the sparkling June wind. For all that an unclouded sun shone down upon them the occupants were muffled up to the eyes, and every now and again they shivered and frowned about them as though the garden was in some way responsible for their discomfort.

Miss Jones bent her head over her work. She was unpicking an old frock of Mrs. Newman's, and it was perhaps her position which made her cough so much. Each time that her frail body shook under the storm Mrs. Newman glanced at her companion and the pointed shoulders went up in ejaculatory significance Mr. Modrow's lips moved silently. There was something judicial about him. He might have been a judge passing sentence, a humane, very regretful judge, and a final, irrevocable sentence.

7

Afterwards a little gust of liveliness and good-humour blew over them both. An old man brought out a table and aid tea. They called him the butler, but beyond his sedate, accustomed bearing there was very little of the servant about him. The shabby old suit of tweeds which did duty as a livery were as wrinkled and worn as himself.

"It *is* an east wind," Mr. Modrow asserted sharply as though in answer to an unheard statement. "I can feel it in all my bones. What do you say, Mrs. Newman—shall we have tea indoors? Tea before a nice fire, eh?"

"Excuse me, sir. Mrs. Harding left orders. Tea was to be served in the garden."

Mr. Modrow gave a little jaunty laugh.

"Well, Mrs. Harding can do as she likes. You're not a policeman, are you, Thomas?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then—tea indoors."

"I'm sorry, sir. I've got orders——"

"I know—I know—never mind that——"

"I do mind, sir."

Mrs. Newman blinked angrily.

"You are a most amazingly devoted servant, aren't you?"

"I hope so, ma'am." He adjusted the cosy neatly over the tea-pot. "I served Mr. Harding's father before him, ma'am."

"Did you? How interesting! And who was Mr. Harding, senior?"

"A doctor, ma'am."

"And what became of him—wasn't there some talk?"

"He died." The old man gave a quaint little bow. "Tea is served, ma'am."

He went into the house, and they heard the sound of a key turning in the lock.

"We might be children!" Mrs. Newman tittered indignantly. "I shall complain. It is an insult."

Mr. Modrow brought his fingers neatly together.

"After all, dear lady, we must be fair. The law is made for the sake of our weaker brethren. If we were all strong there would be no law. You take my meaning? If Mr. Harding had only us to deal with. . . ."

"But Mr. Tillett likes the fresh air." It was Miss Jones

who interrupted. She sat up, and brushed the hair from her tired eyes. "He loves the garden."

"And other things," Mrs. Newman concluded sharply.

She had just begun to pour out the tea. Her wizened hand shook, and it lost its grip altogether as a sudden, raucous singing broke upon the afternoon stillness. The tea-pot clattered back on to its china stand.

"I'm afraid——" she began.

"I too am afraid," Mr. Modrow said with sorrowful understanding.

Stephen Tillett kicked open the garden gate. One arm still rested affectionately on Felix Bayard's shoulders, but he had released Earnshaw, who brought up the rear, and his intoxication had in so far abated that he was now coherent and wildly jolly. At the sight of the two aghast faces he burst into a fit of laughter.

"Didn't I tell you, your Holiness—didn't I tell you they wouldn't be glad to see me? Look at them—sour as lemons. And why? What's the matter with me? Ar'n't I respectable? Would a clergyman of the Church of England and a full blown hero, blazing with medals, be seen with any one who wasn't respectable?" He patted Bayard familiarly on the back. "Introduce yourselves, your Holiness. They won't believe me. Can't believe I'm in such good company. So damn respectable themselves, you know. Permit me—on the right there, ensconced among the scones—Mrs. Felicia Newman; on the left a brother-in-the-cloth, his Riverence, Mr. Silas Modrow, nearly of Canterbury, but not quite, and somewhere in the background you may see, if you look hard enough, a little grey lady who isn't so respectable but that she can help a lame dog into a chair. Thank you, Miss Jones; in the name of Bacchus, whom I serve, all thanks."

He bowed to the ground, and collapsed then, with acrobatic neatness, into the wicker chair which Miss Jones had quietly brought up for him. In an attitude of insolent ease, the black hair over his eyes, he surveyed the company which he had thus insolently brought together with the malicious amusement of an intoxicated satyr.

Felix Bayard held himself stiff and straight. Even if he had realised it, the fact that he was very red and hot and unclerical, would not have worried him. But he had come to Lone Point against his will. He knew by now

that the Hardings did not want him—had in fact snubbed Genifer's neighbourly advance, and he was perfectly certain that he did not want them. And yet, thanks to an uncontrollable Christian impulse, here he was on their territory and liable to become their guest. And there were other reasons for his discomfort. He loved most of his fellow-creatures instinctively and unaffectedly—it was perhaps the one matter on which he and the tenets of the Church came together without jarring on each other and it covered a multitude of dogmatic deficiencies—but he had not succeeded in loving them all. There were some people he disliked on sight and usually for ever. And his healthy, robust soul shrank from the painted wreck of a woman, and still more from the grey, dusty-looking man whose twitching features and rheumy eyes smirked unpleasantly close to his own. Quite unreasonably he was indignant with Earnshaw, who kept coldly and resolutely in the rear—"well out of it," as the vicar mentally complained.

Mr. Modrow's dry, hot hand shook his repeatedly.

"This is a great pleasure, Mr. Bayard. Of course I know of you. Who doesn't in these parts? I have heard so much of your eloquence in the pulpit"—the vicar winced—"that I would have come over to Divine Service before now, but I am here under orders—medical orders—and am allowed very little exertion. The same applies to Mrs. Newman, and, I hope, excuses our absence."

"Of course," the vicar put in hurriedly, "please don't suppose that——"

"It must have seemed strange that, as a brother clergyman, I did not make my appearance at once," Modrow persisted volubly. "But what can one do? My health shattered—the lungs affected—overwork, of course. I was vicar of St. James, Bradstow. Perhaps you knew. Anyhow, I had to resign. It was a terrible blow. Excuse me—I ought not to trouble you with my ills in this way. A new acquaintanceship, which I hope will develop, in spite of this sad beginning."

"Your friend——" the vicar began again, but was interrupted by an appealing gesture. Tillett threw back his head and laughed shortly.

"Don't be so tactless, your Holiness. I'm not a friend. Not worthy enough. Say rather a humble servant, an attendant in the outer temple, the bearer of fuel to the altar fire——" He took a full brandy-flask from his pocket

and aimed it at Modrow with a grin of malicious delight. "You see, I didn't forget, your Riverence. I had a lot of trouble with the 'Green Man,' who murmured a tale about an unpaid score, but I persuaded him and he saw reason. I'm a man of my word. Here, catch!"

The flask fell on the grass at Modrow's feet with a dull thud. Modrow drew back, his hands uplifted in uncontrollable disgust.

"You see how it is, Mr. Bayard. It is terrible. Our poor brother—we are quite helpless. He ought not to be here. There are homes, I believe, where proper treatment——"

"I pay eleven guineas a week," Mrs. Newman wailed unexpectedly, "and I am compelled to consort with drunkards and paupers. It is disgraceful. Mr. Harding ought to be ashamed. I shall tell him—either this—this person goes, or I."

The door of the house opened and Mrs. Newman's voice died away like a fretful gust of wind. The abrupt quiet aroused Earnshaw, who had been scarcely aware of the little scene. He had held aloof, telling himself that he had not wanted to come and would be glad to be gone. But all the time an odd tenderness for the old place held him. All that day he had been restless, impatient, eager for something vague that he could not define even to himself. Life and health had throbbed painfully in his veins like blood flowing back into a numbed limb. Now his whole body rested in the exquisite, sensuous content which follows pain. He forgot Modrow, the painted, bewigged woman, and the sprawling drunkard. They were so many shadows there to mark the brightness of the sunlight. He looked away from them to the old weather-bitten house which had always seemed to him as grim and dour as the rocks. To-day the sun mellowed them to a friendly lavender. The open windows, that had scowled out with sinister blankness from under the black eaves, twinkled gaily with their fluttering white curtains. Everything had changed. The whimsical fancy came to Earnshaw that surely the thrift had never spread itself so splendidly for Red Rover's callous feet. A new spirit haunted Lone Point. The old wrecker—gallantly or perforce—had given place to a woman.

Earnshaw felt her presence—he even imagined that he saw her, as he knew her best, with her hands thrust into

the pockets of her jersey, her head lifted to meet the wind that set the tamarisk and her red-gold hair ablow. He imagined her eyes. Their young gravity rested on him, and he looked back, holding her steady gaze with his. And even in that imagined meeting his pulses started and drummed their warning. But he was not thinking of himself. He was not given to self-analysis. He thought again and again, "She lives here," as though the childish repetition were a charm, a lulling music.

And now, in Mrs. Newman's sudden silence, he turned and found her almost at his side, as he fancied her, only that she looked past him at Harding, who had come out of the open door of the house opposite. It was Harding, indeed, who had silenced Mrs. Newman though he scarcely glanced at her. He stood for a moment motionless, the unsmiling, penetrative eyes passing from face to face, seeking the key to the unexpected scene before him. He found it in Tillett, and frowned an impatient understanding.

"You had better go in," he said. "And you, too," he jerked his head at Mrs. Newman and Modrow. "I have no doubt," he added satirically, "that you have had enough fresh air."

The vicar and Earnshaw waited for the promised protest—some sign of revolt against this galling imperiousness—but none came. Mrs. Newman rose tremulously. Her furtive, frightened glance flickered over Harding's face as though she were trying to read his thoughts, but she said nothing. Modrow coughed and bent to pick up the brandy-flask.

"You can leave that!" The order cracked like a whip and the flask slipped from Modrow's hand as though it had burnt him. He stared stupidly down at it, rubbing his side-whisker with a grimy finger.

Miss Jones lifted her faded eyes from her work.

"Would it matter if I stayed out a little longer, Mr. Harding?" she asked timidly. "I love the wind. I fancy my cough troubles me less."

His face relaxed.

"Stay if you wish it." She went back to her work and he turned to the languidly extended figure on the wicker chair. "I told you to go in," he said.

Tillett rose at once. He rocked on his heels, and it seemed to Earnshaw that he wilfully exaggerated his own state.

"By—by all means, my Lord Othello. I admire your methods. No shilly-shallying. You—you treat us like the stray curs we are—and we run before you with our tails between our legs." He lurched forward and gave an ironical little bow in the direction of Harding's companion, who had hitherto kept in the background. "But won't you introduce us? Even here, as his Reverence would say, we should cling to the decencies of society. And so fair an addition to our select circle——"

The new-comer interrupted on her own behalf.

"I don't want none of your lip," she observed trenchantly. "You're drunk. Say, Jimmy, if this is one of your cures I don't think much of it. Try 'im for D.T.'s next time. That's wot's the matter with 'im. If there's one thing I'm wise on it's D.T.'s. Mother 'ad 'em. The doctor said e'd never 'ave believed any one could 'ave 'ad 'em so often and not popped off. You mind, young feller. It ain't funny watching black beetles crawlin' all over you. Take it from one who knows."

"I am profoundly grateful." Tillett bowed again, but a certain curiosity mingled with the satirical amusement written on his haggard features. "If only I could know the name of my benefactress."

"Well, I don't mind if you do. Cissie de Valincourt, *alias* 'Arris, Queen o' the Ballet, Pearl of the Beauty Chorus, *at* your service, I don't think!"

She curtsied—an amazingly incongruous figure in her long, imitation fur coat, her ostrich feathers nodding and swaying in the breeze. "And now, where's the missus, Claude? I don't want to make no mistakes. And break it to me gently like."

She was looking doubtfully at Mrs. Newman and to prevent a ridiculous complication, Lillah pushed open the gate by which she had been standing and came to meet the stranger, her brown hand frankly outstretched.

"I am Mrs. Harding," she said, and added quite gravely —"the missus."

The shy humour in her eyes tickled Miss de Valincourt immensely. She grasped the extended hand and included the company in a general wink.

"Well, this knocks me out, don't it? Oh, me blighted 'opes! Algernon, you're not 'alf the mug you look. Excuse me, won't you, my dear? but me and Algernon are old pals. Nursed 'is father, I did, and 'eld the orphon's 'and

and all that. And now he's gone into the Conjurer's job and is goin' to give me back lungs and all to a sorrowin' Empire. 'Ere, Johnny, introduce me to your other victims, won't you? We might as well die all 'appy and sociable together like."

If ever Mrs. Newman and Mr. Modrow had cause for complaint they had it now. She was so vulgar, so riotously, recklessly herself, with her hollow, feverish cheeks, curled hair and dancing feathers. But they made no protest. They stood there, in silence, their self-importance deflated to a painful, abject discomfiture. Miss de Valincourt eyed them and then Bayard and Earnshaw with a frankly comparing interest.

"Sort of 'before and after' business—eh, Claude? Two real live clergymen—my Gawd, wot 'oliness! Shall I want 'em all to see me safely over?"

She laughed, and, for all its vulgarity, it was infectious laughter. Even Silas Modrow permitted himself a twisted little smile.

"But you won't want any one to 'see you over,'" Lillah Harding answered proudly. "You are going to get well. My husband has promised."

Miss de Valincourt winked again, this time for the exclusive benefit of the vicar.

"Wot about faith and your bloomin' old mountains, now—eh?" she demanded triumphantly.

Felix Bayard prepared to retreat. He could deal with ordinary human beings, but these people were not ordinary. They were like figures in a bizarre, diseased fantasy. They bewildered and frightened him. He and Earnshaw had reached the gate when Harding himself overtook them.

"I understand that you brought Mr. Tillett home," he said. "I am grateful to you."

The few weeks at Lone Point had wrought a certain physical change in him. The sun and wind had burnt his stubborn features so that by contrast the thick, untidy hair seemed almost flaxen. He was thinner, wirier-looking. There was not an ounce of spare flesh on him. The powerful bones of the jaw and brow stood out sharply under the brown skin—the whole face was hard, worn smooth as a bronze mask.

For all that he hated him, Earnshaw felt himself held by an unwilling admiration for the sheer forcefulness of the man.

Bayard meanwhile was looking for his indignation, and, not finding it, grew unexpectedly pompous.

"We did what we had to do, Mr. Harding," he said. "But I hope that, in future, you will keep your guests in bounds yourself. St. Maro is a steady-going place. We can dispense with drunkards."

"You are talking of a dying man," Harding interrupted.

The vicar faltered.

"Dying?"

"They are all dying here—unless I save them."

"You take a great deal on yourself," Bayard blazed out. "Has God no say in the matter?"

"I have taken a great deal on myself," was Harding's imperturbable reply. "I do not know much about God." The intense eyes under the strong, fair brows sparkled with a moment's pure fun. "I should like to know more. Perhaps I shall come one day and hear you preach, Mr. Bayard."

Lillah had come up quietly and stood beside him. All through the recent grotesque scene she had watched him closely as though he had been a fighter, his back to the wall, surrounded by a pack of enemies. Earnshaw she had not even seemed to notice. And, now that her chance came, she took her place shoulder to shoulder with her husband. Yet in that very moment it flashed into Earnshaw's mind, "She doesn't love him. He's just a great, passionless, pitiless machine that's swept her up in its course for its own ends. She doesn't love him. I am more to her. She has never loved any one. If she did——"

Suddenly out of the hot confusion of his thoughts a desire arose so trivial, so definite and overwhelming that its fulfilment seemed inevitable as the rising of the sun. She turned her head slowly. For the first time their eyes met. What was in his own he did not know. He saw the blood mount under the warmly tinted skin and then recede again like a tide, leaving her white and still. For barely a moment their gaze held. Then it was as though a stupefying, blinding cloud settled on him. He did not even remember how they parted.

But long afterwards he found himself striding along the cliff at Felix Bayard's side. He heard the vicar's voice shaken with anger and distress.

"A pretty figure I cut, didn't I? Dying! Uncharitable cad! Insufferable prig! I could have kicked myself. He

made fun of me, and he was quite right. What do I know about God, or anything else for that matter? And yet—I wish they hadn't come, dear fellow. I wish they hadn't come. I can't help feeling it—it's a sort of disaster."

Earnshaw nodded.

Yes, it was a disaster. He knew that.

All his body and soul were delirious with the knowledge.

III

Whilst he talked the dusk had swept into the room. It grew so dark that presently Genifer let her work slip from her hands and sat back, watching his shadow move restlessly backwards and forwards against the wall. She could not see his face, and gradually as the darkness increased he seemed to recede from her to grow himself dim and unreal. Without the constant reminder of his physical appearance his very voice sounded unfamiliar. She wondered whether she had ever really heard it before—if she really knew the man who was speaking to her or if some stranger had found his way into the room.

But, as she listened, the voice began to take on a personality, to reveal itself. Now that her eyes were closed, her hearing grew sharper, almost taking on the attributes of sight. She began to see him. Something that he was trying to hide under the darkness was betrayed by the changing inflections. The big cheerfulness of his words had no significance. It was the voice she listened to. The strained equanimity, the forced good-humour, the uncontrollable gusts of unrest and impatience, were like the signs of a code which she was learning to read.

And he talked a great deal, very rapidly, with a convincing fluency. She did not interrupt him. She sat very still, and presently, as though he became conscious of his own remoteness and feared it, he came and knelt down beside her and took her hands in his.

"I've been talking a lot about myself, haven't I, Jenny? I want you to understand how I feel, dear. I feel like a kid trying to tell his mother that he's growing up and must have more room to kick about in."

She smiled faintly.

"I think most mothers know that for themselves," she said. "Though perhaps they try not to know—which is very foolish of them."

She caught herself judging the quality of his short, answering laugh.

"Why, isn't it a consummation to be desired? Don't mothers like their children to grow up?"

"Oh yes, of course. But they are also a little afraid. It means change, doesn't it? And people who are happy are afraid of change—unless they are very brave."

"You are very brave, Jenny."

She bent her head over her work.

"It depends what you mean by brave. I can go through things when I have to. But I'm afraid, all the same—I don't want to go through them."

"That *is* courage. Anyhow—there is nothing to go through. We're talking nonsense. This child of yours—for I believe that's how you look on me—is simply getting his muscle back. You ought to be glad."

"You know I'm glad."

"But you must be glad over the consequences. When I came down I was all to bits. I'd forgotten what it felt like to be young and take joy in one's own body. You know, I used to feel as though even my sight had gone wrong. Colour-blind—that's what I was. Where other people saw reds and blues and greens I saw nothing but a flat, dull grey; so naturally enough it did not matter to me where I was or what I did. It was all the same. But it's all come back to me—and I want to move, to be up and doing, see things, travel—don't you understand?—it's a sort of reaction—I can't rest, Jenny." The note of desperate impatience broke through again. His hand tightened on hers. She could feel that he was trembling. "Jenny, dear—you understand, darling—I can't stay here. It's not enough. I'm too young—too vigorous yet. I must get away—work—work off steam somehow before I settle down—that's what I've been trying to tell you."

She looked up at him. Though it was too dark for them to see each other, he felt her eyes on his face like a warm light.

"I know. Keith, dear, you mustn't think I've been so dull as not to see this coming. I've longed for it. Why, how old are you? Twenty-eight. A mere boy. No wonder I feel like a mother to you. Do you really think I'd keep such an infant tied here to my apron-strings?" She gave her low, comfortable little laugh. "Of course, I know you're my last hope, Keith; but still——"

"You haven't understood," he broke out with a humourless persistence that was new to him. "Genifer, I want you. I want to be tied to your apron-strings, as you call it. I want you to marry me now—and take me away—make a whole man of me—we'll travel together and forget—forget everything."

"What is there we want to forget?" she asked gravely. He did not answer, and she went on after a moment: "It's always seemed to me that forgetfulness is a shallow, silly thing for shallow, silly people. What's the use of things happening to us if we don't remember them? We might as well be dead. I know there's nothing in my life that I could afford to forget."

He bent down and kissed her hands almost roughly.

"That's because you're so good. Nothing but good comes your way."

"Including Keith Earnshaw," she retorted delightedly. Then very gently she lifted his face to hers. "I can't help teasing you. You're so desperately serious about something so natural. It *is* natural that you should feel as you do. And your instinct gives you the best advice. You must get away from here. Travel. Losing trains and luggage and temper is the finest antidote for superfluous energy that I know of. And—and when you've had a look at all the fair ladies of the world and come back really decided that you prefer them large and plain and muscular, why then, Keith, there'll be an absolutely perfect specimen sitting on the cliffs waiting for you like Penelope—or whoever she was——"

He tried to set his tone to hers, but his voice sounded strained and hard.

"Are you refusing me by any chance, Miss Bayard?"

"No—merely postponing you."

"You—won't marry me?"

"Not this minute, Keith."

He forced himself violently from her hands and sprang up. "When I first came back you were ready to marry me then and there."

"That was different. You were ill. You needed me. You don't need me, now."

"By God—I do—more than you know."

They were both silent. It was so dark that even their shadows were lost. He strove to imagine her face—to penetrate her silence. He could only hear the echo of his

own outburst. Yes, it was true. He needed her desperately. When he spoke again his voice shook with anger, pain, and resentment.

"I suppose I might have known this would come," he stammered. "Whilst I was ill you felt it was your duty to humour me. My temperature went up so easily, didn't it? and you were the most self-sacrificing nurse God ever gave a man. So you kept me quiet with promises you wouldn't—couldn't keep. You never meant to marry me. You talk about yourself as though you were ugly. What do you think of me? I'm only half human—a surgeon's masterpiece."

"Keith—that was the first caddish thing I've ever heard you say!" She was on her feet now. He could just see her standing very straight against the dull grey of the window. There was something so fierce and big and generous in her anger that even at the height of his passionate bitterness he faltered and went sick with shame.

"I'm sorry," he muttered. "You're quite right. I'm a whining cur. Jenny, forgive me. Try and imagine I'm your patient again"—he forced a wry smile—"with the patience all on your side. I said just now that I'd been blind. I think when a man recovers his sight suddenly he must feel as I do. The very brilliancy of things makes him dazed and ill. I'm ill—not physically, but in my mind—in my soul, if you like. And I need you, Jenny, stand by me, dear. Give me a helping hand. You always swore you would."

"I promised I would come to you when you wanted me."

"I do want you."

She came up to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Can you swear that?"

A minute before he could have sworn it. He could swear it now—he was sure of it—and yet, before he realised what was happening, he had let a stupefied hesitation answer her.

Her hands pressed his shoulders lovingly.

"Don't worry about it, Keith—only I'd rather wait until you can——"

"I can—I do now." His voice sounded too loud. It jarred on his own ears and goaded him to a burst of irritability. "You're not fair to me, Genifer. What have I done? Is this the penalty for coming back to life? Be just at least. Give me some reason."

"I have given you a reason."

"Which amounts to this—that you don't care enough." She turned away from him. He felt as though he had struck her, and an odd, horrible sense of relief came to his fevered, unhappy mood. He followed her and drew her gently into his arms. "Jenny, Jenny, we're not going to quarrel, are we?"

She clung to him for an instant.

"No—no. Only be honest with me—with yourself."

"I am. What do you mean?"

"I can't explain. Be patient with me too, won't you, dear?"

He had no chance to answer. The door of the study had opened admitting in succession, as it were, a stream of light, a large lamp, and the vicar. The latter's face peered over the top of the lamp which he carried with a sacrificial solemnity, and its childlike expression of distress was accentuated by his hair tousled into a disreputable halo.

"It's all very well for you two," he complained. "You can sit here and take life easily. Nobody worries you. Every one worries me. Young Polglase has just sent over. His father has gone off his head or something. Won't speak to any one, and sits and glowers. It's that confounded scally-wag."

He put the lamp on the table and looked frowningly from one to the other. "Is there anything wrong here?" he asked.

Earnshaw made a gesture of half-mocking, half genuine despair.

"Genifer won't marry me, sir—that's all."

"Won't marry you? There, I knew I should find something unpleasant. Everything goes wrong—everything. Why won't you marry him, Genifer? What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing more than usual," she picked up her work and seated herself contentedly by the lamp. "He's just romancing, father—making a scene, for the sheer fun of the thing. Men always do that if they're not kept busy—like children."

"But if you won't marry him——"

"I will marry him. I never said I wouldn't. Only not to-morrow morning. He wanted to rush off and get a licence, and I wouldn't be hustled."

Earnshaw turned to her quickly. His face was flushed

so that the network of scars stood out with painful whiteness.

"It's you who are not being honest now, Genifer. You know what was arranged when I came down. We were to be married as soon as ever we could manage it. You agreed."

"I know I did." She looked up at him. The light was in her eyes. They were star-like. He did not know why their laughing brightness hurt him. "It's too bad," she declared. "You people are always complaining that I am not feminine enough, and then when I have a real good try at being a nice Victorian lady and change my mind—not every five minutes, it's true, but just once—you grumble. There's no pleasuring you."

Earnshaw's face did not relax. He bent over the table towards her.

"When will you marry me, Genifer?"

"I have told you when."

Without a word he turned and left the room, and a minute later they heard his hurrying steps on the garden path. The vicar went over to the window as though to look after him, though in reality it was too dark to see farther than the first fuchsia-bush. He stood there for some minutes and then came back. Genifer worked on. The light on her head drew out the hidden gold from the brown curls.

"Bobby—what's wrong?"

"Nothing."

He scowled menacingly at her. "Don't treat me like an old fool. Don't dare. I know it's a long time since I was unhappy like that—but still, I haven't quite forgotten the symptoms." His voice softened. He stood beside her and laid his hand shyly on her shoulder. "Genifer, I've worked hard to earn your confidence. I know it's harder to earn the confidence of some one younger than oneself than anything else in the world. But I've tried honestly—and I'd hoped—perhaps it was foolish of me—I'd hoped that you had never felt that I was your father."

"I don't." The work dropped from her hands, but she did not look up at him. "I could tell you anything."

"Then why—why are you unhappy? You are unhappy, I can feel it. It's in my bones. Don't you love Keith?"

"I love him," she answered simply, "more than anything in the world."

"Then——"

"But he is not ill any more."

"Is that a reason, my dear—I don't understand."

She leant her head on her hand shading her eyes from the light. "I've seen so many men come back to life," she said in a low, steady voice. "I know how they feel. Their whole outlook changes—there's a glamour, a romance over the simplest things. Just being well is a kind of intoxication. Even bad things seem beautiful, and they go to ruin over them—and good things—really beautiful things are sometimes almost more than they can bear. But the things that had seemed so wonderful, so necessary when they were ill—they fade."

"Genifer——!"

"They are like children," she said almost inaudibly. "They must go out into the world—and choose afresh."

"You mean——?"

She did not answer. She picked up her work and went on sewing. She did not sew very well at any time, and now the stitches were clumsy and uneven.

For a minute Bayard stood there frowning at nothing, his round face wry as though he had bitten a sour apple. Then suddenly a fit of rage overtook him. He clenched his fists and shook them at an unseen enemy.

"Oh, damn!" he swore fiercely. "Damn—damn everything!"

He was very splendid in his wrath—very patriarchal, but scarcely clerical.

And Genifer laughed. She buried her face in her hands and laughed till the sobs shook her. Then she mastered both tears and laughter and was quite still.

The vicar of St. Maro ceased swearing. He knelt down, and, as though she had been a little child, gathered Genifer into his arms and comforted her.

CHAPTER VI

I

IT was a curious thing. There was no cream to be had in all the village. Even the little post-mistress, whose supply had been unfailing, had shaken her head, and just as Lillah reached the door had added hurriedly:

"And I'm sorry, Mrs. Harding. We can't send no more butter. And eggs is scarce now. It would be better if 'ee'd get some one else to serve 'ee. Maybe Mrs. Strange, now——"

But Mrs. Strange suffered from the same scarcity. And she had not shown regret. Dour and monosyllabic, she had guarded the gate of her cottage against her visitor, and her eyes and grim mouth had never softened for an instant. Even when Lillah had turned out again into the dusty high-road she had still stood there and looked after her as though she had been something suspicious—almost malevolent.

All this Lillah told to Earnshaw. He had overtaken her on one of the innumerable paths which linked up the cliffs and the narrow break-neck lanes of the scarcely less break-neck high-road. It seemed a chance meeting, but, though he scarcely knew it, he had waited all day for her, made dogged by a desire that was beyond the power of reason. There were times when, indeed, he caught a glimpse of himself—as though a man falling from a terrific height became suddenly a spectator, watching the catastrophe, unable—perhaps unwilling—to stretch out a saving hand. In a sense he was quite calm, almost deliberate. The thing that had taken possession of him was too big for struggle. It swamped remorse and paralysed the will. He gave himself up and it carried him away on its torrential course, where he neither knew nor dared to ask. He had a detached sort of wonder at his own quiet. He knew that he showed no sign of what was happening to him. He was sure of it. And yet Lillah had not looked

at him. Her manner was friendly and untroubled. But not once had her eyes met his.

They walked on together to the massive Cornish stile at the hill's crest, and there, by unspoken consent, they stopped and looked back over the way they had come.

For a time they were both silent. A kind of peace came to the man. He had tramped all day in search of it, and now it had come to him, and he could rest and be content. He did not forget her or himself, but he had ceased to think. There was no past or future, but just this present. She was near to him. He could have stretched out his hand and touched her. But there was no need to do that. Her nearness enveloped him. He breathed it. Whatsoever his eyes rested on in that wide, wind-swept prospect of sea and land translated itself into the terms of that overwhelming consciousness of her. She was in all things, fused with them, and, for that instant at least, with his own soul.

From their vantage point it seemed as though all Cornwall lay beneath them. To the left the land ran down straight and smooth to the sea, whose breakers stretched in long glittering bars from point to point of the wide bay. To the right were the rounded hills and the deep valleys, barren and wind-swept, with only here and there a ragged elm, bent and crippled, its crest, like the head of some sad worshipper, bowed to the east. The fields had not yet ripened to their summer gold, and the grey-stone villages and scattered cottages lost themselves in the soft, neutral-tinted earth. It was a drear, soberly painted picture, the colour laid on flat, with no relief, no sharp line or bold outstanding feature—cold, severe, almost unlovely. And yet, as the eye accustomed itself to its austerity, it began to glow and live, to grow warm and gracious, and to reveal its treasures. It laid strong, hard hands on the heart and held it against all others for ever.

And so for a while its charm kept Lillah and her companion silent. Then, as the sunlight mellowed to a deeper gold, Earnshaw roused himself. He could check his own thoughts, his own consciousness, but not time. Time was slipping through his fingers like running water.

"You must remember that things have begun to change," he said, going back to her last words with a forced lightness. "We can no longer have the earth, and the fruits thereof, entirely to ourselves. In the spring and winter we were

the most important people, and now we're just the favoured among many. In other words, the 'season' has started. You can almost see the bungalows rubbing their eyes and yawning, and the time is coming when we shall have to burrow into the longest, darkest cave for our bathing toilets. It's very tiresome—but I think you'll find it's the greedy, plutocratic tourist who has licked up your cream and stolen your eggs."

"Does Miss Bayard have to go without?" she asked quietly.

He flushed up to the roots of his hair.

"Ah—well—Genifer is different from anybody else. She has a way with her. And then, there's her father. You see, between them they nursed and comforted a good few of St. Maro's fellows—and—and people haven't forgotten. Whereas you are——"

"—strangers with a black record," she interrupted.

"—a blank record," he corrected.

She shook her head. Her elbows on the stile's broad ledge, her chin held in the palms of her slender brown hands, she was gazing seawards, and so at last he dared to turn full to her and slake his aching, thirsting memory of her at her reality. With a fanatic's measureless self-abandonment he dwelt on the loved familiar lines of her profile, the forehead half hidden under the loosely gathered hair, the small aquiline nose, the finely modelled lips, austere and passionate, the resolute, sensitive chin. He could not see her eyes under their black lashes, but he knew that they were graver, sadder than he had ever seen them. The knowledge steadied him. It eased the heavy, sickening beat of his pulses. It gave him momentarily the power to forget himself in the simple chivalrous desire to shelter her. And she spoke with a wistful gratitude, as though she had felt the generous change in him.

"I know you want to be kind, Mr. Earnshaw. You would like to comfort me with the tourists, if only I would believe in them. But—I can't. I seem to understand these people so well. If they trusted us—loved us as they do you—they would keep their best for us, and the tourists, if they were ever so plutocratic, would have to wait. They are very proud. We are rich, but all our money won't buy them. They have to be won. You have won them—you and Miss Bayard and her father—but we haven't won them—not yet."

"You will win them," he asserted earnestly.

"Oh yes—one day." Even then, when he knew nothing, the touching certainty of her voice went to his heart. She drew herself up and brushed back the hair from her forehead, with the eager, impatient movement which he had grown to know so well. "Mr. Earnshaw, don't you remember—I told you once that many people hate us? And they hate us here. They would like us to go. They would like to drive us out of their world. It *is* their world, isn't it?—a little-big community where every one has earned his citizenship—his right to his bit of the soil. And we are just strangers—and aliens." She turned to him, but he knew that she did not see him—could not read his eyes, for her own were dim with tears. "They don't understand, do they? They think there is only the one way of service—the quick, straight way which every one sees and understands. They don't know about the long, lonely road which goes winding about the mountain, through forests where no one has ever been before—which no one sees or cares about until the traveller has come to the end—right at the mountain-top—and then——"

"And then——?"

"Sometimes it is too late."

He clenched his hands. He felt dimly that she had pleaded with him for an assurance he could not give because he did not understand. But, with all his rectitude and loyalty, he fought down the tragic impulse of his love.

"I can't bear you to be unhappy," he muttered. "I can't bear to think that our people here should hurt you."

"And I hadn't meant to trouble you," she interrupted. "One bears so much, and then suddenly a little absurd thing comes and it all spills over." She smiled, the gallant spirit shining through her tears. "You see, I could bear their distrust and dislike—I know they would feel differently if they understood—but when it's a matter of not knowing where our next egg is coming from—and we do need them so badly for the invalids—why, then I could sit down and cry like a baby."

Many things trembled on his tongue. He held them back, and when he spoke he wondered at the quiet friendliness of his own voice.

"They don't really dislike you, Mrs. Harding. They're just puzzled and suspicious, and—and superstitious. I

believe—though they wouldn't own to it—that the evil eye is still very much a reality to them and what they don't understand they fear. They don't understand you. So they want some one to introduce you—go bail for you, as it were; some one whom they trust. You see, most visitors take shelter with the vicar, and as long as he keeps them under his wing St. Maro is satisfied. They don't care much for his doctrines, but he's proved himself a man after their own heart, and——"

"——And we've quarrelled with him," she put in sadly. "We're not on speaking terms."

"Was that his fault?"

"No—nor ours. It was just inevitable."

"It's not inevitable now." He was almost happy in his eagerness. "Mrs. Harding, can't you be friends? He's such an easy-going, splendid old fellow—and Genifer—well, you've an idea of her already, haven't you? And they'd both be only too thankful. You don't know how it weighs on their innocent souls, being on bad terms with any one, let alone some one in St. Maro. There's no need for anything formal; just drop in and say you've come to return their call. They'll see the joke at once, and love you for it. And I know when it can be done gracefully. They're having a sort of levee next week—a tea-fight for all the visitors, which the vicar devoutly hopes will discourage them from coming to church. A pal of mine will be there too—Arnold Carrington—a first-rate chap, who ought to interest your husband. It was he who patched me up in my present state of loveliness. A most remarkable piece of surgery, I believe, though personally I don't admire it. But you may have heard of him."

For she had turned abruptly, and her eyes were puzzled and vaguely anxious.

"Yes—I seem to have heard of him. The name is familiar—almost unpleasantly——"

He laughed.

"All surgeons are unpleasantly familiar. But you'll come, won't you? We shall all be so much happier." Hidden beneath his will to serve her was another impulse. He saw her as the Bayards' friend. Sometimes when they wrote her name would creep in, and wherever he was—at the other end of the earth—he would feel as though he had seen her and touched her hand.

But she shook her head, and her eyes clouded with that

swift reserve, that look of drawing back deep into herself which he so feared.

"We have chosen to go our way alone, Mr. Earnshaw. It was not an easy choice; but it was a wise one. I know Mr. Harding will not leave it."

"But you—you——" he persisted impetuously.

"I have chosen to go with him—all the way."

He was silent. It seemed to him that quite suddenly the light which had lain in a shimmering veil over sea and land had grown dull and turgid. To the south-west lowered an ominous, ill-defined shadow which, even as he watched it, spread out like a dirty stain over the faded sky. He looked back instinctively, and inland on the rounded crests of the hills the brilliant day made its last gallant stand against the enemy. A breath of dry, irritable wind eddied round them and died away, leaving a stifling emptiness.

"You cannot go on as you are doing," he said at last with an abrupt decisiveness: "you can't live among us and ignore us. You say you know the people here; but you don't know how dogged and pitiless they can be. They will drive you out—as they have driven other people out They will refuse to serve you—refuse your help. And in the end they will win."

She smiled. Her face was so young that, by contrast, her smile seemed pathetically old and wise and proud.

"We have withstood so much. It is not likely that we shall be beaten now."

"Why can't you be friends?"

"Because"—her voice dropped a little—"when people set out on some hard and dangerous enterprise they must go without friends. They may reap the glory alone. They must reap the—disaster alone."

"Disaster? I don't understand. What disaster is there that a friend can't share in?" She did not answer, and he went on hurriedly: "I won't press you—I have no right. But give us the chance to choose whether or not we will go with you. Do as I ask you. I beg it as a farewell favour."

"Farewell?" She turned to him with such a frank trouble in her eyes that his strength faltered. "Are you going away? But I thought you were to be married."

"That's—postponed. I'm going to travel first. You know—I have been very ill—I am still not strong—I want to—to get away and forget things." He scarcely knew

what he was saying. Underneath the words which he actually spoke, like a secret subterranean river, poured the one thought, "It is you I am to forget— I shall never forget you as long as I live."

"You mean—all that you have gone through?" He nodded, and he heard her quick, unsteady sigh. "You want to forget what I should be so glad to remember. It is not that I—I have romantic, foolish notions about it all, but I have often thought that you know men and women—yes, and death and life—as I shall never know them. You know just how big and how little they can be. I often wanted to ask you——" Her voice sounded rough and uneven—"you see, I have been out of things."

The wind rose again. It carried with it on its fluttering wings the boom of the incoming tide. The breakers seemed to be moving faster now. Earnshaw watched them as they raced over the black, evilly shining water.

"It is not easy to talk," he said. "No one ever does. It's not that we forget. But what we remember is half sacred, half accursed—I can't explain." She did not answer, did not move, and her silence was full of magic, the poised, breathless stillness of a bird on the brink of flight. And suddenly he began to talk. He told her of things which he had kept buried even from himself, he unlocked thoughts and emotions which he had swept almost unheeded into the unlit places of his memory. He spoke quickly, in short, vivid sentences that never stumbled for a word. She was so quiet that he forgot her separateness. He told her the story of twelve months of his life, months laden with colourless drudgery and rare, awful minutes when the blunted instinct had sprung awake to the knowledge of imminent death, when mind and body had cowered before the question, "Is this nightmare, or is it possible that to-morrow, in an hour, I—I in my full strength, *I* may be cut off, smashed into nothing?"

He told her of the final dawn.

"We lay there, huddled together in the mud and darkness. No one spoke. Our voices sounded too loud. They frightened us. We kept on looking at our watches. It was to be at five o'clock—just with the first streak of light. At first I was afraid—sick with fear. I think we all were. There was a young fellow next me—a mere boy, who had been in it from the beginning. He whispered to me: 'I can't go through with it, Earnshaw, I can't.

I shall hold up my hands to the first man I meet. I must get out of this—some way or other.' I didn't answer. I began to get sleepy. At four o'clock I was rocking with sleep and chilled to the bone. I didn't care whether I died or lived. The British Empire and we with it might have gone to hell for all I cared, if only I could have gone to sleep. The boy next me was groaning to himself. I hated him for making a noise. The artillery row did not trouble me. I'd grown accustomed to it. It was a sort of lullaby. I kept on forcing my eyes open. It was always too dark to see anything. Then once I thought I saw the boy's face. The next time I saw it clearly and I knew that the morning had come. And suddenly the guns stopped."

He told her then of the whispered order, the scramble out of the slippery trench, the first rush. He told her how the boy died.

"He was just in front of me—running like mad, shouting to his men as though they were at a football match. Then he went down, all at once, in a heap, and rolled over. I caught a glimpse of him. He was smiling. I have never seen any one look so happy." He did not say much of the actual fighting. What seemed to matter was not the way men killed, but the way they were killed, their attitude towards death.

"They did not mind, even when they saw it was no good. They came on like those waves over there, line upon line, broke, and vanished. But in the night the enemy had brought up reserves, and they were too many for us. About thirty of our men stuck to a crater midway between the trenches. They wouldn't go back. All through the day they hung on. The enemy played their machine-guns on us and we stood a good chance of a bullet from our own side. One after another they were bowled out. But the rest hung on. By evening there were just three of us who could hold a rifle—Polglase and another man and I."

He told her of that night's work, how he had crawled backwards and forwards with the wounded, sometimes on hands and knees, falling flat on his face each time a star-shell burst over him. He made ten of these journeys before morning, and the last journey was for Polglase, who lay among the dead with a shattered foot.

"It was too light to move any more. So we stayed

together. And then it was only a question of time. A hand-grenade came over to us among other things. It didn't explode immediately and I picked it up to throw it back. But it was too quick for me—a beastly, defective thing. It wasn't out to kill—just to make a mess of me. I don't remember what happened after that. I came round a week later in a base hospital. It took me a day to realise what had happened—and then I prayed them to let me alone to peg out. But they wouldn't. Carrington and Genifer were there, and they patched me up. I thought they were devils; how I cursed at them!"

There was rain in the wind now, and rain on Lillah Harding's cheeks.

"But you have never cursed them since."

"Oh, I don't know. For a long time I wanted to hide. It was not for myself so much as for other people. Then I grew accustomed—hardened, perhaps. I learned to wait for that look of horror and pity, and not to mind. Only once it hurt."

"Then—— ?"

"It was here—the first day—on the station—when you looked at me."

She laughed unsteadily.

"That hurt you ? Do you know what I thought ?"

"I know it was nothing cruel."

"No—it was envious. I thought—most of us have to work so hard and grow so old to win noble lines for our faces; but that man has won them when he was quite young."

He did not answer—or the wind carried his voice with it as it stormed the fading sunlight on the hills beyond. His head was bent. She could just see that half of his face with the deep, white scar which ran from temple to mouth tightening the lips into a tragically unchanging smile. As she looked at him the wind eddied, whirled about like a checked, frustrated army, and flung her against his shoulder. He held her, and she saw his eyes, close to her own. They, at least, had been spared. In them she recognised the man that had been—and was still, for all the maiming, withering blast—young, ardent, desperately athirst for life. For a second their fascinated gaze held. Then, courteously, he released her. In the lull that followed his voice sounded steady and untroubled.

"It's on us now. Do you know the superstition ?

They say that about this time of the year Red Rover came to his earthly end, and at every anniversary the devil gives him a week's sport. He lets loose the wind, and for seven days there are awful storms and wrecks. This is the first."

"Lone Point should have the worst of it."

"Yes. Red Rover stirs his cove into a cauldron. A man on the sheep-track wouldn't have a chance."

She, too, had regained her serenity. She climbed the stile and stood for a moment on the high stone step, flaunting the wind, fire in her cheeks and in her eyes.

"I love the storm. I love the battle against it. Women could fight well, you know. And because they may not, they never forgive those who can and will not."

"Never forgive?" He had no interest in his half-unconscious query—only the desire to keep her a little longer, standing there like a radiant spirit of victory. Her answer came back to him in broken snatches.

"Courage is—like cleanliness—its absence is repulsive. I couldn't live with any one—who wasn't clean—body and soul—and brave." She turned, steadying herself, and gave him her hand. "The wind won't let me moralise. It would rather blow me out to sea. Good-bye."

"Let me go with you."

She smiled down at him.

"I like the lone fight best."

"I shan't see you again, perhaps."

"If I can I will come—to the levee—to thank you for all you've told me."

"I shall wait for you—on the cliff—until you come," he shouted after her.

But she was already battling across the empty sand-dunes, and Earnshaw could only stand and watch her until suddenly the storm broke and in a minute she had vanished like a wraith into whirling clouds of mists and rain.

II

The lane had not been made for a 40 h.p. American car. Judging by its width, it had been intended for a foot-path, but had deliberately outgrown the ambition of its maker, who had curbed any further growing propensities by two stout stone walls on either hand. Certainly no two vehicles could have passed each other, and the waving plumes of

tamarisk hid effectively whatever lay behind the next treacherous and apparently reasonless bend.

Thomas Polglase of Illinois, U.S.A., cursed. He had felt a drop of rain on his face and an inherited, unforgotten wisdom warned him against those wildly flying clouds and the wind which, baulked of the lane by its high barriers, moaned dismally overhead.

His curses, like the rest of his vocabulary, like his clothes, like his very expression, were entirely American, more so than any genuine article of U.S.A. citizenship could have been. It was as though every eccentricity, every bizarre phrase, every feature, every exaggerated fashion of the national life had come together in one personality and developed there into an amazing caricature. Sometimes, indeed, he was obviously spurious. For in five years a man cannot develop a new nationality without making mistakes.

His chauffeur, Edwards, was genuine—a New Yorker and a good man in his own country, where the roads were built to assist traffic rather than discourage it. But this serpentine, thread-like Cornish lane, which aroused his alternate contempt and admiration, also wore his temper to ribbons.

"If it's meant to travel on it's a bad dream," he had muttered gloomily. "But if it's meant to keep down the population—sure, it's the most homicidal thing I've struck, and I give it best right here."

Thomas Polglase took the wheel from him. He was not wholly displeased. He had dreamed of this moment a thousand times, and each time the dream had varied. Sometimes he had walked—a kind of Haroun al-Raschid version inspired by a false and rather malicious humility—or he had driven a pair of greys bought for the occasion at Tattersall's, or he had used his latest Chalmers Limousine, lounging in solitary splendour amongst its luxurious cushions, or as a sportsman goggled and unrecognisable, whirled down upon St. Maro in a racer, himself at the wheel. None of these alternatives had been quite satisfactory. To walk meant sacrifice, and possibly danger, because, without the obvious and blatant signs of his wealth, he distrusted his own power. Also he distrusted his horsemanship. And if he stuck in the back of the car it might be taken for a hired affair. Or again, if he drove himself, thereby proving ownership, he might not be re-

cognised, and at best the man of leisure would seem, as it were, less leisurely. But this was the ideal. It partook both of ease and custom. The chauffeur was at his side, and if he drove himself it was for a whim, a fancy which could be relinquished at any moment. There was something casual, almost patronising about it which suited the man of wealth. He chuckled loudly.

"This 'll make 'em sit up, Edwards. Can you believe it, man, that I was raised here, in this forsaken nest—lived here for twenty-five years, as good a fool as any of 'em—dug up the taters and fed the pigs and dreamed of comin' in to a tater-patch and a pig of my own." The chuckle grew to a laugh. "Then I skipped to the States—it was that or goin' for a darnation soldier—and in five years—well, say it's some change, eh ?"

He talked for the sake of talking, for he was intensely excited. A long time ago he had known well enough what St. Maro thought of him, but since then he had lived among a class of men with other standards, and he had forgotten everything but the grudge he bore his own people. For he had smarted a long time under their silence. They had made him cringe and cower in himself, and a man who has been made to cringe never forgives or forgets.

"Gee! They'll sit up now!" he reiterated huskily.

Edwards made no comment.

"S'ppose you've cabled them ?" he asked. (The title 'sir' very rarely escaped him.) "Given 'em the chance to bring out the village band and all that, eh ?"

"Say, what sort of a silly bub do you take me for ?" his master retorted amiably. "Yes, I wired all right. And they'll be there, you can stake your aunt's last dollar on that, sonny. Oh, they had their grouch on me when they could afford it, but they can't afford it now. A pile in five years. Some goin', eh what ?"

"Yep," Edwards agreed.

Tom Polglase swung the great car neatly round a bend of the lane which seemed suddenly to have got the better of its chaperons, and spread itself out in a wide, unhedged track. Beyond the clearing lay Roads End. Polglase had never seen it before, and his tight, hard mouth twisted to a grin. In the dismal setting of colourless dune and dark, menacing clouds the place had a cheerless look. The flowers had no light in them, and the little grey-stone houses seemed to huddle miserably together. But there

were men and women and children lining the roadway, waiting, and Tom Polglase's heart swelled and grew hot within him.

"That's the happy home a fool gets for catching bullets for his country," he laughed. "Sort of pauper settlement. Wall, I don't bear a grudge. My folk won't have to stay here. I've got a brother, too—never walk straight again in his life—but I'll set him up—there's no stinge in T. Polglase—sakes alive, there's the old Ju-Ju himself." He waved and shouted, and, to the manner born, steered smoothly towards the gate against which Old Polglase leant and drew up almost without a sound. "Wall—old man, here's your prodigal!" He jerked open the door and sprang out, both hands outstretched. But Old Polglase did not move. He stood there—crouched rather—and his eyes gleamed like fires under the heavy brows. Behind him on the door-step of the house were his wife and younger son, as motionless as himself, watching. No one had spoken—no one had made a sound. Even as he had driven down the broad street Tom Polglase had wondered at that silence. It had chilled him, checked his self-confidence. He had expected cheering, facetiousness, perhaps masking envy and admiration; he had meant to answer good-humouredly, win them right off, recognise his old pals with the easy nod of success. But he had not done these things. He had gone straight to his own people, as though he had not noticed those others who watched him. And now he stood there with stubbornly outstretched hands. "Wall—say, don't you recognise me?" He could not stand there for ever in that posture. He was like an actor whose partners had not answered their cue. The blood flowed darkly under his sallow skin. He shouted to the two beyond that aggressively silent figure. "Hullo there—mother—Jim—can't you give us a welcome?"

It had begun to rain in good earnest—a fine, drenching rain which the wind blew about him in dank, icy sheets. No one had stirred. They were like frozen images. Only the eyes under those heavy brows kept their unrecognising stare on him. He took a step forward. "Look here—don't make a fool of me like this—you don't understand—I've made my pile. I'm going to play square with you." He paused, drawing his breath sharply through his teeth. Then he went on in a hurried undertone. "If you've got

a grudge against me—let's have it out indoors—it's darn wet here." He had struck every tone—appeal—bluff—boast. Old Polglase had not moved. It might have been that nobody had spoken. His face was like a block of roughly carved wood. His eldest son turned from him with a shrug of contemptuous good-humour. "As you like. It doesn't matter to me. If you can afford these little luxuries I don't care." But he was shivering. Not with the cold. A nervous agony twitched at his muscles. He had bullied through so many ugly moments—and come out strong. Now his teeth chattered. His feet and hands felt swollen. But his head had shrunk. It felt like a meaningless dot on his big body. He tried to walk steadily back to the car. "Wall, I guess we'll get a move on, Edwards."

He spoke loudly—louder than he had intended. It might have been a signal. The men who had stood at their gates came out and towards him. Some of them limped. They came slowly, not in the least menacingly, so that for a minute he thought that they recognised him and had decided to do the friendly. He grinned. "Wall, it's a bit late, you guys, but I reckon you didn't expect me like this——"

They did not answer. Throughout it had been as though he had not spoken at all. Their expressions were good-humoured, smiling. Some of them were smoking. Their wives and children stood by their gates and watched whilst they came from all ends of the settlement, converging on the new-comer, who recognised an old acquaintance with outstretched hand. "How's yourself, Treseth? There was more to you the last time we met."

The hand was not taken, apparently not seen. Roads End formed a circle round Tom Polglase. They came no nearer, but just stood there, still casual and unthreatening and quite silent. Two of their number came forward and quietly, but expeditiously, slipped him out of the heavy, astrachan-collared coat. He tried to laugh. "A sort of custom, eh?"

The man Treseth produced a pair of sheep-shears. With the same utter deliberation the coat was cut across and across. Tom Polglase gaped—then burst into a torrent of oaths. He rushed at them and was quietly pushed back and released again. "Darn you—what's the game? That's a five-hundred dollar coat you're doing in——"

They went on methodically. Treseth had been a tailor

in his time, and even with his one hand he could cut with dexterity and swiftness. In a minute each man had a small square of the precious cloth. Only Old Polglase refused his piece. He stared at his eldest son as though he had been a strange animal at bay. Tom Polglase turned about, swearing helplessly, and the shears ripped up the back of his coat and the shirt beneath, grazing the skin. It was done neatly, without violence, no one holding him, but the circle in which he stood was three men deep. He could have fought, if not to much purpose at any rate with some effect, for he was a big man, and his padded shoulders made him look bigger than he was. But he had lost the power and the will to fight. The instinct was atrophied. He had lived too long with the creed that most assailants can be talked or bought or cheated over. He tried to regain his self-assurance. But the wind blew the long, lank hair over his eyes, his face streamed with sweat and rain, and his coat hung in ribbons from his shoulder.

"Say, you guys—I guess we've had enough. I didn't come down here to be man-handled. I came back home just to show I hadn't forgotten—to give the lot of you hero fellows a high-class do."

They took no notice of him. One of them approached Edwards and gallantly offered him a hand to descend. He obeyed instantly. His assistant jerked a thumb over his shoulder and spoke two words. "Neutral. Git."

Edwards came from a country where it is essential to be clear and prompt of understanding and he understood. This was his employer's affair—a domestic squabble in which he had no call to interfere. He turned up the collar of his motor-coat, the circle made way for him, and he "got" with dignity and celerity.

"For the love of God——" Tom Polglase shouted after him and broke off, sobbing. He was frightened now, but it was bitter humiliation rather than fear that had broken him. He cut a forlorn, piteous figure in the hurricane of rain and wind, and it was merciful that no one save his father looked at him. The rest were too busy. They worked hard, and with some knowledge, and regardless of the increasing storm. In half an hour the splendid racer lay in pieces, undamaged—but every bolt and screw and valve neatly piled together in the roadway.

Then the circle opened, opened and spread out into two lines forming a passage.

Tom Polglase tried to speak, but his quivering lips made no sound. No one spoke to him. But not a woman or child or man let him out of their eyes. He tottered forward —and then suddenly, almost without his own volition—he began to run, and in a minute was flying like a man possessed—seawards.

III

He came out of the driving mist like a spectre, shadowy and indefinite, his arms waving, his black hair streaming in the wind. He did not walk straight, but staggered from side to side or swung round completely, seeming to veer about with the storm as though he were a part of it, and had no will or purpose of his own. He carried an unopened brandy-bottle which he flourished like a weapon in the face of an invisible enemy. And as he went he shouted incoherent blasphemies.

Thus he stumbled against Thomas Polglase of Illinois, U.S.A.

A cloud of rain whirled about them and hid them from each other, and Polglase clung to his invisible companion with a convulsive terror, which passed as the mist thinned for a moment, leaving them both dimly visible. He drew back with a shaken laugh.

"Gee—but I thought you were the devil himself!"

Stephen Tillett halloed exultantly and slapped the stranger on the shoulder.

"Gee—and so I am. Or—no—I'm a finer fellow than the devil—who's a simple soul at bottom—knows his job and does it—whereas I never know my job—and if I do —don't do it——" He hiccoughed and inspected the saturated and tattered figure before him with drunken sympathy. "And you—my magnificent vision—whence art thou—brings't thou airs from heaven or blasts from hell? or has the sea given up its dead—or art thou merely a symptom of my unfortunate complaint?"

The other drew himself up stiffly.

"My name's Polglase—T. Polglase, late of this—this damnation hole, now of Illinois, a U.S.A. citizen."

"You don't say? Wall—I guess Illinois hasn't agreed with you."

"It's agreed with me mighty well. You ask for T. Polglase at Illinois and they'll take their hats off and spread a carpet for you." He drew the tattered remnants

of his coat about him. He had been running, but no motion could keep the penetrating chill of the rain at bay. His teeth chattered. "I came back to see my people—this is what they've made of me——"

Tillett tossed his arms. Though he spoke rationally enough, there was something wild and reckless in his manner which was not all drunkenness. He seemed to be fearfully aware of a third presence, to whose voice he listened with anxious, hungry attention.

"People? Why—what's the good of 'em—throw them off—cut their tentacles—self's the man—paddle your own canoe—let the rest drown." He broke off, and his restless, sunken eyes dwelt on his companion with a kind of satirical intentness. "They've made a pretty mess of you. Get the law on 'em. Make 'em bleed. What's the law for if it don't protect a man?"

Polglase bit his teeth together.

"I don't want a scandal."

"You don't? Say, what did you pinch when you were—were late of this darnation hole?"

"I pinched nothing." He peered at Tillett through the thickening deluge. "Say—I'd better put my cards down. I left England five years ago, sir, because I had—my—my—own notion about things and meant to live up to 'em. That's my crime. My people are down there—at Roads End—so they call it."

Tillett rocked on his heels, brandy-bottle hugged to his sunken chest. His eyes gleamed with a brooding mischief.

"Five—years—ago—notions—United States Citizen—Roads End—why, man, it's like spelling a word—coward they called you—and kicked you out." He measured his companion from beneath knitted brows. "So—that's how one's soul looks after five years of it," he meditated.

Polglase did not answer. He was afraid—not for his life, but for something which had grown to be infinitely dearer to him. If only he could escape—get back to his hotel without having to run the hideous gauntlet of Roads End and St. Maro. He would not and could not face it, and his only hope lay in this mad and drunken stranger. Tillett nodded to himself. With the handle of a clasp-knife he snapped off the head of the bottle and drank deep before he handed it across.

"Take a mouthful of that. It'll set you up—make you forget your damn-self. Notions! Man—I had a con-

science—queer thing—a conscience—after you've served her with your soul—to turn on you and leave you in rags. But *that* helps. It clothes you. For a bit—you can believe you're a man again." He slipped his arm through his companion's and turned about, facing the wind. "You can come with me, Mr. United-States-Citizen. There's a place for you where I live—a hole for another of us—the chucked out, the belong-nowheres, the blasted do-as-I-pleases—Red Rover and Othello and all the rest of us——"

The wind seized on his voice with a moaning howl and for a moment both men staggered helpless and breathless in the teeth of the storm. But for all his intoxication and emaciated, bloodless body, Tillett held his ground and like a child Polglase clung to him. He had lost all sense of shame—all strength. To be strong he needed the fur-lined coat, and Edwards, and his racing-car, and all the insignia of his money. In this wracked and lonely world of rain and wind and thundering, invisible seas his money seemed an afar-off and fantastic unreality.

Tillett began to push on. The smoking mist shrouded their feet, which sank deep into a slippery quagmire of soaking grass and mud. They could only judge their direction by the sound of the sea booming against the base of the cliffs. But though Polglase's ears were strained in dread, his companion seemed madly reckless, indifferent. He began to sing—an absurd and tuneless ditty punctuated with shouts and taunting curses, as though in answer to the invisible third who stalked on his other hand. Sometimes the mist drifted so thickly between that he appeared only a shadow to his companion and the loud, hoarse tones sounded afar off and eerie, like a voice of the storm.

Polglase shook him by the arm.

"The sea!" he gasped—"we must be on the edge of the cliff—we've been going down hill—I can hear it—under our feet."

Tillett laughed. A sudden, savage gust of wind lifted the dense rain-cloud that had enveloped them, and, with a sick scream of terror, Polglase dropped to his knees, digging his fingers into the soil, clinging to the short grass as though an invisible devil were dragging him to his damnation. Right before them—so close that the edge crumbled under Tillett's feet, was a hideous, gaping void, whose width hid itself in darkness—a black measureless thing

like the mouth of a volcano, ablaze with white, ferocious flames.

Tillett stood motionless, gazing down, a grin on his livid, hatchet face, his gaunt arms raised above him as though in greeting.

"Aye, aye!" he shouted. "You earth—you'd be glad to be rid of us. The rain spits in our faces. The wind blows us to the sea, and the sea will have none of us, and spews us back to the land." He bent down and jerked Polglase brutally to his feet. "What are you cowering there for? Don't you hear? They won't have us. Aye, times have changed, my good friend. Once we could come along with our filthy, reeking money and buy our bit of land and call it ours and name ourselves this and that—and talk large, fat talk—Empire—England—freedom—God knows what—but that's all gone and done with. The price has gone up, Mr. United-States-Citizen—the land and the good names go to them who can pay the price—it belongs to the blood that *has* paid for it—and we—we, dirty, homeless dogs—we go naked in the storm. There is nothing we can buy now—our money stinks—only this is ours by right." Still swaying like a reed at the edge of the blow-hole he lifted the jagged lip of the brandy-bottle to his mouth. His long, thin neck swelled with the greedy draughts. "There—drink yourself—drink yourself mad like me."

Polglase snatched at the bottle. His own hands shook with cold and terror. The raw, cheap spirit flowed like red fire through his frozen blood. He went on drinking.

The mist rolled up again, hiding them from each other and from the chasm gaping at their feet.

IV

The window of Harding's library, which faced south-west, rattled dismally under the rain's thwarted imperative fingers. Sometimes, in a sudden gust of wind, the separate drops fused to a deluge, and the angry tapping became a swirl, a mysterious swishing, as though the draperies of a moaning, unhappy phantom brushed appealing against the window's fastness.

And, mingling with these nearer sounds, was the sea, roaring into Wrecker's Cove beneath.

But the library itself was quite still—an oasis of silence.

A shaded lamp burned on the glass table, and its circular glow made a frame for Harding's bowed head and shoulders and the big, supple hands. Mrs. Felicia Newman was in shadow—or rather it seemed that she herself had faded like a dying fire, whilst the man radiated his own strength.

"Now!" he commanded.

She made no move and he glanced up at her and encountered her look of mute terror and appeal. Then, at once, though he had not spoken, she drew up the sleeve of her dress and laid the pitiful arm on the edge of the table. As he rubbed over the skin with a disinfectant she whimpered, and, as he took the hypodermic syringe from the tray beside him, the whimper rose to a wincing cry; but his hold was implacable, and he paid no heed to her until he had jerked the needle dexterously from its sheath. Then he looked up again, and his expression was new to her, so that she gaped stupidly, her sunken, painted face still twisted into grotesque lines of pain and resentment.

"You cry from habit," he said, but quite gently. "You do not need to cry. *You* are very much stronger than you were."

He did not ask a question—he affirmed the change. But for the first time his eyes met hers intimately, they seemed to see her, no longer as a disease but as a human being—a personality. They were still penetrating but their intensity was softened by a thoughtful solicitude, a kind of eagerness which made him less inaccessible, less terribly invulnerable.

As a rule, she answered his brief statements with a docile "Yes, Mr. Harding," but her sick cunning had marked the change in him, and she bridled and pursed up her weak, untidy mouth.

"I—don't know. You're always saying I'm stronger—I don't know. I cough all day—as much as I ever did. And I don't weigh more than I did a month ago—even you can't make out I do. And my temperature——"

"So you've been taking it again," he interrupted. "How many thermometers must I confiscate before you learn to do as I tell you?"

She eyed him furtively.

"I suppose one's got the right to know about oneself," she mumbled.

"The right, of course. You have the right to clear out of here to-morrow."

Her gaze wavered and sank.

"And there's Mr. Modrow—he's not better either. He lies about it because he hates me to know, but I've heard him coughing—all through the night." She thrust her face suddenly close to his. "And Miss Jones—*I* think she's dying."

He did not flinch. Not a muscle of his face had stirred. And yet she knew somehow that inwardly he had stiffened as a man does under a sudden blow. A little evil wave of exultation lifted her on its crest. "You see how it is, Mr. Harding. And naturally I am anxious. I placed myself in your hands under certain conditions."

"Have you fulfilled mine?" he asked sharply.

She hurried on.

"Most people—my friends—would say I have been very foolish. After all, you are not a doctor, Mr. Harding. I don't know exactly what you are. I dare say doctors would—would disapprove—if anything happened——" She broke off flurriedly. "What I feel is—you ought to call in some one—in consultation—a qualified opinion."

He got up and stood in front of her with his hands thrust into the pockets of his white overall, and as surely as she had known that he had winced she knew now that he had passed out of her reach.

"I'll have no qualified opinion here," he said. "No doctor is going to take a hand in this fight. Understand that. But the way to Harley Street is open to you now—to-night. Shall I send Ashley for a carriage?"

She seemed suddenly to collapse. Her insolent voice cringed and whined.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Mr. Harding—of course not. It was the last thing in my mind. I have every confidence——"

"In that case I may explain that you are suffering from a reaction—an expected and necessary reaction. Hanuman, who was your immediate predecessor, suffered in the same way."

She had risen feebly to her feet and her moist, unsteady eyes peered across the intervening shadow at the limp little figure, uncannily childlike, which lay stretched out on a cushion before the smouldering fire.

"How quiet he is! I thought—monkeys are so mischievous and restless—aren't they? Is he—ill?"

Harding nodded coolly.

"Yes—very ill. If Hanuman is not exactly human he is mortal, and if I am not a doctor I am also not a magician. I am not even quack enough to cure everything." He gave a hard, ironical little laugh. "I should like you to be clear on that point, Mrs. Newman."

She went tottering across the room, her dried-up, bony hands clasped together, her eyes cast down.

"Yes, Mr. Harding." But as she opened the door she hesitated, her bird-like, sinister head cocked on one side, and listened. "What was that?" she whispered.

He turned impatiently. At first he heard nothing but the rain, then the sound of thick, excited voices reached him from the hall beneath, and without a word he crossed the room and pushed Mrs. Newman on one side. A blast of rain-soaked wind blew along the passage, the swinging lamp that hung from the old rafters flickered—then a door banged. He heard Ashley's nervous remonstrance and Cissie de Valincourt's accents of withering, pitying contempt.

"You swine—you dirty swine!"

The light still wavered, and the partial obscurity at the bottom of the stairs was alive with fluttering movement. Harding saw Tillett with his back to the wall and the black, dripping hair hanging over his eyes. Beside him, clinging to him as though they were still battling against the storm, was a man whom Harding had never seen before. His blank, white face with its gaping mouth made a queer blotch among the shadows. His free hand plucked persistently at the tattered remnants of his coat in the futile endeavour to patch them over his bare shoulders.

"You make me sick!" Cissie de Valincourt informed Tillett vigorously. "You're like a baby—if I let you out of my sight—off you go to the nearest mud-heap." Then, as she heard Harding's step on the stair, she swung round. "Algernon, keep out of this! It's no scene for your young and innocent eyes. You leave 'em to me. I've managed mother, and a couple of drunks won't worry this child."

Stephen Tillett looked up, and his smouldering eyes met Harding's with a stare in which was misery and laughter, hatred and pity.

"Brought a friend home, Othello—don't mind, eh? Congenial companion—one of our sort—he'll explain—you'll see."

Thereat the stranger roused himself. He grinned stupidly and held out a fat white hand that shook.

"'Scuse informality, Mr. Harding. Storm—ship-wrecked—so to speak. Mr. Tillett 'sured me of—of kind hospitality. My name's Polglase—T. Polglase of Illinois, United States Citizen, sir, at your service." He laughed. "Not my usual get-up, I may say. Drove down in my car—with chauffeur——" Suddenly he broke out into a stuttering, stammering rage. "Free country! You call this a free country? I tell you—I've been man-handled, sir—by my own people, by God—and for what? For not being a damned fool—for having my own notions—and—and sticking to 'em. What had all that damnation fighting got to do with me? I'm not a fighter. I've done with all that prehistoric stuff. I'm a man of brains and business, sir. Made my pile—and this is what I get. Damn them—and damn their silly, chuckle-headed bit of cabbage patch." He choked and his flushed and swollen face contorted itself into a grimace of understanding. "Say, Mr. Harding—we can shake on that, eh? You skipped, too, eh? Quite a happy little family gathering—birds of a feather—and—and all that. Shake, sir!"

But Cissie de Valincourt had taken a step forward, coming between Harding and the outstretched hand.

"If you weren't a poor drunken male thing I'd give you a thick ear for that!" she blazed out. "Birds of a feather, indeed! Who are you calling names, you third-class, boozey blighter!"

The light had steadied, and under it, her cheeks and eyes aflame, she seemed to blaze with her own audacious fury. And at sight of her an almost poignant, physical relief came to the man whom she defended. He had felt tired—tired beyond power of action—and oddly alone among these many watchers.

There was Modrow's twitching livid face peering at him over Ashley's shoulder. Behind him, among the shadows, Mrs. Newman tittered malignantly. And somewhere, though he did not see her, did not look for her, was a third presence who like the rest stood aloof, and watched and appraised and measured the strength of his defence. If he flinched they would be on him, like a pack of wolves.

"She, too?" he wondered vaguely.

But the cockney dancer had not watched. She had stepped between him and the attack. Her loyalty had flashed into instant action. And she looked well, too—

almost strong. Or was it only anger that gave her that vivid flush, that erect bearing? He compared her with the half fainting, bloodless girl he had found that night on the London streets, and a fierce assurance, mingled with a queer proud gratitude towards her, flowed into his exhausted nerves.

He turned to Ashley.

"Get Mr. Tillett to bed," he ordered. "This—this other gentleman can have my room. I'll sleep in the library. Give him dry clothes. You had better lock their doors. If you have any trouble—call me."

He went back up the stairs. He passed Mrs. Newman, who shrank away from him. She was afraid, for he had not flinched. And yet the very fact that he could take comfort in that triumph of his will revealed a change in him. He had never thought of triumph or of failure, or of anything but the one purpose. He had always stood aloof, dispassionate, impersonal. Somehow all that had gone. Somehow he had fallen into the thick of a struggle which he despised and hated. These people had suddenly become alive and real. He saw them as friends and enemies, good and evil, beautiful and ugly. He was in the midst of them—bound up with them. He felt their breath on his face, the heat of their bodies pressed against his.

He felt suffocated, oppressed—afraid.

He knew that he was not really afraid—only tired—utterly tired out.

But in the quiet solitude of his own room there was no rest or relief. Rather the silence, with the rain and wind beating down upon it, deepened his isolation and that new consciousness of lowering enemies closing in on him on every hand.

He moved uneasily about the room, turned up the lamp, and poked the dying fire to a last glow. And, as he did so, Hanuman, stretched on his pillow, opened his eyes and blinked at him and held out a hairy, feeble little hand.

A saucer of milk stood by the fender, and Harding dipped in his finger and held the white drop to the monkey's lips. There was no response. Only the golden-brown eyes, infinitely pathetic, sought his, and the hand remained patiently outstretched. He took it in his own, and the eyes closed. It was like a sick child, comforted and content.

Harding did not move.

The door opened. He heard it close again before he roused himself from his thoughts and turned to the intruder. The firelight had dazzled him, and, though he knew who it was, he felt no recognition but a blank, troubled wonder.

"I came as soon as the coast was clear," she said breathlessly, and with a subdued fierceness in her voice. "I feel mean and weak and beastly. *I* ought to have spoken—*I* ought to have answered that loathsome coward. I should have stood between you and such a mean attack. . . ."

"Why do you mind so much?" he interrupted curiously. "It isn't the first time that that sort of thing has happened. It isn't even the worst thing. . . ."

"To me it *is* the worst thing," she answered. "So much the worst! One doesn't mind fighting the enemy, and the blacker he is the better. It doesn't matter what he says or does—it can't touch one's own honour. But to be called friend by him—to be welcomed—recognised as—as a brother—that was intolerable." She pushed the loose hair from her face with a gesture of hot self-contempt. "And I let you stand there alone. I let her answer for me—and so finely, too—and I'd been silent—because I was ashamed——"

"Ashamed?" he echoed.

She stood silent. A smile, half gay, half abashed, played about her lips. It was as though she said to him "Don't you see for yourself?" And all the time he had been looking at her as a man does who wakes from a narcotic to strange surroundings and a strange face.

The hair fell loose over her shoulders, and in the shadow its splendid wealth of colour shone like burnished bronze. He had never seen her hair loose like that before. It reached almost to her knees—a bright mantle flung in daring triumphant contrast over old rose *crêpe-de-chine*, fashioned in that time—before things had happened—when a woman's dress sheathed her in close flowing lines like the drapery of a statue. In those days—on the rare occasions when women crossed his mental horizon—he had gibed at such a fashion. Now he remembered it, and saw that it was beautiful. And it seemed to him that he saw her, too, for the first time—some one superficially familiar, profoundly unknown.

"Why were you ashamed?" he persisted gently.

She shook her head.

"You will think me such a child. I found this old dress and put it on. I wanted to see what it felt like—to try and go back as it were to what I was then—and then I heard voices, and came out of my bedroom. But I couldn't come down—I thought you would laugh—I was ashamed." She turned away. "And now I'm so ashamed of my shame."

"Won't—won't you stay with me a little?" he asked.

He felt that she started. He felt that her eyes sought his in puzzled questioning. It was as though they watched each other from behind a barrier of shadows.

"If you wish it."

"Yes—I wish it. You know I am not given to politeness."

She came silently across to the fireside and sat down in the big chair whose austerity held her warm, rich colouring like the setting of a barbaric jewel. He looked up at her, but her eyes avoided his. They rested on Hanuman, whose limp little body lay between them.

"You are very patient," she said under her breath. "Sometimes I can hardly bear your patience. Oh—not with Hanuman. No one could be too patient with him. But with these people! You are giving them their lives, and they only hate and thwart you."

"They try to thwart me," he corrected grimly. "They are very ill."

"And Tillett is the worst—the most despicable."

"No—only the most suffering." Very gently he laid Hanuman's paw back on the cushion. He got up and stood by the mantelshelf, his face shaded by his hand. "That is why I have patience."

"You told me that of them all he was the best case."

"Physically—yes. I spoke of suffering. The man is sick in his soul. He drinks—and I can't stop him—not because he is ill, but because he is getting stronger. When one is very ill, things are less definite—less clear."

"What has he to forget?" she asked.

"His conscience." She lifted her grave eyes to his, and he went on with a subdued passion. "People talk glibly enough of conscience as the infallible guide, the impeccable judge. But it's all lies—humbug—hypocrisy. The greatest crimes and follies have been committed by men who have obeyed their inner voice. And those few

who awake too late to find they have been duped and tricked—their conscience bribed by fear or ambition or cruelty—they suffer, they are damned." He broke off abruptly, his brows convulsively knit, and she, too, was silent. They were both oddly thankful for the forgotten wind which from a moan rose to a sudden prolonged and wailing cry. It filled their consciousness, keeping thought in abeyance. In ghostly accompaniment they heard Tillett's voice from the room below. He was singing fitfully, sometimes at the top of his lungs, sometimes in a low, droning chant, his voice rising and falling with the storm. But there was no tune nor recognisable coherency in what he sang. Like the wind, it was pregnant with significance, and like the wind its meaning slipped away illusively into nothing.

Lillah sat back deeper into her chair, her slim brown hands clenched on the arms.

"There are spirits about to-night," she said, half to herself. "It doesn't matter whether one believes in them or not—they are there—Red Rover and all his gang. I can see them outside in the storm, beating at the doors and windows and cursing us. For this is the night when Red Rover comes back into his own, and we usurpers have barred the doors against him. Do you hear now? They are whispering amongst themselves—plotting against us—evil things; there—that is Red Rover's voice!"

It was the sea she heard—booming into the subterranean caves and tunnels of Wrecker's Cove. Harding glanced down at her with a half smile.

"You people the world with your fancies," he said. "Is Red Rover one of th[illegible]?"

She shook her head

"No, he is real. Al[illegible] people about here know him. He lived at Lone Point[illegible] was in these windows he set his false beacon, and in this room he hanged himself," she glanced about her, seeking the shadows. "You see, his time was up. The excise men were at the door—and somehow, for all the evil that he had done he was a sort of gentleman—a brave man. There was to be no jeering and laughter over his end—no dragging through the streets in irons, no shameful gallows. He paid the penalty—but he paid it in his own way. . . ."

"From these rafters?"

"Yes."

"Who told you this tale?"

"Mr. Earnshaw. He told me that once a year—perhaps because he cheated justice—the devil sets him free, and for a week there are storms and wrecks all along the coast. And at Lone Point they are worst of all."

Harding looked back into the firelight.

"You and Mr. Earnshaw are great friends," he said.

"Friends? Yes—I suppose we are. We meet sometimes on the cliff. And sometimes I think he is only another fancy of mine—a kind of make-believe who tells me stories—brave stories I would like to hear from my brother, or some one. . . ." She broke off. She scarcely knew her own thought. But Harding had turned away and walked over to his writing-table. He stood there with his back to her, and she heard the impatient rustling of his papers. "You do not mind my being friends with him?" she asked.

"Mind? No. I am glad. It will help you over this time."

"Not even that. For he is going away."

The restless movement stopped.

"You told me he was to be married."

"The marriage has been delayed. He is going to travel first—to forget things. . . ."

"To forget things!" he echoed with ironical inflection.

She glanced shyly round at him.

"But before he goes he is so anxious that we should be friends with the people here. Otherwise he feels that things may become very difficult—almost impossible. He has asked us to call on the Bayards, who would stand up for us, as it were. They would be only too glad. But I would not accept until I had spoken with you. For I know how you feel . . ."

Harding did not move.

"Did—this Earnshaw ask me, too?"

She nodded eagerly.

"You especially. A great friend of his will be there whom he wants you to meet—a doctor—Arnold Carrington was the name, I think. It sounded familiar somehow. Have you ever spoken to me of him?"

He waited until the howl of the wind had died down again.

"Yes—I may have spoken of him."

"Are you angry?" she asked.

He turned at once and came back to the fireside.

"Why should you think I am angry?"

"I don't know—you were so quiet."

"I was thinking. You want to go to these Bayards, don't you?"

She considered a minute, then lifted serious eyes to his.

"Yes—somehow I do."

"Then you had better go. Give Mr. Earnshaw that last consolation."

"Will you come with me?"

"No."

"I do not wish to go without you."

"Why not? What does that matter to you?"

"We are partners. Partners must go together."

"You are very loyal. Too loyal perhaps. If you had fallen into unscrupulous hands you might have had to pay dearly for your loyalty."

"Do you think me so foolish—such a gullible child? You see——" her smile was a little mocking, "I have not fallen into unscrupulous hands."

"No—but if you had," he persisted. "For the sake of argument, let us suppose that you had entered into partnership with a man who had lied to you—boasted of funds which he did not possess—of plans which he could not carry out—what then?"

She bent her fine brows on him in puzzled reflection. It was not his question that troubled her, but Harding himself. There was something strange and unfamiliar in his look and voice, as though, beneath the semblance of half good-humoured, half patronising interest, the whole man quivered with intolerable nervous tension.

"What then?" he repeated doggedly.

She answered almost without thought.

"Why then—I suppose the partnership would be dissolved."

He stared at her for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"Why—of course. The natural, rational thing. You would wash your hands of him, pay his debts like an honourable partner, get the last stain off your fingers. Whoever said women were not practical!" He broke off. She had the feeling that he had locked and barred some inner door against himself. "Well, as you say,

you have not been gulled like that. If we two dissolve our partnership, it will be because our work together is done. In another week, at the latest, we can go to these Bayards—to this precious Carrington—this Earnshaw; there will be no reason why we should fly them then."

She was up and facing him in the dying light of the fire.

"Do you mean that we are at the end? . . ."

"I mean that in a week, at the latest, I shall know. I had expected the first signs of reaction earlier. In a week they will be there. . . ."

He faltered, the facts that he had meant to lay before her fading from his grasp. For suddenly he had realised her strangeness in that unlovely, gloomy room—and in his own life. With her free hair and the rich, incongruous dress, she was a phantasy, a dream, something beautiful but unreal, and alien to his whole thought and purpose. And yet, again, there was such pride and joy and exultant belief written in her eyes and trembling lips that he was shaken—thrown from his self-possession and stoic reserve.

"Oh, you have made me happy!" she whispered. "You have made me happy!" He said nothing. She bent down over little Hanuman, and he knew that it was to hide her tears. "And he, too, has done his share. And he knows nothing—and lies so still. Why is he so quiet—so cold?"

He held himself stiffly, almost rigid.

"I don't know. I am not a doctor. I don't know why—he is like that." His voice broke and grew rough and uneven. "There *are* things I don't know—don't understand. And yet I have meddled—sometimes I think that I have been more audacious than the gods allow—that I have dared more than a man may dare."

She drew herself up again, very quiet now and steadfast. And he knew that, for all his strength and will, he had cried out to her.

"You have only been brave," she said. "And the gods love courage."

"You still trust me?"

"Yes."

"And if I told you that Hanuman—Hanuman, who is, after all, my test, my justification—were dead?"

"I should still believe in you."

"Hanuman *is* dead."

She held out her hand to him.

"In a week, partner!"

He felt her warm, strong clasp. It awoke a memory of her—of that first night on the station platform—and how, even. then, her touch had thrilled and warmed him. He turned away sharply and went back to his table and sat down.

"You have been very kind. Don't think about it all —or worry. I have my moods of despair, like other men. And I am more tired than I can tell you."

"I know. Just lately I have begun to see how tired you are. For five years you have never rested—never taken your eyes from your goal. Sometimes I have forgotten that you are human."

She stood on the other side of the table, opposite him, and he looked up at her. his features stern and colourless.

"I am not human," he said. "I have no right to be. I have gone against my race. I left the herd in its hour of peril and went against its law. A man who does that loses the right to feel and think with his kind. He has become an outcast. There is only one thing that can give him back his right—if he can prove that he went his own way, not for his own glory, not to save his own skin, but for the ultimate good and happiness of his herd —then, and then only, can he be justified."

She came nearer to him. It seemed to him that now he saw nothing but her eyes so full of generous faith.

"As you will be."

Her hand rested on the table. He covered it with his own for an instant, then withdrew it and let it lie clenched before him.

"Until then I may not be like other men. I have no right to desire, or feel, or even suffer. I must bring my proof before I can be a man again—and feel as men feel. And then"—he turned his head frowningly away— "then it may be too late."

She made no answer. She bent down swiftly and silently, and a minute later he heard her light step and the soft closing of the door.

But he sat there motionless, staring at the hand which she had kissed.

CHAPTER VII

I

IN spite of gnawing impatience to be gone, Earnshaw was compelled to a laugh and a good-humoured expression of respect for Genifer's method of dealing with a thorny situation. For an hour it had really seemed as though the celebrated yearly tea-party—always organised with the idea of discouraging further visits from Bayards' temporary parishioners and always so successful that from thence on to the end of their stay they haunted the vicarage and went to church regularly to please the dear old vicar—would come to a real and dismal disaster.

It appeared that the Apron had had "words" again with Mrs. Strange who acted as butler on these occasions, and consequently there was no Mrs. Strange to be had—at least not for the Apron's asking, even supposing she could be induced to ask a second time, which was more than improbable. It was in this crisis that Genifer had revealed a masterly if somewhat Machiavellian diplomatic talent. With his own ears Earnshaw had heard her address to the Apron. It included sundry references to the Apron's superior talents, her advantages as a Londoner over a poor benighted Cornishwoman, who had never so much as seen the Tube or scented the petroleum-flavoured atmosphere of a 'bus, and wound up with a Christian exhortation to charity and loving-kindness, especially towards one's less favoured brethren.

"And I'm sure when Mrs. Strange comes round presently you'll be kind to her, Maggie," had been among the concluding sentences. "It's hard for a woman to apologise to some one younger than herself, and naturally you *were* a little impatient, weren't you?"

And now Genifer had just finished with Mrs. Strange.

"So you'll come, won't you? I knew you would. We couldn't do without you. Poor Maggie gets so tired even

as it is. You see, she had a hard time in that dreadful London, and it's made her irritable and quick-tempered. And then she's getting on, poor old dear, and her rheumatism worries her dreadfully. I know I can trust you to be forbearing with her, won't you?"

And Mrs. Strange smiled her slow, good-humoured smile, and Genifer returned to Earnshaw, who waited for her at the gate and greeted him with a triumphant boyish wink.

"That's just to show you how I'll manage the House when I'm Prime Minister," she said gaily. "And now we'll be off and meet your lady of Lone Point."

They walked quickly, for they were already late, and Genifer was eager to be back before the arrival of their guests. Moreover Red Rover had still a night to run, and there was a sultry, windless twilight creeping up from the south-west, which she watched with a distrustful, experienced eye. "It may just wait for us," she judged, "but there'll be a rough night. When do you expect Carrington to turn up, Keith?"

"Any time. A motor-car knows no law." He hesitated and then added hurriedly: "In a way I'm glad Mrs. Harding is coming by herself. Her husband is a queer fellow, and this—this sanatorium business is queerer still, and Carrington is so confoundedly orthodox. They might let fly at each other. I don't want Mrs. Harding to be hurt. . . ."

"She shan't be—if we can help it."

He looked at her with warm eyes.

"I don't believe there is any one so good as you are in the whole world, Jenny."

"Good!" She lingered over the word, smiling to herself in an odd, one-sided way. Then she sighed and shook her broad shoulders as though she were throwing off a tiresome burden. "Keith, at this time of day, you should know better than to call me good when my nose is peeling, and when we are about to meet a lady whose nose, I am sure, never peels. Really, men have no tact; even an entirely worthy, well-meaning specimen like yourself pays compliments that would disgust an elephant!"

He laughed at her good-natured wrath, but he had no heart to retaliate. Their old, cheery comradeship, with its banter, its gibes, and mock-indifference covering a serene and confident love, seemed to him to have become

a sham—a pitiful ceremonial like the crowning of a powerless king. And yet she played her part so well. She was so gay, so apparently untroubled. She filled his drear silence with easy talk of his coming journey. She made plans, envied him, even discussed their marriage on his return.

"For perhaps I shall marry you, after all," she explained, with a wise shake of her curls.

Intoxicated joy of life and profound despair alternated in him so swiftly that he was never far from emotion. So that he answered with genuine feeling. And she smiled again the same whimsical, one-sided smile.

"You've got to travel a long way first, Keith Earnshaw," she said grimly.

They came to the cliff path which Lillah would have to follow on her way from Lone Point. Whether she would really come, whether she expected him he hardly knew. There were moments when the whole thing seemed unreal, visionary, a midsummer night's passion, when there was nothing substantial but Genifer, and their marriage, and the quiet, settled routine of his life.

Then he saw her, and all else receded into shadow. Genifer's voice beside him sounded dull and afar off. He could not hear what she said. His heavy pulses had leapt up as though in answer to a familiar, irresistible call, and their beating thundered in his ears. Remorse, doubt, self-questioning were gone like a mist before the wind. The sun—so it seemed to him—had broken out from behind the clouds. His blood raced smoothly through his veins with a young and reckless surrender to the moment's happiness.

She was kneeling at the edge of the cliff, peering over, but when she heard them, she sprang up in laughing confusion—a rather unfamiliar figure, with a wide leghorn hat shading her eyes, and the rough tweeds replaced by a Liberty muslin frock that revealed all the slender grace of her body. She looked at once younger, gentler, and a little ashamed, like a child that has been caught and tamed and decked in its best clothes. And she was radiant enough to stir the heart of any man or woman.

"You've never seen me like this before, have you?" she asked. "I've made myself a real lady for you, and you don't know what it cost me. I sat up all night over this old frock. Will it do?"

She looked at Genifer as though they had been friends all their lives, and Genifer looked back with serene appreciation.

"Fine, Mrs. Harding. But you'd do in sackcloth. But I believe you'd forgotten all about us. You can't get to the vicarage over the cliff—unless you want to reverse things and travel via heaven."

"It was the cormorants," Lillah explained. "*You* ought to be interested in them, considering what you owe them. There are three babies and they're walking up and down their precipice trying to make up their minds to fly. And to-day I've discovered a young seagull—an absurd, solemn wee thing like an alarmed owl. We've been staring at each other. I wish you'd look at them."

Genifer shook her head severely.

"It's my lot to have to do with irresponsible people," she declared. "Do you realise, Mrs. Harding, that I am supposed to be presiding at a tea-party at this moment, and that I have come, like the policeman I was supposed to have been in my last life, to fetch you?"

Lillah turned quickly, and her face was earnest now, almost pathetically eager.

"Did you really come to fetch me, Miss Bayard? That was kind of you. I shan't be shy now."

"I never heard of any one being shy with me," said Genifer, rather regretfully. "I inspire many things, I believe, but not awe."

She gave her big, jolly laugh, and then they were walking together over the grassy downs as though nothing so ugly as the scene of their last parting had ever been. Earnshaw followed, of a purpose keeping a little apart from them. All through he had not spoken, instinctively leaving to their feminine wit the task of bridging the first awkward moments of their meeting, and now it gave him a queer, tender pleasure to see them, as it were, from a distance, separate from himself, walking together as friends—two women whom he loved. "When I am thousands of miles away I shall see them like this," he thought, and the vision of friendship between them stilled the conflict within him and eased his aching sense of disloyalty. They were so sane, so balanced, so fine in their different ways that beside them his passion looked violent, ugly, a monstrous, unclean thing. Its glamour faded. He saw that, so long as it possessed him, he could

have no part in their lives, that he was a masked enemy against whom their finer instinct would be aroused. And now indeed he felt that he would be content--humbly grateful, just to walk with them, be their friend, their brother, their trusted comrade. A lucid serenity and resignation, like the clean, cold wind on a mountain height swept over his fever. He began to make plans for their future, to rebuild his life. He would take all that had happened to him, all that he had done, even to this madness, and build up something fine with it—not a cathedral, but a strong human dwelling-place, which men and women would turn to in the storm and pass smiling in the sunlight. He saw himself, after the healing passing of time, as Genifer's husband, with the old love growing up straight and green from its deep roots. He saw Lillah standing within the glowing circle of their lives. There would be a secret bond between the three of them—something finer than most mortal friendships. The dross and froth would have been cleared away, leaving them the clean good wine.

And he was content, unutterably at peace.

And so he planned and dreamed until they reached the tamarisk-guarded walls of the vicarage's back garden. And there Genifer came to a halt, with a look of such rueful consternation on her broad, sunburnt features that he laughed and felt his feet already on the new road. But she shook her head at him. A distant hum of conversation, punctuated by the rattle of teacups, and the boom of the vicar's best clerical notes, justified her solemnity.

"They've come—the whole clan!" she lamented. "Keith, we must pretend we've been here all the time showing Mrs. Harding the flowers—oh, I know there's only a cabbage patch, but Mrs. Harding dotes on cabbages—don't you? And there *are* sweet-peas—crowds of them. Keith, please rescue me—look intelligent—or, if you can't manage it—just look natural, there's a dear!"

Leaving him to bring up the rear, she took Lillah by the arm and led her cautiously up the narrow path which ran between the cabbages and past the kitchen, whence came sounds of wrangling, flavoured with strong Cockney and Cornish accents. A gaily coloured screen of sweet-peas did in fact divide the back garden from the lawn in front, and as she reached it Genifer paused again, her finger to her lips, her brown eyes dancing. For the

general talk had died down. The vicar apparently held the platform, his supremacy only threatened by one voice—a very cool, well-modulated voice, which cut through his fierce tirades with the keen precision of a knife.

"I don't care what you say," declared the vicar, after the manner of his cloth, "if you take that idiotic baronetcy, Carrington, you're a confounded fool, and you'll never catch my guineas straying into your consulting-room. You'll have done for yourself in the eyes of all self-respecting, thinking men. Everybody knows what you paid for the thing, and everybody'll want to know what sort of a fool you are to need it. I'll tell you what a title is, my friend—it's the mayonnaise over doubtful fish. It looks well—and it's not till afterwards you know what you've eaten—but, by Jove, you can never look mayonnaise in the face again."

There was a laugh—not a very certain one, because the birds of passage were not expecting so much eloquence from the rather halting clergy of the preceding Sunday—but quite irrepressible.

"If you do away with titles you must do away with distinctions of every kind," remarked the deliberate voice.

"And why not?" boomed the vicar. "Why the devil not, sir? Am I any more or less reverend for having Reverend stuck on to my name?"

Gonifer pushed the sweet-peas carelessly on one side.

"It's a shame to interrupt," she whispered. "Father and Carrington always quarrel, and it's such a treat for them. Look at the gladiators, Mrs. Harding."

Lillah peered through the gap. She saw the little green stretch of lawn and a brave show of summer flowers, and many tables squeezed into every possible nook and corner, and many complacent people. The vicar, in his best clothes, stood big and defiant against a background of fuchsia, and opposite him, stretched out easily in a deck-chair, a slim, keen-faced man looked upon him with a good-natured tolerance. From first to last Lillah never took her eyes from this stranger. She was sure that she had not seen him before, and yet it was as though she had known him intimately—feared him all her life. Laughter and high spirits were dead in her. She felt oppressed, uneasy—she did not in the least know why.

"Why shouldn't humbugging distinctions be done away with?" the vicar repeated defiantly.

Arnold Carrington selected a cigarette from his case with a care of a man who has made deliberation a pose, a professional hall-mark.

"For one thing—because they are not humbugging, but absolutely necessary. They are the only guide that ordinary people have to travel by. What would happen, for instance, in my profession, if all the half-educated cheats and cranks were allowed to set up on an equality with genuine doctors and thus prey on the gullibility of the people——"

"Well—they do set themselves up anyhow," Bayard interrupted truculently, "and if people want to be gulled, no one can prevent them. Besides, there are so-called cranks that do a lot of good. There's a fellow here who has set up a sort of sanatorium, and his patients seem to swear by him though he turns more than one honest penny over the business. Mr. Harding's no doctor that I know of, but I dare swear he's as good as——"

"Harding, did you say?"

Earnshaw made a quick, anxious movement. But the disaster had come like a flash of lightning out of a clear sky, cleaving an abyss at their very feet. And his intervention was useless. For Carrington had laughed.

"Peter Harding—is that the man? Well, I knew his father—a thorough-paced crank, if you like, who had to be hounded out for a disgraceful breach of professional etiquette, and the son——"

"The son's a decent fellow enough," Bayard insisted hotly, regardless of his own dealings with Lone Point. "None of your Levitical carryings on into the third and fourth generation here, please."

Genifer tried to move, to put an end to an intolerable situation, and Lillah turned to her. Her face was so stern that, quick of action as she was, Genifer faltered helplessly.

"Please—don't interrupt. It's my—my affair, Miss Bayard."

Carrington's voice went on, and its lazy good-humour had given place to a hard, scarcely controlled anger.

"I know Peter Harding, too," he said; "and, since you say he has ventured to set up a sanatorium here, I have not the faintest hesitation in telling you what I know Moreover, if it lies in my power to expose him and bring

him to book, I shall do so. For the man is dangerous—a half-trained scientist stuffed with a lot of haphazard medical knowledge gained from an obsession-ridden father—and a despicable character to boot. It's a harsh statement, but—well, judge for yourself. This Peter Harding came to me at the end of the first twelve months of the war. I was home on leave. He was in rags, and pretty well starving. Somehow or other the fellow had got wind of compulsion, and, in the event of it becoming law, he wanted me to help him to an exemption, on scientific grounds of course, because he was doing invaluable work, etc., etc.—you remember the rigmarole. I laughed in his face. Simply as a joke I told him to get behind petticoats—marry, you know—they weren't thinking of married men at that time. And do you know what the beggar did? He did marry—some unhappy, deluded girl—an heiress into the bargain, if you please. How he inveigled her into it, I don't profess to know; but he was a dogged sort of chap, and of course she hadn't an idea of what he was really after. So they married at once, and then, when the Compulsion Act spread a little wider—why, they fled together—to America."

Lillah drew a deep breath—almost of relief. Something that had lain like a galling poison in her blood had come to a head at last. She had held back so long, been silent, patient to the end of her endurance. But the end was reached now. She heard Earnshaw's voice—"Lillah—Lillah!" he seemed to say over and over again. She felt his appealing hand on her arm. She shook it off contemptuously.

"This is my business," she repeated stubbornly.

She waited for the vicar's troubled answer.

"It's ugly—it sounds ugly," he admitted. "I don't know what to think. After all, he has come back, you know——"

Carrington shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he would. Believe me, they all do. Murderers come back to the scene of their crimes. This Polglase you were telling me about, and Harding—they're the same make. They have to come back. They can't help themselves. Cowards though they are, they want to have it out——"

She never knew how it came about, but the next instant, so it seemed, she was standing alone, facing Carrington.

With the other men of the little party, he had risen instinctively to his feet, and she met him, eye to eye, and all the bitterness born of the searing humiliation of those exiled years blazed up in her, so that for a moment she was only conscious of freedom and relief.

"I heard what you said"—her voice was low-pitched and clear and very steady—"and, Dr. Carrington, since you have chosen to attack my husband here, publicly, thinking there was no one to defend him, I have the right to answer you as best I can. And my answer is that you lie, you lie stupidly and spitefully, knowing nothing of the truth. I am the unhappy, deluded girl—the heiress—whom he cheated into marriage. I asked him to marry me. I asked him for that privilege. I desired to save him because I knew that he could do for England—yes, and for all the world—something that no one else could do. I knew that, in trying to save himself, he was doing the finest, bravest thing of all. He *has* done the bravest thing; and in a few weeks, a few days perhaps, he will be justified a thousand times, and you, Dr. Carrington, will be so shamed—so sick with shame that you will wish that you had died——" She paused. No one had stirred. Carrington faced her in silence; his face as white as her own, but there was a flicker of a smile about his thin lips. She saw it. Even then her voice never rose from its quiet level.

"But I remember you, Dr. Carrington. I remember now, quite well. You were Dr. Harding's friend—his *protégé.* He trusted you—and, as the younger man, you believed in him, fawned on him, took all he had to give you in encouragement, in influence, in knowledge. And then, when he had set your feet on the ladder—when his bad hour came and you saw your own career being dragged down with his—you dropped him—you washed your hands in innocence—'I do not know this man.' You called my husband a coward, and I say that you lie—and you lie because the cowardice is in you. What he did was done to save others—what you did was to save yourself."

He was not smiling now. He looked at her gravely.

"You are almost libellous, Mrs. Harding. But I can feel no resentment. Your faith is so very—so very admirable."

She stared back at him, incredulous, stricken with an

unbearable sick horror. The enormity of what she had done was nothing to her. She had meant to sting him to fury, to a blow even, anything so that she might at last come to grips with this haunting enemy whose spokesman he had been. And instead he faced her unmoved, and his eyes were full of a dispassionate pity.

She did not answer him. Suddenly all her strength was gone. She turned. Vaguely she was aware of many faces—of the vicar standing there looking at her in sorrowful, helpless consternation, of a firm hand that stretched itself out of a gathering mist and took hers and led her. . . .

She clung to it, for she was half-blind, and could not even see her way.

II

He kept resolutely to her side. After that one moment's blind groping, she had forced herself from his hand and turned seawards, walking with a desperate, unpausing swiftness. He did not speak to her. She seemed blankly unconscious of his presence, and yet he believed—knew that she needed him. He knew everything. He knew that she longed for silence, that she must walk fast because only with every faculty of her body in action could she master her intolerable pain. He took a pathetic pride in this knowledge of her. For he was wrought up to the state of exquisite sensitiveness and intuition which comes only to those who love greatly, and in much sorrow.

Once he had glanced at her. If a trace of girlhood had lingered in the gracious lines of her features, it had gone now. In one moment, so it seemed to him, she had matured, grown to her full stature of mind and body. But the change had been too sudden. The golden-brown of her face and neck were drained to a bloodless white; there was a pinched look about the fine nostrils and the ardently curved mouth. Still, she carried her head well, and under the black arch of her brows there glowed an undimmed and gallant scorn of weakness. That, too, he knew.

His heart was hot with pride of her, and sick with pity.

She led the way over the windy headland where already the spume lay in quivering yellow patches on the short grass and the gulls rose up in white clouds from their

eyries, and were driven, screeching and circling, inland before the gale. She came to the old trenches and the narrow clefts in the cliff, and the jagged, isolated rocks where a patient sea had broken through the defence and drawn the bones of the defenders, and the earth they fought for, down into its quiet depths. And suddenly she stopped, as though she had come to the end of her quest, and dropped down and lay huddled in the spray-soaked grass with her face hidden in her hands.

He knelt down quietly beside her. He did not touch her or look at her. Just as he knew that she needed him, so he knew that she did not want him even to think of her, but in his very mind to stand away from her and leave her free and alone to her struggle.

So he sat and looked out to sea and watched how, as evening drew on, the sweeping line of the coast merged into the sullen water, and how, minute by minute, the south-western horizon darkened and threw its dead shadow over sea and land so that the whole world seemed steeped in hopeless grey. The wind, which had dropped since morning, was rising fast, coming on in great bounds like some wild beast. He felt its moist body encircle him and suck him out in its recoil towards the cliff edge.

He forced his mind resolutely from the woman beside him. He thought of the three-master out to sea, running before the storm, of the men aboard her, and of *their* thoughts again as they watched the ugly weather gathering about them, and the great pursuing monsters at their heel. He thought of Lone Point and of Wrecker's Cove beneath with the spectre of their old lord haunting their fastnesses in wait for just such another victim. This, his last night, he was brewing to some purpose.

And of many other things Earnshaw thought, but of himself and of his love—not yet.

He felt something brush against him. It was so light and cold that he did not know whether it was the grass bowing before the wind, or her hand resting for an instant on his. But she had drawn herself up and was looking at him. The leghorn hat had long since been tossed aside, and the wind blew back her hair from her wet face. But he saw that it was spray, not tears, on her cheeks, for her eyes were clear and her mouth steady. Somehow he knew that it was a long time since she had cried.

"I don't know why I mind so much," she said.

"You know I would have given anything on earth to have spared you this," he answered unsteadily.

Her lips curled with a bitterness that was not for him.

"Yes—but you couldn't have helped it. Things like that have happened before—nothing perhaps so definite, but worse—pin-pricks, looks, words dropped here and there—things you couldn't get hold of. And I never minded. I laughed at them. And then—it was such a long time to wait—whilst—now it's almost at an end. But perhaps I have grown tired—and lost courage."

"You were very brave," he answered.

She shook her head.

"Oh no, that wasn't brave. It was weak. It—it was like a betrayal. I should have laughed. That would have been the strong thing. But I couldn't any more. Suddenly everything seemed to come to a head—and it was too much. We have borne it so long—you don't know what it has been like——"

He made a gesture of appeal.

"I want to know. Tell me—so that I shall know how to help you."

"Did you believe what he said?"

"I haven't thought. I've only thought of you. I only seem to have heard and seen you. I know that it was nothing against you—if it had been I shouldn't have been such a helpless fool. Carrington would have had to answer to me——"

She frowned painfully.

"You can't separate me from my husband like that."

"I know—forgive me—tell me—I shall believe what you say."

She did not answer at once. She looked down at the man beside her. Such loyalty and compassion suffused the disfigured face that instinctively she stretched out her hand in gratitude and laid it upon his. But she did not feel him tremble.

"You are my friend—my good friend. I have no one else. Believe me—help me."

He bowed his head over her hand.

"I will help you. It's a pitiful, worn-out phrase; but I would give my life—every hope of happiness—to know you happy."

And still she heard nothing but his friend's compassion and as yet he himself knew of nothing else. In the tumult

of his mind it was the thing that he clung to—believed in till it was too late.

"I only ask you to believe me," she repeated.

"I shall believe you—I do."

She sat for a moment in silence, brooding over the sullen waste of water.

"I think the really murderous lies aren't lies at all," she said at last with subdued anger. "They are truths told by people who have no faith—who are bad themselves and must believe evil of others at whatever cost. What that man said was true and blackly false. It was as though he took the body of all that had happened and gave it his own ugly, hateful soul. And no one can prove what he has done because every one can see the body, and the soul is hidden."

"Show me the soul," he interposed steadily.

"I must—I must make you see it. For then I, too, shall see clearer and be strong again."

"I want to understand." He drew himself nearer to her, leaning on his elbow, his face hidden. But his voice vibrated beneath its quiet, judicial level. "You married your husband so that he might escape service?"

"Yes."

"Was it—for love of him?"

She laughed—an unsteady, irrepressible laugh, surprised out of her distress, and then she paused a little as though pondering over her own laughter.

"It was the second time that I met Mr. Harding that I proposed. The first time was in the Southampton Express. We travelled together, and he told me odd things about his work. I did not know it then, but we were both going back to a death-bed, he to his dying father—I to my father already dead." She turned quickly to Earnshaw. "My father was Andrew Calhoun. You may have heard of him, for though he was not good, or even great, he was rich and so well known. He held great blocks of East End property--and factories where women worked. We were friends, he and I, until one day I went among the people he employed and the homes he had built. In those days I don't think I had any fixed creed or principles or politics, but I suppose I have the modern woman's soul, and there were some things I could not tolerate—things that drove me mad to think about. My father and I had one short interview, and after that we

never spoke. It was finished—all our friendship and affection gone in a flash, turned to hatred. We had lived together all these years and suddenly we recognised whom it was we had lived with. I went abroad, to think things over, though at the bottom I knew well enough that there was only one course possible, and whilst I was away my father died." She paused, frowning to herself. "I felt nothing and I know that his last thought was full of malice and bitterness. He wanted to hurt me in the cleverest way he could. There was no question of disinheritance. Every penny of his fortune came to me—but under trust. And when I married the trust came to my husband. So all my life this loathsome money which seemed to me foul with blood and sweat was to hang about my neck—poison my relationship with the man I might marry—poison my life. It was like a devil—I might have yielded to it and taken all it had to give me, but its enmity was pitiless. For I could do nothing with it. The trustees were men after my father's own heart and mind. They knew his wishes, and they meant them to be obeyed. One of them, indeed, would have bargained with me—" she made a little gesture of disgust. "Forgive me—I have to tell you all this if you are to understand. I have never told any one else—only Peter and you—you are the first and the last friend."

"And I thank you," he answered in his low voice. "Of all things in my life, I shall be most proud that you trusted me—Lillah." He did not know whether he had spoken her name or whether it was only the persistent, remorseless echo in his mind. But at least she had not heard. She had gone back to her memories.

"So I did what I had meant to do from the beginning. I refused to touch the money. I went out and found work. It was hard enough to find. But though my father refused me the freedom he had trained me for, I had had a man's education and I won through at last. Even then my father's malice haunted me. I might earn my own bread, but the money was there all the time—accumulating like a horrible heap of fœtid refuse. Men and women were being ground to death for it, in my name. I couldn't forget it. It was a nightmare that followed me all day. I went and lived in the lowest slum of my property—a stupid, futile penance, I know, but it eased me. And then the war came." She lifted her head a little. "I

suffered, I suppose, like hundreds and thousands of men and women. I loathed the slaughter—perhaps more than most, because my whole life was impregnated with the misery and suffering of others—but still the duty of it was never hidden from me for an instant. I could not stand apart. It was my soil—my people. I had no right to climb into safety and brood over the salvation of my soul and conscience whilst men and women of my race were dying. I went into the factories—not into the ordinary factories—but there where every hour teemed with destruction. Oh—no, don't look like that—it was not in any spirit of heroism, but to get peace—not to shelter myself any more behind the bodies of others." She had stretched out her hand in involuntary protest, and he caught it and held it for an instant between his own and kissed it. She felt nothing—for at that moment he was only the man who had fought and she the woman who had stood beside him, unknown and blessed.

"One ght I came back to London, and when I had done my business I went to a little eating-house which I had frequented before the war—a tidy, working man's place—and there I met Peter Harding for the second time. At first I hardly recognised him—though I had never forgotten his face. He was in rags, almost penniless—and starving. I made him eat with me and when he had eaten he told me of all that had happened to him, of his father, of how he had sacrificed his career, his fortune, his life, to the new serum which he believed he had discovered. He told me that he had gone into it all—studied his father's notes and experiments—and that he believed absolutely that his father had been on the right track. There had been mistakes—there was still a hitch somewhere; but he was convinced that if this new serum could only be perfected, consumption would be stamped out, as the plague had been stamped out of Europe. So he had taken on his father's work and had gone to Carrington and all his father's old friends and begged them for help. And they had sneered, condemned, and even threatened. Then the war came. He showed me what it meant to him. You see he was not a doctor—had never wanted to be one, though he had all his father's learning at his finger-tips. He had devoted himself to research work at foreign universities, and beyond an ordinary English degree he had nothing to show for himself. No one would help him or

believe in him. And yet this work, this immense thing waited to be done.

"I think he was light-headed that night with weakness and all that he had suffered. I shall never forget how at the end he sat back in his chair and laughed. 'And now they are going to stick me in a uniform and I shall go out and kill and be killed, and people will say, "Well, he came out all right in the end." But I shall go down damned to hell because I had it in my power to save humanity from its worst scourge—and I just funked and saved myself.' And then—you know how hard and taciturn he is—he hid his face in his hands and cried, like a child."

She faltered, and Earnshaw looked up at her and saw that the tears were there now—great drops of remembering pity. He clenched his fists. He hated the man she pitied with a hatred that was akin to madness. Her voice steadied and she went on.

"And then—I saw what I had to do. Nothing has ever been so clear to me. This was my chance—the way out. The filthy thing I carried might be cleansed and become a blessing even to those who had been sacrificed to feed it. I told Mr. Harding of my own life—how I was tied hand and foot and how I could escape. I asked him to marry me."

Earnshaw turned his head away with a smothered exclamation, but she did not hear him. Her eyes shone now with an exulting memory.

"We talked until they turned us out of the restaurant and all night we walked the streets until the dawn came and everything was clear between us. And within three days we were married." She paused a moment, and when she spoke again he knew that she had left the mountain heights and was treading a dusty, stony valley. "For some time my husband carried on his work in England and then, when things became too threatening, we went to America. And there we stayed until the war was over. And every Englishman or woman whom we met seemed to know and shrink from us. But I was content—more content than I had ever been in my life. Perhaps that seems difficult to understand—but it was so."

He turned to her. The scars on his face were livid.

"Did you believe in him so absolutely?"

"Yes—absolutely."

"Do you believe in him now—like that?"

She had been gazing steadily out over the black green water, smiling gravely to herself. But now, as she met his eyes, he saw a change steal over her—an ashen-hued pain. He had seen that same look in the face of a man stricken down in the moment of victory.

"Should I go on? should I be with him now if I did not believe in him?"

"I don't know. I can't see into your heart. But I can see into his. I can see that he saved himself——"

"Hush! You promised you would believe me——"

"I do," he answered violently. "With all my soul I believe you. I worship you for your fine faith—your generous, quixotic sacrifice. Oh, and I can believe him too, for I know how men cheated themselves—and lied and humbugged. Theirs was a prior duty, their conscience, their religion—God knows what—but always some fetish to hide behind and pay homage to until the very man who funked death was ready to die for it. Yes, I can believe that he believed in himself and let him go, though thousands have suffered death and worse for such as he——"

"Has he no scars?" she interposed breathlessly. "Do you think I have none?"

"You?" The storm was on them now. A white tongue leapt out of the cleft rocks and licked the grass-grown edge of the cliff like a famished beast. The spray stung their faces. For a moment Earnshaw's voice was lost in the boom of the water. In that moment he tried to master himself—to hold back, but the fine defence he had built only an hour before had crumbled and gone down into the tide like a child's sand-castle. He was being driven before the wind on to the rocks, to a disaster which he welcomed now with the relief of a man who has fought a losing battle and sees the end.

"I can forgive him his cowardice," he said, his voice thick with distress and passion. "But I can't forgive him for sacrificing you—your youth, your fine faith. It was a crime—an unpardonable crime——"

"He was justified!" she retorted proudly.

"You say so. What proof have you? What proof has he? A handful of dying, credulous fools who trusted him as you did—who have been sacrificed as he sacrificed you."

"You do not know what you are saying, and so I can

forgive you. There was no sacrifice." She faced him indomitably. "Did you talk of sacrifice that night when you carried those wounded men back to the trenches? You were ready to give your life for any one of them. And do you think so little of me that you talk of sacrifice when I have the chance to give up something for countless thousands—for generations unborn——"

"It is the waste—" he stammered, "the futility. He knew the futility. He must have known. Who is he that he should succeed where great men have failed? What is he more than a quack—a charlatan, wrapping his ignorance in mystery? He lied to you." He drew himself up, for suddenly he had seen his justification. A link in the cable that held him to his anchor had snapped and set him free. "You married him under a delusion—for a noble purpose, but without love. And when that purpose is no more—when you see him as he is—a self-deceiving coward, stripped of his illusions—when you see that he has cheated you—what then? Your whole life will be forfeited. And you are so young—you have never loved, or known love; but assuredly love will come to you, and then, indeed, you will need your courage, for he has bound you hand and foot to himself——"

She had started suddenly to her feet, but she was looking past him. The clouds were sweeping up fast. They filled the old trenches with black, restless shadows.

"Why do you talk to me like that? Of what use is it? I have never thought of love in my own life—never asked for it."

He seized her hands. He kissed them. He pressed them against his breast with a fanatic's ecstasy.

"You have no need to ask. It has come—inevitably—it is here." He lifted his face to hers, for she stood on higher ground, and he saw that her lips were parted in some breathless anticipation. The rich blood was in her cheeks again. Under the serene brows her eyes were wide and eager, as though a mysterious vision had at last thrown down its disguise before them. But they did not look at him. They were fixed still on the black, broken circle.

It was dusk now—the dusk not of evening, but of tempest. The three-master had gone down under the lightless horizon. The coast was a white, gleaming line of foam.

"Lillah—Lillah—my dear—my love."

She looked down at him—at first without expression,

as at a stranger who had accosted her. Her hands were still in his. She considered them curiously—and suddenly her brows came together in a proud, austere anger.

"Lillah," he panted. "Surely you have known—surely you knew what I had to forget—and what I cannot forget for a moment of my life——"

She freed her hands. The moment's anger had died and with it their friendship. For good or evil it could never come back to them. It lay between them like a precious vase that he had shattered. And, seeing it, a laming apathy crept over him. He made no effort to plead with her or hold her back. He stood there, bowed like an old man, and she turned away from him and wearily climbed the headland. For a little while her slight, lonely figure was visible—then it reached the skyline and went down in the blackness of the storm.

CHAPTER VIII

I

MRS. FELICIA NEWMAN was afraid.

Suddenly fear had laid hold of her. It was as though a hand had stretched itself out of the darkness and had clutched her heart and was squeezing the blood out of it with a quick, pulsing pressure.

Since ten o'clock she had lain in the bed drawn up against the white-washed wall and stared up at the ceiling—or at where the ceiling had been before she had blown out the candle, for now her straining eyes encountered limitless black void in which she hung—suspended from nothing, above nothing. She had tried to sleep. Usually the wind lulled her. She liked to boast of her love for the wind and of the admiral, her great-grandfather from whom she had inherited her predilection. But to-night the wind did not lull her. She knew all the tones of its voice, from the uneasy sigh which foretold rain to the wail of a western gale searching the house, and she would draw nearer to the fire or creep deeper into her bed and picture some one out in the teeth of it and be glad.

But to-night it was not a voice, but a Thing.

Just for a moment she had closed her eyes and her mind had wandered a little. The fancies which seem to belong to the waking thoughts, but are already twisted out of shape by sleep, had crowded under her closed eyelids. She was on board ship. The engines had begun to throb. The vessel shook and shivered from stem to stern with their throbbing. She lay in her narrow bunk and wondered if it were really safe, and waited for Mr. Modrow's cough.

And then suddenly her whole body had leapt up as out of an abyss, and lay quivering and bathed in sweat just over the frontier of full consciousness.

She was afraid.

She was dying. She had never thought of death before

—not of her own death, though she knew to a fraction just how much of that right lung remained to her and how much more might go and still leave her her little bit of gasping life. She had been too busy watching Modrow and Tillett and Miss Jones dying to think about herself. Now she felt nothingness sweeping up her limbs. It came to her brain. Her body lay there, but she herself faded, grew dim, spluttered, and went out like a gutted candle. And as she faded she heard them talking—whispering among themselves—not sorrowfully, but with the perfunctory respect such as an atheist might use in a cathedral. "Yes, it's all over. Oh, the undertaker will give you the name of a woman. It should be done at once. There is an undertaker at Orra. I'll get a doctor—we shall need a certificate——"

They drew the sheet over her face. She heard them go out, closing the door after them with that same contemptuous reverence.

It all passed before her in a flash. For a moment she thought she was really dead and in the close, suffocating blackness of her grave. Then she tried to remember. But, though she fought her way back to her room, nothing else was clear to her. The window which usually stood out in a ghostly square from the darkness was lost, and with it the door—the walls—she herself. She felt sick and giddy. She had a hideous, ludicrous sensation of being mixed up with the furniture—of being churned about with the chairs and wardrobe and washhand-stand—of gyrating with them in a mad circle. She clung to the sides of her bed, her teeth chattering, her brain reeling.

Then, suddenly again, everything righted itself, slipped into its place. She had heard Mr. Modrow coughing. She remembered that his room was on her left so that the door was on her right and the window opposite her. It was like a releasing spell. She heard him moving about—stumbling over things, and then again that dry, barking cough. She tapped against the wall. She did not quite know what she wanted, but the horror of her death and isolation still clung to her.

The hurricane engulfed his answer. She could hear nothing. A kind of panic seized her. She scrambled out of bed, wrapping herself up in the red flannel dressing-gown, and her shaking hands tapped through the darkness for the matches. But, though she knew where they were,

she could not find them. She could not wait to find them. Her terror was no longer passive. It sent her groping and gasping to the door.

The light, feeble as it was, dazzled her. She gaped stupidly. Mr. Modrow stood at the head of the stairs. He was peering over the banisters trying to throw the light of his candle into the black well beneath. As her door opened he turned sharply, and his face was as aghast as her own. They stood there staring at each other like two grey, dishevelled ghosts.

"Did you tap just now?" he whispered.

"Yes. I heard you moving about. Is there anything the matter?"

"No—no. I'm glad it was you tapping. I thought—there are such extraordinary sounds in the house to-night. There—did you hear that?"

They listened motionlessly. In eerie contrast to their stillness was the wild flickering of the candle-flame in the draught and the huge, black shadows scudding up and down the walls. The whole house whispered with invisible movement. A door creaked softly; its handle rattled. A rafter groaned overhead. Light, stealthy feet creaked up the stairs and along the passages.

"It's Mr. Harding in his library—I can see the light under his door—or it's the storm. The storm shakes everything."

"Yes—the storm." His rheumy eyes peered at her slantwise, and instinctively she put her hand to her head and tried to smooth out of sight the grey, straggling hair. But he was not thinking of her. "I can't sleep," he muttered. "My nerves—all to pieces—I can't stand this—this noise. It's horrible; Mr. Tillett has a sleeping draught—I was going to ask him—I must sleep—I must."

But he did not move. She came waveringly nearer to him.

"Our rooms face the wind. Once I fancied the walls would blow in. And the sea—do you hear those waves? Like guns. If the cliff were to give way—a landslide—it happens—sometimes—great pieces of land——"

Her quavering voice died away. He shuddered.

"I shan't go back. Perhaps there's a fire still in the sitting-room. We might stay there for a little—and wait. The storm may die down towards morning—one can't sleep now."

He seemed to nerve himself, and began cautiously to descend the stairs and she followed, keeping closer to him as they crossed the stone-flagged hall to the sitting-room. But the darkness and emptiness which they had anticipated did not meet them. The log-fire had been built up anew, and by its shadowy glow the faces of the two men seated on either side of the hearth shone with a lurid vividness.

Thomas Polglase had not moved. He sat as he had sat all day, huddled in the corner of the big Chesterfield, his mouth gaping, his dulled, indifferent eyes fixed blankly in front of him. They lifted for a moment as Modrow entered, and then closed as though they had seen nothing. Tillett sat opposite him. His lean body was lost in the black frame of his chair so that the gaunt, satyr face, thrust a little forward into the firelight, caused a momentary illusion of gruesome detachment. He grinned at Modrow, and, as he saw the latter's companion, threw back his head in a soundless laugh.

"Macbeth's witches, by all the gods! Harbingers of evil! What seek ye here?"

But his laugh was perfunctory. The two figures were grotesque, but not laughable. They crept up to the fire, where he made room for them, and crouched close to its warmth. They were half dressed—tousled and grey with uneasy sleep. With all their little devices to hide their pitifulness stripped off them, they crouched there, shameless in their misery.

"We couldn't sleep," Modrow whispered. "Such a storm! My nerves—not what they were—and then Mrs. Newman—frightened—there are queer sounds in an old house like this—one fancies—people walking about—rats, of course—the rotten woodwork——"

"Or our friend the wrecker on his last prowl," Tillett suggested. "Well, one would think he'd have a success or two to-night. 'Some hurricane,' as Mr. United-States-Citizen would say."

Polglase stirred but did not open his eyes, and a silence fell on the little group. Even Tillett's sardonic humour could not free itself from the oppressive burden which weighed upon them. The tempest enveloped them, stupefied them like dull monotonous beating upon the brain. There was no wailing—no sighing in the wind to-night—scarcely a rise or fall in tone. Wind and water were locked together and flung themselves in deafening,

ceaseless roar of sound upon the coast. The stone walls of Lone Point, which had withstood the violence of a hundred years, shook under the assault. Reverberations from the shuddering cliffs ran through the foundations in electric shocks seeming to threaten instant, headlong destruction.

The quiet room, with its steady, burning fire and motionless figures was the centre of a whirlpool, its quiet deceptive, treacherous, having its own terror. Overhead the stout oak beams creaked under feet that walked backwards and forwards like the feet of a caged and tortured prisoner.

The group about the fire exchanged glances, sullen with reasonless resentment.

Presently, when the door opened they started violently as though the innocent sound of the handle turning had been an unbearable interruption. Even Polglase drew himself up and blinked about him in half-awakened alarm. Then, seeing who it was, they sank back irritably into their several attitudes of waiting.

Cissie de Valincourt dropped them a satirical curtsy. She was fully dressed and wore the inevitable fur-coat flung loosely over her shoulders and buttoned at the neck like a soldier's mantle. By holding out its skirts to their full extent she imparted a certain grace and elaboration to her performance.

"I guessed there was some sort of tea-party going on," she remarked casually, "and I do 'ate to be out of things What's the joke? Waiting for the devil to fetch you all—or what?"

No one answered her. Modrow shrank together as though her voice had been a blow, but in reality she had not spoken above an undertone. It seemed inevitable that she should speak so quietly. The spell that held them all to an uneasy whispering was stronger than her lawless humour. She came over to the fire and sat down on the arm of Tillett's chair, from whence she surveyed the circle with a moody interest. "Well, if the devil isn't after us, he's after some one," she reflected. "My 'eaven, what a row! Belairs Alley on Saturday night's quiet compared to it. One'd think the whole blasted ocean was coming in. I looked out of my window a while ago and it was wet with spray and you could see them breakers as clear as if they'd got the limelight turned on 'em. And it's a black night, too." Still no one responded. She stared

for a moment into the firelight, and then she went on again. and her voice had lost something of its clearness.

"I've just been with Miss Jones. Algernon fetched me. She's mighty bad. I didn't like the look of her, and I told him so, and he sat on me like a ton of bricks. She's asleep now, thank the Lord, but she and that racket 'ave fair knocked the sleep out of me. I'm mighty glad to find you folk about." She paused and listened. "'Ark at 'im walking up and down like a caged lion. Not too 'appy in 'is mind, either—one'd think."

"Perhaps he has good reason."

"Wot's that you said?"

Mrs. Newman tittered and did not answer, but her face was ghastly in the firelight. At that moment Modrow roused himself. He looked about him furtively and lastly at Tillett, who had dropped back into the shadow of his chair.

"Mr. Tillett—I can't stand it any longer—my nerves—if you could oblige me—a spoonful of that tonic of yours."

Stephen Tillett guffawed. The violence of his own laughter seemed to startle him, for it was short-lived. and his answer came in the old subdued key.

"I can't oblige you, your Riverence. At the present moment my—my tonic, as you euphemistically describe it is lying somewhere in the garden. I chucked it out of the window only an hour ago. If you'd like to fetch it, do so."

His head was turned away from the girl seated at his elbow. She stared down at him—gaping ironically.

"Did you say 'chucked it out,' Gallows?"

"I did."

"Not 'dropped' by any chance? Well, I never thought so well of you! Wot cher do it for—eh?"

He laughed again, but quietly, with a mixture of shame and bitterness.

"I don't know. Perhaps to pay you a compliment. Perhaps because it's the sort of night to do daft, melodramatic things like that. I dare say I shall fetch it in the morning."

"You won't." She grinned at Modrow. "If I knows this house-party you won't find it." Then quickly, roughly like a schoolboy, she kissed the top of Tillett's head. "There now—and you can boast about it when I'm doin' the

'igh kick to the lads at the Empire. No end of a swell you'll feel."

But her light-hearted banter awoke no response. Something in her very words had touched the dormant terror in them all, so that they looked at each other, no longer antagonistically or defensively, but with a terrible, pitiful self-abandonment to the thing which had gnawed at their courage and driven them together like a little herd of frightened sheep. It was not each other's death they calculated now, but their own. There was disruption in the air. Things that had seemed to them adamantine and impregnable were like toys in the grip of the demoniacal force which had been let loose. Their own little shreds of life fluttered in the tempest—were being swept away into nothingness.

She had spoken of the future and they had no future.

Mrs. Felicia Newman hid her shrunken, ashen face in her hands. She was crying. The grey hair hung undisguised about her shoulders, and she neither knew nor cared. She was old and dying. She cried pitifully.

Modrow lifted his head and stared at her. Then suddenly he began to talk. He talked in a rapid undertone as though there were some one creeping nearer with every minute to spring upon him and silence him. His thin voice was like the patter of rain amidst the thunder of the storm. He made disjointed, grotesque gestures with his wrinkled, grey-tinted hands.

"We're being murdered—we're like animals—like that wretched monkey he experimented on and killed. He's killing us. He lied to us. We're not better. We're worse. We're dying, and he knows it. Look here—I met a man on the cliffs to-day. He spoke to me. He asked me who I was. He gave me his card. He's a doctor. He told me to come to him if—if anything happened. He warned me——" Modrow's eyes searched the shadows of the room. His voice sank to a whisper. "This man's father killed a woman—for the same thing—the same way. They hounded him out—and his son carried on his work—not even a doctor, mind you—just a quack—an ignorant quack. He's taken our money. He's cheated us. We've got to save ourselves. This doctor is prepared to help. He'll take us into his sanatorium. He promised. If—if anything happened—we could give evidence——" Once again the ferret eyes made the circle of faces. "It is

essential that we should stick together—and be ready. We must have our plans if we're to do anything effective."

Polglase leant forward. The dead, indifferent eyes were alive now. They glittered with the lowering activity of a dangerous bull.

"Say, I'll have a hand in this game, my son. Maybe I'm not exactly in your boat, but I'll come along as passenger and pay my way. The dollars can do their bit even in this darnation country, and I'd give every dollar I have to see that guy squirm. *You* saw the way he treated me —a sick man, too; put on airs as though he were the Lord Almighty and me a dirty hobo begging for a dime. Gee!—I'll show him what a United States Citizen with a wad of dollars can do. When it comes to a stand-up fight I'm with you, sir—I'm with you all the way."

He held out his hand and Modrow touched it with his long, stiff fingers.

"It's a—a pleasure to deal with a gentleman again, sir—a great pleasure."

Mrs. Newman lifted her twitching face. The tears still hung in the deep wrinkles, but her heavy-lidded eyes were hungrily bright.

"It's our duty—isn't it? He might get hold of other people—poor people without—influence—and—and friends. It's horrible to think what he might do to them. With us —it is different. He would be afraid."

They did not hear the dull thud which broke suddenly through the monotonous battery of the wind. They were watching each other with the old furtiveness, gathering up their tattered garments, hiding the sores which they had so recklessly exposed. Polglase thrust back his shoulders. His loose mouth had tightened into the greedy, ruthless lines which had given his face a deceptive force.

"Gee!—it don't pay—treading on the Stars and Stripes," he boasted.

All through, Tillett had not moved, but sat with his hard-bitten, satirical face turned to the firelight, and now, as the girl sprang up from beside him, he gave no sign.

"Stars and Stripes!" she ejaculated and spat, actually and vigorously. "You dirty renegade little Cornishman! Why, you can't even hold your liquor—but come crawling here like a kid sick with its first cigar. Only you ain't a kid—nothing so 'olesome. You're a nasty, mangey little hound that, after it's been chevvied out of the kennel

it's disgraced comes whining for shelter to the first best fool who'll listen to it? Oh—he's a fool right enough." She jerked her thumb at the ceiling whence came the sound of restless, unhappy pacing. "I'll grant you that much, a fine fool. He thinks he can make you fit and sound again—and he can't. He can give your lungs back—patch up your rotten bodies—but he can't patch up your rotten souls. You're putrid—worm-eaten—the lot of you." She burst out with a scornful laugh. "You and your admirals and your congregations and your churches and your fine friends! Do you think I've mucked about the gutters and pulled my mother out of every pub east of the river for twenty years and don't know what you are? Why, the work'us swarms with the like of you! come down in the world—that's what you 'ave—and mighty fast and 'ard at that. Given the push early for turning up at a Mothers' Meeting a bit too fresh! How's that for a guess, Mr. Curate? 'Ow about half a quid a week to keep out of the way of your fine friends, Mrs. 'Igh-and-Mighty? And then when the 'orspitals booted you both out he came along and gave you food and clothing and a sportin' chance. And you've done yourselves fine off 'im, bragged yourselves blue in the face and wiped your boots on that bit of innocence upstairs because she was fool enough to tell the truth. Well—I stood that. It was a sort of joke to chuckle over when I felt low—but you've tried to round on him, and now I've rounded on you—and the best you can do is to lie low and hold your evil, dirty tongues."

She stopped, shaken and panting with the fierceness of her onslaught and like a challenging little wild-cat eyed them each in turn and waited.

Mrs. Newman rocked backwards and forwards moaning to herself as though in physical pain, but instinctively the three men had risen. Silas Modrow lifted his clenched fists and shook them. He seemed suddenly to have withered into a senile old man.

"You slut——" he spat at her; "you drab——"

"Steady there, your Riverence—not too much Christian charity, or you'll have me to deal with."

Polglase broke in with an unsteady, jeering laugh.

"Hullo, Mr. Conscience—you can put your fists up all right so long as your man's small enough."

Tillett turned on him, his ugly jaw thrust out threateningly

"I didn't fight when I should have done, because I had a damned sight too much feeling about my fellow-creatures. I haven't got it now. And, by heaven, if I wiped the floor with you, you scab, I believe I might respect myself again."

Polglase flung the intervening chair aside. They were half-way to each other's throats when the dull thudding sound was repeated, so close at hand now, that even in their red rage they stopped short, staring at each other. Simultaneously the footsteps overhead ceased. It was as though the whole house held its breath and listened.

"Did you hear that?"

"That wasn't the wind. It was a gun—a signal of distress."

"There's some one shouting."

There were voices in the hurricane—vague, fluttering sounds that, even as they took shape, were broken up and flung asunder. At a bound Tillett reached the hall, but another's ears had been quicker to understand than his. Already Lillah had drawn back the heavy bolts, an instant later a wild swirl of wind rushed past her, slamming to door after door in its headlong course through the passages, so that the whole house rang with a dismal echoing. Earnshaw stumbled out of the darkness. He was hatless. The oilskin coat which he had dragged on over his evening clothes dripped heavily on to the stone flags. He glanced at Lillah, and then at once away from her to the man standing on the stairs.

"Wreck!" he jerked out, "right up into the cove. Some sort of tramp. Steering-gear must have jammed. I heard the gun half an hour ago, but couldn't locate her. Carrington and the vicar have gone to Orra with every available man to get the rocket apparatus along." He made a gesture of impotent despair. "A lifeboat couldn't live in that sea in any case, and it wouldn't help. She's right up—spiked on the rocks and breaking up like matchwood. God alone knows what we can do."

Harding had not moved from the head of the stairs. He did not seem to see the huddled group by the library door. He was looking from Earnshaw to his wife, and there was something dull and apathetic about him, as though he had not heard clearly or had been roughly awakened from a heavy sleep. Lillah turned to him. And in her, by vivid contrast, there was a poignant eagerness, a word-

less, breathless expectancy. She was watching him. He seemed to start suddenly awake. The white face lit up with a fire of action. The next moment he was at Earnshaw's side.

"Is there any one with you?"

"Some Roads End men—those who could get along through the storm. It took us half an hour to get there. In places we had to lie down and crawl."

"Rockets?"

Earnshaw laughed savagely.

"At Orra, perhaps."

"Ropes then!"

"A dozen yards or so—too little—it's pretty hopeless."

Harding had flung open the door again, but, strong and heavily built as he was, he faltered before the massed force of the hurricane which flung itself upon the narrow breach. The boom of the sea sounded almost at their feet, and once more—for a last time—they heard the muffled, sinister thud of a gun. Earnshaw pushed past the man in front of him. The darkness was like a black wall. With his hands instinctively held up before his face he groped his way to the gate. He knew that Harding was close behind him and out there in the storm-tormented waste there were others whose nearness he felt though he could neither hear nor see them. The wind drummed in his ears and filled his brain and swept through his body as though it had been a transparent thing. His own shout sounded like a whisper.

"Others—coming—flares——"

He did not hear Harding's answer. It was impossible to stand still. The hurricane flung itself upon them and dragged him malignantly forward. A hand groped to his arm.

"Take care—the suction—we can't be far from the edge."

They stood for a moment pressed together, and with that physical contact sheer animal hatred blazed up in Earnshaw like a blinding, scorching flame. He knew instantly, with exultant joy, that it had blazed up in the man beside him. They held each other against the storm. It needed but little and their hold would have been a death-grip.

Earnshaw broke away gasping

"Come on there—come on, for God's sake."

The spray stung their faces. They could almost see it—

ghostly, phosphorescent shapes flying across the obscurity. They thrust on, sometimes on hands and knees, keeping together by instinct and guided by the increasing thunder of water. The earth shook under its assault. Through a dozen secret passages the sea was sapping the stubborn defence, widening a breach begun half a century before, eating its way to a sudden, violent cataclysm—a year hence or to-night. Even now the last prop might have gone.

The handful of rescuers held their ground. It was all that remained to them. Futile as it had seemed to go, there was no turning back possible. They had lost their bearings and the lights of Lone Point were blotted out. Nor could they go forward. A terrific back sweep of wind which leapt at them, like some savage, hungry beast, warned them that Wreckers' Cove lay immediately at their feet. Half stupefied, they crawled to the shelter of an overhanging rock and lay there huddled together and waited. Though they were not even shadows to each other, they were at least warm, human tangibilities in a chaos of intangible horror. Beneath them—straight down two hundred feet and more, other men were being mauled and smashed to death, a ship was being ground to driftwood. And yet they heard nothing—not a cry or groan or crack of bursting timber. It was as though deafness had overtaken them—or sound itself was dead, beaten shapeless in that whirling, ceaseless Pandemonium.

And then almost imperceptibly a change began. It was like a gradual return of consciousness, a receding of black walls leaving them dimly aware of each other and of the outline of the rock under which they had taken shelter. They could distinguish separate sounds, each other's voices, the ebb and flow of the water. It was as though for an instant the tempest held back, itself baffled and awestruck. Overhead the night thinned to a tattered pall and through the rents a pale light sickened down and hovered in a ghostly luminous haze over Wreckers' Cove. The phenomena lasted scarcely a breathing space, but in that time the cowering, stupefied men saw what lay beneath them—a cauldron of smoking water that came rolling down out of darkness in mountainous solidity and dashed itself into white flames on the rocks that bared themselves after each onslaught in snarling, indomitable defiance.

One other thing they saw—something that had been

flung up against the side of the precipice like a child's toy —the dismantled hull of a ship, one mast still standing, and on it a few black specks that clung like flies.

Away to the left, lights had sprung up—flickering points of fire that came and went, zig-zagging in apparent purposelessness through the night. Earnshaw had seen them first. Regardless of the wind, which had now regained its full fury, he leapt to his feet shouting like a madman.

II

Thomas Polglase also had seen the lights.

For a time he had gone back into the sitting-room and chewed the end of an unlighted cheroot and stared into the fire with a stupid intentness. There had been no one to bear him company but Mrs. Newman, who had sat and moaned and rocked herself. Tillett had gone, the objectionable ballet-dancer, muffled in her vulgar coat, at his heels. He had seen Mrs. Harding wrap herself in a hooded cape and slip out into the storm. There had remained no one but himself and this doddering, slobbering old woman.

Finally, the thing had got on his nerves. He had gone back to the hall and pulled open the door. The magnitude of the storm had daunted him, but he had an insatiable passion for immense spectacles and lurid sensations. He would have given a thousand dollars to have his emotions tickled. And the thought of men being smashed to pieces within a few hundred yards had tickled them irresistibly.

Even so he had hesitated. But, as he saw the lights and heard voices, he was reassured. Having slipped into his coat, and still chewing the cheroot, he went out to meet them.

III

They met by the rock where Earnshaw and his companions had taken shelter. By this time the clouds had raced together over the breach and the pale gleam had been blotted out. One or two electric torches blinked with a childish feebleness into the night and where the flares had been banded together a long horizontal flame streamed out by which they saw each other in black,

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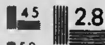

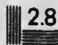

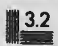

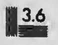

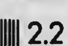

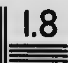

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unsteady shadows with faces like masks and eyes that were unlit hollows.

Tillett and his companion were there and a dozen fresh men from Roads End, but for Earnshaw there was only the one woman. She stood with her back against the rock. The hood of her cape had slipped to her shoulders, and in the lurid glare her face was very still and luminously white. He stumbled up to her and caught her by the arm.

"You should not be here," he shouted in reckless anger. "It's not safe. Have you no pity? For God's sake go back."

But she did not look at him. She was watching Harding, who had made no protest, who did not even seem to see her. Amongst all these men he was the tallest and the biggest. His shadow was the shadow of a giant.

The rest crouched around in helpless inactivity. There had been an accident or a mistake. The rescue party from Orra showed no sign, and each minute was heavy with disaster. One or two of the more able had ventured out in search—perhaps only to break the intolerable waiting—and presently one returned, crawling up into the light, panting and almost finished. It was Young Polglase. With a shaking hand he pointed back the way he had come.

"She's well up on the side, sir. There's some one on board still. I heard a shout just now when the wind slackened. If any one could get down the sheep-track to the platform our bit of rope might be of use."

The storm and his own exhaustion silenced him. But they had heard enough to understand. They remembered now the ill-defined, precipitous path and the built-up ledge where Red Rover and generations of villagers had collected wreckage. In ordinary times it was well above the tide; what it was now they could imagine. They looked at one another, and suddenly Tom Polglase laughed.

"Gee!—any fool who tried that game would be swept off like a scrap of paper."

He had spoken. The desire to assert himself amongst these men who had so savagely ridiculed him was stronger than his caution. Only one man heard or heeded him, and he fought his way across the intervening space, clinging to the rocks' side with both hands, and gripped the speaker by the arm. Tom Polglase stared down into the upturned

face. His jaw dropped. For a few seconds father and son confronted each other. The old eyes, even in that fitful light, glittered with a ferocious significance. The old, harshly twisted lips which had kept long silence, parted as though wrenched open by an inner convulsion.

"Now--now!"

His son cursed at him.

"Damn you—damn you—it's not my job—I——"

With a dexterous twist he wrenched himself free, turned, and stumbled into the darkness.

The incident had passed unnoticed. The silence of suspense had seemed unbroken. They still looked at one another, and no one moved. For they were men shattered by other storms; they knew their own helplessness. It was Tillett who crept forward—a grotesque, scare-crow figure whose long limbs seemed to flutter in the wind. Even at that moment he afforded himself a typical little gesture, half eager, half mocking.

"Permit me—delighted to finish an honourable career even if in water."

Earnshaw shook his head.

"No good. Nerves to bits. There's only two of us here—only one need go. If it can be done at all one man can do it—if it can't, two would be waste."

He waited a little. He waited with an exultant, scornful patience. He did not look at Harding. But he knew that she looked and waited. And Harding did not move. He was the biggest and the strongest of them all—the unscarred, unbroken man. His face, dripping with sweat and spray, was turned in mask-like stolidity to the sea.

Earnshaw picked up the coil of rope and bound it about his waist. He fought back to Lillah's side. The Latin tag flashed disconnectedly through his thoughts: "Morituri te salutant."

"Tell Genifer," he gasped. "Forgive me—both——"

She did not answer. Still she was watching the tall figure in the midst of the torchlight. Her lips were parted, her brows knit. The clenched hands were crossed, almost convulsively, on her breast. It was as though she had been praying.

He turned away from her with a bitter, aching satisfaction in his heart.

The men whom he had led in battle cheered raggedly as he passed out from among them.

"Carry on! Carry on!"

The old cry came down to him on the storm.

IV

Polglase ran—faster and faster—till the wind overtook him and tripped him up and flung him down on his face. Fortunately the turf was soft, and after he had lain there for a moment panting and badly shaken, he got up and felt himself over and laughed. The fact that his fall had lost him all sense of his whereabouts did not trouble him. He prided himself on his level-headedness—his common sense. If he had fought the wind coming, it was obvious that he must have it behind him on the return.

He kept on more circumspectly, with his ears pricked for the sound of the sea. As it grew fainter his calm returned absolutely. "Some adventure!" he thought, and subsequently, with another laugh, "Damn the old fool! What did he take me for?"

It was only after an hour's cautious walking that he became definitely aware that somehow or other he had overshot the mark. There was no light to be seen anywhere—if anything, the darkness had grown heavier—curiously suffocating. The wind had dropped and blew fitfully. It occurred to him that it might have changed its direction and thus deceived him. Then—and for the first time—he became afraid.

His fear was oddly like the wind—something outside himself which came in rushes and shook him and dropped away. It did not demoralise him. On the contrary, it goaded him to a sort of dogged courage. He was tired and cold and hungry, and unaccustomed to privation. The thought of food and a warm bed made him childishly peevish. Still he kept on. He told himself that he was bound to come to St. Maro, and this time he would face them.

The sound of the sea was muffled now. He could walk freely.

He was thinking of the future and more especially of a welcoming supper-party in New York at which this adventure would provide an amusing story, when the disaster overtook him—so suddenly, so terribly that it was over before he knew what had happened. He had stepped out more boldly, for his thoughts stiffened his nerve; but,

instead of the springy turf his foot encountered emptiness —broke through—and in a second he was rolling swiftly downwards, over bushes and stones, headlong. His level-headedness failed him, not his instinct. He clutched out—his hands slipped over stones and crumbling earth. A bramble-bush held at last. For a second he hung in the balance—then, like a wild animal, scratched and tore and bit his way up. If he had paused to think, nothing could have held him. The sheer impetus of his terror carried him from one insufficient support to another; but on the top he collapsed utterly, his face in the grass, his legs dangling.

For a long time he remained motionless. Then he sat up. His face and hands were wet with blood. His coat had been ripped to tatters. He sat there listening. Far away beneath him he could hear the clop-clop of water beating its way in and out of its subterranean passage to the blow-hole. Sheer terror shook him. He vomited like a frightened child.

By now the storm had lost its bitter violence. It began to rain—a drizzling, pitiless rain. He cowered under it, and it soaked through the tattered remnants of his clothes. His teeth chattered wretchedly. He tried to drag himself f rther into safety, but his legs were powerless, like the hindquarters of a paralysed dog. It was in vain that he told himself that the dawn and safety could not be far off. Something that was not imagination—for he had none—racked him on a quick succession of intolerable terrors. It was not of men that he was afraid now, but of the wind and water, of the very earth. To his frantic apprehension they were living, tangible beings. They were against him. They sought his ruin—his death. He could feel their lowering eyes on him, watching for the moment when the earth should betray him to them. Scraps of Tillett's drunken frenzy came back to him, obsessed him: "The wind spits on us—the sea spews us back—the earth will have none of us."

And there was a fourth presence—less actual, more terrible. It waited for him. The conviction that he was not alone drove an icy sweat out of his body. Yet he dared not move—dared not attempt escape.

He lay there, cringing in the grass.

Presently the night lifted. Eastwards a light broke through the flying clouds. It came on, creeping reluct-

antly over the hills, to the grey and angry sea. The man lying in the grass lifted his head and his eyes, as though drawn by magnetic power, fell instantly on that which waited for him. He dragged himself to his feet with a whimpering, stricken cry.

Old Polglase, crouching on a hump of rising ground, had also risen. He threw away the stick which he carried. It was still twilight, and it was only when he came quite close that his son saw his face and the mad, distended eyes. He read them instantly. He could have fought—for he was younger and stronger—but he had never fought. The instinct was dead in him. He would have bargained; but there is no bargaining with the elements.

He turned. The blow-hole yawned immediately behind him and he tried to skirt it, running ludicrously, the rain-soaked coat clogging his knees. He heard soft foot-falls behind him—the panting of a man in hot pursuit. A mist of fear blinded him. He did not see the sharp outward twist of the precipice.

This time there was no bramble to stop his course. Nor did he seek to save himself. It was useless.

For the wind and the sea and the earth whom he had betrayed had leagued themselves against him.

CHAPTER IX

I

IT was all grey at Lone Point. Greyness and silence. The night's insurrection had battered its frenzy to despair, and a mute wind prowled the empty cliffs like some destroying spirit brooding over its plunder. The low-hanging clouds moved heavily northwards. From the sea, sullenly withdrawing from its assault, came a monotonous murmur which served only to deepen the desolate hush.

In Lone Point itself the hush was of another kind—stifling, uncanny. The riotous and beaten elements had no part in it. It was as though the inhabitants of a madhouse had broken loose, and for a long night had wandered about their prison whispering and moaning to each other. Now the doors were locked upon them. But the disorder of their demented revelry still hung about the empty rooms. The sound of their sinister voices echoed through the silence. The air was tainted with their madness.

Lillah sat by the ashes of the fire. Ashley, timorous and pitying, had tried to build it up for her, but she had shaken her head imperatively. He had brought her tea, and in his quiet, devoted way, poured it out for her and set it at her elbow much as one tempts a sick child. She had not touched it. She was too utterly weary—broken in body and mind. She could not even rest. When she closed her eyes her thoughts, freed from her waking control, gyrated in a maddening circle It was always the same pictures their wheel turned to her—a torch-lit rock, the black, dominating shadow of a man, a face scarred and haggard with passion, the grey dawn breaking over the hills, the grassy slope leading to the precipice, and two men lying there, lashed together—and again the scarred face upturned to the light—composed now, dignified by a high, accomplished purpose.

Then back once more to the night and storm and the relentless shadow.

The door opened. She started and shivered with a sudden, penetrating cold, but she did not lift her eyes from the dead ashes of the fire. She knew who it was who entered. He came slowly across and stood opposite her. She felt that he was looking down at her with a narrow intentness.

"Carrington has come," he said quietly. "He is with the man now. I left him to it. I knew he would resent my presence. Queer how things turn out, isn't it?"

"Yes," she agreed tonelessly.

"You need not worry about Mr. Earnshaw," he went on. "He is on his feet already, and not much the worse for the adventure. I asked him—in both our names—to stay here until he had completely recovered. He assures me that it was only a passing exhaustion, and that he wants to get back before the vicarage gets a garbled version of the story. He tells me he is going away—at once—for a long time. He wishes to say good-bye to you."

She nodded. His eyes no longer rested on her, and she looked up at him. He had already changed his clothes and the fair hair was smoothed to an unusual precision. His bigness and utter composure filled her with a dull incredulity—a kind of sick awe. He was like a Juggernaut, crushing his way over life and d[illegible]'s end.

As though he had deliberate[illegible] trap for her, he turned suddenly, and their eyes [illegible] and held.

"How badly you hate me!" he said gently. She gasped, and he cut short her interruption with a curt gesture. "Oh, I know, quite well—you hate me because I did not go last night. I know—but I am puzzled—I don't understand——"

"Nor I," she answered bitterly.

"My work is not finished," he continued. "If the next few days brings success—as it shall—my work will still not be finished. Months must pass before I can lay my case in a conclusive form before the faculty. You know that as well as I do."

"Yes, I know."

"You resent it that I did not risk my life and all that it entails. Some years ago I was faced by the same problem.

You held me back. You justified me. What has changed you?"

"Why do you defend yourself?" she asked back in a gust of anger. "What does it matter to you what I feel or think? We are partners, and nothing more. You put the case very clearly once—you have supplied the brains—I, the money. Why should you trouble yourself about the foolish emotions of a foolish woman?"

He did not answer for a moment. The mobile lines of his face hardened to the familiar mask which expressed nothing—felt nothing. Yet the intensity of his gaze remained.

"I am sorry—I never thought that you were foolish. If I gave you that impression it was because I counted too much on your understanding to pick and choose my words with you. I have never had but the one thought. I had no time for subtleties. Lately it has been different—I seem to have lost grip a little—a certain inevitable fatigue, I suppose." He smiled mirthlessly. "My humanity has asserted itself in spite of myself."

"It is only natural." She frowned at the pitiful conventionality of her answer. "You must not let me add to your burden," she added.

He held his ground doggedly.

"You *are* my partner. There was a time when I might have taken you at the low valuation you have just set upon yourself. That has passed somehow. Perhaps I have grown weaker—perhaps wiser. At any rate, I need your support. The feeling that you have withdrawn it irks me—makes me stupidly unsure—almost afraid." The slow, angry blood mounted to the roots of his fair hair. "I am not whining to you. I shall go on in any case. But it would be easier for me. I merely want to understand now what has changed you—why to-day you hate me for something you upheld yesterday?"

"Why should you think I hate you?"

"I feel it. I knew last night. You don't deny it, do you? You wanted me to go?—at whatever cost?"

She did not answer.

"Won't you explain?"

"I have no explanation. I am a woman—illogical——"

"That is a worn-out folly. Why do you try to hide behind it? You are not illogical—I know you are brave enough to tell me the truth." He waited. Suddenly, with

a jarring cry of exasperation, she dropped forward, burying her face in her hands. "I am so tired—so desperately tired. Won't you let me rest? Why do you worry me now? I tell you I haven't an explanation. There is no need for one. You did what was right—I admit it—I'll say so publicly if you like—only let me rest."

She broke off, fighting her own weakness, and braced herself to bear his dogged, pitiless questioning. But he turned away. She heard him cross the room. The sound of the heavy, listless tread seemed to vibrate through her whole body.

"Very well. I'll just tell Earnshaw that you'll see him now."

He went out. She heard him speak to some one in the passage, and the answering tones filled her with consternation. She sprang up, calling him confusedly:

"Peter—please wait—Peter——"

But he had not heard. He had gone on. She could still distinguish his tread, grown firm and vigorous again, receding towards his library. She caught herself listening to it, even when Earnshaw crossed the threshold and stood waiting by the open door.

"Mrs. Harding, I have come to say good-bye."

Something—an intolerable tension—relaxed. She answered quietly, with a formal courtesy.

"Surely you are not strong enough. Why must you go so soon? There is no hurry."

"I want to get to the vicarage before some absurd story reaches there." He forced a smile. "By midday, no doubt, I shall have rescued a ship's crew and been smashed to bits in the process. Myths grow quickly in these parts."

"You are a man around whom a myth grows quickly," she retorted impulsively and with strange bitterness. "To the children of Roads End you will be held up as a demigod—you will be a model for all future generations. They will tell each other legends of you just as we tell legends of our old heroes."

"You are making fun of heroism," he interrupted gravely.

They eyed each other in silence, like people who have come through some great suffering and who mask the ravages and changes that the passing has brought.

"I was not making fun of heroism," she said at last. "We who stand close to an event can hardly appreciate

its magnitude. What you did was not less brave than deeds that in olden days made men immortal."

He had understood her bitterness. Now he could measure her generosity.

"I was not brave—nor even very successful. One poor fellow, who may not live till morning!" He came a step nearer to her. He was looking at her now with deep significance. "I tell you—I was not brave at all—not even decent. When I started out last night I deserved to fail. There was not a generous or fine impulse in me. I am more ashamed of last night than of anything in my whole life. Perhaps you know—perhaps I don't need to tell you——"

There was no need. She looked at him and understood. Between this wan and suffering man and the man whose face had thrust its triumph at her through the storm there extended a narrow, but profound crisis. There was a fineness about him now, a dignity and self-mastery that she had not known before. And, seeing it, her eyes filled.

"Yes, I do know. Don't let it make you unhappy. It was fine all the same. There is some dross, isn't there, in the best we do?"

"I am not unhappy," he answered. "I cannot be. As you say, nothing we have is perfect—we mar our biggest moments by some meanness. We have to resign ourselves to our failures. And, in spite of everything, I know that—that a big and splendid thing *has* come into my life—something that in itself I am rather proud of. I have made a mess of it—spoiled it by my own weakness; but the thing itself is splendid. There is nothing that I need be ashamed of or—or that you need think of with regret. I want you to believe that."

"I do believe it."

He braced himself a little.

"But I have found my own limitations. I can see what it was I had set out to do—to deface the one b romance in my life. So I am going away. I shall k away until I know myself strong enough——" He broke o abruptly and held out his hand. "Good-bye—and thank you."

She could not answer. Now that the end had come she knew her own loneliness. For an instant their hands met. He turned away, and at the door hesitated.

"There's just one other thing—it may sound tawdry

and commonplace, but I must risk it. If anything should ever happen—to you or to any one dear to you—if ever you should need a friend—remember that I would come—and be glad—just to be your friend—and serve you."

He did not wait for her to answer, did not even look back to her. He went quickly out of the silent house, and, keeping well away from the track already dotted with eager sight-seers from the village, struck up the headland towards St. Maro. He was not conscious of exhaustion now, or of any physical sensation. It was as though the communication between mind and body had been roughly severed. He saw familiar landmarks and did not recognise them. The lowering sky and black, turbulent water seemed to be in his brain—a vision of his own state. For the brief exaltation of sternly accomplished purpose was over. It had lifted him high on its crest—now it had let him sink back into a trough not of despair, but of apathy and indifference.

He saw Genifer coming towards him and went to meet her, and still felt nothing—neither reluctance nor pity nor regret. But, as he saw her face, he faltered—was aware of a thrill of pain like a returning flow of blood to a numbed limb. The big, good-humoured face was so wan, so pale, the laughing brown eyes so very weary. He went up to her and she said nothing, but put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him. She showed no sign of emotion, and when she spoke at last her voice was quiet and untroubled. But the pressure of her hands betrayed her. And suddenly the deadness in him was gone. He could have poured out his heart to her like an unhappy child. She had known him at his weakest, when, in horror of his own hideousness, he had clung to her as the one sure and stable thing in his tottering universe. Others had never seen him flinch. But before her bigness he had thrown down the shield behind which men guard their suffering from one another. He had known no shame. He felt none now. Yet the very knowledge that there was no need to hide from her gave him back strength and courage.

"Dear old Keith!" she said. "Dear old Keith!" That was all she found to say to him—just the familiar, school-girlish phrase. Yet it warmed him like a fire burning at twilight on a loved, familiar hearth.

He smiled wryly.

"You see—I'm alive still. I suppose they've served you up some fantastic tale, haven't they?"

"Young Polglase came round. He told me you have rescued some one and had been picked up unconscious. I can see you for myself. But the other poor fellow——"

"In a bad way, I'm afraid. Carrington's with him——"

"I'm going along to them now. They'll need a nurse. And you know I can't bear any one to be ill without butting in."

"They'll be thankful to have you." He took her hands from his shoulders and held them tightly in his own. "You'll be there some time, Jenny—and—and when you come back I shall have gone. I want to say good-bye to you now, dear."

Her eyes met his gravely and steadily. Only he felt how her hands answered to his desperate pressure.

"Well—I'd rather say good-bye here too." She was trying to find something that would make it easier for him. "I shall be happy if you're happier. You mustn't worry about me. I'm too busy to worry. It'll all come right."

He shook his head.

"I don't know. It's pretty black now, isn't it? Everything we were so sure of gone, because of what I am." He dropped her hands suddenly as though they hurt him. "Genifer—you said you had only heard me say one caddish thing. Dear, I've been a cad. I've been a cad to you in my thoughts—and in my actions—disloyal to you—and to everyone. I'm clearing out because it seems the only decent thing left for me to do—and to give you the chance to forget me."

She interrupted him scornfully.

"I nursed you when you were dying, Keith. I won my little bit of right over you. Do you think I'm going to relinquish it now? Do you suppose, because you're in for another bad time—far worse, perhaps—that I'm going to wash my hands of you? I don't mean to forget you—and I don't want you to forget me."

"I never shall," he answered.

"Why should we forget? Only—no sickly, maudlin remembrance, but something that will make us happier when it comes to us. I know"—for the first time her voice shook a little—"our love isn't a great passion—it doesn't run to poetry or romance—it's a stay-at-home-

sit-by-the-fire-with-your-slippers-on sort of love. But I think, whoever or whatever comes our way, it will last us all our lives."

He tried to bend down over her hands, but she laughed brokenly and instead put them on either side of his head and kissed him solemnly on the eyes. "That's to take with you. And of nights when you're lion-shooting in Africa or wherever else lions grow and you're feeling a bit tired and down you'll say to yourself, 'Well, I've got a good pal over there, anyhow.' And perhaps at the same moment I shall be drowsing over the fire and imagining what you are doing and thinking of the good times I shall have when my good pal comes home with a menagerie, and perhaps a wife in tow."

She laughed again, and so it was done. With a little clumsy jest she had set him free. He drew back from her and looked at her with hopeless incredulity.

"Genifer——"

She shook her head imperatively.

"No fuss. I'll be getting along now. Nurses can't loiter about in this disreputable way. Good luck, dear. Write whenever you want to, and, if ever you want to—come back!"

"Jenny!" He took a stumbling step after her. "Be good to her."

She smiled, the queer little twisted smile that had come often to her of late. Perhaps she saw him at that moment just as a child, an unconsciously all-demanding child.

"I'll be good to her for her own sake."

So they parted—quite simply—as though they might meet again in a few hours. At a turn in the path she looked back and waved to him.

He remembered suddenly that in a month she was to have been his wife.

II

The two men met at the head of the stairs and with a curt gesture Harding motioned the doctor to precede him into the laboratory whence he had just come. Carrington hesitated, and then, his shoulders lifted in an impatient shrug, accepted the invitation. But he did not sit down. He stood ostentatiously near the door, scrutinising the very modern and even extravagant display of scientific

material with a close but wholly expressionless attention. Harding went over to the window and stared out, his hands thrust into the pockets of his long white coat, his face averted. In the course of his inspection Carrington's eyes encountered the big, stubborn-looking figure, and for the first time a flicker of satirical and wholly contemptuous amusement relaxed his impassivity.

"Well?"

Carrington appeared to rouse himself from preoccupation.

"You must understand, Mr. Harding, that I do not propose to treat you in any way as a confrère," he began, "and one of the first things that I must request of you is that so long as Mr. Jeffries *is* under my care you will abstain from any interference. I cannot share my responsibility with you. If you do not agree I shall be compelled to withdraw from the case at once."

"I agree. Mr. Jeffries is my guest."

"That, of course, is inevitable."

"So that, with the greatest desire in the world to oblige you, I cannot altogether obliterate myself. As Mr. Jeffries's host I am almost obliged to inquire after his state, am I not?"

Carrington assented frigidly.

"Until Mr. Jeffries's relations appear you have certainly a claim to be informed. On that ground I have consented to an interview which I desired, I am sure, as little as yourself. Mr. Jeffries's state is very serious. It's not so much his injuries, though, as far as I can judge them at present, they are bad enough; but the man's whole constitution is undermined. I don't know, but I fancy he's some Government official in a God-forsaken corner of the Empire, and, having collected all the diseases, has brought them home with him. At any rate, he's got an ugly bout of malaria shaking him to pieces now, and complicating matters seriously. It'll be a long business at best. We shall want a nurse——"

"Miss Bayard has already arrived. My wife has some experience, and could relieve her."

Carrington's face had relaxed somewhat. He laughed grimly.

"I doubt very much whether Mrs. Harding will consent to work under me," he remarked. "Our one encounter was not fortunate."

"I did not know that you had ever met," was the ndifferent comment.

"Once—when I was unfortunate enough to make very drastic remarks on your case in her presence. Her vindication of you was, I confess, a fine thing, if scarcely convincing from a professional point of view." His tone had warmed, and behind the pose of resolute reserve there gleamed a certain good-humoured tolerance. "Still, from any other point of view, I believe I must have cut a poor figure," he added dispassionately.

Harding had turned sharply to him, his haggard face contracted with an ugly resentment.

"You mean—there was some sort of scene?"

"Oh—undoubtedly a scene. Didn't Mrs. Harding tell you?"

"No."

"Admirable. Reticence added to eloquence."

"Carrington—leave my wife out of your damned sarcasm!"

The doctor raised his eyes to the man opposite him. For a minute he may have glimpsed the price which this misguided revolutionary had paid for his revolt. Or he remembered days when they had been friends, and had sat together at old Harding's table and planned their careers under his gloomy, inattentive eyes. At least his answer was restrained and almost conciliatory.

"I intended no sarcasm," he said. "I have the greatest respect for Mrs. Harding—so much so, that I wish with all my heart that you had chosen another course."

"What other course was there?"

"You could have taken your degree—worked legitimately—or brought legitimate authority to your assistance."

"That comes well from you!" was the bitter retort. "How willing and eager you were to lend me your 'legitimate authority' when I appealed to you!"

"I did not believe in your father. And when the war broke out——"

"——You did not believe in me?"

"No, I admit I did not."

"Well, you'll have to believe soon."

The truculent, insolent tone killed whatever sympathy had flickered up out of Carrington's dislike. His features instantly reassumed their mask.

"I should be glad to do so. You may think me a bigoted Pharisee, if it pleases you, but, as a matter of fact, I am too much a lover of my profession not to welcome progress from whatever quarter. If you succeed in this matter I shall be the first to offer my apologies and whatever reparation lies in my power."

"You must think yourself very safe," Harding sneered.

"I do—and all the safer for your violence." He paused, and then added: "In the meantime, I warn you frankly that I am your opponent. I distrust you. Apart from the question of your sincerity, I detest your methods. I consider your conduct to be not only foolish, but criminal. You have money, and to some extent your money protects you—sets you above public opinion. But, if anything happens, that protection will fail you. There will be an investigation. You know best whether you will be able to face it or not."

He waited, and then, as Harding did not answer, he went out closing the door quietly after him.

All that afternoon Harding worked as usual. Though there was no one to watch him, he subdued any outward sign of disquiet or irritation, keeping himself to his task with a grim pertinacity. There was much to be done. From the very beginning he had kept a diary—minutely accurate and detailed notes of each day's work, his deductions, disappointments, a record of slow and weary progress. The closely written, neatly paragraphed pages were steps on a road which he had hewn out for himself up a steep, untravelled mountain—now on a level, now twisting back on itself, never yielding ground save to break out in a new direction. Now that the summit was in sight it was curious that his fluent clarity failed. There were gaps of many days where he had written nothing. Even to-day he was conscious of a certain dulness and apathy. From time to time he turned over the old pages, seeking inspiration.

He encountered persistently one sheet that was almost blank save for a date and one brief sentence:

"Hanuman died this evening."

At last he sat frowning down at it as though it bore for him some hidden, unescapable significance.

Towards evening, Genifer came to him. She had resumed her old hospital uniform—a very spruce affair in blue and white—and her old hospital manner, which was

genial but autocratic. Between the two she managed to conceal the deadly pain and weariness in her eyes. Harding had not moved, and she touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"My patient's very restless," she said. "He's asking after you."

"After me?"

"Well—after his rescuer."

"I am not his rescuer." He got up and faced her in a sudden gust of passion. "Why do you bother me? Is it a joke, or what? Why don't you get Earnshaw?"

"Because Mr. Earnshaw isn't there. He left St. Maro early this morning."

He regarded her fixedly, and, though she did not flinch, she dreaded his ruthless, penetrating eyes. His anger died out as suddenly as it had flared up. His manner was almost gentle.

"Gone! Well, that settles it, doesn't it?"

"Not at all. You see, Mr. Jeffries is very ill and anyone will do. He's been asking for you—or rather Mr. Earnshaw—ever since he regained consciousness. I shall never get him quiet until he's been humoured."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Pretend you're the man he wants."

He was silent a moment, turning over his papers with an idle hand, and then he laughed a little.

"Well—it isn't often I play the hero—I mustn't miss the chance, must I? Lead on, then!"

"I shall have you ill on my hands next," was her keen and unexpected retort.

The room to which she brought him was in part darkness. The blinds had been drawn down over the open windows, and in the restful twilight the bed, drawn up against the farther wall, gleamed with an arresting whiteness. Little by little, as his eyes accustomed themselves to the dusk, he made out all the neatly ordered paraphernalia of sickness which Genifer had ranged among the shadows, but at first he saw nothing but the bed and its restless, tossing burden.

"Is that you, Mr. Earnshaw?"

Harding approached gently. He took the burning, shaking hand extended to him. Any denial that might have risen involuntarily to his lips turned to consent as he saw the face lifted to his in such eager scrutiny.

He nodded. "You've been asking for me, haven't you?"

"Yes—I wanted you—to thank you, of course—that first—but that's not all—I'm in a bad way—three ribs stove in—and infernal malaria too—I may be off my head soon—and dead to-morrow—I wanted to talk—whilst I knew what I was talking about. Don't let them send you away—will you ?"

"I won't go till you're easier."

"Thanks—thanks, awfully."

He broke off shuddering with fever, his lean, dark hands twisted in the coverlet in the effort to master their weakness. He was quite young but the thick black hair was already grey at the temples, and the face drawn and shrunken with care and withering sickness. The features were well cut and in themselves essentially Anglo-Saxon, but the sallow skin, the dark eyes, the whites streaked with yellow created a total impression that was not even European. He had dropped into a shallow doze, and little broken sentences escaped his dry lips—a jumble of unfamiliar words and queer, distorted English phrases.

Presently he opened his eyes again and smiled faintly.

"Wandering, eh ? I don't even seem able to keep my thoughts straight. Ask nurse to give you my wallet, will you ? I saved it—somehow. It's waterproof. You'll find a lot of papers inside—and a map. I want you to look at it and follow the names of the places——"

Harding glanced at Genifer, who immediately handed him a stained and battered leather case attached to an already rusted chain. He hesitated, but her gesture was eloquent and peremptory.

"Have you found it ?"

"Yes—here it is."

"And the map. There are two—the rough, ink-drawn one—spread it out before me—will you ?"

Harding laid the tattered, blotted sheet across the shaking knees. He saw then how justified Genifer had been, for the sallow face relaxed, grew almost boyish in its relief. With an ague-shaken hand he traced the lines which he described in short, disconnected sentences.

"You see here—that's Sekondi—then across to Accra—that was our starting point. The railway takes you up past Takwa to Coomassie. Then you strike out north-east on your own—you see this blue line—into the bush. That red scrawl is the boundary—Ashanti—and just beyond a dot—our place—Kese-Fo—some such damned name—it's

got a different one in hell—swamps and mists and tsetse fly and fever—a regular little incubator for every West African devil. That's our choice. Settled there. No white man has ever stuck it." He fell back with a laugh that was half a groan. "The Omanhin Dakwa didn't want us much—the sly hound—he had his own little game to play. Got above himself, and no Englishman there to keep the lid on. But he just waited for the usual thing to carry us off—or a drop of something in the water to help the good work. But we stuck it. Saunders—Microbes, we call him—Baillie, and I; late D.P.W. They're out there now—draining, digging, germ-hunting, keeping the flag flying. I was going back—and now—this damned business——"

The dark head rolled restlessly on the pillow.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"I tell you——" He tried to drag himself upright and again pain and weakness flung him back, but unbroken. "I tell you—when we've done the place it'll be fit to live in—all of it—from one end of the coast to the other. There'll be no more of this grave-digging business. Thirty per cent. of deaths—think of it! Thirty per cent. give their lives to hold on for the sake of—of God knows what. Oh, it's rich land enough—the finest colony in the world—littered with English bones. We're going to change all that—we three." His hand grasped Harding's in a burning grip. "*They* won't help—of course not—never do—never will till the job's done. Who cares? We do this sort of thing best off our own bat. I wouldn't give a tinker's curse for their beastly patronage. Ah—but a bit of land won—just to see a beastly, infested swamp—blossom—like a rose."

He smiled to himself, whilst his whole body shook in the teeth of the fever. Harding pressed the hand that still rested on his.

"You wanted me to do something for you, didn't you?"

The dark eyes opened again. They looked at him vaguely. It was evident that he was struggling to remember—to lay hold of his disordered thoughts. Then he smiled—with a sort of boyish weariness.

"Oh yes—of course—they'll be wondering. Just tell them how it was—like a good fellow."

Delirium closed over him—not violently, but little by little like a quietly rising tide. Harding did not move.

He sat there on the edge of the bed with the burning, twitching hand in his, and listened.

It grew dark. Genifer lit the lamp behind a screen at the far end of the room and the diffused light fell softly over the speaker. She herself came back and stood at the foot of the bed, drawn by the fascination of the husky, urgent voice.

In their silence it told them of strange things—of dangerous, reef-strewn seas and a lovely, terrible land, of great, winding rivers, and forests whose tangled roots had never seen the sun. His broken, wandering sentences painted for them the surf as it broke on the sand-bars, the sun calling up the deadly vapours out of the valleys; they smelt with him the fœtid odours of evil swamps and the stifling, saturated atmosphere of the bush. They knew a terrible loneliness, eternal twilight and a blinding sun, cold and heat, fever and deadly peril, of little gain and fabulous suffering.

And through it all, like a pattern woven into some vast and wonderful fabric, ran the story of a gallant struggle, of a far-off victory, and the price.

"It's going on," he whispered. "If we go under—there'll be others. Only—let them know—don't let them think I funked——"

Some one tapped urgently at the door. Genifer turned away. She came back a moment later.

"Mr. Harding—they're asking for you. Something's happened——"

He started up—like a man who has been wakened from a dream by an expected, dreaded summons.

CHAPTER X

I

"AND remember I'm boss here now," Genifer had observed as she closed the door. "Though I don't happen to want you to-night I shall want you to-morrow, and ghosts are of not the slightest use to me. So do as I tell you—go to bed."

Her bluff, kindly authority had been very soothing but not easy to obey. Sleep stood afar off. There was unrest in the house, for all its silence, and unrest in Lillah's heart. Ever since Genifer left her she had sat by the open window and watched the dusk creeping up over the cliffs. It was very quiet and peaceful out there. The storm had passed over like a burst of human passion and had cleansed and burnished the heavy, sultry atmosphere to a sparkling clarity. Rocks that generations since had been broken off from the mainland, and in the mists of tranquil summer days were distant shadows, had come closer and rose up sharply against the golden green of evening light. She could see the foam break on their rugged sides and flakes of snowy white where the seagulls rested.

No wind stirred. In Wrecker's Cove the sea murmured slumberously. Overhead little hanging balls of cloud that had kindled themselves at the sunset smouldered and died out and their ashes were mingled with the lustrous nightfall.

In the house the quiet was of another kind. Earlier in the evening Lillah had heard hushed footfalls, her husband's patients creeping restlessly about the passages, and overhead, in Miss Jones's room, subdued movement. All that had passed. But the silence was uneasy—wakeful, heavy with suspense. It weighed upon her thoughts, so that, whether they turned to the past or to the future, they were never free from the burden of the present. A part of herself that could not escape for ever listened and waited.

There comes a moment in every protracted struggle when all the early trials, the half-forgotten wounds and black hours of discouragement burst out of their subterranean hiding-place and fling their combined forces against the shaken vitality. That is the supreme moment—and that moment had come to Peter Harding's wife.

She had thought herself unscarred and unwearied and now it was as though she were encompassed with the ghosts of each day's heat and burden—as though the wretched outcasts whom her husband had gathered about him had flung their malign influence over her spirit. They were the enemy, and it seemed to her that they had triumphed.

As it grew darker her oppression laid tighter hold upon her. The very atmosphere in that haunted house smelt moribund, fœtid with death and sickness. It became intolerable. But as she rose to go out into the free, clean air she was arrested by a sudden movement overhead. Some one in Miss Jones's room—some one who had not stirred for the last hour—crossed the floor. She heard a heavy tread on the stairs—a brief hesitation—and then the slow opening of the door.

And she knew clearly that this was the end—the crisis for which she had watched and waited.

"Peter," she whispered. "Peter—what is it? What has happened?"

For she knew, too that some definite, conclusive event led up to this moment. He did not move, but stood massive and still, a shadow among shadows. She could not tell what was written on his face. Her heart beat out the seconds in which they thus confronted each other in groping, wordless suspense. Then at last he came towards her—and again stopped. In overwhelming pity she realised that he had fumbled for his steps like a blind man.

"Peter—are you ill?"

"Not ill, exactly. I am tired—very tired."

"Come and sit down by the window. Surely you can rest a little now."

"Oh yes—I can rest now."

But he did not move. He stood by her little worktable and she heard it groan under the heavy pressure of his hand. "First—there is something I have to tell you."

"I know—I can guess."

"I promised I would tell you immediately I knew for

certain. I know for certain now." His voice was toneless—a mere breath. "It is finished."

The whole of her life that had seemed for one moment suspended—to flicker low like a flame in the wind—blazed up in her.

"There is no doubt?"

"None."

She went towards him. She did not know yet what she meant to say or do. Inadequately words of praise and thankfulness died on her lips. Then, as she saw the white blur of his face, knowledge came to her. The sombre unrest that had been creeping up about her in these last weeks dispersed before it like mists before a strong, clean wind. A sob of sheer relief broke from her heart. The next moment she was crying recklessly against his shoulder. His whole body gave a convulsive start and then held itself rigid. He did not touch her. His arms limp at his side, he stared blindly into the dusk.

"I'm sorry—I did not mean to frighten—or hurt you."

"You haven't hurt me. It's just the reaction. I've been so unhappy—terribly unhappy. I've been afraid—I can confess it now. It wasn't disloyalty. I was just worn out. There was nothing for me to do but wait—and it was so long—and I was tired." She lifted her head and brushed the tears scornfully from her cheeks. "Oh, I am ashamed! Forgive me, Peter. Such a weak, uncontrolled partner!"

"Partner!" He started violently out of his apathy. "We're not partners. Didn't you understand? It is finished, I tell you——"

"I know. But what has that to do with us?" She laughed brokenly. "I thought partnerships were dissolved for failure—not for success."

He threw back his head.

"You don't understand. You gave your money, your youth and freedom, to my work. Now—that it is finished—you take back what is left. You are free."

"I am your wife," she answered.

"A formality—a sham. There is a way out—there must be—there shall be: I won't have your life and happiness on my soul." He caught her by the arms. His voice rasped with intolerable pain. "Do you suppose I haven't realised what I've done? Do you suppose I was really blind

to everything else? I was: for a long time. I kept myself blind. I'd never loved any one—never connected love with you or myself. But when I saw—when I realised what was happening, I swore that, whatever it might cost, you should be set free."

"Do *you* want freedom, Peter?"

"Why—why do you ask?"

"Because *I* don't." He came close to her. His eyes were black, lightless hollows in his ashen face. Their violence was like a perpetual menace. She did not flinch under them. Her voice was steady and quiet. "Not that freedom."

"You—you wished me dead——"

"That's a lie. You must be mad to think it."

"I dare say, I think I am. You wanted me to go last night——"

"Yes—because you were *my* husband."

"Lillah——"

"Because my pride in you ached till I was beside myself with pain. I forgot everything else—nothing else mattered—I could only think of my—yes—of my love, and desire it justified—before all men—before myself."

"Earnshaw loves you," he stammered.

"And Mr. Earnshaw has gone."

For one instant he remained silent and rigid, staring at her. Then, with a muffled groan, he caught her against him. His whole strength enveloped her mercilessly, brutally, but she knew of infinite relief and peace. Dazed and almost unconscious, she leant against him and through a deepening mist she heard his stumbling, broken words, a stream too long checked—its natural course too dry for grace or gentleness. She felt his lips on her eyes and mouth—and something hot and moist that mingled with her own burning tears.

"Peter—my dear husband."

His violence passed. They clung to one another. By the compassion in her heart she knew that his strength was of the body only—that some deep, agonized need in him called upon her. "Peter—don't, dear! It's all right now. We've won through—don't, my darling——"

He drew away from her a little, though his hands still held her.

"Yes, it's all right, isn't it? If it's a dream we'll dream

it through. After all these years one has a right to sleep and dream a little."

"Only—this our waking life—it's true——"

He did not answer. She felt that he was looking about him, searching the darkness which now filled the room. His hands shook.

"Lillah—let us get away from here—out into the fresh air—somewhere where it is clean and wholesome. This place suffocates me like a vault—full of dead things—dead hopes, dead people. And we are living."

She yielded silently and he put his arm over her shoulders with a clumsy, protecting tenderness that brought the tears back to her eyes. It was so new in him. The strangeness of it all overwhelmed her. They had lived side by side and had scarcely touched each other's hands. . . .

They went out of the murky, sombre house into the night. It was so still that the rustling grass under their feet sounded louder than the sea whose ebb and flow, like two mysterious voices, drowsed on the empty shores. Night spread a glittering darkness over the last pale gleam of sunset. Here and there some secret little scrap of life whirred and chirped and fled away from the disturbers or watched them with bright, unseen eyes from its lurking-place amidst the dunes.

But they themselves were quiet, held in the lulling enchantment of the hour, and when, at last, the woman spoke it was beneath her breath, as though she feared to wake some beloved and weary sleeper.

"I had dreamed of it so differently. I thought that you would explain it all to me and that we should plan the future and be so exultantly glad. And now—after all—I can hardly think of it. I *am* glad—without it there could be no gladness for us—and yet it seems a little thing—like a candle burning in the sunshine—compared with this. It sounds poor and selfish—I cannot believe that it is wrong—it cannot be wicked to be just human——"

"It is our right," he answered.

They crossed the grassy sand-dunes and over the headland to the old entrenchments, and there, where they had rested once before, he knelt and drew her down beside him and held her to him with a wild and desperate tenderness. But in the pale starlight she saw his face and freed herself. She took his head between her hands and kissed his eyes.

"Oh, Peter—and I said that it was Hanuman who paid

in suffering! I didn't know—I didn't understand. Only twice—once when we heard the singing—I caught a glimpse. And then that first night—that first night of all——"

"Did you really understand?" he asked feverishly. "Or did you think it was fear for my life, my career, my duty? I tell you—remember this—it was something finer—or meaner, I don't know which—but at least it wasn't that. I didn't care for duty. I wanted to be rid of it. My life—my career were nothing. I wanted to go—yes, prayed to go, as a child prays—not to kill or be killed or even for honour's sake—but just to keep my humanity, my fellowship with other men and women. For as clearly as though it had already happened I foresaw that other night here on the cliffs, when *they* would go past, singing, and I should lie here alone and hear them go and have no part with them." He bent his head over his tense locked hands and his voice hardened. "It was ... so I went to Carrington, and to all those others—to pass my burden on to them who had a right to bear it honourably, and to go free. But you know their answer. And that night I made a bargain with myself. If nothing came—no sign, no help, I *should* be free. I should be absolved and justified. I had fought to the last ditch. I could go. I should have done all that a man can do——"

"And then——?"

For he had stopped like a man overwhelmed by remembrance.

"You came. I was beside myself, and you seemed like a miracle—a direct sign from heaven that I could have denied only at the cost of my soul. And so I bound my burden tighter to me—became its slave, unfree to live, unfree to die, unfree to love——"

"You are free now," she whispered.

"Free to love and live and die," he paraphrased with sombre passion.

"And you can take your place among men—among brave men—all those who have sacrificed themselves for unknown people. You will be brother to the sick and helpless in all the world."

He bent down and kissed her hands.

"You faithful dreamer! I thought myself strong, and the strength was all in you. The greatness was yours—the genius and the goodness."

"It is just your love that thinks so." She wondered a

little, smiling to herself. "And I never guessed you cared. And I never knew I cared—until to-night."

His hands relaxed as though they had lost power.

"To-night? And I—God knows how long. In all this time you have been growing about me like a vine, binding me to you, I never knew until suddenly I was afraid. I had never thought of love until I saw it in you—and not for me——" He pointed with a trembling vehemence. "That man, standing there in the trenches, looking seawards—do you remember?—the Seer and the Deliverer. It was Earnshaw's face."

She followed the pointing of his hand.

"I can see him clearly now; even then I knew him. But there was a veil over my memory. His name was forgotten. At first I thought of him as a type—and then of Mr. Earnshaw as the man he typified—a figure among all the ages of men. But now I know. I can see—and the veil is gone. I know who bore the brunt of the fight and the deepest scars." His face was hidden in his hands, and gently she drew him to her. "But it's over now, Peter—the long fight. It's your hour now—at last."

"Mine!" He lifted his head and a white defiance shone like a fire in the haggard, stricken features. "My God—after all these years—in success or failure—I have a right to my hour——"

"—— And to all I am," she answered steadily.

But now a stillness had come over him. He did not touch her. He sat there with his hands clenched together so that the skin gleamed white and drawn in the pale light and the sinews cracked. It seemed natural to her that they should be so still. She herself scarcely spoke again, and then softly and brokenly, like a child hovering on the borderland of sleep. The night enveloped them, and they were one with her and with the sea and earth.

The stillness deepened. Thought and speech went down in a greater power as rocks are submerged under a rising tide. The soft breath of the water as it rose and fell was a lulling music.

She leant drowsily against him. A weariness as sweet and deep as death laid its hands over her eyes. A chill little wind blew over the empty cliffs. She thought he whispered to her.

But he had not spoken—not moved.

Now suddenly he got up. He stood at his full height.

He towered above her, his massive outline cut sharply against the luminous sky. She smiled to herself. For she knew that shadow well. It had been the companion of her lonely fancy, the Victor and the Deliverer. Even now she did not know—was it shadow or truth?

She called him softly.

He bent down and lifted her in his arms and carried her over the headland back to the dark and silent house. And on the threshold he set her down and held her for a moment. Still she was in the midst of her dreams, and his voice sounded vague and broken and afar off.

"You'll understand — to-morrow — I couldn't — after all."

She awoke suddenly, and found herself standing in the darkness—and alone.

II

It was a very wonderful dream. The management of the Alhambra and the Empire had—figuratively at any rate—come to blows over her, and it was merely a case of waiting until one or other had reached his outside limit with regard to spectacular salaries. Except for the filling in of blank spaces with the final figures, the contract was already drawn up and waiting. Stephen Tillett had drawn up the contract. Wonderfully arrayed in the prevailing fashion, and wonderfully sober, he played a considerable if rather hazy part in her dreams. Whatever she was doing —patronising royalty or snubbing managements—he was always there, rather nebulous but pleasantly ubiquitous. She did not quite know what he was up to, dodging in and out of her affairs, but she rather liked it.

It was a wonderful dream. It came to her just before dawn after a night of painful unrest during which she had tossed from one side of the bed to the other, seeking a cool spot where she could rest her aching misery. She rarely slept well. Once it had been her cough, and then, lately, a kind of extreme bodily tension as though her limbs were on the point of spasmodic and uncontrollable movement. To-night there had been an aggravating addition in the form of sheer nerves. She had lain and quaked, in a cold sweat of terror, at the slightest sound. And even when the house sank into a profound silence she was afraid—

more afraid, because to her overwrought fancy it was not a sleeping silence but a wide awake, dreadful suspense.

"Lor'—you're the limit, you are!" she repeated inwardly and with extreme self-contempt.

Finally, she had bullied herself into a light sleep with an accompaniment of highly coloured dreams whose chief contents have already been described. She had just reached the culmination of a "command performance" when she was awake again, suddenly and with a terrifying completeness. Everything in her awoke at once. There was no transition from dream to reality—no confusion. She was aware instantly of two things—firstly, that her door which had been shut was now ajar; secondly, that there was some one in the room. By this time dawn had broken. A faint light outlined the window and gave shape to the opposite wardrobe with its glimmering ghost-like mirror. She was just able to follow the intruder who crossed between it and the foot of the bed—on tip-toe—and deliberately pulled up the blind. Whereupon her terror turned to resentment.

"Well, of all the cheek!" she said simply.

Harding took no direct notice of her outburst. He came and sat down on the edge of her bed and motioned her briefly to silence. She noticed at once, though without any resulting deduction, that he was fully dressed and in his overcoat. His face was as yet nothing but a shadowed blur. Its extreme pallor might have been due to the light, and the possibility added to her annoyance. She knew that the early morning was not her best time, and that, what with one thing and another, she must be at that moment an unmitigated fright. "Language fails me, Johnny!" she added to her first ejaculation. "For once in my blessed life it fails me."

"I'm glad of that," he answered in a cool undertone. "I don't want a fuss. I pulled up the blind at once in order that you should see who it was and not imagine Red Rover was on his rounds again. Speak quietly. I don't want—any one disturbed."

"Except poor me, eh?"

"I want to talk to you," he replied. "It is urgent. I must be on my way in half an hour."

"So it isn't pulse-hunting this time?"

"No. I shan't pulse-hunt, as you call it, again."

"Wot's that, Jimmy?"

"My duties as your—your pseudo-medical attendant—are over."

She lifted herself on her elbow. Even then she could make nothing of him. His head was bent a little, his arms were folded over his breast. The whole attitude expressed calm, almost indifference. But she had quick ears.

"Wot's up, Cully?" she whispered.

"I've come to tell you—'wot's up.' You will know in any case quite soon, but I wanted to tell you myself. I have various reasons, selfish and unselfish. For one thing, I am coming to you for help. For another—it seems fairer. You've been a good sort to me. You're the only one who hasn't done his best to thwart me and who doesn't actually hate me."

She dropped back on her pillow.

"No—can't say I hate you, old chap. Never did—not at your rudest. But you shouldn't take that sort of thing to 'eart. It doesn't seem 'ealthy or natural in you somehow. When I first knew you, you didn't care a pennorth o' woodbines whether one fancied you or not. Did you now?"

"No," he admitted slowly. "I didn't care then."

"Well, don't now. It ain't worth it. You've got to realise you've done these old crocks the worst hinjury one mortal can do another mortal—you've made 'em realise wot they've come to. They were orl right in their gutter—at 'ome and comfy. But 'ere—well, you've made their self-respect itch like chilblains, and it's no use asking 'em to love yer." She yawned, her first alarm having subsided. "Besides—I ain't the only one 'oo loves you, Albert. Wot about Miss Jones?"

"Miss Jones is dead."

She sat up with a gasping cry, which he smothered roughly with his hand over her mouth. His face was quite close to hers, and its suddenly revealed expression effectually silenced her. His hand dropped. He went back to his normal tone. "She died suddenly yesterday evening. Though she had been complaining, it was totally unexpected. I was with her, poor soul. I think *she* knew, but she never grumbled, never reproached me."

"Why should she reproach you?"

"Because—I suppose people will say—I killed her."

Cissie clutched his arm.

"'Ere—not so fast. Wot cher mean? Killed 'er?

For Gawd's sake, 'Enry, say wot you've got to say—spit it out! I've got the jumps enough already——"

"What I've got to say is just this—I've failed."

"You mean—this cure of yours——"?

"It isn't a cure. I've believed in it and in myself till the very last. I'm beaten. How far I was wrong I don't quite know. Perhaps another man might have succeeded, but I hadn't the experience. I've meddled with a thing that was too big for me—and others have paid the penalty." He stopped, and though his head was bowed she could guess what that silence hid from her. Then he went on again in the same level, dispassionate undertone: "You remember Hanuman dying? That was the first warning. He had been my final test case, it was on my results with him that I based everything. When he died I had my first doubt, but I soon found explanations—excuses. Then other things happened—or rather didn't happen. Reactions that should have followed the injections did not set in, and there were symptoms that I did not understand. Still—I meant to fight through. Then she began to fail—just as Hanuman had done—and went out as he did—suddenly."

For a minute or two she did not speak or move. He heard her take a deep breath like some one who had come through a hard conflict and still carried his colours high. "And to think five minutes ago I was gathering bouquets out of the orchestra like peas out of a pod! Which just shows that dreams go by contraries. Well, I can have my cough out now without feelin' I'm doing' you a bad turn—eh, Cully?"

He caught the hot, groping hand in his and for the first time his voice was a reckless betrayal.

"Is that all you've got to say to me?"

"Wot else should I say?"

"You could slang me. I've cheated you—promised things—given you false hopes——"

"Dry up, old chap. You've clothed me, given me more grub in a month than I've had in all my blessed life. This time down here 'as been worth dyin' for. I ain't goin' to round on you——"

"Others will," he put in.

"The Archbishop and Co.? 'Oo cares! You can fight 'em——"

"I'm not goin' to fight them."

"Tell your grandmother!" she retorted scornfully.
"It's true. I'm clearing out—now."
She lay still, staring at him through the dusk.
"Johnny—don't you do it! I'd rather you didn't—I would, really now."
"Why?"
"I dunno. It's ugly. Not like you."
"People will say it's very like me."
"I don't care a sardine wot people say. *I* say—it ain't like you. You ain't goin' to do it—I shan't let you."
"I've got to."
"And leave 'er to face the music?"
He turned on her with a muffled cry of rage and pain.
"I'm doing what I've got to do. You can think what you like of me."
"Thank you for nothing." But her grip on his hand had tightened. "Steady, old chap! 'Old tight. You're as nervy as a kitten. Lor', I'm not goin' to join the 'appy band of mud-slingers, never you think it. A pal's a pal. If you was to poison the lot of us 'olesale I'd say 'Well, 'e was a good sort. P'raps 'e 'ad a wery good reason for it——'" She gulped, and then mustered a laugh. "Their 'Olinesses shan't 'ave it all their own way. Me and Gallows 'll stick up for you. Gallows is a good sort——" she broke off again and turned over on her side, tucking her face in the hollow of her arm. "Cully?"
"Yes?"
"S'ppose our passages are booked for sure this time?"
"I don't know—God help me—I don't know."
"Good old Gallows! And there 'ave I been raggin' 'im and bullyin' 'im, fillin' 'im up with orl sorts of fine stuff—ranch in California—a new start—and no more booze—and it's been all for nothing." She sprang up violently. "Cully, I can't stick it—I can't—I 'aven't the pluck. It's bad enough to peg out oneself with nothin' done, but him with 'is poor moth-eaten conscience and 'is little bit of 'ope—no, I can't face it. Get me out of this, old chap—do me a last good turn—take me with you——"
"I was going to ask you if you'd come."
"You!" She gaped at him. "You!"
"Yes—now, at once."
"You and me—doin' a flit?" A London gutter-snipe's grin, with its humour and its cynicism, broke through her misery. "Lor, that's a bit of scene-shiftin' if you like!

Wot cher want with me? We're nothing special to each other—just pals——"

"That's all we're ever going to be. I'll explain as we go along. I can give you half an hour to get as much together as you can carry. We'll have to walk to St. Maro and catch the morning express down. No one will know we've gone till we're well on our way. Will you come?"

She was very still with her face buried in her hands. Then she looked up at him.

"Yes—I'll come."

"You're plucky."

"Oh, dry up!" She ground her teeth together. "Wot's the good of whinin' and squirmin'? Get out—I'll want every minute of that half——"

"Very well. I'll wait for you by the Cove."

He nodded and left her. Downstairs in the gloomy hall Ashley awaited him. The old man was trembling with the chill morning air, and with an anxiety which his dim eyes betrayed as they followed Harding's movement.

"I've done everything you told me, sir," he whispered.

"That's good. I know you'll remember. Take my letter to Dr. Carrington first. The other two can wait till your return. You have the key of Miss Jones's room. Dr. Carrington must be the first to see her, you understand."

"Yes, sir."

Harding hesitated by the hall door.

"You've been very faithful, Ashley."

"I have felt faithful, sir."

"You're standing by me as you stood by my father. And I know you'll do your best for—for my wife. I can' do much for you. But I know she won't forget."

"Thank you, sir."

He was crying openly. Harding patted him on the shoulder.

"You silly old fool! One'd think I was your only love."

"Well, sir, there's been no one else but you and the doctor."

Harding found no answer. He opened the door softly and went out. It was quite light now. A morning breeze, sweet and strong as new wine, blew off the sea and ruffled the tamarisk on the stone hedges and the feverfew which waved like a white shroud over the faded thrift. He went

out of the gate and over the smooth, velvety grass to the head of Wrecker's Cove. The tide was in, and the peaceful water played in and out of the caves and tunnels and lapped the sides of the battered hulk of a ship with an innocent tenderness. Here and there a spar floated amidst the yellow spume, but there was nothing sinister or tragic. Already it was as though it had all happened years ago and those who had died and suffered here were half-remembered shadows. Later on in the day it would be different. But in the first flush of dawn nothing sorrowful can live.

Harding looked back over the land. The red gold rays came softly down the hills and in their fire sky and earth flamed up and glowed brighter and clearer. Flowers that had lain dark and still and later would fade in the garish midday, shone out from amidst the luminous grass—gold ragwort, like pools of sunlight, and, farther off, where the sand-dunes began their sweep into the horizon, a blue haze of vipers'-bugloss, and little breaks of mallow, rosy as the clouds. Scarcely a moving thing except the wind. One solitary young gull, startled by Harding's presence, beat up from the cold shadow of the rocks and warmed its wings in the first sunlight. The sweetness of the earth was in the wind's breath. A little bed of wild thyme grew at Harding's feet. He dug out a root and held the purple flower in the hollow of his hand, against his face.

And then for the first time he faltered, staggered by a pain that rent him, body and soul. This earth and the woman who slept in the peace of her illusion were fused by the agony of farewell. He could not separate them. She was of the flowers, the sea, and of the beloved soil. And all were lost.

He felt a touch on his arm. It was Cissie, wrapped in her fur coat and with a small, untidy parcel. She looked broken and demoralised. Her clothes had been flung on anyhow, her hair was wispy and unbrushed.

They stared at each other for a moment in naked, shameless grief. She jerked her head impatiently.

"Well—we can't stick here all day."

"No—we've got to step out."

They went silently over the springy downs. As they reached the rising ground Harding turned and looked back.

"Something to remember——"

"You'll come back," she muttered between her teeth.

"No. Unless"— he lifted his head suddenly, scenting.

the wind—" 'The souls of men return to the soil they fought for,' " he said.

"Wot's that, Cully?"

"Nothing. We've got to catch that infernal train."

She caught his hand and gripped it.

"Steady—hold up, old chap."

He nodded. They strode on, side by side, into the rising sun.

III

The Rev. Silas Modrow had been waiting in the passage. As Dr. Carrington and Genifer came out of the death-chamber he pounced upon the former and clung to his arm and mumbled hysterically.

"Doctor—is it true? For God's sake don't keep me in suspense—my nerves—my poor nerves—is it true he's bolted? I can't believe it. One knows there are wicked people about, but still—it's incredible—too horrible——"

"It happens to be true," Carrington interrupted frigidly and tried to shake off the bony, tenacious hand. "Mr. Harding has gone. For the present I am in charge here."

"And Miss Jones—poor dear soul!—dead—he killed her—I'm sure he killed her. And Mr. Polglase—where is he? what has happened to him? No one knows. But he was going to show that man up. Looks bad—terribly bad, Dr. Carrington. I should be glad to give evidence. He took my money—he ruined me—and now—now what is to become of me?"

He was crying—ugly, pitiable tears of senile weakness. The soiled hands clasped and unclasped themselves. But all the time his eyes were watching Carrington furtively.

"I can't say yet. I shall let you know as soon as I do. In the meantime you will stay here. The question of your evidence may arise later."

"Thank you, doctor—thank you. It is a great relief to me—a genuine medical opinion—what an innocent, trusting fool I've been!—a man like that——" He leered and dropped his voice to a whisper in deference to Genifer's presence. "I suppose you know—she's gone with him—I heard the servants talking—I always thought there was something up."

Carrington motioned him aside.

"That's no affair of mine—or yours. Please don't

detain me any longer. And the next time we meet you might arrange to be sober. Representing genuine medical opinion, I should say that you were drinking yourself to death, and, as far as you are concerned, I absolve Mr. Harding from all responsibility."

He went on downstairs with Genifer, and Modrow, after a moment's hesitation, followed. Cautiously, like some guilty animal, he slipped into the sitting-room and closed the door and stood with his back to it, giggling and panting.

"It's all right—we're to stay here—and if we're clever we make a good thing out of this. Mrs. Harding 'll pay a lot to keep our mouths shut. And it's true—he's gone for good—bolted—and that drab with him. Ah, Mr. Tillett, surely even you can perceive the hand of God working on your behalf. What an escape—what an——!"

But Stephen Tillett, who had been standing by the window with his back turned, swung round. He came at Modrow like a mad bull, his eyes blazing, his nostrils distended, and, without a word, caught him by the scraggy neck and shook him till the ugly white head rolled horribly on his shoulders. Mrs. Newman, who had been cowering by the empty fireplace, sprang up, screaming. Then, still in utter silence, Tillett dropped his prey, who crumpled up in a shabby heap of clothes on the floor, and turned and went out of the room.

He came face to face with Carrington. The latter might have been attracted by the uproar, but he made no reference to it. He merely held out a detaining hand. Tillett tried to thrust it on one side.

"Leave me alone—damn you!"

Carrington remained imperturbably in the way.

"You are Mr. Tillett, aren't you?"

"What's it to you who I am?"

"I may want to discuss matters with you later on. You were one of Mr. Harding's patients, and, as I am interested in the whole case, I should be glad to receive you as well as the others into my sanatorium, at any rate for a time. This is to relieve you from any immediate anxiety. Moreover, it is possible that we shall want evidence——"

"Have you any right to detain me?"

"Certainly not—as yet."

"You'd better hurry up, then. You'll find me in the nearest pub. And damn your charity! What do I want with it? Do you think I'm so keen on this muck-heap of a life that I want to cling on to it? Get out of my way!"

Carrington shrugged his shoulders and made no further protest. He waited until the last echoes of the violently slammed outer door had died into silence and then t down the passage to the room which Genifer had indicated to him.

He entered quietly, as though within some one lay very ill. Indeed, he scarcely knew what it was he had prepared himself to meet, but, at least, the absolute stillness was unexpected and oddly disconcerting. He saw Mrs. Harding seated at her writing-table with a letter in her hand. Evidently she had read it more than once, and the torn and crumpled sheet of paper struck a warning note of violence which yet was not discordant. It was like the foam that marks the dangerous, hidden rock in a quiet sea.

She rose as Carrington entered. There was no trace of tears on her cheeks—no trace even of emotion. She was very still—terribly composed.

"Miss Bayard told me that you would see me," he began hurriedly. "I shall only have to detain you a moment. But it was essential that I should tell you what can be done—and what must be done."

"I am very grateful to you," she answered.

"You know that your—that Mr. Harding sent me a letter early this morning. Among other things, he has handed over to me all his papers, the records of his investigations. Also he suggests that I should take the unhappy people he gathered about him into my care. This, I may say, I should have done in any case——"

"They will be your patients in the ordinary sense of the term," she interrupted. "As long as they live I shall provide for them amply. It's not a question of charity, but of atonement. We—I gave them a false hope. I know of nothing more cruel than that."

He bowed.

"That is generous of you—more especially as Mr. Harding explicitly denies you any share in this deplorable business."

"Nevertheless, I had my share."

He hesitated. He found her composure terrible, and indescribably moving. He remembered her defence of the man who had deserted her and wondered if she realised the full significance of Cissie de Valincourt's disappearance. As though she divined his uncertainty she took up the crumpled letter and smoothed it out with a quiet hand.

"My husband has given me a full explanation and account of all that he has done," she said. "He has warned me that there may be an inquest. Is that probable?"

"I'm afraid it's certain. On the results of the post-mortem will depend whether or not any—any further action will have to be taken."

"Yes. I understand."

"At the same time, you need feel no concern for yourself. You need not, and shall not be involved. In the meantime, is there any one—any friend whom you would like me to send for?"

He fancied that, for the first time, a wave of intolerable recollection passed over her face.

"I have been an exile too long. I have no friends."

"Your exile is over," he returned warmly. "As to your friends—they are where you are. I trust that I may count myself among them."

"You are very generous."

He caught himself blushing foolishly, like a boy.

"Nonsense. But I shall want help—legal advice. Miss Bayard has suggested that we should send for Earnshaw. You know him very well, don't you?"

"Very well."

"He is a good fellow, and, what's more, he was, before the war at any rate, on the way to being a good lawyer. He might be of great use. At the same time, there'll be no need to drag a stranger into the affair." He looked at her questioningly. "Have I your permission to wire for him?"

He heard her draw a quick, unsteady breath.

"Yes."

"Very well. May I suggest now that you go home with Miss Bayard? We shall have a nurse from St. Orma at midday, and Jeffries is doing very well. Allow me to take over everything here—for the present."

"You are intolerably good to me."

He turned hurriedly to the door.

"It gives me pleasure to help you."

"Dr. Carrington——"

"Yes?"

He knew that the colour which flooded her white face sprang from an almost physical pain.

"You have a right to an apology from me. I—I cannot make it. Do you understand—can you forgive me?"

"I thought you fine that day," was his answer. "I think you finer now."

His bow was more than a formal courtesy. As he went out he involuntarily glanced back at her. She was standing by the hearth, and the torn fragments of the letter fluttered down from her steady fingers.

PART III

THE DELIVERER

CHAPTER I

I

THE Haussa, animated in equal parts by trepidation and irrepressible excitement, attacked his task with corresponding tact and violence. Having approached his master on tip-toe, he yelled.

John Edwards, D.C. for the region of Kum-Prah, oft consigned and likened to other regions equally unwholesome, sat up and swore—swore with such volume and feeling that, as the Haussa afterwards expressed it, "Him think lib for plenty trouble." Considering that it was early afternoon, the unhappy D.C.'s passion of rage was awe-inspiring and only explicable by the fact that he had lain for two solid hours in the comparative coolness of the verandah and wrestled with exhaustion and a total inability to sleep. Now, just as he had succeeded in dulling the edge of his wakefulness, this unprecedented and appalling howl had broken upon him.

It proved the last straw on the back of an English gentleman who had borne fever, swamps, soaking rains, and scorching heat and undiluted native society for a year, with Christian fortitude. It was only when the Haussa interposed an alarmed "White man, Massa, White Man small far—liff small here," that he ceased swearing and condescended to glance in the direction indicated by the black hand. Then he sprang up with a "By Jove—so it is!" and became suddenly not merely pacific but amiable.

The District Commissioner's bungalow was situated on the outskirts of the village on a knob of rising ground—a position which gave it an air of grandmotherly supervision

and a certain superiority in the matter of effluvia. From the verandah the village looked like an untidy rabbit-warren with its intersecting passage laid open, and it was possible to keep an eye on the whole population without stirring out of one's long chair. Mr. Edwards, therefore, had a full view of the procession. It came slowly and attracted considerable attention, every living thing streaming into the main street amidst ecstatic yells and beating of tom-toms. For a white man was a rarity in that part of the world, and usually signified a ceremonious gathering of chiefs and Grand Palaver—all of which, in the native mind, is equivalent to high junketings.

It must be confessed that the D.C. usually shared in the excitement. Kum-Prah lay out of the beaten track. Gold and rubber hunters avoided it, not because it was poor in either commodity, but because it was ill-omened and possessed of a climate in which men died off with a facility extraordinary even for West Africa. The grave of Edwards's immediate predecessor stood on the bush-track which he had to pass on his periodical tour of inspection. The fate of the rest he had been careful to ignore.

He himself had "stuck it" for a year and was now on the verge of leave. But the loneliness—of which there is none greater in the world—had bitten into his soul and fever had rotted his body like a corroding acid so that his hands, though he was in the prime of life, shook piteously. They shook the more now because the advent of this white man was totally unexpected. As a rule, any traveller from the coast heralded his approach by runners and an official took care to allow time for a suitable reception. Moreover, this cortège which came straggling out of the village street into the clearing was unusual in its composition. It was very small. The army of camp-bearers had shrunk somewhere to a mere handful, and these of a quality which the D.C.'s accustomed eye appraised contemptuously. He was inclined to agree with the Haussa's murmured comment that "White Man lib for no good," but his suspicion did not prevent him snatching at his pith helmet and descending, at once dignified and hospitable, to greet the stranger. A lunatic, so long as he was white, would have been welcome.

As he advanced across the open, sun-scorched square he perceived that the party had no intention of breaking their journey. They were moving on to the opposite track

which led back into the bush and only as the white leader caught sight of Edwards did he turn aside. The two men approached each other gingerly. Edwards held out his hand.

"We don't need introductions in these parts," he said, smiling, "and, whoever you are, I'm infernally glad to see you. Where've you sprung from?"

"Accra originally—Tarkwa three nights ago."

Edwards whistled.

"Some going. Well, this is Kum-Prah. I'm the D.C. of these parts. You can put up in my shanty. God knows there's room enough."

"Thanks—I've got to push on."

"Push on?" The D.C. was at once aghast and bitterly disappointed. "Well—upon my word! Have you a gold-mine waiting you somewhere? Or are you winning a wager; or escaping justice, or what?"

The stranger smiled.

"Nothing of that sort."

"H'm. I suppose you don't realise I haven't spoken to an Englishman for three months?"

"Haven't you? Well, it's some time since I've put my legs under a friendly table." He turned and gave an order to his boys in pure English, which they imperfectly understood. But his manner was matter-of-fact and compelling in its sheer incredulity of disobedience. The natives, chattering among themselves, retired into the shadow of the palm-trees and squatted down beside their burdens. He turned again. "I'll have a drink if you can spare one," he said, "and you can air your native tongue."

"Thanks." The official's tone was rather grim. He was not sure that he had upheld his dignity. But a lonely man is not often a proud one. "You're new to these parts, aren't you?" he asked as they mounted the verandah steps.

"How did you know?"

"You don't speak the lingo."

"No—I haven't got the hang of it yet. I shall soon."

"You talk as though you meant to make a stay of it."

"I am going to stay—a long time."

The Haussa, who was well trained in these matters and knew exactly what luxury fitted what event, had produced

and boisterously uncorked a champagne-bottle. The stranger drew a quiet sigh of content, stretched out his long limbs on the wicker lounge, and held his glass appreciatively to the light. He had removed his helmet and against the bronzed face his hair looked almost flaxen. He was a big, powerfully made man, trained down to the last ounce, and his drill-suit fitted him so perfectly that its soiled and rather tattered state escaped notice. He glanced at Edwards, and his smile relieved the rather tense lines of mouth and jaw.

"Good luck!"

"Same to you!"

The D.C. set down his glass. The society of this unknown Englishman added a wonderful zest to his drink. He returned instinctively to the attack.

"Where do you propose camping to-night?"

"Anywhere. We'll go on till dark."

"Your boys won't like it. They hate the dusk. Evil spirits and all that, you know. And it will be night in the bush in an hour."

"We'll manage somehow. I'm behind time already. I was hung up at Accra trying to get carriers. They weren't keen on the job."

Edwards laughed.

"I reckon by this time they're still less keen. Where's your destination?"

"Kese-Fo——"

Edwards no longer laughed. He ceased to be the rather futile and tremulous invalid. He sat up alert and vigorous.

"Government?"

"No."

"Then what the devil do you want at Kese-Fo?"

"I'm joining another party."

"Saunders, Baillie & Co., by any chance?"

"That's it?"

"Friends of yours?"

"No. I knew Ralph Jeffries. He was one of them."

"Yes—I remember him. He went through here on his way home. Dying, I should say."

"I'm coming out to take his place."

The commissioner knew all that he wanted to know, and he exploded.

"I don't know you—I don't know your name—but I tell you straight, if you don't keep out of it you're an

infernal fool. A set of cranks! God in heaven, what's their game? They've set out to make the place habitable. That's failed. As though every one didn't know that it would! It was meant to be a hell, and it's running in the face of Providence to try and better it." He leant forward, holding out his shaking hands. "Look at that! I can't hold a glass steady. And I can tell you that this hole is a health resort compared with Kese-Fo. They've gold in the rivers—any amount—and forests of rubber, but you won't find a sane man to try his hand at getting it. If the fever doesn't catch them out, something else will. And those three lunatics, with their theories and serums and what not! Well, Jeffries you knew, and the last time I went through Baillie was off his head with some new-fangled germ that Saunders had discovered. I tried to get them out of it, but they wouldn't come, Saunders having developed another mania. He's got it fixed that the Omanhin of the stool next door isn't all that he might be—making mischief with other stools, and so on. Which is sheer tosh. The Omanhin is a good sort and as civil as you please—and—as to the other stools—well, I've never had trouble in my district, and I don't propose beginning now."

He had worked himself into a state of tremulous exasperation—an easy performance after a year of tropical hard labour—and had almost forgotten his guest, who was engaged in stuffing an old pipe with careful, loving fingers.

"What's an—an Omanhin?" he asked lazily.

"Chief, of course."

"And stool?"

Edwards gave a peevish laugh.

"My good fellow—do you propose settling yourself down there, not knowing even the rudimentary facts of native life?"

"No. I'm working hard. I've got a whole library wobbling on some poor devil's head. In a month or two I shall be hob-nobbing with their most select ju-jus. By the way, what *is* a stool?"

"Tribe," Edwards answered irritably.

The stranger got up and adjusted his pith-helmet.

"You see—I make a point of collecting information. I think I'd better be getting along now——"

"So you're set on leaving your bones in that God-forsaken swamp?"

"Well—I've got to leave them somewhere."

"You don't need to leave them riddled with every conceivable sort of microbe, first."

"I don't know so much about that. I'm interested in tropical diseases. Used to study them. That's why I thought I might be of some good out here. I've brought a whole lot of scientific stuff. . . ."

"Another bug-hunter!" Edwards ejaculated sourly. "All bug-hunters are hopeless. What on earth do you do it for?"

The stranger glanced at him keenly.

"What do you fester here for?"

"Me? God knows!"

"H'm. Perhaps He does. So long! I'll look you up if I'm this way again."

Edwards growled to himself.

"You never will be. And I shan't be here, please Heaven. But you're bound to find some other poor devil——"

"May his champagne be as dry!" the other interposed good-humouredly.

"I'll leave a bottle for you." Edwards sighed with relief. "I'm off home next week. Any message for the old country?"

The stranger frowned out into the sunlight.

"Oh—just give it my love." On the way down the verandah steps he hesitated. "By the way, was that—er—Omanhin's name Dakwa by any chance?"

"How the devil did you know that?"

"Oh, Jeffries mentioned it—that's all."

Edwards watched the tall, white-clad figure cross the square patch of blazing heat. He heard the word of command. The native bearers thereupon shouldered their chop-boxes, camping-gear, and what was no doubt the "scientific stuff." and started off in single file. The Englishman came last of all. At the black edge of the forest he turned and waved. Edwards waved back, more in sorrow than in anger.

"I've always wondered why foreigners call us mad," he soliloquised. "Now I know."

He poured himself out another glass from the half-empty bottle. But the stuff tasted flat and insipid. He set it down disgustedly and went back to his siesta.

But more than ever sleep evaded him.

He lay there and knew that he was old and tired and

indifferent. There was only one thing that mattered to him now, and the stranger had brought it vividly to his senses—the smell of an English wind.

II

For a long time it had been very still. The old chief sat on his wooden stool and stared unhappily out of the open doorway, whilst his uneasy fingers plucked at his beard or fidgeted with the elaborate royal toga, which as a sign of respect he had allowed to slip from his shoulders. An impassive native immediately behind him fanned him with a palm-leaf, and the soft swish-swish of the air was the only sound that broke the silence.

The man lying on the camp-bed against the wall appeared to sleep. He had been propped up with an old tiger-skin rolled up into an extemporary pillow, and his attitude suggested that he had fallen asleep suddenly—perhaps in the middle of a sentence. His arms sprawled on the rug which covered him to the waist, and they were shrunken and withered like an old man's. But he was not old. His face, quiet and composed now, had youthful lines which the drawn and yellow skin could not altogether obliterate. The brown hair was boyishly thick, and, like the stubble on the wasted cheeks, had got out of hand, growing over the ears and adding an incongruous femininity to the gaunt and suffering features. Sometimes the cracked lips stirred as though with an eager sentence, but no sound came from them.

Suddenly he started violently, and his eyes opened. They passed unrecognisingly over the poor contents of the hut, over the little armoury of rifles stacked in the corner, the big wooden box, its lid laden with strange, carefully labelled bottles, the table, the litter of a rough, unfinished meal. They rested at last on the old chief, on whom the dull, yellow light from the door had seemed to gather. Then he drew a deep breath of the moist, lifeless air, and shuddered over his whole body as though with a sick and bitter recollection.

"I'm sorry, Kwayo," he said faintly. "We were just discussing something—I've forgotten—I'm afraid I must have fallen asleep."

The native, who at the abrupt waking had half risen from

his seat, sank slowly back again. But now his rolling eyes sought the sick man persistently and with a kind of dog-like appeal.

"Yes—you sleep. You sleep heavy too much. Time White Man sleep Dark Man lib for no good. Time White Man sick for die then plenty trouble come." He shook his grey head, "plenty trouble. White Man very strong. White Man great Ju-ju. So long White Man lib bad Dark Man afraid. White Man sick for die"—he stopped short and his restless eyes roved among the shadows—"then plenty trouble," he repeated dully.

"You friend of White Man, Kwayo?"

"Yes, friend of White Man. White Man save peccan. White Man great witch-doctor. I no forget."

"Then tell me what you know."

"I no savvy——"

"You savvy that there's plenty trouble coming. You say so. You come here to warn me. You lib for truth, Kwayo. Is it the Omanhin?"

The chief stood up. He had come to a decision, and a sullen, obstinate reticence weighed on his heavy features. He drew the native cloth back over his shoulders with an air of finality.

"Me no savvy. White Man great Ju-ju—but Omanhin also great Ju-ju. The White Man sick for die. . . ."

"If I die another White Man come——"

"You say that—all time you say that, and I wait—yes, I and my people wait. And the Omanhin wait too. But no White man come."

"I have sent for the D.C."

A slow grin parted Kwayo's lips.

"D.C. good man. He come. Make great palaver. Omanhin shake him hand. Talk big talk. And when him go Omanhin laugh."

The Englishman lifted himself upright. His eyes blazed in their deep sockets. He pointed his shaking hand at the open door, where the white fire of midday deepened to gold.

"You have been talking to the Nyanga Nkissi—Omanhin's witch-doctor he come to you and he say, 'White Man die to-night, and no other White Man come. You follow Omanhin when he call you.' But I say to you—White Man come. He come even now. I hear him steps in the forest—in the swamp—faster and louder. No one

stop hi: —no, not the Nyanga nor the nails he drive in the Fetish. Ah, you think I not know, Kwayo! You think I not se the Nyanga when he creep to Fetish and drive him nail in body and call to him. 'Nkiss—Nkiss—White Man die to-night. To-morrow no White Man come.' But I laugh. For White Man's Ju-ju stronger than the Ju-ju of Nyanga—stronger than Omanhin—stronger than Nzambe. He come to-night—before he dawn break."

He fell back, crumpling up like a terrible marionette whose strings have snapped, his head lolling over his pillow, his mouth gaping. For a minute the old chief had faltered. The passionate, prophetic voice, the visionary eyes, had held him in a grip of superstitious awe. Now, as the Englishman collapsed, the moment's hesitancy passed. He made a little gesture—regretful and incredulous—and went out into the street.

The village slept under a pall of sickly heat. Here and there a dark, half-naked form, crouched in a doorway, gave Kwayo respectful greeting. The rest of the population had crawled deep into their huts and lay there, awaiting the evening hour of deliverance.

The chief went his way mechanically—listless and heavy-footed, like some old dog that has lost his master; even the pounding of the tom-toms as the gates of his clay palace were flung open to receive him did not rouse him. But, as he entered the first courtyard, he drew himself up sharply. A native runner, scantily clad and still panting, who had been resting on his haunches, approached with an obeisance that was at once profound and insolent.

"Listen, listen in the name of God, O Chief! It is the Omanhin of Durebe who sends me to thee. To-morrow the Omanhin comes to make great palaver. Thou knowest what questions he will put to thee. May the answer that thou givest be wise and true, and to the great good of thy stool, O Chief!"

Kwayo nodded. He gave no sign of trouble or displeasure. He seated himself in the shade of his verandah, and, almost motionless and utterly expressionless, smoked an old briar pipe and stared ahead with dull and brooding eyes. Many of his vast household passed to and fro before him and peered at him furtively and questioningly, but he gave them no heed. As the last light faded from the courtyard and the dank chill of night breathed over the village, he rose again, and, silently and unescorted, went out

into the streets. They were crowded now. Men and women and children moved soft-footed and noisy-tongued through the twilight, but as Kwayo passed out among them they ceased from their various occupations and stood still and waited. He spoke to those nearest him, briefly and heavily.

"To-morrow there will be grand palaver with the Omanhin. To-morrow we shall give answer."

They made way for him, chattering subduedly, and he went on—out of the village towards the clump of palm-trees that hung like a black cloud in the misty twilight. He went cautiously here, looking to right and left, for in every shadow, every stone and tree and blade of grass, lurked a spirit that might wish him evil. As he entered the Fetish grove he held himself rigid and the sweat broke out over his tense body. But he went on doggedly.

A young moon showed its crescent over the dense black barrier of the distant bush, and in the pale light the high stems of the palms were like the majestic pillars of a temple. There was at first no sound. Kwayo's footfalls were hushed. But presently there broke upon the ominous stillness faint dulled blows of a hammer. They grew louder, but they never swerved from their monotonous rhythm. And in that monotony there was some purpose—malignant and relentless.

Kwayo crept nearer. The doors of the hut stood open. On either hand the palms built an impenetrable wall, but down the Grove itself a ghostly river of moonlight flowed softly and gathered in the Fetish House into a misty, shining pool, out of whose depths something rose up that was black and definite and shapeless. It bore no living thing resemblance, yet it had to life a grotesque and loathsome affinity. Its invisible head reached up into the gloom, but its hideousness was visible, and the horror of it groped down like a greedy, seeking tentacle. About its feet there was movement. The shadow of an arm rose and fell persistently, and with each fall there sounded a metallic, heavy thud.

Then came profound silence. Kwayo crouched down on the threshold, his face hidden in his hands, whilst shudder after shudder rippled over his huddled body. When he looked up at last a man stood beside him—upright in the moonlight, and stark naked save for a sinister girdle of bleached bones that shone palely about his waist. He did

not seem aware of Kwayo's presence. The painted face was lifted to the patch of open sky. The long hair had been plaited tightly so that it stood up from the narrow, receding forehead like the horns of a bull.

Kwayo held out a shaking hand.

"The Omanhin has sent to me, Nyanga Nkissi," he whispered. "To-morrow I shall give answer. What answer shall I give? Thou knowest. Thy Nkissi has spoken."

"To-night the spirit of the White Man wrestles with the spirit of the Omanhin," was the answer, delivered in a low monotone.

"Who shall overcome?" Kwayo crept a little closer, peering up anxiously through the light. "The White Man has a great spirit. He is strong to save. He tore the devils from my son's throat. He has driven out the evil ghosts that enter a man's body and make it swell to death. He has powerful spirits that he can let loose upon his enemies. He is a great witch-doctor, the greatest of all. Surely he will overcome?"

The Nyanga lifted his clenched fists above his head.

"Twice has the nail been driven home. Nkissi has spoken. To-night the spirit of the White Man dies. The spirit of the Omanhin shall eat him up. There shall come no other White Man. Go thou with the Omanhin at day-break and see all that the Nkissi has left of thy great witch-doctor." A sneering laugh broke through the prophetic monotone. "By what thou shalt find there take thou thy course, O Kwayo."

The chief bowed his face again into his hands. A long time he remained there, huddled and still, and when at last he drew himself unsteadily to his feet he was alone and the door of the Fetish House closed and black against him.

III

The Englishman who lay dying in his hovel outside the village had heard neither the tom-toms beaten in Kwayo's honour nor the noisy shoutings of the natives as they awoke from their midday stupor. He was floating out on a black river where there was no light or sound—farther with every moment, faster as the current drew him nearer to the sea.

At first he had struggled, knowing dimly that once the bar was crossed there could be no return. Then he had grown weary, and had yielded himself to that peaceful flowing movement and forgotten what it was that had held him back. He had struggled hard for something already dim and afar off. He had suffered unspeakably for it. Now it was good to rest.

He was dying. The water had almost closed over him. And then—suddenly, with a frightful, agonising resurrection of his will—he struck out and battled madly for life. Something had reached the fading senses—a challenge, a war-cry, the mocking drum-beat of a triumphant enemy. It resolved itself gradually into one definite sound. It filled his ears, and from thence till the moment of his death he heard no other sound. It was as regular as the beat of his pulse. It was heavy as the beat of a hammer.

He struggled up. It was pitch dark in the hut itself. An immeasurable distance away from him a pale, phosphorescent square like the screen of a cinematograph threw up black faceless shadows that came and went and whispered among themselves. He knew that they whispered though he could hear nothing but the beating of the hammer. He knew what it was they whispered: "White Man die to-night. To-morrow no White Man come." And he shouted back at them—it was no more than a dry and pitiful whisper—"He come to-night—before the dawn breaks. For White Man's Ju-ju stronger than the Ju-ju of the Nyanga—stronger than the Omanhin——"

He broke off, thinking to himself—"Why doesn't Jeffries come—oh God, why doesn't he come?"

The hammer beat out an exultant answer.

And suddenly he knew that before he died he must go out and find Jeffries. He must go out and find him now—out there—somewhere. He could not rest until he had found him. He got up. He went reeling and stumbling, drunk with weakness, towards the light; but on the threshold he remembered those watching shadows. He drew himself up. A gaunt, grotesque figure in his pyjamas, bare-footed, his long hair flung back from a livid face, he attained in that moment a stupendous dignity. The crowd of shadows that hung about, waiting for his overthrow, shrank away from him screaming. For to them he was no longer living, no longer human, but of those beings whom to meet and touch at night-fall is to die. He

went through their midst and down the track which led into the bush. Kwayo, stealing out of the Fetish Grove, saw him and dropped where he stood, muttering an incantation. But the Englishman, his bare feet making no sound on the dusty road, passed on unheedingly and vanished, into the fastness of the forest. The beating of the tom-toms, the deafening, terror-stricken shouts had fallen back from his consciousness like waves from a rock-bound coast. He heard still nothing but the deadly blows of the hammer. And each blow was a menace—a sinister warning. It shook him—it struck at the roots of his life. But it urged him on.

"Soon the nail will be driven in," he thought repeatedly, "and then I shall be dead. I must find Jeffries—I must find him—before daybreak—Jeffries——"

He shouted the name. His need gave him superhuman strength and his voice echoed and echoed again through the stillness. He ran on. It was dark now—darker than night. He was in a world where neither moon nor sunlight had ever penetrated. A narrow path had been cut through an evil twining undergrowth which linked one bare-stemmed giant to another and when he stumbled blindly caught him as in a net and flung him back. There were roots like the legs of monstrous spiders that tripped him up and wound themselves about his limbs, so that for minutes together he lay stunned and bleeding. But in the end he plunged on again. He was obsessed, galvanised by the one purpose. He must find Jeffries. Jeffries had promised to come and Jeffries was a good fellow. He would not fail. He must tell Jeffries about the Omanhin so that he should be on his guard. Somehow he must get Jeffries to Kese-Fo by day-break. He had sworn it—by the White Man's spirit he had sworn it.

So he ran on—deeper and deeper into the stillness, waking the awful solitude with his shouting.

IV

Harding heard the cry in his sleep. It wove itself grotesquely into the fabric of his dreams, and then, as it came nearer, tore him violently back to full wakefulness. He raised himself on his elbow. The camp-fire, which early

in the night had filled the clearing with a lurid illumination, had burnt itself down to a fading glow. The black circle of forest trees had narrowed, and against the wall of shadow he saw a nightmare fresco of dark faces, mouths agape, the brilliant whites of the eyes shining in an agony of horror. For a minute the motionless suspense lasted. He himself could not have moved. In that eternal silence where every sound was alien and every tree a thing animate with secret malignant forces, the faintest footfall, the lowest whisper, had power to freeze the blood. And this hoarse, tortured cry might have been wrung from the very earth. A minute afterwards Harding had flung off the stupor, but it was too late. Panic, which had been held in leash by sheer physical paralysis, broke loose and leapt from one to another like a wild and senseless beast. He shouted at them. He flung the first man who tried to dash past him headlong to the ground. He threatened with his revolver. He might as well have set himself against the course of a torrent. He could have shot them, for it was not death they feared. For an instant their distorted shadows gyrated madly against the fire-glow, then broke and vanished like stones flung into a black and bottomless pool. Harding remained alone. He had stuffed his revolver back into its holster. He knew instinctively that there would be no need for it. Whatever was coming out of the night came in dire need. The cries had begun to shape themselves. The branches and tangled undergrowth cracked and snarled before the reckless, break-neck progress. And suddenly, beyond the dull smouldering fire they were burst apart, and Harding saw that for which he waited. He sprang towards and caught it in his arms, just as it tottered. It clung to him. Blood-stained, wild-eyed, tattered almost to nakedness, it was yet instantly and passionately near and precious to him. He felt in the clutch of those torn hands the answering recognition. In that place of desolation they were of the same race, of the same kind. They were leagued together in brotherhood against the alien spirit that enveloped and threatened them.

The frenzy died out of the upturned, emaciated face. The mouth, flecked with foam and blood, closed to a firm, half-smiling line. He tried to stand alone and could not, but broke helplessly against the man who held him.

"I'm sorry—I was looking for some one—a friend—I—I

don't know how I got here—I've been a bit—off my head. Who are you? Where am I?"

"We're not far from Kese-Fo. My name's Harding. I am supposed to be camping here, but my fellows must have thought you were one of their devils. You were shouting—some name or other——"

"Yes—Jeffries, wasn't it? I'd got him on my mind. He was to have come—I was looking for him——"

"A man called Jeffries sent me." Harding interposed quietly—"or I sent myself. He couldn't come, and I had an idea you needed help. Are you Saunders, or Baillie?"

"Saunders." A shuddering sigh of relief escaped the fever-withered lips. "Put me down somewhere, will you? I'm dying, you know—been dying for weeks—and now they've driven in the last nail—I haven't got much time."

Harding carried him to the fireside—he was light and fragile as a child—and set him down with his head resting on a rolled-up blanket. The flask which he offered was waved aside.

"Thanks. It might go to my head. And I've got things to tell you. Sit close there and give me a hand. I feel as though I might rave again—or drift off. You've come in Jeffries' place? Bit of luck our meeting, eh?"

Harding nodded. He saw that there was no time for his own explanation. The man's brain was clear now, but he was dying fast. "You'll find it a tough job. You'll die of it. Baillie died six months ago. Our plans went to bits—they wouldn't back us, and we hadn't the money; but we hung on because of that beast, Omanhin. He's up to mischief. He's smooth-tongued; they wouldn't believe it at Accra—or at home. But he's got half the stools under his thumb—he'd have got them all, but we shut down the small-pox and Kwayo believed in us—thought us sort of big Ju-ju—and all that. He and his lot would stick to us now—but there's only me left—and I'm done for—and the Omanhin's always at him—and his damned Fetish Man—hated us—took his custom—did him over the small-pox——" He faltered and then went on ramblingly, but with a desperate eagerness. "So he's been hammering nails into me—'To-morrow White Man die—to-morrow no White Man come.' But I did a good swear too. 'He come to-night,' I told 'em. 'Before day-break. Your damned nails in Fetish no good. White Man stronger than Ju-ju—stronger than the Omanhin—stronger than——'

Oh Lord, I am raving again—where's Jeffries?—why doesn't he come?"

Harding pressed him gently back.

"Steady. It's all right. I'm as good a man as Jeffries. I'm going."

The glaze cleared from the sunken eyes. They brightened with a last up-flame of life.

"I like that. You'll stick it?"

"Rather. I know a lot about bugs. I'll Ju-ju them."

Saunders gave a dry, rattling laugh.

"That's good. Before day-break, eh? Push on now—you see, I promised——"

"I can't leave you like this——"

The other shook his head petulantly.

"Don't be—a bally ass. I'm dying like a lord—with a jolly fire and all—and no tom-toms for once. Get on, like a good chap. It's beastly in the bush at night—but you'll manage. Stick to the path—first mansion on your right—you'll know it by the window——"

He laughed again with a sudden boyish clearness. "You'll give 'em fits—my White Man—sprung from nowhere—and me gone. They'll make Ju-ju out of you. They'll be offering you sacrifices, as sure as——" His voice faded. The firelight on his face seemed to grow dim and pale. "Damned old Omanhin! Do you hear—that hammer?—the nail's almost home—push on—before day-break."

Harding nodded. His wrist-watch gave him two hours—two hours on a black, unknown forest track. He began to gather together the few things that he could carry. And always the dying eyes followed him with their stern insistence. He came back at last.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing. I hadn't hoped for such luck." An ineffable content dawned over the ashen features. "I—I rather like those black devils—but it's good to see an English face at the finish. Good luck!" They shook hands. Saunders stretched himself out peacefully. "Carry on! Carry on!" he whispered.

Far down in the depths of the forest, Harding looked back. The last glimmer of the camp-fire had died out. A darkness which was loaded with dank and evil oppression enveloped him. The light from his electric torch was like an eye watching him from amongst the black pillars of the

trees. He listened. He thought he heard Saunders's whisper repeated softly, exultantly. But he knew that the call was within himself—that he listened to voices that he had heard long since and to whose bitter memory he had held in his worst hour. They were borne on the wings of the storm-wind. They echoed through the tempest.

"Carry on! Carry on!"

But now it was to him they called.

The sun showed over the edge of the eastern hills, and from the valleys and deep ravines the grey, sickly mists rose up like ghosts at the call of an omnipotent evil power. Death, which had slept in the swamps and slime-banked rivers, shook itself in the first breath of heat and strode forth with a new strength, throwing its seed far and wide to the fertile soil. The first sun-ray heralded its coming. Men cowered before it. There was no life in its brightening, no joyful promise. It was a malignant thing, glittering with a brazen menace.

But in Kese-Fo it was a signal. It flung open the wooden gates of Kwayo's palace. It awoke the narrow streets to a seething life. To the delirious beat of drums, men and women streamed together, jostling and struggling with a frenzy that was oddly voiceless. The excited shouts and eager, incessant chattering which marks the native feast-day seemed to be crushed under a burden of foreboding. And, as Kwayo came forth at the Omanhin's side, the last murmur died down like a feeble gust of wind. Both wore their robes of state. But behind them came the Omanhin's giant sword-bearers, his monstrous State Umbrella, and all his warriors. His was the power; he flaunted it insolently. He was young and powerfully built, and beside him the old chief walked like a broken captive; they did not speak to each other. There was no need. The Nkissi had answered. In Grand Palaver their treaty should be ratified, and the last free stool linked up in the Omanhin's chain.

And no White Man should ever come again among them.

The Nyanga Nkissi walked alone at the head of the procession. There were skulls added to his girdle, and

from his neck hung knives ominously stained. He chanted as he went—a wild, discordant song of triumph which broke fitfully through the beatings of the tom-toms and the shoutings of the Omanhin's people. He sang of the White Man whose spirit he had crushed for ever.

And the Omanhin's narrow, cruel mouth curved with a sneering exultation.

And then, from its highest pitch, the uproar dropped. It was so still that the clash of a sword that slipped from a nerveless hand sent a shudder over the serried crowd.

For the White Man sat on the rough bench outside his hut. He sat there, as they had so often seen him, calm and imperturbable, one knee crossed over the other, smoking an old pipe. There was nothing changed. But he had grown—taller and stronger. There was a power about him which they had half forgotten.

He seemed not to heed the silent, stupefied faces that surrounded him. Only as Kwayo, with outstretched hands, stumbled towards him, he turned his eyes leisurely from their watch on the eastern sky. He showed no trace of that night's terrific effort, nor of the fierce excitement which thundered in his pulses. Every faculty in him was strung to its highest. Fragments of Saunders's dying sentences came back to him. He pointed his pipe-stem to the east.

"The dawn has broken," he said loudly, "and the White Man has come, as the White Man promised. For the White Man's word is stronger than the Omanhin's, and stronger than all his spirits."

He waited. A low murmur went up from the ranks of Kwayo's people. But the people of the Omanhin were still. Harding did not know the significance of that change. But he knew dimly that his own li[illegible] nd the lives of others were not yet won. He did [illegible] e. Impassive and patient he waited. He saw th[illegible] le of state slip from Kwayo's bowed shoulders. St[illegible] Omanhin held his ground, drawn to his full and magnificent height, the narrow head thrown back, the savage, pitiless face set in implacable defiance.

And so, amidst a murmur that rose and fell like a gathering storm, the two men fought each other. Neither moved. The one insolently, the other dispassionately assured, they wrestled, will against will, courage against courage. And, as though the struggle had been physical, body against

body, now it was the Omanhin's tribe that cried out, and now Kwayo's men. And in the voices of the latter there was a growing power, a note of menace that the Omanhin heard and understood. For their faith and homage were to the strongest, and the boast of the Fetish Man had been proved vain and idle.

He faltered—again rallied. Then Harding stood up. They were of an equal height, but that sudden movement, the power that lay behind it, made the White Man seem taller and broader. He came towards the Omanhin. He was smiling a curiously tight little smile that was very ugly. He came close up to the negro, and for the first time the latter met the full intensity of the White Man's eyes.

It was absolutely still again.

The mantle sank slowly from the Omanhin's shoulders. He stood there with his splendour in the dust, quivering like a frightened, angry child.

Harding laughed and turned on his heel. He knew that he had won. This land of swamp and fever was his by right, of conquest. From now onwards, so long as he lived, it was his country.

CHAPTER II

I

IT was spring in St. Maro. The long winter, which had bowed the solitary elms to a deeper humility, had blustered itself out at last, and for the first time the ragged branches stirred like the limbs of some one waking from a long, deep sleep, and a faint, luminous promise glimmered through their sorrowful black. Fair weather followed hard on the March storms. Each day was a bright gem in a diadem of days. The nights were sparkling and clear and cold, and when the sun broke over the sea and brown, undulating land, a lark, that had hidden in the flowers and grasses of the dunes, beat up into the blue and sang till the sky was full with its delirious ecstasy.

The village was very still. There were no visitors to worry its tranquillity, and the bungalows slept with tightly closed eyes, and the weeds grew up impudently in their little gardens. A Roads' Ender, dropping into the "Green Man" for a friendly chat and a pint of the best, was the only break in the monotony, and there were whole afternoons when Mr. Tibbs, the landlord, snoozed behind his bar, forgotten and forgetting.

So that the advent of a stranger—and a more than usually peculiar stranger at that—put the little man into a positive flutter. The whole household, which in the summer-time could have coped with an army without turning a hair, whirled about the visitor, tumbled over itself, gasped out orders and counter-orders, and behaved generally as though it had never aired a bed or cooked a chop in the whole course of its existence. The cause of all this turmoil gave his name as Edwards. He looked very ill—"all of a twitter," as Mrs. Tibbs observed—and could scarcely hold a knife and fork in his shaking hands. He arrived by the early and only train and promptly went to bed, re-appearing at two o'clock, when he partook of his chop with

an appetiteless deliberation. By this time the "Green Man" had recovered its nerve sufficiently to become curious. Now, the best way to draw out some one else is to be expansive oneself, and this Mr. Tibbs knew very well. So that, when his guest inquired after Lone Point and a Mrs. Harding, he fairly bubbled over with information. He related a whole romance with a fluency that suggested constant repetition.

"Yes—she's still there. Some of us wondered a bit at her stayin' on, but she's got pluck—no end of it—and she's just lived the whole thing down—leastways, there was nought for *her* to live down—poor soul! 'Twer'n't her fault she'd married a murderin', cowardly scoundrel, and she did handsome by them he'd wronged. Carried her head high, she did, and after the inquest and every one knew what she'd done and why, and what he'd done at her—why, St. Maro couldn't do 'nough to make things easy. There'd been a sort o' bad feelin' against both of 'em, you understand, and we hadn't wanted to help keep them, but now—well, so long as there's an egg or a spoonful of cream in St. Maro she gets it, even if every one else has to go without. But there—maybe you know more about it all than I do, seeing as you're a friend of Mrs. Harding's?"

He peeped interrogatively at his guest, who set down his knife and fork with a sigh of weariness.

"No; I don't know her. I met the man—twice. By the way, you called him a murderous scoundrel, but I understood that there was no charge against him. If his so-called patient died from natural causes he wasn't responsible——"

"Natural causes!" Mr. Tibbs sniffed. "If I die because some one bashes me over the head with a hammer I die of natural causes, don't I? I didn't hold with that there verdict, and I don't hold with it now. If he had a clean conscience what did he bolt for? And there's another thing"—he came a step closer, and his voice dropped mysteriously—"what became of Tom Polglase?—that's what I want to know. Tom Polglase had a mint of money on him. He was staying in Mr. Harding's house, and the evidence proved they weren't friends. And the night of the storm he vanished—just as though the earth had swallowed him. What do you make of that, sir?"

The visitor got up leisurely.

"I don't know. It seems queer, but he didn't strike

me as that sort of man. What's his wife doing about it all ?"

"Divorcing him, for sure." Mr. Tibbs beckoned and drew the casement curtain cautiously aside. "See that gentleman across the road? That's Mr. Earnshaw—Captain Earnshaw, V.C. He's working it for her, they say, but it takes a powerful long time. A sight easier to tie a knot than to untie it—eh sir ?"

"The easiest way of all is to use a knife," Edwards remarked. He reached for his heavy overcoat and huddled into it with a shivering satisfaction. "Well—I fancy I shall be saving Mr. Earnshaw a lot of trouble."

Mr. Tibbs cleared his throat encouragingly.

"Are you—are you bringing any news, if I may ask, sir ?"

"You may ask." The guest smiled for the first time. "I don't propose to answer. Do you mind showing me the way to this place ? I'd like to get back before dusk."

Mr. Tibbs, in a high state of thwarted curiosity, stalked out into the road and proceeded to give his directions with an offended and unnecessary distinctness. But, though he almost shouted the name "Lone Point," Earnshaw, who was engaged in conversation with the post-mistress, merely glanced up, and then, nodding his recognition, went on his way. Afterwards he wondered at his own lack of interest. For few people inquired after "Lone Point," and none that he did not know of beforehand. But he was tired—worn to indifference.

Each of these visits—grave and friendly and unemotional as they were—sucked up a little of his life. He lived for them, dreamed of them, hoped much from them, and when they came he braced himself to a chivalrous restraint which thwarted every dream and hope that in his solitude he had so passionately cherished. And the price was always the same—profound exhaustion of mind and body, a numb despair from which recovery was each time more arduous. Thus, beyond a dull wonder at his own stupor, he gave no further thought to the unknown visitor to Lone Point. He went on stolidly, and not till he reached the vicarage gate was he aware of any guiding purpose or desire. But there he stopped. He could not have passed on or gone back. An emotion that was half gay, half poignantly sad, held him.

For there was Genifer seated in her favourite place under

the shadow of a ragged Scotch fir—wrestling with enormous holes in disreputable masculine socks and looking already woefully defeated. There, too, was the Rev. Felix Bayard himself, wonderfully attired in a medley of garments which, from their appearance, might have been preserved as mementoes of a long and arduous career, bedding and weeding with such tremendous energy that the soil grimed him to the roots of his white hair. And as he worked he talked—breathlessly, in little grunting jerks—about his flowers, and his plans for their future, and a new manure which was to make them the most wonderful St. Maro had ever seen. It was all so familiar—so unchanged. Even when they looked up at Earnshaw and he saw how old the vicar had grown, and how the ruddy colour had faded from Genifer's cheeks he felt that, underneath it all, their true selves were as they had always been—unconquerably young and strong and good. Their welcome of him was just the same. It was as though nothing had happened—as though there had never been any breach or sorrow between them.

The vicar waved a trowel by way of friendly greeting.

"I won't offer you a hand, Keith. You mightn't like it. But it's fine to see you again. Where on earth are your traps, man? You've got some, I suppose? If you've left them at the inn I'll—I'll—I don't know what I'll do."

"I'm glad of that—because I have left them."

The vicar threw the trowel into the flower-bed.

"It's an insult—a positive insult. Well, never mind. I'll have them over before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' I'll carry them myself, and, for your sins, you shall see a Church of England clergyman wheeling along your luggage as though he were an ordinary, mortal porter. Don't you dare interfere, sir——"

He bustled Earnshaw out of the gateway, and any remonstrance was cut short by Genifer's quiet gesture of appeal.

"Let him go, Keith. You'll hurt his feelings—and mine," she added, smiling. "We want you."

He came and sat down tailor-wise on the grass at her feet. "Do *you* want me?" he asked unevenly.

"Of course I do. Why shouldn't I want you?" She bent down and rummaged among the disordered hosiery in her basket for a fresh victim. "I want you now more

than usual. You may help me over this awful crisis. Would you believe that that pair was new only a week ago? And do you realise now the silent heroism of my sex?"

"I don't know——" He tried to enter into her unforced gaiety, but his heart failed. "I do know that you're—you're different from any woman I have ever met or read of."

"Thank your stars for that! And in what, pray, am I so outstandingly wonderful?"

"Because you tolerate me."

She met his faltering with her blunt sincerity.

"You mean—I don't scratch your eyes out or cut you dead because you won't marry me? Oh, my dear, don't be so Victorian. One of the blessings of this age is the possibility of friendship between men and women. It may develop into marriage, or it may not. Ours hasn't. We don't need to bury it alive on that account, do we?"

His short laugh hurt her. It was as though he had laughed to cover a groan.

"You don't mean us to bury it—alive or dead—do you?"

"No, I don't. And I should be ashamed of myself if I did. So that's settled, once and for all." She threaded her needle and settled herself to her work with grim intentness. "Tell me the news, Keith. You've just come from Lone Point, haven't you?"

"Yes. Things are just going their way. It's a straight case, but there are endless formalities. It will be some months before we can get the decree made absolute. Fortunately that fellow left himself no loophole."

"Perhaps he did not mean to."

He frowned impatiently.

"You've always got a good word for him, Jenny. Why? One would think you were sorry for him."

"I am. I don't think he was very happy."

"Nor is she happy," he said bitterly. "You forget her when you judge him like that. And she was so young—so terribly young. Oh—I know all that can be said about it. She is young still, and the pieces can be patched together, but the finer the clay the worse the breakage, the harder to hide the cracks and scars. Sometimes I feel that it can't be done—that things can never be mended for her——"

"Very loving and clever hands could do it, Keith." She bent her head more closely over her work, for the light was beginning to fade. "You know, I see her every day, and so I don't see very clearly. You can tell best how she is—if there is any change——"

"She has changed." He sat still and silent. He saw nothing of the little garden. But he saw Lillah as she had first appeared to him with her brave youth, her simplicity, and eager love of things that was so oddly passionless. He had thought of her then as a mountain-stream that flows, joyous and clear, from its source, revealing all its treasures and fearing nothing. Now it had changed—suddenly the stream had flowed out—into a broad, deep bed. He saw her now as a river, slow and strong and secret. Her eyes had not lost their honesty, but they had gathered over themselves a veil that he could not penetrate. Behind her friendship, so loyal and open as it was, there smouldered something fierce and bitter and unresting. Passion, like a red wine poured into clear water, obscured and troubled her clarity. Passion of anger, or pain, or hatred—he did not know which, but that consciousness of standing outside her life, ignorant and helpless, fettered by his own love for her, broke down his self-restraint. He turned to Genifer with a movement that called up all her pity in response. It was so baffled—so desperate.

"Yes, she has changed," he repeated. "I don't know how—I only feel that she is unhappy—frightfully unhappy. I don't know what it is—but it's more than disappointment or shame for—for him—or lost faith. It's something that's got the whole of her—gripping her—hurting her all over. And I can't help—I can't do anything. I just blunder round like a stupid, willing dog—but I'm no good. It's not myself I'm thinking about; I don't care. It's this helplessness—and, Jenny, I can't bear it. I want her to be happy—at whatever cost——" He broke off, ashamed and incredulous. It seemed so impossible that he should sit there and lay bare his love as he had done, and yet so natural. It was as though Genifer claimed it from him as her right. She sat very quiet. Her work had slipped from her fingers. The early dusk crept over the garden, and with the passing of the sunlight a clean coldness sharpened the sweetly scented air. But she was not conscious of cold or darkness. She was thinking of the man who crouched beside her—that bowed, unhappy shadow. In

the deepening twilight he seemed unreal and yet more familiar, closer to her memory. The thought came to her that, after all, she knew him best in suffering and weakness. The strong man, glowing with the pride of life, who had strode beside her over the cliffs, was a stranger. This man whose tragic face loomed dimly out of the dusk was her very own. There was something maternal in her feeling for him, as though in those black hours when he had hung, maimed and writhing, on the brink of death, she had borne him again, giving him her own life, her own flesh, her own spirit. What he had been before she did not know. He had come to her a stranger, without personality, a Thing, shapeless, inhuman with pain, and she had made him, had built him up out of the treasures of her own big storehouse. Like a child, too, he had grown big and strong—but away from her—independent, self-sufficient. But now that he suffered again he had come back to her.

She laid her hand quietly on his shoulder.

"Keith—I think I know what it is. I don't know what is making her unhappy; but I know what has made her different. I think she has learnt to care—to care dreadfully—with her whole heart. I can't tell you how I know—it's just a sort of—of instinct, I suppose—but there's nothing else big enough—nothing bigger——" She faltered herself now. She felt how his whole body grew rigid. He lifted his head sharply.

"Do you mean—she loves—any one?"

"Yes—I think so. Keith—I can't be sure—I just tell you—because—you see—I want you to be happy, too."

He got up swiftly and strongly. Though she no longer touched him she knew that he was shaking from head to foot.

"Jenny—I daren't believe it—and yet—I don't know—Jenny—it's big of you—you're bigger and finer than all of us put together——" He broke off, groaning. For she, too, had risen, and his instinct knew that he had blundered cruelly. He might tell her all he chose of himself—might demand any sacrifice. He might not praise her. "Oh, I am intolerable—intolerable!" he muttered.

She smiled ruefully.

"Not more than most people who love, dear."

There was a rumble of wheels on the road outside. The gate swung open and a wheelbarrow, apparently on its own

initiative, reeled drunkenly into the garden, wavered, and finally turned over, depositing a couple of suit-cases on to the path. The vicar followed at leisure, heated but triumphant.

"I don't believe a real live London porter could have done that better," he declared. "If I haven't smashed anything it's simply because I haven't had practice." He boasted loudly, as though something in the two silent people in front of him caused him a sadness which he determined should not get the upper hand. "Oh, by the way, Keith, I met young Polglase. He'd heard you were here, and he wanted to know if you'd go down to Roads End. His father's very ill—dying, I think—and he's been asking for you——"

Earnshaw started eagerly.

"Of course—I'll go at once, sir."

He was glad to go. She heard the relief in his voice—in its clear and ringing vigour. He went out into the road where the light still lingered and as he looked back she saw his face. The wearing trouble had been wiped out. He looked strong and exultant, like a man who had won his freedom.

But it was she who had given it him.

"Don't wait up for me," he said. "Poor old Polglase! He's a pal of mine!"

The vicar stood by the gate gazing after his retreating shadow. Then he drew a big breath and turned away.

"He seems better," he said. "I thought he looked very ill. Poor Keith! He's having a rough time. We mortals don't make life very easy for ourselves. Perhaps things work out right in the end. I'm bound to say so anyhow—but I wish I knew——"

"I think it will be all right now," she said cheerfully.

He gave a disconsolate shrug.

"You're twice the man I am, Bobby. Well, it's too dark to work; I might as well start my sermon. Come in soon. It's getting cold."

He collected the suit-cases and righted his wheelbarrow and trundled all three down the little path to the side-door where Genifer heard him arguing mildly with an irate Maggie. For Maggie was of unforgiving stuff, and her love for Earnshaw was dead.

It grew quite dark, but for a long time Genifer did not move. She sat there, still as the shadows, with her for-

gotten work scattered about her on the wet grass. Only when the study window shone out warmly on to the lawn she roused herself with a shake and a smothered sigh.

"After all—I do want it—at whatever cost," she said aloud. It was like a defiant answer.

Then she gathered up the undarned socks and went into the house singing to herself in her jolly, out-of-tune contralto.

II

"Are you listening, sir?"

Earnshaw nodded. He sat close to the old man's pillow because, for all the energy, the exultant ferocity which flamed up in his dying eyes, the voice was little more than a piteous whispering. Polglase turned his head petulantly towards the candle, and, understanding the unspoken demand, Earnshaw drew the light a little nearer. As though the increased brightness lit up the gathering night within him Polglase rallied sternly. He caught up his last broken sentence and finished it—"so that was his last chance. He wouldn't take it. I've seen a [illegible] [illegible] against the wall for less—the damned, yellow-livered scoundrel—and I went after him. It was dark—you remember how dark it was—but I nosed him out like a silly rabbit. When the morning came there he was lying in the grass—cryin' and snivellin' and [illegible] with [illegible]. There weren't nothin' fine about him then—just a w[illegible]d, shakin' jelly, like I've seen 'em after a night-attack—and when he spied me, sittin' there waitin' for him he got up—and ran—Lord, how he ran—straight into the blow-hole—as though it had been his warren——" Old Polglase laughed joyously. "Eh—the old country got her bit back on her ain—she didn't need me to help her. She just chucked him out into the sea—and what the sea did with him I don't know—gave him to the fishes for a rotten meal maybe.——" He gasped, and the grim, relentless fight for life seemed to fill the room. For a last time he flung back the enemy. But the end was near. Earnshaw bent over him.

"So it wasn't Harding——"

Polglase turned up glazing, contemptuous eyes.

"Did you ever think it was [illegible]" he whispered. "Him!

He hadn't the pluck—it takes pluck to kill—even a rabbit like Tom—and he—a dirty shirker like that! I let 'em think what they liked because——" He tried to explain, wrestling for coherency amidst the waves of the last suffocating assault, and something piteous swept into the hard, malicious face. "I hated him—he was worse than my Tom—and I drove Tom out—I helped kill him—my son—and him—so I held my tongue—and maybe you'll hold yours—because you hate him too—you'll keep him out—we don't want no blacklegs—at Roads End—eh, sir?" He groped for Earnshaw's hand. His lips moved, but they made no sound. An implacable resolution spoke for them, and moulded his features into their final mask. For it was the end. Even then he did not surrender. Death overwhelmed him—fighting in the last trench.

Earnshaw hurried out into the passage where Mrs. Polglase and her younger son waited. They read his face instantly, and the old woman went past him into the quiet room. She was crying—perhaps from real grief, perhaps a little because the etiquette of her class demanded tears—but Young Polglase, who was bound by no code, remained stoically unmoved.

"It's no sort of good pretendin', sir," he said moodily as he limped at Earnshaw's side to the gate. "He's given us a hard time. Maybe it's a release for him—we know it's a release for us. Not that I want to blame him or say hard things—it's just that he hasn't been right like—not since Tom was—He'd been rough on Tom, but one can be rough on folks and yet care all the time. Maybe Tom's murder preyed on him——"

"Tom wasn't murdered," Earnshaw interrupted. It was night now, and the moon had not yet risen, and he felt rather than saw Young Polglase's shrug of incredulity. He did not persist. His mind was a tumult of confused, warring impressions out of which rose, straight and stark, hope—a growing, splendid vision of deliverance. Nothing else mattered. Everything else was a grotesque intrusion. Death, even that of his grim old comrade, appeared insignificant. The thought of defending, of exonerating a man he despised and hated, filled him with a black anger. "He was not murdered," he repeated, "not in the way you think. I'll tell you about it—to-morrow—this is not the time——" He did not mention Harding's name, but muttered some commonplace and strode off into the dark.

ness. At the back of his mind was the thought of the dying man's malicious knowledge of him—" you hate him too—maybe you'll hold your tongue." It was almost ludicrous, and yet he had come near to making it horribly true. He had not wanted to clear Harding from a charge that had always been incredible. He *had* held his tongue. There was excuse enough—plausible enough—but his honesty knew it for what it was. He hated himself. He did not hate Harding less.

" What am I coming to ? " he questioned bitterly. " Is this what *I* am at bottom—after all ? "

Moved by an obscure impulse, he took to the track that led out over the dunes. He had an imperative need to re-establish his integrity—and not before himself alone. It was as though he had given ground to Harding—had blunted his own weapons. Now, in turning towards Lone Point, in giving himself up to chance, he was offering an eager proof of his real purpose. He climbed up amidst the long grass to the top of a sandy hillock and there stopped short. It seemed to him that his offer had already been accepted. Some one was coming down from Lone Point. Two fire-points that dipped in and out of the undulating ground grew gradually larger and brighter as he waited. Presently, by the pale light of their lanterns, he recognised Ashley and the stranger whom he remembered to have seen on the steps of the village inn. He stood aside for them to pass, but Ashley stopped, peering anxiously up into his face.

" Oh, it's you, sir! I was to bring you a message—would you please come at once, sir. My mistress has had news——"

" And bad news I'm afraid," the stranger intervened from between chattering teeth. " No one regrets it more than the luckless bearer."

" I'll go at once," Earnshaw said curtly. He nodded and sprang back on to the path. A minute later, when he had lost their lights in a hollow of the sand-dunes, he began to run recklessly. The swift movement was as joyous to him as to a prisoner who for the first time can stretch his limbs in sweet, delicious freedom. He was free. And in the moment of his freedom she had sent for him. He accepted that as a sign—an omen. He gave himself up to a superstitious faith which poured irresistible strength and confidence into his blood. There could be no faltering

now. Chained and gagged—he had blundered clumsily—he had had to stand aside and be still under the goad of his helplessness. Now he could act. He could give his desire full play at last. The initiative was there for him to take and use to his end. He had ceased to be the docile, tongue-tied servant.

He climbed the last slope and the solitary light of Lone Point shone towards him like a golden, watching eye. He stopped then—arrested, subdued, the almost brutal exultation sinking beneath a wave of finer, rarer feeling. All the romance and chivalry that he had gathered secretly from the grim years culminated in him now. The very beauty of it quieted him. He felt like some proud barbarian who had broken into a great cathedral and now stood abashed and awestruck before his conquest—his strength hushed, his violence turned to a faltering reverence.

He went on quietly. He was going to her. He repeated it over and over again to himself. For now his happiness made him afraid. He could not grasp its whole meaning. It had in its heart the unmeasurable quality of the night that enveloped him, of the sea whose voice he heard murmuring drowsily against the cliffs. It was the sublime exaggeration which comes once in the lives of all men and for its little hour is true. It made him feel very young—very god-like. He walked with his head among the stars in deep humility.

And then—suddenly—it was over. He saw her, and in the same moment his earth-bound mortality returned to him like a heavy, stifling burden. She stood by the gate—a mere shadow against the light of the open window, and so still that until he came close to her and could see the white blur of her face he could not be sure whether she was real or the creature of his eager desire.

What was there in her quiet that so oppressed him he did not know. He came to her over the soft grass. He called her and she turned swiftly to him with a movement which he knew he had startled out of that depth *in* her which he had never penetrated. Even now he did not understand. The gesture had expressed welcome—relief—and something else, something baffling that had chilled his joy in it.

"Lillah!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "Lillah!"

Not since the catastrophe had he called her by her name He felt that she scarcely heard him, but her cold hand

clung to his with the thankfulness of a child that has wakened from nightmare to a friendly comfort.

"Forgive me—I was startled. And yet I expected you. I sent Ashley for you half an hour ago."

"I met him. But I was coming anyhow."

"You know, then?"

"I don't know anything except that you need me."

She turned and preceded him slowly to the open window which led into her room. A bright fire burnt on the hearth. The lamp and table had been placed at the elbow of her chair, and the shaded light encircled a curious collection of old and battered objects that had been set out with what seemed an ironic care. There was a small despatch-case, such as a surgeon might use for his instruments, a leather pocket-book, some letters, a disreputable-looking pipe. These things held Earnshaw's eyes from the first. He did not know what they signified, but their dumb, secret authority seemed to dominate even over Lillah herself. For she went back to them and sat down in the vast shabby chair that had been Harding's. One by one she touched them—lightly, mechanically, as a sleep-walker or some one under hypnotic influence might have done, and then sat very still, her hands clasped over the leather arms, her head thrown back, her eyes closed in apparent sleep.

Earnshaw stood opposite her. His pulses were beating thickly with suspense. But his elation was dead—the victorious self-confidence which had brought him to her fettered by the old fears. Above all it was the quiet that baffled him—as though deliberately it set him face to face with the veiled influence which he had divined in her without understanding. It opposed itself to his love, which had become inexorable. There could be no more of patience and resignation and quixotic self-effacement. Flesh and blood claimed their release. If he still held stubbornly to his silence it was because, even in the midst of his own strife, he pitied her. She was so pale, fragile, and almost old-looking. The soft, black dress and the massive chair added to that pallor and pathetic weakness. She who had been so gay, so buoyant in soul and body, seemed to have withered as if an icy wind had frozen her spring of life. In death she would look like this, he reflected, and then, because her stillness was too vivid, too poignantly akin to his thought, he stirred irritably, forcing

her back to wakefulness. Her eyes opened and rested full on him. They were clouded and heavy, but not with sleep.

"You said that you were coming to me, anyhow," she said. "Was there anything you had to tell me?"

He mastered himself sufficiently to answer with an equal steadiness:

"Yes. Old Polglase died an hour ago. Just before the end he sent for me. What he told me I felt you ought to know at once. It appears he knew all about his son's death. It was accidental—most people would call it accidental—at least, no one was to blame."

"What has that to do with me?" she asked.

Her frigid serenity, contrasting with his own increasing unrest, stung him to a brutal directness.

"You must know very well whom the people suspected."

"You mean—Peter? That doesn't matter now—to me—or to any one."

"Surely to Harding——"

"Peter is dead."

"Dead——?"

She continued to meet his eyes unflinchingly. Not a line of her face had betrayed the faintest feeling.

"That's why I sent for you. A Mr. Edwards has just left me. He's a District Commissioner out in West Africa, where he met Peter. It was some wild, unhealthy place, and he warned Peter against going on. But he wouldn't listen. A day later his native carriers came back. They declared they had been attacked by what they called devils—hostile natives in all probability—and simply fled. Mr. Edwards sent a search-party. They found these things in a forest clearing where Peter had camped—and a man's skeleton." Her hands fluttered up from the arms of her chair. It was her only gesture. "It seems—there are things out there—driver ants they call them. They work very quickly." She waited a moment as though for him to speak, but he was silent and she went on levelly: "Mr. Edwards found one of my old letters in a tin case. He is home on furlough, and thought it was his duty to find me out—and tell me himself—what I have told you. Out there, it seems, Englishmen have a sort of family feeling——"

Her quiet horrified him. He came up to her and caught her by the arm.

"What do *you* feel?" he demanded roughly. "You must feel something."

She knitted her brows as though in reflection.

"Death is always terrible. A stranger dies—some one we have never seen—and it strikes a chill into us. It is too near—too common to the race—for us to be indifferent——"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't talk like that!" he interrupted bitterly. "I don't believe in it. You lived with him for seven years; you stuck to him, stood up for him, believed in him to the end. You can't feel for him as you would for a stranger."

Something familiar flashed over her face—a fleeting look of fierce pride and defiance.

"I feel nothing more," she answered stubbornly.

He was silent, beset with doubt and distrust. He was like a soldier who had prepared himself for a long and arduous struggle and suddenly finds the road clear before him. His momentary, instinctive pity for Harding was gone. Harding had ceased to count as an object of contempt; but as an obstacle he might still exist. He tried to thrust the suspicion from him. No one—no woman—would have the strength to act a part like that. He put his shaking hand over his eyes.

"What a fool I am! Do you know—I almost funked telling you that about Polglase. It sounds vilely caddish. I—I was possessed, I suppose. I hated him so—I didn't want to help clear him—before you——"

She rose suddenly to her feet.

"Did you suspect him?"

"Why not? I knew the sort of man he was—a shirker, a cheat!"

"I knew him better. Did you think *I* suspected him?"

"No," he flashed back in bitter triumph. "I knew you didn't. But then—what is it? What *has* he done? Are you pretending? I've got to understand, Lillah—once and for all, or I shall go mad. He's dead. If your dog had died you would have shown more, a thousand times more. Is it just his failure? I can't believe it. You were partners—you said that you took your share of the responsibility. To feel like this towards him *now* is to throw the whole thing on to his shoulders. Oh yes, *I* do it; but you—it's not in keeping with your former attitude. You're damning him for too little. You believe in him still too

much. You would no more suspect him of murder than yourself. Then why—how can you blot him out like this?"

They faced each other—in the open at last, their defences overwhelmed, their sternly guarded selves recklessly revealed. And in the midst of his own ferocious pain of jealousy he felt the misery in her as something intolerably worse.

"You are right," she said. "It is not enough. His failure was nothing. It did not matter. It never could matter. But I loved him. And he knew. That is why—I don't care any more."

He stared at her dully. His whole splendid edifice had crumbled about his ears, and he turned sick and faint as though it had been his body which had gone under in the catastrophe. Then again sheer pain drove him to an exasperated protest.

"You do care. You couldn't have left off caring—like that."

"I did. I had to—to survive."

She turned away. Stupefied, at first incredulous and angry, and then with a rising hope, he watched her as slowly and methodically she took the various tragic objects from the table. She placed them in the cupboard of her desk and turned the key. There was a finality in that act, as though she said, "I shall never look at them or think of them again."

"Lillah!" he pleaded.

She came back to him.

With the full firelight on her face, his restless jealousy could trace no change in her. The immense strength of pride and will which had accomplished this self-mutilation filled him with an awed, remorse-stricken pity. He took her hands and kissed them, and when he looked up there was no anger in her eyes. They were sombrely acquiescent.

"I meant to make you happy," he stammered. "Dear—that counted more to me than any hope for myself. And yet I've blundered like this—I let my pitiful self run away with me—I've hurt you as though I hated you. I shall be ashamed of it all my life."

She shook her head.

"You need not be ashamed."

"You know how I love you?"

"Yes, I do know. And you have been very chivalrous.

Don't think I haven't understood and valued those times when you have borne so much for me—in silence." The tears were in her eyes at last. He saw them, and his own hard agony of mind and heart melted. He was unafraid now. For he knew the fineness of her. She would not have let him speak against her will or to gratify a passing need of him. She would not hide behind any subterfuge now that he had spoken.

She laid her hand gravely in his.

"You are my dearest friend. I have lost so much—it would be hard to lose you too. But I don't love you. I've got to be honest—it's for you to choose——"

"There is no choice," he answered brokenly—"no more than if you offered me life or death."

Then he saw the change that had come over her. She was not looking at him. In a moment he had passed out of her consciousness. A brilliant colour had flooded the still pallor of her face. She was listening—her head lifted—her lips parted.

"Lillah—what is it——?"

She did not answer. She freed her hand from his and went swiftly past him to the window. She drew back the heavy curtains. The full moon had risen and from its suspended disc a pale brightness poured down over the quiet sea and land. Where there had been empty darkness there was now light and a mysterious life. The sea rose and fell glitteringly like the pansered breast of some sleeping warrior. There were shadows on the land—shadows thrown by the rising ground, shadows that had no visible body.

Earnshaw came quietly to Lillah's side.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"I don't know—I thought I heard—do you see anything—out there?"

"No—nothing. What should there be?"

"I don't know. Do you remember one night—long ago—you and some of your men from Roads End went home over the cliffs? They were singing. Do you remember?"

"Yes—I think I do——"

"Peter and I were there. We lay on the grass and listened. It seemed to me that I—I heard it again—that singing."

"It is fancy. There is no one."

She turned to him—clung to him.

"If he were not dead!" she said, scarcely above a breath. "If he were not dead at all, and were to come back! Just now—I was almost sure——"

He put his arm about her, soothing her with stammering, broken words of tenderness.

"There is no one there. You poor child—you've been so unhappy—so alone! He is dead. He'll never trouble us again. If there is more evidence needed I will find it—I promise you. You shall have peace and quiet at last."

But she seemed not to hear him. And with a suddenness that was almost of panic he tore the curtains back across the window, shutting out the night.

CHAPTER III

I

THE Deputy District Commissioner was, comparatively speaking, very young for his job. He was newly returned from a year's leave and possessed more energy and high spirits than he was likely to display after two months of his own particular swamp. Moreover, the task of hunting up a mislaid Englishman was a distinct side-line to his ordinary business and therefore positively welcome. Not that he believed much in his success, or even in the Englishman. It was not a case of looking for a needle in a haystack, but of looking for a polar bear in the tropics. In other words, an Englishman in that part of West Africa to which the D.C. was requested to turn his attention was in the last degree an improbability. The D.C. had not yet made his tour of inspection, but he knew that Kese-Fo and its neighbourhood had a reputation which lent its governmental visitors wings. Therefore, a White Man who chose to live there must have been originally mad, and was certainly by this time dead. The latter probability was increased by the lurid stories which were rife among his own "boys" concerning a certain presumptuous Englishman who had been beset by an outraged forest devil and devoured, all but the bones, which were found by the D.C.'s predecessor and decently buried. There were witnesses who had seen the devil, and still more witnesses who could testify to the burial. The fate of the Englishman concerning whom he was to collect evidence seemed pretty evident.

It was, therefore something of a shock when, after four days' bush work he landed simultaneously on the outskirts of Kese-Fo and on the object of his search. The latter was seated cross-legged in front of a native hut, smoking a briar pipe and pounding away at some compound which simmered over a brazier and smelt horribly. The D.C.

recognised him by the pith helmet and the briar. Otherwise there was not much of the Englishman left—and still less of civilisation. A pair of shorts and an old shirt formed his complete equipment. Arms and legs and neck were burnt to a rich mahogany. A fair, carefully trimmed beard grew almost to his eyes, which were most English of all—very bright and intensely blue. Altogether he was an amazing and not altogether creditable specimen of his race. If he upheld the national dignity—as in some odd way he did—it was by his bigness, his casual attitude of being thoroughly at home in his environment, and still more by the fact that he survived at all. An old native whom the D.C. put down as a headman or small chief sat on his right hand and watched him with a childlike solemnity and awe.

Both rose as the D.C. and his escort made their appearance. The native bared his shoulders and the Englishman offered his hand. It was all very natural and matter-of-fact, as though—so the D.C. afterwards described it—he had dropped in from the next villa for a friendly chat and a cup of tea. Then the Englishman went back to his brazier.

"You'll excuse me, won't you? I can't leave this stuff. If I let it boil over it's done for."

"And a good thing too—judging by the smell of it," the D.C. retorted. After a moment's consideration he gave an order to his carriers and squatted himself lazily on the opposite side of the fire. "What's it for, anyhow?" he asked.

"Oh, fevers and all that sort of thing. It's a patent of mine. First-rate, though I say it. It'll keep a man fit even in a hole like this. I'll give you a bottle——"

"Thanks—I'd rather die."

"The smell, you mean? I can give it you without the smell. The people like it about here. It's a matter of taste—eh, Kwayo?"

The old chief looked up with a willing smile, but the quick, correct English was too much for him, and he relapsed into his religious contemplation of the smoking cauldron. The Englishman glanced at his guest and sighed. "Seems rather inhospitable sitting here like this. But you know I've nothing to offer—only some Fu-fu. But perhaps you don't like that either."

The other laughed good-humouredly.

"No, can't say I do. Don't worry about me. I've

given my chaps order to get tiffin ready. I hope you'll join me."

He caught the quick, almost famished glance of the intense eyes. The D.C. was old enough in the loneliness of bush life to know that it betrayed a deeper hunger than that of body. He was oddly moved by it. "We'll dispense with dressing," he added slily.

The Englishman added his chuckle.

"Thanks. As you observe, I've dispensed with it some time since. But I'll tidy up. It'll be a treat to have one's legs under a civilised table again. I suppose you'll be moving on to-morrow?"

The official considered his companion thoughtfully.

"I don't know. I'm not exactly on tour. This is a private little enterprise. To tell you the truth, I'm looking for some one whom quite a number of people in England seem anxious to find, alive or dead—an Englishman. As there's no agony column in these parts, the luckless D.C. gets put on to it. Rough, isn't it?"

"Very. But you won't be overrun with pretenders. Englishmen are rare about here."

"Very rare." The D.C. offered his pouch. "Try mine; it's good stuff. Still, if he's above ground I mean to find him."

The Englishman sniffed at the mixture and seemed satisfied.

"What's he wanted for? As a rule, it's only the police who take such passionate interest in other folks' whereabouts."

"That's what I thought. It seemed all the more likely because you'd suppose that only some one very badly wanted would bury himself in a place like this"—he laughed—"present company always excepted. So I inquired and I got this cable. It must have cost a mint of money. Here, you can see for yourself; it's some sort of domestic business."

The Englishman finished lighting his pipe and then took the proffered slip of paper and considered it gravely. His detachment was very marked—too marked to be natural, as his alert guest noted with satisfaction.

"H'm—in connection with divorce proceedings—supposed to have been killed on the night of the 28th December, in bush between Kum-Prah and Kese-Fo—signed Earnshaw and Edwards. Who the devil is Edwards?"

"Oh, Edwards is the chap whose job I've got. He stuck his name on just to keep me warm. Doesn't Earnshaw interest you?"

"Not a bit." He handed the paper back. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I'm sick of the whole business. I wish you were the chap."

"Do you?"

"You're not, by any chance?"

The Englishman stared into the fire.

"I'm sorry. I can't oblige. But perhaps I can help you a little all the same. I shouldn't bother about this—this Harding. You won't find him. He's dead. I buried him myself. He won't trouble any one again in this life. You can cable that with an easy conscience."

The D.C. nodded. He was wrestling with his pipe, which after the manner of its kind had gone out, and for the time being appeared to have lost interest.

"Well—that's a relief, anyhow," he said at last between puffs. "Still, if you knew the fellow, couldn't you tell me a bit more—give me an affadavit or something? It's a bit vague, isn't it? If there were any mistake—it might be confoundedly awkward for a lady—a widow, so to speak—contemplating a second marriage. If he's dead, the divorce need not go on, if he isn't—well——"

He shrugged his shoulders. He was not looking directly at his companion, but that startled movement had not escaped him. The Englishman took his nauseous compound from the fire and allowed it to simmer down.

"Yes—I see your point," he said deliberately. "It's awkward—I couldn't swear to anything. There are hundreds of Hardings in this world. I've buried one—it might not be the one, eh? Tell them to get on with the divorce—that'll be on the right side. But, as far as anything else is concerned, they can safely think him dead. How's that for a solution?"

"Very neat. I'm awfully obliged to you. The thought of tramping round my district asking after stray Englishmen didn't appeal to me in the least." He stretched himself lazily. "By the way, what's *your* job in this little Eden, Mr. ——?"

"Mbuiri." He nodded gravely. "That's what they call me in these parts. It's slightly more interesting than Jones, and I like it. As to my job—it's rather peculiar

too. I'm Fetish Man here. The original chap had to shut up shop. The people here have no reverence for gods and priests as such. It's a question of who has the best stunts, and, as my stunts are by far the most striking they've given me my present post. If you look into any of the huts here you won't find any of those little wooden fetishes —you'd find a bottle with my label on it. Which reminds me—any embrocation in your kit ?"

"A bottle to spare."

"Let me have it—there's a good chap. I can't pay you —haven't a sou in the world—but it'll be an act of patriotism. Embrocation is my best Ju-ju. And I've got to keep my Ju-ju's going if the Omanhin's to be kept innocuous. I've got the situation well in hand at present—but it's a fight. and I can't take risks."

The D.C. pricked his ears.

"What's that about the Omanhin ?" he asked.

The other made a movement of impatience.

"You're an official—it won't interest you. Saunders and Jeffries talked themselves hoarse about the Omanhin and no one listened. He meant trouble in their day and he means trouble now. He has the ambition of a Lucifer, and enough cunning to make things infernally hot—if he dares. I've quashed him once. So long as the people here believe in me he's helpless. If anything shook my authority——" He stopped and looked up with an expression which the other could not interpret. "I suppose you'll think I'm bragging; I don't look so useful as all that, do I ?"

The D.C. reflected deliberately. It was getting dark, and he narrowed his eyes a little as though to inspect his companion to better advantage.

"I don't know," he said. "I'd rather fancy you in a tight place—Mr.—er—Mbuiri."

They both laughed. The official got up and stretched himself. "Well—I'll get along to camp. I've told the boys to set up near the village. Come round as soon as you've got into your evening togs, eh ? I'd like to talk a bit more about the Omanhin. If there's one thing I love more than another it's worrying the dear old ladies at headquarters. They hate me for it and I shall never—never get a soft billet in this life. But it's worth it. Until we meet, Mr. Ju-ju !"

He strolled off and the Englishman went back quietly

to his cauldron. For a little he stirred methodically, then he forgot. He sat motionless, his head resting on his hand, and stared blankly into the glowing fire. Kwayo looked up at him. Something anxious, almost terrified, awoke in the old, deeply lined face. He stretched out feebly and touched the Englishman's hand.

"Mbuiri, Mbuiri," he whispered. "Him water Ju-ju angry—him boil for bad—look——"

Harding snatched the cauldron from its hook. But it was too late. The mixture had bubbled over and splashed, hissing, into the glowing fire. Kwayo shrank back as from something evil. "Him Ju-ju very angry. Him bring bad luck."

Harding laughed.

"He can't bring me no bad luck, Kwayo. My Ju-ju too big for him. My Ju-ju take everything from me—so no bad luck come to me any more. See, Kwayo?"

The old man shook his head. He waited patiently. Even when Harding had gone into his hut he did not move. It grew cold and dark, and he drew his native cloth closer about his shoulders. He sat there, as one hypnotised, and watched till the red wood burnt to grey ash and darkness.

II

"You'd better chuck it and come along home with me," his host said as they shook hands. "I don't know your fable, Mr. Mbuiri; but, whatever civilisation has done to you, I reckon it's better than this dog's life. Nobody's going to thank you for it—nobody cares. And in the end you'll peg out——"

"So will you." Harding interrupted smiling. He hesitated, and then added awkwardly: "I've got nothing against civilisation—quite the contrary. That's why I'm here—I sort of fancy myself—a kind of out-post, you know."

"H'm—yes." The D.C. considered him frankly. He saw the pathetically eager efforts that the man had made to retain the little symbols of his inheritance—the well-groomed hands, the trimmed beard, the scrupulous cleanliness of the ragged clothes. It moved him to a rather boyish kindliness. "You're a fine chap for the job, anyhow," he said. "Where in Heaven's name would the old country be if it weren't for her crack-brained sons, that's what I'd like to know?"

Harding laughed. In the firelight it had seemed to his companion that the laugh strove to cover an irrepressible self-betrayal.

"Well—thanks for the compliment. I'll take it home with me. By the way—I've given a bottle of my stuff to your boy for you. Try it. I'm not quite so—so confident about things as I used to be. But I believe it's really useful."

"I'll drink it for love of you," the D.C. retorted, "and if I live I'll bring you some more Ju-ju stuff in exchange. So long—and good luck!"

They shook hands again. Secretly they had both striven to prolong their meeting—to put off the moment when each would go back to his loneliness. But they showed no particular regret. Harding strode off into the darkness. It was not till then—not till he had turned his face from the friendly fire-light—that he felt the sickening reaction. It was like the aftermath of some wild night of spiritual excess. He had sat there and drunk deep and madly of things from which he had severed himself for ever. He had listened to an English voice, and heard tell of English things, and tasted the moist sweetness of an English wind. Hour by hour he had let desire slake its thirst at the forbidden wine. And all the chaotic fancies of intoxication, all the old ghosts had poured down upon him and wreathed out of their misty selves one form in which all else was personified and lost. Now, with the harshness of a stale orgy upon his tongue and the dead cold of returning reality upon his heart, she still remained. The appalling vividness with which his brain could conjure her up before him was like a blow on some vital organ that sent him reeling and staggering, helpless and stupefied with pain. Only guided by a blind instinct, he stumbled his way through the black, straggling village street to his own hut. He struck a match, and as the pale yellow light kindled about him, lifting out of their dark hiding-place the stark realities of his life, he felt as though he was waking slowly from a long unconsciousness in which pain had been a dull, far-off fancy—an impression which his deadened nerves had scarcely received. Now he was back in the thick of it—face to face with agony, every cell and nerve and muscle tuned to its highest power of suffering.

He could not rest. He lit the oil-lamp upon the wall

and pushed back the matting from the doorway, letting in a breath of dank, fever-laden air. It was useless. It brought him no relief. His very lungs craved for another food. This tasted fœtid and evil. He went back. From an iron box on his rough table he took out an envelope, and from the envelope a crumpled, withered little heap of wild thyme and pressed it in a crazy passion against his lips. It was a taste of bracken-water to a man dying with desert thirst.

Suddenly he grew very still. The mere physical torture came under control. His mind had begun to act again. It took up the thought of the future. He reckoned, with a cold, cynical side-glance at his own discoveries, that thanks to them he would in all likelihood live out a man's allotted span of years. He was young still. He was immune to a climate that killed hundreds of unwilling, life-loving men. It would go on like this—year after year. For what? He had deluded himself with a false value set on his task. It was as that happy-go-lucky official had said—nobody cared. And if nobody cared—not even he himself—what purpose did all this living serve?

By a freakish twist of memory he recalled Red Rover, stalking his lonely cliffs, making his own end when an end had to come. He had chosen wisely. It was finer and better to clear the road of one's own free will, rather than wait and be thrust aside. It would be better if Earnshaw received a curt and truthful confirmation of his hope.

It seemed odd to him that he had never thought of it before—never contemplated it even that last night under the Wrecker's grim, significant rafters. It seemed so ridiculously natural and obvious.

He got out his revolver. He was reasoning it all out calmly and lucidly as a man can do who is spiritually mad. All five chambers were empty. He loaded them, watching himself with puzzled, incredulous detachment. If it was absurd that there should be such an easy way out, it was more absurd that he should choose it.

Yet he put the muzzle to his head. Whether or not he would have taken the final step he never knew. For the dementia between whose murderous talons his will lay helpless rose suddenly clear of him with a black, beating of wings, and left him, mauled and shaken, but free.

A native woman stood in the open doorway. He had

not seen her come. It was as though she had risen from out of the earth and it was her sudden, inexplicable presence that startled and shamed him back to sanity. She was watching him, her black eyes wide and distended, her mouth agape, and even as his arm dropped to his side she went down, sinking to a piteous blot on the bright floor, and crawled towards him, embracing his feet, moaning in incoherent terror.

He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the pile of matting which served him as a bed. His torpor had passed. An instinct—inherited and strengthened by this last year—asserted itself. For himself he had ceased to matter. He was just the Fetish Man, the witch-doctor to whom his people came at every hour with their devils and sores and sorrows. But as he undid the native shawl, bound bunchily about her breast and shoulders, he realised that here was something unusual—outside the custom. A little child, not more than a day old, whimpered softly from under the woman's arm. She herself was travel-stained, with bloody feet and tattered garments. There were gold bracelets on her arms and ankles, and the shawl was richly embroidered. By all this he knew that she was not from his village, nor was she any ordinary village woman. The signs were royal. Her state declared a terror that had roused her to a superhuman endurance.

He fetched a restorative from his medicine-chest and forced it gently between her lips. Almost at once her eyes opened and fixed themselves on his with the mute appeal of a frightened, wounded animal. He spoke to her, careless whether she understood or not, trusting to the significance of his voice.

"It's all right now. There's nothing to fear. You're quite safe——"

She answered in English—so broken that at first it seemed a mere meaningless jumble of words. And all the time she clung to him, rubbing her cheek against his hand, crooning to him like a coaxing child.

"Two peccan one time—two peccan one time lib for bad. The bad mammie have two peccan—one peccan die—they go take other peccan for kill. But me Christian mammie. Me heard Christian man palaver—me say wrong kill peccan—me no bad mammie—me lub peccan!"

The last was a cry, triumphant over all reason. But still Harding did not understand. She saw his look of

troubled puzzlement, and slowly, painfully repeated her poor little rigmarole, throwing in here and there a new word which sometimes illuminated and more often darkened. It was a chance phrase that threw his groping mind back on to a tale that Kwayo had told him one night by the camp-fire. Twin children were born of the devil; twin children brought misfortune; twin children died. They were carried out into the bush—or the Fetish Man did his work neatly and quietly. Anyhow—they died.

"You mean—they come after you for kill peccan?" he asked.

She nodded passionately.

"They kill peccan—but me no believe bad Ju-ju. Me come White Man—White Man lib for good. He say 'no kill peccan' and him strong. Him big. Omanhin fear White Man."

"Ah, my friend the Omanhin!" He sat down on the edge of the matting, smiling sourly to himself. He understood now. This was the clash. He had always known that it would come. Now it was here. The knowledge steadied him. The weakness which had contemplated death as an escape seemed already alien and contemptible. His blood stirred like rising sap. Something tremulous and exultant quivered in his muscles. His mind was keen as a whetted blade.

All the time the woman lay there and watched him. She repeated "White Man lib for good," with an insistency which gradually remoulded the rambling words to a bigger, wider meaning. What she loved was in danger, and she had thrust him into the breach because he typified for her all that his race stood for in justice, in faith, in strength and righteousness. Some wandering missionary, perhaps, had sown the belief in her heart. He had given her the White Man's creed. Now in her agony she had claimed from the White Man that he should stand by his words and prove his truth.

It was a big issue. Not simple. He was alone. His authority, his very existence hung by the slender thread of his success, of his power to adapt himself to the will and custom of the people among whom he lived. One blunder, one serious opposition to their law, and then nothing could hold the torrent which he had dammed a year before. His downfall would involve others—the cheery, kindly official, already on his way back to Kum-Prah, the scattered

European population throughout the State, weak garrisons, even women. And he had a choice. He could say to himself and others, "It was this sickly child against hundreds," and be justified. He could yield to native custom—compromise, save bloodshed by diplomacy. He could save white men's skin by the sale of white men's honour.

It seemed to him that even as he thought of it that the choice took on a more than personal significance. For this woman and for countless others he was the touchstone, the test by which his whole people would be judged. Did they stand by their faith, or did they save themselves? Was their faith a truth, or only another Ju-ju to be propitiated and lied to and humbugged when the pinch came?

He had to choose—not for himself only, but for all the rest who, unasked, would have to pay the price of his choice with him.

The woman drew the baby closer to her. The dark, wild eyes watched him narrowly. They were already distrustful, as though they read the conflict in him. He looked back at her. But she had grown shadowy and unreal. His vision was fixed beyond her—on black waters and rugged coasts, on deep trenches where men stood shoulder to shoulder, facing eternally seawards, eternally on guard. He lay there in the long grass and watched them. He heard them singing their uncouth, tumultuous song of defiance. The woman beside him lifted her head and listened.

"The souls of men—come back to the soil they fought for," she said.

It was good to think that after all, at the very end, one might go back——

He roused himself. A burning hand clawed at his knee. A dark face was lifted to his in panic.

"Him come—Omanhin come—take peccan—White Man lib for good. White Man save peccan——"

He got up. Very gently he disengaged himself from her desperate clutch.

"That's all right. White man lib for good—don't you worry. Peccan safe."

He stood in front of her. His pulses drummed heavily in his temples like the beat of a war-march. But his attitude was audaciously indifferent. He did not know

it, but when they rushed in on him he was standing there with his hands in his pockets, laughing at them. It was as though a pack of riotous children had burst into the house of a grown man.

"Well, Kwayo," he said. "What the devil does this mean?"

Kwayo halted. Behind him were the Omanhin's Fetish Man and a half-naked giant whose face, as it came into the light, froze into a mask of foolish, grinning cruelty. Harding measured the three of them. Kwayo, tremulous and cowed, he half pitied. The other two were the brain and the strength which had pitted themselves against him. But behind them was the incalculable horde—the torrent on whose course his fate depended. He heard it seething and muttering, and the sharp staccato screams that were like sudden flashes of threatening foam on a black sea.

"Kwayo, what the devil does this mean?"

The old chief came forward. He cringed a little. His eyes sought Harding's—furtively, questioningly.

"Omanhin—him send—him say, 'Give peccan and woman. Her lib for no good. Two peccans one time fetch him bad luck. You no give—me fight.' And me say him, 'No fight.' Me give him peccan and woman. For him law——"

"You took a lot on yourself, Kwayo. Do you think I care for all that stuff? Do you think I'm going to give up the child or the mother to that murderous, sickening brute? Tell these two to clear out—to get back to their precious master, and tell him I stand here for a bigger Law than his. Let him defy it and me if he dares."

He did not stop to pick his words. But he spoke ringingly, throwing his challenge to the storm without. It lulled. The Fetish Man swung round, screaming at it, and it responded menacingly. Harding understood enough. He had given his enemy the weapon he sought. He was trampling on their beliefs, setting his gods against theirs. The moment of disaster rode down upon him.

As at a signal, the giant advanced into the hut. Harding heard the woman's wail of terror. He knew then that there had never been a choice. He waited. He let the negro pass him—then—with his whole strength caught him by the neck and waist-cloth and swung him clear of the ground. He could hear his sinews crack under the strain. But that which he meant to do—the spectacular,

superhuman thing—was accomplished. He had a clear vision of himself standing out sharply against the light. His struggling burden was held well above him for a instant, then flung headlong, crashing against the Fetish Man who went down under it like a lightning-stricken tree. The two bodies rolled clear of each other. But neither rose.

It was quite still. The torrent recoiled upon itself, eddied and sank into a sombre quiescence. Kwayo held out his shaking hands. He was crying piteously like a child.

"You too, Kwayo? Shall I break your neck as well?"

"Oh Mbuiri, Mbuiri, it is war. And we small—we no many—Omanhin kill all——"

"Join him then!" Harding mocked. "Join him then—the lot of you!"

But Kwayo's eyes rested on the two bodies lying like black smudges in the circle of light. They were more than the broken bodies of men. They were symbolical.

"You great Ju-ju," he said softly. "You strong man—you lead us—we no fear. You fight Omanhin?"

Harding nodded. His arm hung limp and useless at his side; but he felt the woman's face against his hand.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, Kwayo, I fight at last."

CHAPTER IV

I

"SO it's tigers and jungles after all, Keith?" Genifer said.

They had mounted the grassy hill almost in silence, and now, where the path joined the road by a rough stone stile, they both stopped and looked back as travellers do who have reached their journey's end. They knew that they would part here. The place had seen all their happiest meetings; it was to see their saddest farewell. It was not finality, or the time that was to separate them, but the intuition of a coming change, the knowledge that somehow it marked a parting of the ways. They would meet again many times, but not here. Their friendship would endure, as the mountain-peaks endure; but the glow which still lingered on them from the vanished sun would have died out. They would never warm themselves in it again.

They were very cheerful, very confident, but they could not meet each other's eyes.

"I don't believe there are any tigers," Earnshaw said. "Jeffries says the only thing you catch out there is malaria. Nice, cheerful soul, isn't he? My word, I shall be glad to see this clean, hard world again, Jenny! The corn's turning gold already. They'll have reaped and sown perhaps before I come again." He laughed awkwardly. "That sounds rather sentimental, doesn't it? But I'm feeling homesick already—like a school-boy. One grows out of some things, I suppose—out of homesickness, never."

Because his profile was turned to her she ventured to glance at him. She guessed what lay behind his spoken thought, "When I see all this again the last obstacle will have gone. I shall have all I ask of life. I shall be happy." But his face showed no premonition of happiness. It was thin and careworn. There were harassed lines

about the mouth—lines such as might come from a perpetual unrest. The vigorous life and joy of living which had marked the waking of his love for Lillah had changed. The vigour had become a fevered, irritable activity, the joy an unquiet, persistent seeking. She looked away from him.

"Must you go, Keith?" she asked.

"You know I must." The exasperation broke through the veneer of his serenity. "Why do you ask? Surely you can see the necessity for yourself. The native evidence we have got at present wouldn't be worth a breath in any court of law. Edwards's evidence is equally unsatisfactory. The truth is—we have no evidence. I believe he's dead—I might say I know he is; but if there is to be any peace for her we must have proof. I am going for the proof. Don't you see that I must?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Will she be glad to know that he is dead?"

"Yes," he said. "I believe she will be glad. I don't mean that she wishes him ill—or indeed feels anything at all. He has been dead since the day he left her, as far as she is concerned. But it will be a clean severance. As things are to-day there is always something ugly and unsatisfactory about a divorce. Death—almost—wipes out everything."

"Almost?" she queried meditatively.

He frowned.

"Why do you emphasise that?"

"Because I don't believe death wipes out everything—even life—much less memory."

He was restlessly silent. The fretting fever in him betrayed itself in every little, stifled movement. She heard it in his voice when he at last spoke—in its harsh restraint.

"That sort of thing may be true or it may not. I don't want t think about it now. I want to believe that the damage that—that cur has done is reparable. I want to believe in the possibility of her happiness—yes, in my own too," he added, with a bleak defiance. "Otherwise all this would be intolerable. I couldn't go through with it. For pity's sake, Jenny, leave me my peace of mind!"

But she did not answer. His last exasperated plea, which would have shaken another woman to eager consolation and assurance, left her helplessly silent. She

would have been glad to give him what he needed, what he asked of her, but she could not. The heaviness of her heart seemed to hang upon her tongue. She blamed herself, accused herself—but no violence to her own feelings could change their character. His unhappiness, which he would have denied bitterly, was in her blood. She could not deny it, she could not even hide her recognition of it from him. He turned his grey face in her direction, though his eyes still avoided hers. "You don't believe in our future," he said harshly. "You don't believe I'm any good--I can't help her—that's what you mean, isn't it? You don't believe she'll ever care for me——"

It was the first time that any hint of the real trouble escaped him. The pain which had forced the impulsive outburst, its sober unexpectedness, melted her own stiff, inarticulate pity.

"She does care for you," she said. "If he is dead—it will all come right, Keith, I'm sure of that. Death *does* make a difference; it will make a difference to her. She has suffered a great deal—you know her better than I do and you know why perhaps—and she will need time and peace. It's almost lucky you have to go away. It will help her to get things into perspective. It will be a sort of convalescence—for you both."

He did not respond. He drew out his watch and walked the little remaining distance to the stile.

"I shall have to hurry. You won't come any farther?"

"No. I'll wish you good luck here."

She gave him her hand. Their eyes met for the first time. His were heavy with sullen resentment. "Keith," she said imperatively, "I'm not going to let you go like that. You're angry, and you've no right to be angry. If you were anybody else, or if you were just running up to London I'd let you go—on my word, I would—and let you get over it by yourself. But I'm too fond of you, and you're going too far, and I'd hate you to be overtaken by remorse when you couldn't even cable apologies. You've got two minutes to say what you've got against me and one minute to make it up. Now then---quick!"

He stared at her. Then a faint light broadened from his eyes over his whole face. He laughed, and for a second she saw him as he had once been.

"Why, Jenny, you're just the same! The whole earth turns inside out and topsy-turvy—and there you are,

standing on your feet as usual. You haven't lost a whit of your nerve since the time when I wanted to cut my throat and you shook me and jawed me till I went to sleep in sheer self-defence!" He put his hands on her shoulders, and his laughter could not hide the quiver that passed over his face. "Dear, I've got absolutely nothing against you. I reckon you're the finest, biggest pal God ever made. But I've got a whole lot against myself. I believe I had an idea, way back of my mind, that because I'd done decently on the field that I could sit tight and comfy for the rest of my life and let my precious decentness flourish all by itself. And it hasn't flourished a bit. It appears it's the sort of thing that wants watering. It's a nasty, worm-eaten little shrub at present. And that's why I'm so beastly to you. It's your plant, Jenny, and I've let it go to bits. And I'm conscience-stricken and guilty and sick with myself. And whenever a man gets sick with himself Heaven help his friends!"

"Two minutes up!" she announced firmly. "The explanation is accepted. Let there be peace."

"Do you forgive me?"

"If you swear to bring yourself and that conscience of yours back safe and sound I'll forgive you anything."

"That's a nice feminine bargain! I accept it because there's no time to point out its trickiness. Good-bye, dear—take care of yourself—and—and thanks for everything——"

They both knew what his clumsy gratitude covered. She nodded cheerfully as he climbed back into the road.

"And remember our bargain—one tiger-skin at least, and a thought or two over the camp-fire."

He stood for a moment on the farther step of the stile and his eyes swept the waving gold of the fields down to the quiet sea. And last of all he looked into Genifer's upturned face.

"I shall think of all this, Jenny. It'll bring me back safe if nothing else does. My bones wouldn't rest quiet on any other soil."

"You're a gruesome sentimentalist, and you'll lose your train," she retorted, and then, quickly, rather brokenly, "Bless you, Keith! You're a duffer and—and positively, I'm another. A few months is nothing. There—there—go on! We'll all meet you with brass bands—and don't forget what I told you—quinine at the first shiver."

"Woman, you've a medicine-chest instead of a heart," he mocked at her.

At the bend of the road he looked back, and then it seemed to him that the whole thing must be a dream and that this was only another of their old, happy partings, when she had waited there to give him the last salute. She was there now—staunch and cheery to the end. He waved back gaily. As he strode on a faint, comforting hope kindled within him. She had been like a good omen.

But he did not know that, even as she waved, she could not see him because the tears had blinded her.

II

St. Maro had always reckoned, that, for its size, it knew a good deal. There might be more traffic and more people and consequently more of everything in London, but all that was a mere matter of repetition and variation. You couldn't get more than human nature anywhere, and in St. Maro you had it better under observation. Or, in other words, St. Maro was the world in little—the cream of the world, to be quite straightforward.

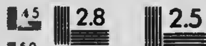
But in the course of the last months the village had suffered several disconcerting shocks which had compelled a revision of their social and psychological wisdom. It was not the quiet dissolution of an engagement very dear to them that had done it, nor even the obvious significance of those professional visits to Lone Point. Such things had happened before, and would very certainly happen again. But the spectacle of two people whose troth was broken remaining friends, of two women who should have loathed each other becoming inseparables was a source of long, bewildered discussion. When, on Earnshaw's departure, Lone Point was closed and Mrs. Harding came to live at the vicarage there was a tendency to cut the lot of them. In the eyes of the village it was more than inhuman. It was a breach of etiquette.

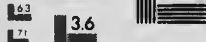
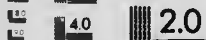
"I don't know what to make of it," Mrs. Strange declared to the Apron, with whom she was now on terms of a mutually patronising intimacy. "It isn't proper—as I see it—it's agen human nature, and if it's agen human nature it's wrong. And, if it's wrong, why then I——"

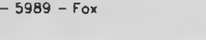
At this point the Apron had interrupted with the following words of profound wisdom.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)





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"It ain't against 'uman nature, Mrs. Strange. It's the only natrool thing to do. It's we sillies that are always trying to put nature into a strait waistcoat that are orl wrong. There's many a young man and woman wot likes each other as good friends but that don't want to see each other every mornin' of their lives any more than you and me do, but 'as to go and get married because it's the only way we lets 'em be pals. And then some fine fancy comes along—the real, red 'ot thing as you might say—and there's a bust-up—or, wot's worse, a nasty smoulder for the rest of their days. Well, Mr. Keith and Miss Genifer was too bright for a mistake like that. They ain't goin' to pass each other with their noses in the air because they don't want to go all the way together. They were friends before—maybe, too good friends for marryin'—and they're friends now; and wery sensible I calls it. As to them two women——" Here the Apron folded her arms over her ample waist and smiled, sphinx-like, "Well, Mrs. Strange, you can take it from me, it's 'uman nature for women to like each other and stick to each other, even with a worrisome man knockin' round. Not that there weren't a lot of misunderstandin' at one time. There was a sort o' game men 'ad of settin' one woman on another, but when the war came they was too busy fightin' among themselves to bother, and, bein' left a lot to their selves like, women came together and found out the whole silly game. Now if you was to make a wheeze about women and cats in any London 'all you likes to mention you wouldn't raise a smile—'cept p'r'aps from them that likes their grandmother's jokes best. You can take my word for that, Mrs. Strange. Now, coming from the general to the partikler, as you might say, them two, Mrs. 'Arding and Miss Bayard—well, they likes each other, and wery natrool too, and they likes Mr. Keith in their different ways, and 'e likes them. Well, then, ain't it 'uman nature to be friends with them you likes: is it or ain't it? You tell me that and then we'll start talkin'."

But Mrs. Strange, who lacked fluency, gave up the contest, and, more confused than convinced, accepted an order for a shoulder of mutton without demur. Therein she set an example to the village. Much head-shaking there was still over the two women who refused to conform to law and order, but finally, since one or other had to give way, St. Maro took down its book of codes and struck out a

time-honoured paragraph with a sigh at the passing of one more myth.

Thus it was to an already much perturbed village that the next shock was administered, and it is doubtful whether St. Maro will ever forget the disturbing vision which whirled through its midst in the hired car from Orra and deposited itself with immense gusto at the vicarage gate. Even the Apron, accustomed as she was to pretty nearly every type produced by her native city, was fairly taken aback, and for a moment stared with a stolidity which Mrs. Strange could not have equalled.

The vision tossed her feathers and rattled her gold chains for all the world like a war-horse of ancient times, caparisoned for battle.

"Now, aunty, you don't need to stare like that. It's not my ghost. It's my own sweet self without my corf. But don't you fall on my neck, or you'll crush my dress."

The Apron had no intention of falling on any one's neck, let alone a person whom she had already classed as a "hussy" of the most lurid order. She had only seen Cissie de Valincourt, *née* Higgins twice in her life, and it would never have occurred to her to connect the haggard, rather slatternly street-girl with this billowing, glittering, resplendent if highly doubtful personage. So that she merely continued to stare. Miss de Valincourt searched in her gold bag and produced a gold card-case and finally her card. "You take that to Miss Bayard, like the dear old thing you are," she said. "Don't shout my name, because I'm 'ere incog.—and ask her not to keep the lady waiting, because she's got to catch the night-train. See, dearie?"

The Apron retaliated by leaving the visitor on the doorstep and went off muttering, "Lady, indeed!" in varying tones of satire and contempt. She found Genifer and Mrs. Harding in the former's "workshop" at the back of the house, and presented the card in an eloquent and outraged silence. Genifer, who had been struggling with parochial accounts, considered the name for a moment in worried perplexity. It did not at first convey anything to her. Then she remembered. She turned impulsively to her companion, who was lying on the *chaise longue* by the open window, but as suddenly changed her mind and got up.

"I'll come at once," she said under her breath.

Lillah Harding had not heeded the interruption. Of late a certain languor had come over her, and she would be content to lie for hours where she could see the cliffs and the distant water, not speaking or even reading, and almost unconscious of those who came and went about her. She was not melancholy—not ill. Her beauty had grown richer and fuller. It seemed to have struck its roots deep in herself—to be less a physical perfection than an outward expression of her mind and soul. But that vigorous joy in herself, in her health and vitality, seemed to have died down. The strength that had carried her through the rough tides of Wrecker's Cove and up the steepest cliffs was turned to another purpose. It was turned inwards. It worked out some problem—set itself to some task which it hid stoically. Gentle and lovable as she was in these days, not even Genifer knew what was in Lillah's heart.

Dusk began to invade the quiet room. From where she lay she could watch the night gathering in deep pools in the hollows of the sandhills and the building of the gold path across the sea. So long as the sun showed its flaming rim she remained motionless and absorbed; but it sank faster and faster as though, nearing its journey's end, it grew impatient, and suddenly the last red spark flashed and was gone. She roused herself then. The chill which seemed to have leapt up instantly into the summer air laid a reminding hand upon her, and with a little sigh she rose and turned back into the dim room. She realised then that she was alone—had been alone for some time. It was absurd—she frowned at the absurdity of it—but the loneliness and darkness troubled her. It seemed somehow ominous—mysterious, as though behind it something was happening—was coming to her. There are few who have not known the dread certainty of disaster or of profound change which can spring from some trivial sound—the knocking at a door, footsteps, the ringing of a bell—still more from silence. That premonition overwhelmed Lillah now; she went quickly to the door and opened it.

"Genifer!" she called breathlessly. "Genifer—where are you?"

And there was Genifer herself standing in the dusk of the hall staring at her. She had been there some time; Lillah knew that by intuition and by the look on the other's face

—tense, abstracted, and half dazed as though for the moment she had forgotten where she was. Lillah went up to her. "Jenny, dear, what is it? Has anything happened?"

There was a strong, passionate answer to the pressure of her hand. Then suddenly Genifer drew herself up with a deep breath and a shake of her broad shoulders.

"Yes," she said, "I've been here, goodness knows how long, trying to think what to do for the best—and even now I don't know. I'm just all at sea; but I *do* know what's right and—and fair, and I've got to do it. If—if I make you—or—or anybody unhappy, you will remember that I didn't mean it—that I'd give my eyes not to—that I just didn't know—you will, won't you?"

"Why, my dear, of course—I couldn't doubt it ever—whatever you did——"

Genifer threw open the door behind her. The eyes of the two women met in the lamplight which poured on to their faces, and both were full of interrogation.

"There's—there's some one to see you, Lillah," Genifer stammered. And turned and fled.

III

Cissie de Valincourt got up as Lillah entered. There was a distractingly luxurious rustle and clatter about her movements which she made a real effort to subdue, for—on this occasion only—Cissie's nerves betrayed her. It was partly the fault of the situation, and partly the fault of the woman who stood opposite her. She was so quiet. She made everything sound and look and feel too loud even to Cissie herself, who in her way was extremely sensitive. So she patted her bangles and chains into silence, half offered her hand, and, deciding that it was scarcely a correct procedure under the circumstances, let it drop.

"Well, I don't suppose you remember me, do you now?" she said. "Bit of a change, eh?"

Lillah Harding came forward. Her little uncertain gesture struck Cissie as oddly pathetic.

"Why—yes—surely—it's Miss de Valincourt, isn't it?"

"Mademoiselle de Valincourt, if you don't mind—looks better on the bills, as my agent says. Being a foreigner in

this country is no end useful. It gives folk an idea they've been rather naughty to come and look at you—and there's nothing that tickles 'em more than that. Besides, you can kick as 'igh as you like and wear as little as you like, and nobody minds. Not"—added Mlle de Valincourt with some scorn—"not that I goes in for that sort of low stuff. The classics are my stunt—Taglioni and all that sort, *you* know." The applauding jangle which greeted her half-begun pose startled her back to consciousness of the white face and half frowning eyes that watched her. "Lord!" she muttered, "'ow I do carry on! As Lord Freddy said only the other night, 'I believe you'll be doing the 'igh kick on the Day of Judgment.' There now—don't you be angry! I can't stand it. I tell you, I'm as nervous as a kitten."

Lillah sat down by the table. She clasped her hands together to hide their trembling.

"I'm not angry," she said hurriedly. "I was only thinking how changed you were—so well—and—and strong."

It was a deliberate diversion—an effort to gain time before they came to the inevitable reckoning between them. Cissie accepted it gratefully.

"Gracious me! yes—I'm as well as a carthorse. That 'orspital—*h*ospital, I should say—and poor old Algernon took me a bit too serious. Nothing the matter with my bellows—never was, I don't believe. That old josser, Carrington, ran across me at Romano's the other night and he had the cheek to ask me to come along and see 'im. I just laughed in 'is ugly face. 'If I'm alive and kickin' it ain't your doin', old corf-drop,' I said. But I'm going along some time if it's only to give 'im a bit of my mind. The way 'e treated Algernon makes me sick every time I——" She stopped. and suddenly her whole tone and attitude changed. It was as though she had resolutely gathered all the untidy ends of her mind together. She leant forward, looking Lillah full in the eyes, and her own gravity revealed something tragic and famished that had hidden under the flippant humour. "You think it a bit queer, me coming to you like this, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes—I don't understand—but I know there's a reason——"

"It's about Algernon."

The hands lying on the table were clenched to a bloodless white.

"You mean—my husband?"

"That's 'im. 'Scuse me—Algernon sounds a bit familiar; but that's my way with them I likes—and I likes him." She snapped a bracelet clasp with a nervous fussiness. "It's about the—the divorce. I saw about it in the paper —and old saw-bones told me—and it got on my mind. It don't seem fair——"

"Fair? Surely!" Her head was lifted now, and the blood flamed in her cheeks. "I am trying to set him free— isn't that what he wanted?"

Miss de Valincourt brought her gloved hand down on the table with a passionate vehemence.

"Yes—he wanted it right enough—but why did he want it? Have you ever thought of that?"

"It didn't need much thought—wasn't it obvious?—he went with you——"

"Me!" She sat still for a moment, swallowing her scorn. "*Me!*" she repeated. "Look 'ere, Mrs. Harding—me and Algernon was friends. He was kind to me. I don't know about his old germ stuff, but I do know that he gave me good food and a breath of fresh air and a fighting chance, and if ever he wants some one to wipe 'is boots on, there's me always 'andy, even if I *am* earning a hundred a week, which is wot I'm coming to. That's 'ow I feel about Algernon. But marry 'im—live with 'im—no, thank you. I don't say that I'm all I might be, but snatchin' other folks' 'usbands is beneath me. That's one thing. And another is—well, me affections—so to speak—were engaged elsewhere. But I suppose you never thought of my feelings, did you now?"

Lillah Harding's lips moved. No sound came from them. It was as though a tightening band were about her throat, stifling her breath. She made a groping, helpless gesture of appeal and Cissie de Valincourt nodded sombrely. "No —you didn't. You took it all for granted. But it's a mistake to think because you're wild about a feller yourself that every one else is. No—don't you interrupt. I know I'm dancing on all the raw spots—I can't help it— I'm dithering myself—but I've got to get it out. I've 'ad a bad time over this job—I've lain awake at nights worryin' at it. I've said to myself, 'If I tells 'er the truth it'll be a low-down trick on 'im and p'r'aps I'll be upsettin' the

whole apple-cart, and I've gone to sleep on it. And then in the morning I've woke up thinkin', 'Well, wot about 'er? Is it fair? Supposin' it's all wrong—supposin' she's breakin' 'er 'eart for 'im——"

Lillah had risen sharply to her feet.

"Wait!" she said, "you've no right——"

"'Av'nt I? Ain't it true? Ain't you breakin' your 'eart?" She nodded exultantly, and her last "h's" fled before the storm. "You 'ear me out, Mrs. 'Arding. I came down 'ere because I'd just got to find out. I wasn't goin' to have Algernon's life—and yours too—go to pot for want of a bit of common sense. So I comes to Miss Bayard and I puts the facts before 'er straight and I says to 'er, 'Now, that's 'ow it is. If 'e was right and she's glad to be rid of 'im, why I'll go straight away and 'old my tongue—my reputation won't suffer—but if I'm right and she wants 'im back—if she's goin' to bits because of 'im, why just send 'er along.' And Miss Bayard gasps at me and goes out. So I don't know wot she thought—except that she *did* send you along—and I don't care. I can see for myself. No bustin' with 'appiness about you, any'ow. You're eatin' your 'eart alive——"

Lillah pushed back the hair from her forehead with the old familiar gesture that was now full of a blind, pathetic helplessness. It was as though she were trying to brush away some clouding dream—the heaviness of a long sleep.

"I don't understand," she said gently and rather piteously. "Please tell me what you have to say. You are quite right—I have suffered a good deal—it has made me stupid—not so strong——"

"Don't you bother—I know wot it feels like. There—I can say it quick now that I knows. It's just this. He and me we bunked together—we got as far as Paris—and then we shook 'ands and 'e gave me my fare and a fat lot over to start on—and that's the whole tale. Never was nothing between us—never could 'ave been. I went with 'im to oblige—because I thought I was dyin'—and I wanted to clear out—poor old Gallows you know—couldn't face 'im some'ow. And 'e went with me because 'e knew 'e'd messed it—'e thought 'e'd killed Miss Jones, and that there'd be a dirty scandal. 'E'd 'ave faced it all right, but there was you—'e wanted to give you a chance to cut loose—to be free—'e'd cheated you, 'e said, and you was to have a chance to forget—and—and start again. 'E

loved you—'e loved you so that 'e couldn't see straight—and I told 'im so——" She faltered.

For Lillah had slipped back into her chair. She lay, her face hidden in her arms upon the table, and cried. There was an awful recklessness in her crying—an utter abandonment, as though a force of grief that had been lain masked and chained in the depths of her soul had gathered itself secretly together and now flung itself upon her, beating her to the ground.

Cissie de Valincourt crept up to her. She knelt down and put her arms about her with a fearless, unhesitating pity and tenderness.

"Lor', it's as bad as all that!" she whispered. "Good thing I didn't trust 'im, isn't it? There—don't—it 'urts me. You don't need to. Mrs. Harding, you never was jealous—of *me*?"

Lillah lifted her head.

"No—not jealous. But I cared so for him, and I'd told him—that last night—and then——"

"Pride!" Cissie nodded grimly to herself. "I told him that. I said any one with 'er face would give Lucifer points. But that's all over. It's been a bad muddle—but it's not too late. We're going to tidy things up. We'll find Algernon, and then——" She saw the other's stricken pallor—"Well—can't we?"

"My husband died—nearly a year ago—out in West Africa."

"You *know* 'e died?"

Lillah turned sharply. [illegible] eyes searched the intent, upturned little face with [illegible]ed questioning.

"Do I know? We h[illegible]—Mr. Earnshaw has gone out now—to be sure. What do you mean?"

"I mean—do you feel it's true? 'Cause I don't. It would be like 'im to sham dead. It wouldn't be like 'im to die—no, not till 'e's got what 'e wants—and 'e wants you—'e wants you, and 'e'll get you if—if 'e 'as to roast for it." She got up with the swift grace of a young panther and stood, fierce and exultant, her eyes shining her faith. "'E ain't dead," she said. "I'd stake my whole blessed career on it. 'E's alive—and if 'e was my man I'd pack my box I would, and I'd find 'im and chuck myself at 'is 'ead. I wouldn't leave it to no blessed Earnshaws—I'd go myself—and if 'e *was* dead I'd go just the same—if 'e was my man.——"

She waited. But Lillah Harding did not move. She seemed to have forgotten that she was not alone. She sat upright, her clenched hand on the table, and there was something royal and strong in the unconscious pose—in the tilt of the head, in the firm, sweet line of the mouth. Her cheeks were wet still. But the tears had washed away all hardness, all weakness. She looked young again—like a proud and happy girl.

Cissie de Valincourt nodded to herself. She dropped a kiss on the ruddy hair.

"You'll do," she said. "You'll do."

She found a restless, wretched Genifer in the dusky garden and tapped her on the shoulder with that air of mysterious and jocular understanding which she had observed in policemen cornering a guilty victim.

"I've done it," she said, "and if I was a Boy Scout I reckon this good deed would last me for a week. *She's* orl right. You leave 'er a bit to 'erself. She'll want to think. If you must get busy, look up the trains to West Africa." She scrambled into her hired car, with a little scream of recollection. "*Which* reminds me! If I miss the 8.30 the rehearsal's dished. Lor'. wot it is to be a London light! 'Ome, John, and drive like hell!"

She kissed her hand at the vicarage generally, and a moment later, in obedience to her lurid command, had vanished in a snorting, hooting cloud of dust and darkness.

IV

It was exactly a month later that Mlle de Valincourt descended upon Harley Street. The fact that she was shown straight into Dr. Carrington's consulting-room without any preliminaries did not at all surprise her since she had given that gentleman to understand that her time was a lot more valuable than his, and that any discouragement in the form of waiting would extinguish what little enthusiasm she had for the business. As it was her whole attitude towards him during the beginning of their interview was marked with a business-like frigidity such as a duellist might show towards his future victim. Cissie was, in fact, "keeping it warm for him," as she expressed it.

On his side Dr. Carrington made no attempt to melt her

reserve, which was not so complete as his own. When she spoke he grunted, and his examination was completed without a single observation. It was only when Cissie began gathering up her furs and chains and general impedimenta, and he had gone back to his desk, that they unmasked their batteries.

"What's yer charge for this little game?" she inquired rudely. "Break it to me gently, won't you?"

"I don't charge *you* anything," Carrington returned. Cissie sniffed.

"Thank *you* for nothing. I don't want no charity from *you*. I can pay my way as well as any one. Do yer know wot I'm gettin' a week, saucy?"

"No. I hope as much as you deserve."

"Not 'alf as much as I'm going to get. Fifty quid a week. 'Ow's that, eh?"

"You're worth a lot more than that," Carrington observed. "Your lungs alone now—I'd give you a hundred pounds a piece just to show them round Europe——"

Mlle de Valincourt sat down abruptly in the chair opposite him.

"Wot cher up to now?" she inquired—"vivisection?"

Carrington allowed himself a smile.

"Oh dear no. As a matter of fact, I did not make the offer seriously. I'm sure your—your performance is inimitable, whereas I have several excellent duplicates of your lungs." He picked up a pen and began to scribble idly on his blotting-pad. "By the way, I hunted up your hospital record and Mr. Harding's notes about you. I suppose you realise that eighteen months ago you were dying as fast as you knew how?"

"No I don't—I wasn't——"

"'Wasn't' what?"

"Dying."

"How do you know that?"

Mlle de Valincourt roared with laughter.

"Why, because I'm not dead, Bright Eyes."

Carrington remained serious.

"Exactly. That's why your lungs are—I was going to say, miracles. Fortunately they are not miracles. He paused, and then asked curtly: "You remember Mr. Modrow, don't you?"

"Wot—'is Riverence? I should say I do. Once seen never forgotten, as the saying goes."

"Well, he's working down in the East End somewhere—some temperance business." He smiled faintly at Cissie's yell of delight. "It's quite true. I had him here only the other day. I doubt very much whether you would recognise him. He is quite changed, and sound as a bell, and really a decent sort. It was a case of the disease getting hold of the soul as well as the body. Most vices are diseases. I saw Mrs. Newman on the same day—I got her a post as house-keeper somewhere, but I believe a reconciliation with her family is pending. She'll live to worry them for quite a time. A dear old body. And wonderfully grateful——"

He talked languidly, apparently more to fill up the time than with any desire to impart information, and Cissie, who was not thinking of him at all, missed the alertness that was almost excitement in the keen, sceptical eyes. She sat pensive for a moment, tapping the table with one of her many rings.

"You seem to have been keepin' your eye on us," she remarked presently.

"Why, yes, I have. I was interested—naturally."

"I suppose"—she looked up at him from under the brim of her immense hat, and the small face was suddenly not that of a fashionable, self-confident woman, but rather of a little London gutter-snipe, eager, hungry, and imprudently wistful—"I suppose, you don't remember old Gallows—do you?"

"Mr. Tillett, do you mean? Yes, certainly I remember him."

"Haven't seen him lately by any chance?"

"Yes, quite lately. Do *you* want to see him?"

She nodded a whole cascade of nods.

"I'd just give me ears——"

Carrington glanced at her shrewdly. Then, without a word, he got up and went to the door of his private room and opened it.

"Mr. Tillett, would you mind coming this way?"

Cissie de Valincourt bounded to her feet. She made a half turn for flight, reconsidered it, and finally sat down, her head up, very tremulous and red and angry.

"Well——" she began. "Well—of all the cheek! Jumping you at me in that Jack-in-the-box style! Is this my consultation, or isn't it? Gallows, what in 'Eaven's

name 'ave you been doin' with yourself! You 'ave 'ad your 'air cut!"

It was true. And, besides the cropping of the black, disorderly hair there were other changes in him. Physically he was another man—upright, straight-shouldered, with the appalling hollows of face and chest filled in. Yet he looked older and the added years lay in his expression. It had lost its frantic recklessness, its haunted unrest. It was yet intensely sad—so embittered that Cissie had much ado to keep her airy indignation going. "Why, Gallows," she said, "I've been lookin' over 'alf England for you. Where 'ave you been 'iding?"

"I haven't been hiding," he said sullenly.

Neither of them had offered to shake hands. They sat at the opposite ends of the table, with Carrington between them, and an awkward, miserable silence ensued Even Cissie's loquaciousness failed her. It was in vain that she unsnapped and snapped her gold bag, jangled her chains, and dabbed her nose with a vigorously perfumed handkerchief. The silence and Tillett's brooding stare became intolerable. "Saw-bones," she broke out indignantly, "if you must have a tea-party you might at least try to make it a jolly one. Or, if it's any one's funeral, for 'eaven's sake say so and let's get on with it."

Carrington awoke from an abstracted silence and became quietly animated. He sat forward, looking from one to another with a seriousness that was not to be denied.

"This isn't a tea-party," he said, "and it isn't a funeral. I haven't time to indulge in practical jokes, and the fact that I have given over an afternoon to this business ought to suggest to you that there *is* business I have asked you both to meet here because I have something to tell you which concerns you both intimately." He turned sharply to Cissie de Valincourt. "You were very rude to me the other night at Romano's," he said. "You accused me of having treated Mr. Harding badly. I took it—well, lying down. Did it occur to you to wonder why?"

"Guilty conscience!" Mlle de Valincourt retorted promptly. To her amazement he nodded.

"You're right—in part, not altogether. I had judged Mr. Harding according to the law, and I made a mistake. On the other hand, I have dealt fairly with the material he left me, and if in the future, at any time, he cares to remember my existence I am prepared to offer him any

apology or atonement that he may choose to require of me." He paused. There was a note of unfeigned humility in his voice that contrasted oddly with his usual pose of frigid scepticism. But neither of his hearers spoke. They were watching him as though he had suddenly become the central figure in a breathless drama, and he went on with an increased seriousness. "You two ought to be dead—by all the laws governing medical knowledge you ought to be dead or dying. Modrow and Mrs. Newman should have been in their graves months ago. You and they are alive because Harding saved you. He did the unjustifiable thing and is justified. He experimented recklessly—on himself, on animals, on other human beings—he risked their lives and his own life, his career and his honour with the audacity of a madman. He succeeded because he was a genius—and immensely brave." He got up abruptly as though inactivity had become unendurable, and began to move restlessly about the room. "I am telling you what the whole world will know in a few weeks. I have just said he was brave. He was not quite brave enough—or rather, towards the end something—some influence came into his life which made him afraid, made him lose confidence. When he should have held on he gave in—he grew impatient—miscalculated—an endless series of small errors. When Miss Jones died he was finished. Then I came in." He stopped short in his restless wandering. "I had done my best to weaken him—to frighten him. Therein you were quite right in saying I was unjust. But when, after the post-mortem examination I heard that I had misjudged him utterly on one head—then I was just enough to give him the consideration I had hitherto refused. I took over his work and the two cases that remained to me, and the result you know. Where you are concerned I was not able to carry on the treatment—apparently it was not necessary. You were cured." He came back to the table and sat down again with a quiet sigh of relief. "That's the affair as it concerns you. For the world it means this—that something has been accomplished which hundreds of men have striven to accomplish with only poor success. I do not say that the cure is absolute; but I believe that ninety cases out of a hundred which were hopeless are hopeless no longer, and that in the course of a generation the plague will have been stamped out. That, at least, is the statement I am going to be

responsible for until Harding can take it over from me himself."

There was a long silence. Cissie had sat still and expressionless throughout his explanation. She was quiet now until Tillett began to speak, then she got up with a fierce rustle of silk petticoats and went over to the window. Her back was turned and she made no sound, but they knew she was crying. They looked at each other helplessly. Tillett's hatchet face was grey-looking, but his jaw was set in a sullen obstinacy.

"Miss de Valincourt," Carrington began, "you mustn't let it make you unhappy. It's not irreparable. Most great discoverers have suffered persecution. The lucky ones have lived to see themselves justified. Harding is among their number——"

She turned on him with a muffled cry of rage.

"How do you know that? Suppose I told you that he was dead——"

"Dead—— ?"

"Didn't your precious friend Earnshaw tell you? He went out to West Africa weeks ago—like the beast he is—because there was a rumour 'Arding was killed. He wanted to find 'is body—gloat over it, I suppose—or, if 'e was alive, kill 'im—oh, don't glare at me like that! I don't care whether 'e'd do it or not—'e wants 'Arding dead—I know 'e does and I know why. Oh, I 'ate 'im—and I 'ate the lot of you!" she added venomously. "You think you can make up with your beastly soft speeches. But you can't—no one can—only one person p'r'aps and p'r'aps she won't get the chance." She came back to the table and sat down, the tears rolling shamelessly down the carefully powdered face. "Poor old Algernon!" she said huskily. "I know wot it was broke 'is nerve, poor divil, and it wasn't nothing to do with microbes either."

Tillett stumbled to his feet.

"I'll get out of this," he muttered. "I've had enough. If you want me again, Dr. Carrington, you know where to find me."

He was detained by an imperative gesture.

"Wait one moment—then you can get Miss de Valincourt a taxi." He turned to Cissie. "You say that Harding has been killed out in West Africa, and that Mr. Earnshaw has gone out there to make investigations. Can't you tell me anything more?"

"No, I can't," she snapped. "If you want more ring up West Africa."

"But you were—very intimate with Mr. Harding——"

"Oh, was I? Well—of all the impudence——!"

Carrington desisted hastily.

"I was bound to find out as much as I could. You must realise that this is an affair of honour with me——"

"Well, wot about us?" she retorted. "We owe 'im our precious lives, don't we?—though I must say there are some folks as look as though they weren't too grateful—and of course I'd tell you all I could. But I don't know any more. I wish to Gawd I did."

Carrington bowed gravely.

"Thank you. You can rest assured I shall get on to this at once. If Earnshaw has really gone out to West Africa I shall cable to him and put the whole affair in his hands. If Harding is alive Earnshaw will find him and bring him back. You may think what you like of Earnshaw, Miss de Valincourt, but he is my friend and I know he is to be trusted."

Tillett lingered sullenly by the door.

"Are you coming?" he asked.

She tossed her head.

"Not with you, Mr. Tillett. I know when I'm not wanted."

"Oh, come on!" he retorted savagely.

Whereat Mlle de Valincourt appeared unreasonably soothed and mollified. She gathered up her belongings with immense deliberation and ruffled her feathers like some bird of paradise fresh from a triumphant encounter. But at the door she paused and looked back very seriously.

"No man wot's in love is to be trusted," she said, "least of all when 'e's in love with another feller's wife. You've judged too harshly once, Saw-Bones—you might make your next mistake t'other way. Think it over. It'll be 'ard if poor Algernon has to pay twice for your silliness."

She did not wait for an answer, but went out holding firmly to Tillett's reluctant arm.

V

No taxi presenting itself, they walked to the top of Harley Street, where Miss de Valincourt suddenly decided that she

did not want a taxi at all. Her remarks on the subject were the first to break the ominous silence, and they appeared to cause her companion no particular satisfaction.

"Well, what do you want to do?" he demanded sourly.

She had a sudden inspiration.

"I'd like a walk, Gallows—I would really. And there's a park just screamin' to be walked in. Nothing special to do, 'ave you now?" He made an unintelligible answer which she interpreted to suit herself. "Give me an arm then, old boy: I do 'ate these 'ere crossin's."

He obeyed helplessly, and they proceeded funereally up through York Gate and thus into the deserted Inner Circle of Regent's Park. It would be more correct to say that Mr. Tillett was funereal. Miss de Valincourt hummed as she walked.

"That's the air of my new ballet," she remarked presently. "Do you like it?"

"I don't know," he growled. "I wasn't listening."

"*How* unkind! But you'll come and see me in it, won't you?"

"No, I will not."

"*How* 'orrid of you! And I've been thinkin' of you no end, Gallows, worryin' my poor 'ead off—I 'ave really, now."

"You don't look like it," he observed brutally.

She squeezed his arm.

"I suppose that's a compliment, eh? But I did worry all the same." Her voice threw off its flippancy like a disguise, and was suddenly serious and none too steady. "There wasn't a day I didn't think of you, I was always lookin' out for you. I didn't change my name because I thought you might see it and come along. I was so afraid——"

"—— That I'd drink myself to death? Well—I very nearly did."

"Why didn't you?"

He ground his teeth together.

"Do you want another scalp to your collection? Well—you can have mine for what it's worth. I didn't because I couldn't. Somehow or other I'd lost the taste—you'd made me see straight and I couldn't see crooked again. I kept on remembering what you said that because a fellow had bossed his chance once he needn't go on bossing other

chances. And when I began to get back my health—whether I wanted to or not——"

"It's old Algernon's scalp really," she interrupted eagerly. "It's 'e that's done it for you, Gallows."

He shook off her arm in a sudden gust of rage.

"I wish he hadn't. I don't want to be indebted to him. He may have given me my life, but, by Heaven, he took care to poison it for me first!"

"How?" she asked innocently.

"You know as well as I do."

She walked on in silence for a little and her next remark was apparently apropos of nothing in particular.

"I was down in St. Maro the other day, Gallows."

"Indeed? Renewing old memories, I suppose."

"Well, no. It was business. I went down to see Mrs. 'Arding and 'ave a chat about things."

"A remarkable exhibition of tact," he sneered.

She nodded, smiling to herself.

"She was awfully pleased to see me. And when we'd 'ad our little talk she went upstairs and packed for a jaunt to West Africa. She started three weeks ago. She'll find Algernon if 'e's alive, and if 'e's dead—well, I've a feelin' she'll leave 'er bones out there with 'is."

Tillett had stopped short. He walked on again—very fast so that she had to hold on to his arm. She could feel that he was trembling.

"I suppose she's prepared to forgive him," he muttered. "Some folks are made like that."

"She's not goin' to forgive 'im," Cissie answered. "There'd never be any silly nonsense about forgiveness between those two—but if there was it'd be 'im that'd do the forgiving," she laughed suddenly and joyously. "Oh, Gallows—ain't you twigged yet? Did you really think I'd bolted with 'im and left you 'igh and dry? Did you think all our talks and the bit of a ranch in Australia was just a lot of gammon? 'Adn't you gumption enough to see wot it was made me bolt?"

He stood still, facing her doggedly, blocking her path.

"No, I hadn't; but I'm going to see now."

"Yes, you are—and no thanks to your eyesight, dear boy. When Algernon came and told me it was all up with the lot of us—wot cher think I felt? Why—I just wanted to go and 'ide like a dying dog. I couldn't face you—I 'adn't the pluck. P'r'aps it wasn't the best I could

'ave done, but I can tell you I wasn't in the thinkin' mood. When Algernon—who 'adn't any more idea of you and me than a fly—asked me to come a railway jaunt with 'im so that Mrs. Algernon should 'ave a chance to be clear of 'im—and 'er lovin' 'im like mad all the time—why, I just came. Seemed to me I might as well be useful as not. All of which goes to prove," she added parenthetically, "that where silliness is concerned there isn't much to choose between the sexes. I was an ass, you was an ass, Gallows—we were all asses. But I flatter myself I stopped bein' an ass first."

He caught her by both arms and shook her till the gold chains and boxes jangled despairingly.

"Then you did care—all the time——?"

"Ain't I tellin' you so? Ain't I chuckin' myself at your 'ead?" She looked at him rather sadly from under the brim of the lop-sided hat. "Not that I'm much of a catch for you, Gallows. I'm common—I've been none too respectable—I drops my 'h's' even when I h-h-angs on to them like grim death."

"And I'm a wretched little middle-class rotter that missed his chance to be something decent—and then tried to drink himself into forgetting! I'm poor—I'm nothing but what you'll make out of me."

She smiled up at him with brimming eyes.

"That's all right, Gallows—I like you as you are; and when I 'ave saved enough—we'll 'ave that ranch and grow chickens or wotever it is, and make good—eh?"

It was dusk under the green arch of trees. There was no one in sight. Perhaps neither of them cared. They clung to each other. The big hat was all over one ear. The chains were muffled into silence.

They walked on presently, pressed close together—very young and foolish and vulgar. They hardly spoke at all—only once when he looked down into her face and saw the tears.

"Why—dear—ar'nt you happy?"

She nodded, gulping hard.

"It's Algernon," she said. "Poor Algernon—out there—and—'er—loving each other so—and then that there Earnshaw——"

"He'll do the square thing," he said, half puzzled, half troubled. "What are you afraid of? If Harding's alive what could Earnshaw do——?"

She shook her head.

"I dunno. All's fair in love and war, ain't it?"

"Earnshaw's proved he's a clean fighter——"

"—— In war," she interposed. "Love's worse."

He did not contradict her. They walked on, rather sober—like people who sit by their own warm hearth and listen to the storm without.

CHAPTER V

I

THE "West Coaster" *Alicia* had cast anchor off the old fort of Sekondi early in the morning, but a stiff sea and the white glittering bars of Atlantic rollers breaking on the reef into a cloud of foam had postponed landing, until twilight, creeping up out of the gloomy forest-hinterland, had made further postponement impossible.

Amidst yells and frantic chattering from the native oarsmen the surf-boats were bumped up alongside and passengers, cargo, and mail heaved overboard and jumbled together on the stern in inextricable confusion. Earnshaw had taken care to be among the first boat-load. He had fought for the position with a callous simplicity of purpose which had induced even a privileged official to stand back. Perhaps, too, it was not entirely his forcefulness which cleared the way for him. The memories of the Great Years were still vivid in men's minds. Most of his fellow passengers knew who he was, and the scarred, distorted face that had grown more haggard, more sombre as the days wore on had awakened in them something that was half awe, half pity. They were men, for the greater part, returning to a hard and treacherous life in which a riotous, resolute cheerfulness was the one salvation. They would have shown no mercy to any one among them who had dared, even by silence, to betray a dangerous melancholy. But Earnshaw's silence and reserve they had respected. And now, quite simply and naturally, they gave way to him.

The coxswain, a mighty, half-naked native, called to his rowers, perched precariously on the gunwales of the boat, the single oars struck the water simultaneously, and with a turn as light and swift as a bird's the boat swung round and fled landwards. The rowers sang as they toiled

—a strange, monotonous song that rose and fell with their hard, drawn breath.

Earnshaw made his way forward to the prow. Before him stretched the flat line of coast, gay and sparkling enough on its fringe, but beyond, where night and grey, sullen clouds wreathed themselves about the mountains, a place of mystery and gloom. He watched it, fascinated. All day long in the glowing merciless heat he had stood in the shadow of the ship's awnings and watched it. It had lain there before him like a glittering gem held in a sombre setting. He had seen the mists rise up out of the valleys, and the endless legions of breakers spring up, as it seemed, from under his feet, and roll forwards irresistibly to the assault and break to nothing against the stubborn reefs. But the clouds that capped the mountains had never moved, never changed. They hung there like a warning hand over a land of treacherous allurement. That allurement, to Earnshaw, was actual—physical. He had felt it when, many days since, he had first tasted the rank, clammy flavour of the coast. Then the unrest, the impatient trouble within him had suddenly changed to purpose—shapeless, unrecognised, but in its very essence ruthless. It was as though this land that lay before him now had been an evil woman, beckoning him on, to whom he was going, if it were through damnation.

For two days he had battled with a raging fever. He had told himself that the tumult was of his blood only. Now, as he crouched in the prow and watched the native huts and the white European bungalows flash into distinctness he felt again the strange, terrifying tightening of the heart, the stiffening of the muscles, as though everything he was gathered itself together for some unknown, but long meditated blow.

He turned his eyes back to the black inland shadow. Somewhere there was the answer he had come to fetch—the decision which was to stamp his life. Never before had it been so clear to him that both would be final and irrevocable.

The coxswain called shrilly, and the rowers hung on their oars and looked back, with glittering anxious eyes, at the pursuing monster. It towered above them, massive and shining, with foaming, greedy lips; another call—a long, deep sweep of the poised oars and the descending avalanche broke at their stern, lifting them forward in one sweet, clean

sweep out of deep water into safety. The keel grated on sand. The rowers drew a long, hissing breath and their living freight stirred and shook off their tense stillness. It had been, as usual, a near thing. The coxswain, standing on his low platform in the stern, held himself like a bronze Napoleon in the hour of victory.

Earnshaw waded through the shallows to the shore. He was impatient of the delay—exasperated by the reawakened bustle and confusion. Yet, once on land, he realised that his impatience had not helped him. For a moment the waiting natives skirmished eagerly about him, then, as he did not understand their chattering, lost interest and hurried on to the more leisurely passengers, and he was forgotten.

He stood and watched them because there was nothing else for him to do. All his fellow travellers were men returning from leave. Friends greeted them. Native servants flung themselves on the baggage with the enthusiasm of friendly recognition. Little by little the crowd thinned. And still Earnshaw remained idle and forgotten amidst his tossed-up baggage, and wondered grimly at his own helplessness.

"Excuse me—are you Mr. Earnshaw by any chance?"

He turned quickly, and with some relief. A white-clad Englishman whom he had noticed on the outskirts of the crowd stood beside him and held out a tentative hand. He took it gratefully.

"Yes—my name's Earnshaw all right."

"Good. I'm Henderson—deputy D.C. for Kum-Prah. You and I have exchanged cables, and when I got your last one saying you were coming out, I thought I'd offer you a shakedown. A stranger's life isn't altogether a bed of roses, unless he has introductions——"

"So I was beginning to realise," Earnshaw admitted. "By the way, is Kum-Prah the next station, or what?"

The D.C. chuckled.

"No, it isn't. It's a nice long way off—thank God for it. I'm here for a bit in circumstances that may interest you. But all that will keep. Dinner first, eh?"

"It's tremendously good of you——"

"Oh, rot—great pleasure, and all that." He shouted to some natives who stood at a respectful distance, and taking Earnshaw by the arm, led him up the beach. "They'll see to your things; I've got a dogcart waiting. It's a bit

of a drive——" He broke off, breathing rather heavily, as though the slight ascent troubled him. He laughed huskily. "Time I had a breath of home air. I'm all to bits. It's this infernal climate—an everlasting Turkish bath——"

"Yes—it seems pretty trying——"

"Oh, it's the devil. If a man's got a weak spot in his soul or his body it finds it out before he knows where he is. I've seen men crack up here as though they were possessed—quite decent fellows too; and peg out—my word—like flies." He repeated his determined little laugh. "Excuse me—we Gold Coasters always talk like that to new-comers—can't bear their infernal cheerfulness, you know; but we ourselves hang on to the old place as though it were the gates of Paradise. It's got some sort of weird hold over us, I suppose." He climbed up into the waiting dogcart and gave Earnshaw a hand. "My word, you're cold enough——"

Earnshaw set his teeth on a long shudder.

"It's nothing. I had a touch of fever on the way out."

His host gathered up the reins.

"Oh, it's a devil of a climate," he repeated philosophically.

II

Characteristically enough, it was not until after a well-served dinner and the two men were lounging on the *chaises longues* on Henderson's verandah that they broached the matter which had brought them together. They had talked of many other things, and now that the soft-footed native boy had set their coffee between them they dropped into an idle silence.

Henderson's bungalow—lent him by an absent official—overlooked the low, flat shore, and from where they sat they could see the lights of the West Coaster still lying in the offing. They were the only break in the muffling darkness, and to Earnshaw they were the eyes of a black, lowering monster whose enveloping breath smelt faintly of a rank corruption. Lone Point, with its fresh winds and clean, laughing seas was of another world. It was [illegible] and proud and joyous as a beautiful girl. But this place was the woman whose being had haunted Earnshaw's disordered fancy—evil, feverish, with burning eyes

and hot, luring hands in whose touch was decay and death.

He sat up, throwing off his thoughts. A clammy moisture had gathered on his forehead and about his mouth. The hand which held the red, glowing cigarette shook a little.

"You said some time back that you were here under circumstances that would interest me," he began abruptly. "Were you referring to my—my purpose in coming here?"

"Why, yes," Henderson fumbled lazily on the low table beside him for a cigarette. "I ought to have explained before now. I came up from my swamp about a fortnight ago—disguised and going for my life. And I shan't return either, until I've got a company or so of Waffs to hold up my tottering dignity. In other words, there's been a shindy down my way—two tribes at each other's throats—a big tribe and a little tribe—and the little tribe loyal and fighting for its life and us as though it hadn't a choice. Rather pathetic, don't you think?"

"And the other lot?"

"Oh, they mean mischief. It's been hatching a long time, but we're so damned unsuspicious and anybody who tries to warn us is always stuck down as a crank. But it would have been very nasty if it wasn't for this bantam crew holding the breach. Heaven grant they may hold on long enough! There's not much Red Cross work down that way, as you can imagine."

Earnshaw leant forward a little.

"What's it all got to do with me?" he asked.

"I'm coming to that. You see, this Harding is living with our little tribe——"

"Living——?"

"Was living then. You're thinking of my ambiguous cable. Well, I couldn't help myself. The fellow denied that he was Harding, but he looked to me like a bad liar. And he wasn't the sort of person, either, whom you would like to call a liar to his face. So there was really nothing for it but to send a sort of impressionistic answer. Now—of course, this business alters things——"

"You mean—even if it was the man—he may have been killed?"

Henderson struck a match, and over the red, flickering flame he glanced at his companion's half averted face.

"I think it likely. This friend of yours looked like

being first out of the trenches and first underground—and not caring much anyhow——"

"He is not a friend of mine," Earnshaw interposed tonelessly.

The keen eyes dropped.

"No—so I judged."

The silence lengthened out between them. Earnshaw had not moved. He felt that the monster had got him by the shoulders and was dragging him down into depths where there was no light and yet an extraordinary visibility—where through suffocating blackness he perceived distinct shapes which were like shadows thrown by his own swiftly moving self. Only they were not shadows of his body, but of his mind. He saw Lillah there. She was not Lillah, but his thoughts of her—such as she might have been, had this feverish, disease-soaked land given her birth—fiercely living, eyes shrouded, mouth curved, her beauty a flame and yet marred and indistinct as though the impression of another's face had been stamped upon her own. He knew again that it was the impress of himself. He shrank from the vision—and could not leave it. He felt as though he contaminated her—as though he were death passing his corrupting fingers over her youth and purity. But never in his life had he desired her as he desired her now. He was in a fire that melted soul and mind and body into one force with one purpose. He desired her. And he wanted Harding dead. Hitherto the wish had been vague, almost impersonal. He had hated the man because of what he had done—because he had slimed her life with his crawling, pitiful cowardliness. He had wished him dead as one wishes the death of something harmful and evil. But now it was a personal need. He was aware, with an unreasoning, but absolute conviction, that Harding barred the way for him. He remembered Genifer's significant answer to him, and now her words were ominous and prophetic—their meaning, which had seemed so clear and simple, changed as he himself was changed "If he is dead it will all come right." And if he were not dead—— ?

He did not know whether or not it was his own voice that suddenly began to talk.

"I can't pretend to wish that he has escaped. He has done a lot of harm—nothing, of course, that one could charge against him—but enough to make a few people

glad if they knew he wouldn't trouble them again. I came out because of his wife. She's anxious—divorce doesn't satisfy women—he pretty well smashed her life. She'll be glad to be free——"

He had thought that what he was going to say was true. So long as it had remained unspoken it had been true. He knew now that it was a lie. He sat there silent, with the whirling blackness before his eyes.

"I'm sorry." It was Henderson's pleasantly lazy voice. "There's another illusion gone. Somehow I liked the fellow. And he's done fine work down there. You wouldn't get a handful of natives to stand up to an army like the Omanhin's unless there was a White Man to lead them—and not an ordinary sort of White Man either. Perhaps he's making good—working out his salvation—it happens out here sometimes——"

He broke off. His servant had come out on to the verandah and was handing Earnshaw something on a salver that shone white under the electric torch.

"A cable—for me?"

"Possibly. I told the office to send up your letters. Sam, hold the light for a minute."

The eye of the torch fixed itself intently on the black hand and the glittering salver with the thin, solitary envelope. It seemed to see nothing else.

Earnshaw unfolded the message. He held it in his hand for some time, staring at it. It was a long cable, Henderson judged. Earnshaw had time to read it over three or four times. Then he folded it up neatly and slipped it into his pocket. The light snapped and went out.

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope?"

Long afterwards, it seemed, he heard himself answer:

"Oh no—nothing—just a greeting——"

The sweat broke out all over his body. The foundations of his life—of his knowledge of himself—cracked and sundered. But he got up and his voice was quite steady—though rather dull and tired. "I think I'll turn in if you don't mind. It's been a strenuous day. I shall have to get on to things as soon as I can. I must find out for certain—I'd like to start for this—this place at once——"

"You'll find it precious hard to get any carriers." Henderson remarked. "If you do get any you can be sure they're rotters who'll desert as soon as you get to the

danger zone. Besides, you won't know how to manage them. You had much better wait for me and the Waffs."

Earnshaw drew himself up a little. The man he had believed himself to be answered tranquilly:

"Oh, I'm not afraid of a scrap. And I can manage men pretty well—I shall be all right. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Henderson smoked on for some time. It was curious that his thoughts were more of Earnshaw than of Harding, fighting his lone battle away down there in the swamps and jungle. He had a vague awareness of a nearer, more vital conflict.

"No, he's not afraid of a scrap," he meditated. "One knows that. But he's afraid of something. And what the devil is it?"

CHAPTER VI

I

THE water of the river ran sluggishly under the shadow of the giant mangoes. Here and there a pale light that seemed to have no source touched its shining, crawling body, and then it looked like a monstrous reptile that wound its way tortuously between the slimy banks and the bared, skeleton roots of the trees. Night was coming on, but here night and day were almost synonymous. There was an eternal dusk. In the daytime a dank mist hung from the dense, colourless foliage, and at night-time the mist shone phosphorescently, and eerie, unnatural fires crept out of their rotting bodies and danced over the oily surface of the river. Now that the shouting and firing had died away, the natural silence returned like a hunted beast to its lair. It was an awful silence. The soft, mysterious movements of hidden life—the little rustlings and whisperings among the grass which haunt the deepest jungle were here unknown. Even the river made no sound. The branches of the trees hung lifeless. The roots sprawled out like the tentacles of a horrible, static life, and twisted themselves about dead things whose bodies lay hidden and discoloured in the oozing mud. It was the place of death. The stench of a perpetual dissolution poisoned the windless air.

The last beat of a tom-tom throbbed in the far distance. Harding lifted himself from his place in the long grass. He whistled softly and at once an alien movement rippled along the river-bank. From the right and left armed men streamed noiselessly towards him and gathered at his back in a rough order. He whistled again, and in answer shadows sprang from the dusk of the trees, spread themselves out, and at a last, low, penetrating signal dropped silently out of sight.

Harding turned and led the way back to the village.

The narrow forest track was strewn with the litter of a recent struggle. A black shape, covered to the chin by an enemy shield, crouched at the root of a tree, its pose so alert and threatening that it seemed to live. Harding touched it with the muzzle of his gun and it rolled over stiffly, blocking the path.

"Bury!" he ordered.

Two men stepped out of the single file, but the rest continued at Harding's heel. Beyond an occasional grunt of pain they made no sound. The beating of drums and frenzied shouting with which they had gone out to battle two days since had given place to a sullen, patient silence. Most of them bore jagged wounds on which the blood had already clotted and their limbs were stiff with the dank cold.

Kwayo hung close to Harding's side. He had received a charge of gunshot in the thigh and moved with evident pain, yet he seemed younger. He carried himself well, proudly and confidently.

"Good fight, Mbuiri!" he muttered. "Good fight! Omanhin plenty men, plenty guns, but him no beat White Man. We hold him river. Time other White Men come we make end for him. Other White Men come leff small."

He said it with a child-like assurance, a triumphant little smile breaking the deep lines of his old face, and for a moment Harding found no answer.

"You so sure White Men come?" he asked at last.

"Yes. Mars Saunders say 'White Man come,' and me no believe. But the Mbuiri come, and me know White Man speak for truth all time."

Harding smiled grimly to himself. So Saunders had sown his little handful of grain on this rough soil and it had prospered well, and the tree had grown staunch and straight, weathering the worst storm. Could it weather much more? For how much longer, in the face of loss and deadly peril, would these dark children hold to their faith? "White Man lib for truth all time." He had told them help was coming. He had sent messenger after messenger to the coast. That was a month ago. For month they had stemmed the Omanhin's rush. By dint of a rough strategy and a careful portioning out of their forces they had held the river crossing. But they had lost many men and they had no reserves. To-night when they had been almost overwhelmed, a strange thing had

happened. Harding had seen his men waver. He had seen the first shadow of doubt in Kwayo's eyes. And then on the very brink of victory the Omanhin had drummed a retreat. There had been something sinister in that sudden silence—in that inexplicable ebb of a tide in full flood. It had choked the exultant shouts of his own men. And for hours he had not moved, but had waited with straining senses for the crisis which prepared itself somewhere out there in the gathering darkness.

But the Omanhin's men had not returned. The noise of their war-drums had grown fainter. The exhausted, shivering Kwayo had lifted his head with a growing triumph. All along their thin line of defence there had passed an electric thrill of revived faith, of a fanatic exultation. The White Man's spirit had conquered. They had become invincible because he fought among them. He was Mbuiri, the greatest of all spirits.

He had lived too long among them not to feel the influence of that belief. Their world, in which every tree, every stone, and every living thing was imbued with a supernatural power for good or evil, where nothing dies, had become his world. Their trust awoke an echo in his own heart, and the old sturdy faith in his own destiny was reinforced by something splendid and simple which they had given him. He believed in their spirits. He believed in those men in the deep Cornish trenches looking seawards—in that great army stretching from forgotten centuries to this hour and to this place. Above him, on the shining heights, were Saunders and a legion of nameless shadows who fought for him and who at last numbered him among themselves.

"Yes," he said softly, "a great fight, Kwayo! a great fight!"

He walked with a new vigour. But the elation of this inner victory did not blind him to the situation which he and these people faced together. Once already disaster had crouched for the last spring. Something had thwarted it, had changed its course, but that it was returning silently and treacherously to the attack he did not doubt. The Omanhin's withdrawal could only have been a feint. It might be that he had found a new ford across the river, already sinking from its rain-swollen strength—or, under cover of the fighting, had constructed a bridge higher up, where their weakness prevented a defence. There were

a dozen pos^ibilities. They could at best only prepare themselves for one.

Kwayo, as though in answer to his thoughts, touched him on the arm.

" Me send son into Omanhin's country," he said. " Him smart man. To-night Mbuiri savvy for what Omanhin no live for fight. Then Mbuiri make him ready and kill Omanhin and all him people."

Harding nodded. This old man's risk of his only son stirred him as nothing else had done. He could not fail so absolute a faith. It was not enough that he had done his best. Somehow the impossible, stupendous victory had to be won. He looked back over his shoulder at the line of dark, silent figures following him through the mist. He knew that they would go to their death, credulously without question, because he was a White Man and they trusted White Men. And again it seemed to him that he stood there for more than himself.

" Yes, Kwayo," he said with a sudden gaiety, " that's all right. We kill Omanhin and him people live for run, eh ? "

And Kwayo laughed back in his simple way.

" Ah, they lib for run very hard, Mbuiri," he said slyly.

But in Harding's mind was the bitter, reiterated thought: " Why don't they send help ? Why are they always too late ? Why is it that those who trust them most suffer most ? "

His own death was possible—credible. He envisaged it with a kind of exalted tranquillity. Death was, after all, the consummation which he had striven to attain in just this way. Then he could go back to his own country. He could lay claim to the secret guardianship of her windy cliffs—and to the memory of that last night. He could take his place in Lillah's life. He knew dimly that then she would belong to him as she could never belong to any other man.

All this was more real and certain to him than life. But to fail these people—to shatter the idol which for his sake they had made of his whole race—that, and not victory, was the impossible, incredible thing.

And, even as that knowledge rusned over him, Kwayo caught his arm.

" See ! " he cried. " See, Mbuiri—flag wave—the signal—at last White Man come ! "

Harding halted a moment, the exultant cry dying on his lips. They were on the outskirts of the village and through the misty dusk he saw the white strip which was to herald relief. It fluttered limply from the roof of Kwayo's palace. But all was still. No fires—no beating of drum—an apathetic, sullen quiet.

An old man limped towards them. He paid no heed to Harding's shouts until he was quite close and then he peered up into his face with a dull wistfulness that was more a question than an answer.

"Yes—White Man here," he said. "But White Man come him one—no bring help for Mbuiri and him people." He half turned and pointed back with a quivering hand. "Him lib in Mbuiri's place—two day he lib there, and ask for Mbuiri."

But already Harding had thrust him on one side.

II

Earnshaw had been lying stretched out on the matting before the brazier, asleep. He awoke instantly as Harding entered and started up, and the two men met with the red glow on their faces. They were both quite silent for a moment, and Kwayo, who limped at Harding's heel, gazed wonderingly from one to the other. He did not speak, however, but crouched away into the shadow and watched them. To him it was as though two gods had met—two big, white gods, who, perhaps, hated each other.

Whatever shock Harding had sustained, he gave no sign. Earnshaw's personality and his own were sunk in the bigger issue. He half held out his hand and then, not waiting, let it drop.

"Do you come alone?" he asked.

"Yes—except for a few carriers."

"Then have you a message?"

"If I reached here at all I was to tell you that they were sending a regiment as fast as they could be entrained. They did not suppose that it could be managed under a fortnight. It's a long march from Takwa—I know that now."

Harding laughed under his breath.

"A fortnight!" he said. "Good God—a fortnight more——!"

"Are you so hard pressed?" Earnshaw asked.

Harding regarded him curiously, then threw an ironic glance over himself. There was mud and slime and blood on his bare arms and knees.

"I don't suggest a picnic, do I? You've been here two days. Didn't anything strike you? There are only women and old men in the village, and they've been digging trenches. The young men are divided into two parties, and we take it turn and turn about holding the river. All our forces have been engaged in the last two days. Now we're come off for rations and Red Cross administrations. I'm the Red Cross. We'll have the whole lot in here soon."

He crouched down before the brazier with a little groan of weariness. "Quite like old times, eh? No, I didn't fight at Festubert, but I learnt a lot from the newspapers. I can build a trench with the best of 'em, and I know a wrinkle or two about strategy. Otherwise we couldn't have held out." He was smiling into the fire, not bitterly, but rather humorously. There was a kind of light-heartedness about him—something free and confident that stung Earnshaw's dull hatred to a flaming anger. He said nothing, and presently Harding looked up at him. Their eyes met like wrestlers in the first clinch—steadfast, watchful, ruthless. "You didn't come here by chance, I suppose?" Harding asked.

"No, I came here to find you."

"How did you know about me?"

"A man called Edwards—I think he was D.C. for this district—found some of your things in the bush. A man's body was there too—a skeleton—and he conceived it his duty to give us the evidence for what it was worth."

"Us——?"

Earnshaw's twisted mouth was ugly now.

"Your—Mrs. Harding, then."

"I see. You thought I was dead?"

"Yes—we thought so."

"My wife, too?"

"She was not quite convinced. That's why I am here. She wanted the assurance——"

"—— The assurance that I was alive?"

Earnshaw let a breath pass.

"No——"

"—— That I was dead then?" He locked his lean, powerful hands about his knees whilst he stared into the

fire; Earnshaw saw that the lids and rims of his eyes were inflamed with sleeplessness. "What you want to say is that she would have been glad if that skeleton had been mine, eh?"

"I think—yes, I think she would have been glad." He paused again, and the scars of his face stood out a deadly white. "I don't mean that she would have wished it—only—it sounds brutal—it would have been a cleaner end—it would have been easier to forget—women are like that."

"You are going to marry her—when she is free?"

"Yes——"

"Even—if I am alive?"

The red, exhausted eyes were raised again. Earnshaw met them cruelly.

"Yes."

There was a long silence. Kwayo, watching from the shadow, wondered at them. He had not understood all that they said. They were so quiet, these two—so deadly quiet. He thought of two beasts of the forest, crouching for the attack.

Harding smiled faintly.

"Why should you grudge me my life?" he asked gently. "You love her so much. You would easily wipe me out of her recollection. I'm not a stumbling-block to your happiness. She can divorce me. I gave her the right——"

"You gave her the right!" Earnshaw mocked. "That's a little euphemistic, isn't it?" Suddenly a thought passed over his face—a searing, angry light. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded brutally. "You went away with that girl because you wanted to. Lillah was never anything to you——"

He thought he saw a flicker in the red eyes.

"I have only said that she has the right."

"You mean more than that. But I don't believe it. It savours too much of heroics—and you were never heroic, Harding." He saw the torn and bloody hands and faltered. But his hatred and fear were overmastering. "You must admit that this is a new rôle," he added cuttingly.

Harding sighed a little and stretched his shoulders.

"We won't discuss that," he said. "It's hardly worth while now. You'll excuse me, won't you? There's a friend of mine here with a fistful of shot in his thigh,

waiting for the doctor without a groan. If you want to see some 'heroics' you can see it now."

Earnshaw did not answer. He would have been glad not to have had to watch, but there was something magnetic about the big, uncouth figure that moved so quietly and decidedly among the ruddy shadows. It was the old Harding for all the tattered clothes and disguising beard—resolute and self-assured and ruthless. He worked like a man who never doubts himself—who rejoices in his work. As he washed his hands in a basin of disinfectant he talked to the old chief huddled in the shadow and the dark, wrinkled face smiled confidently back at him. Even under the torturing, probing, and washing of the wounded thigh the native retained that look of childlike confidence. And when it was done he sat up with a little nod of satisfaction at the swathe of bandages.

"Great Ju-ju!" he commented contentedly. "Great Ju-ju. Him smart, but him make well. Him greater than Fetish Man Ju-ju!"

And Harding laughed.

"Oh, I've got bigger devils than that, Kwayo! But that'll do for you to-night. You fight like ten men to-morrow—you'll have to," he added to himself.

Thereafter he worked with a rising fever of energy and purpose. It seemed to Earnshaw, crouched by the brazier, that the low, ill-lit hovel became a place of fantastic dreams in which dark, strange figures came and went ceaselessly. He saw their faces, the flash of their eyes, and their white teeth and their ugly wounds. He heard their soft chatter and the steady answer. And over them all Harding dominated. The supple, capable hands that tortured them now had moulded their faith. He had led them in battle and governed them in peace. Because he had led them bravely and governed justly their glances sought the strange White Man who watched them from the fire-light with a friendly awe.

Earnshaw knew this—knew it by the instinctive knowledge of men by which in his time he, too, had led and governed. But the admiration, the sense of comradeship which smouldered in him was more terrible, more intolerable than hatred.

The last man had been bandaged and sent back to his quarters. Harding had given his final order. Wounded and unwounded alike were to meet at day-break and relieve

the rest of the tribe which to-night held guard over the river-crossing. For the present they must take what rest they could. Harding drew the curtain back from the doorway and stood looking out into the dank mist which rolled through the reflection from the brazier like a red ghost. It was quite still, and yet he was listening, his head lifted in sharp attention.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

Earnshaw had started involuntarily.

"Yes—it sounded like a gun—some way off——"

"Not so far either. There's another. Closer this time. Now the drums—they've heard. It's as I thought. The Omanhin's crossed higher up—he's outflanked us." He ran back into the hut and snatched up his rifle. Earnshaw had risen to his feet. He had wished Harding dead with a savage's simplicity. It seemed that he had invoked death itself.

"Give me something to fight with," he demanded. "I've nothing here—only a revolver."

Harding turned on him with a shrug.

"You shall have a guide instead," he said coolly. "There are a dozen paths the natives know of, and in the night you may get through." His tone hardened. "Out of this, Earnshaw! You've got a chance still——"

"Do you think I'm given to running away?" was the furious answer.

Harding approached him suddenly. There was a menace in the inflamed eyes, in the grip of his hand on Earnshaw's shoulder.

"You're not wanted here," he said. "One man more or less won't save us. This is my fight. Do you understand? You've had yours—now it's my turn. I'm master here——" The sound of drums and delirious voices was gathering like a storm. "Tell her I'm dead," Harding added hurriedly. "It'll be true. Tell her how it was—she may be glad. Now—for God's sake——"

Earnshaw held his ground sullenly.

"I can't—I tell you—I can't——"

"You shall. She's had enough to bear. You say she loves you—well—save yourself for her—go, I tell you——"

He half dragged his companion to the door. But there he stopped, standing between Earnshaw and the shadows that had leapt out of darkness into the red firelight. "Kwayo!" he exclaimed imperatively, "Kwayo!"

For the old chief, leaning on the shoulders of a native boy, stood in the open doorway and laughed. There was a friendly malice in his laughter, as though he had stumbled upon some secret which Harding had hidden from him. But behind his laughter again was a fanatic's fear and awe.

"Omanhin him come no more to Kese-Fo," he said. "Mbuiri, great chief him savvy Omanhin come no more. Him laugh to-night in him heart time Omanhin people lib for run. For him savvy why." He pointed to his companion with an exultant finger. "My son him savvy too. Him go creep into Omanhin's country. Him find dead body—and more dead body. Him come leff small Omanhin palace and hear Omanhin cry loud him son lib for die." Suddenly he swung round, lifting his arms above his head to the shouting, frenzied crowd that whirled hither and thither in the darkness. "Omanhin come no more. Mbuiri send him devil. For him great chief—him big in fight—him big Fetish Man—and what him say is true——" He broke off, faltering and stammering with the intoxication of a religious passion. Harding stretched out his hand and the old man caught it and grew still. It was as though an excited child had felt a familiar, quieting touch. "Mbuiri, that not all. White Man party small far. Him send runner to make camp place and chop ready. Him lib for travel all night and come before sunrise."

"That's good, Kwayo. Time they arrive bring them to me—or"— he hesitated a moment—"if I am not here, then my friend Mars Earnshaw take my place. Him great White Man, Kwayo. You do for him what you do for me, eh?"

The old chief shot the stranger a quick, searching glance, "Yes, Mbuiri."

"Meantime, go tell your people who keep the river that White Man come and Omanhin beaten. Be prepared all time. And let no one touch dead body. For him devil who lib for hurt."

The old man nodded eager understanding. He went tottering out, and the yelling crowd, armed now with torches whose streaming flames danced frenziedly through the misty darkness, closed about him and bore him with them like a wisp of straw on a broad, impetuous river.

Harding drew the hanging back over the doorway. Therewith he seemed deliberately to shut himself off from their rejoicing—to narrow his world down to the low,

dimly lit hut and this one man. Yet of Earnshaw's presence he showed no consciousness. He stood for a moment or two with his head bent as though listening to the receding clamour, then began to move about quietly, but expeditiously, gathering together odd things which he packed into an old knapsack. There were tin boxes and half-filled bottles. Their tinkle played softly on the deepening silence.

Earnshaw watched him—at first fascinated, then with a gathering anger. It was such an anti-climax, grotesque and ludicrous. This man, with his big words and heroic pose, ordering his bottles like some chemist's traveller, was a jibe at Earnshaw's own hatred of him. He had wished him dead—and for a moment the wish had seemed a strong weapon in his hand—an influence guiding destiny. Now it was just hysterical and futile. He looked down at the revolver which he still held and laughed ironically.

"So neither of us is going to die after all!" he said.

Harding started as though at an unexpected voice.

"Oh no—you'll be all right now," he said absently.

"Apparently you are the saving wonder-worker," Earnshaw went on in a passion of ridicule. "May I ask what form your supernatural intervention has taken?"

"Small-pox." He went on working, and there was no shadow of responding anger in his tone. "It's a scourge in these parts," he explained deliberately. "The natives don't look upon it—or anything, for that matter—as a disease. It's the work of a native spirit, and usually a punishment. I got it in hand once before, and so the poor devils imagine I corked it up in one of my bottles and that now I've conveniently let it loose on the Omanhin. I expect the Omanhin thinks so too, and that's why he's bolted. I'm too big Ju-ju for him." He laughed a little. "Superstition has its value, when you're one against a hundred."

Earnshaw crouched down again by the brazier. There was a dank chill in the air which shook him, body and soul, and, as though Harding had felt the irrepressible shudder that passed over him, he glanced round. "I'll leave you some quinine," he said, "though I dare say you're wise enough to have plenty of your own. You can't afford to take risks."

Earnshaw held his silence sullenly for a moment.

"Why—where are you going—what are you going to do?" he burst out.

Harding fastened up the knapsack and weighed it thoughtfully in one hand.

"If I had really been a big Ju-ju," he said, "I should have chosen something more amenable than small-pox to do my work for me. It's a treacherous brute. These people think I can rope it in when it's done with the Omanhin. But I'm modest about myself. I know I've got to begin the roping in now, or it'll be too strong for me."

"What can you do?" Earnshaw flung back. "You're not a god, by any chance, are you?"

Harding looked at him, a smile that was whimsical and faintly wistful, softening the straight line of his mouth.

"No—I'm not a god—merely a quack with an unpatented specific for small-pox which is perhaps better than nothing. Of course I don't expect you to believe that. You naturally don't think much of my discoveries. I made a bad break before, didn't I?"

Earnshaw set his teeth. He watched Harding strap the knapsack over his shoulders. He told himself that, after all, this was destiny following the dictates of his will. Yet he could not altogether keep silence.

"Where are you going?" he persisted.

"To the Omanhin, to offer him my services."

"You'll be killed first."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Do you want to be killed?"

Harding swung round on him.

"You want me to be killed," he said incisively, "don't you?"

Earnshaw was on his feet. Suddenly both men had thrown off the disguise of a cool, half insolent toleration. They were stripped for the final contest, waiting their moment, seeking each other's weakness. But it was Harding who had struck first. Under the straight blow Earnshaw faltered and shifted his ground.

"I see no purpose in your going," he stammered. "There are other ways of committing suicide, if that's what you want."

"I don't want it. I've got to do what I can. I shall fail, no doubt, and they'll know the Omanhin's Ju-ju was

too strong for me after all. But I shan't have run away—and they'll remember that. It'll make the next man's task easier—your task——"

"Mine——?"

"You've got to take my place—keep things going till help comes. It's only a matter of hours now. I'll tell them you're a bigger man than I am. You'll manage——" He paused. His eyes sought Earnshaw's, and they had ceased to be antagonistic. "Look here, I wanted you to clear out a while back. Forget that, will you? Partly I was thinking of your safety—but also—well, I was rather beside myself. I wanted the honour—to myself. I'd lived for it. I love my wife—it may be hard for you to believe, and I want you to forget that too—but it explains a little why you were the last man with whom I would have chosen to share my—my chance. It's pitiable—perhaps it's human. I don't know whether, even now, you can understand——"

Earnshaw caught his breath.

"Oh, I understand—don't worry—it's all right——"

"Yes, it's all right now. After all, I know the stuff you're made of. I would have chosen you—in the end—to carry on——" He turned, hitching his pack higher on his shoulders. He seemed to be struggling for words—"Well, good luck!" he said lightly. "My love to—to Cornwall—and all that——"

He had reached the door, and still Earnshaw had not moved. But within him was the tumult of a returning consciousness. He had been drowning—and something had fanned the life in him—something familiar—a sound, an echo, in the dying brain. He was fighting his way up from great depths. He felt the merciful wind on his face and tore himself from the force that was dragging him back to the final plunge.

In the depths whence he had come he had dreamed an appalling dream.

"Wait—wait—Harding——"

The other turned.

"What is it, man?"

"You can't go!" His first call had been a gasp from pent-up, bursting lungs, and now he spoke with a gathering force and clearness. "You can't go, Harding. There's no need. I do understand. You're trying to justify—to right yourself—to chuck away your life—as other fellows

did once—to make up for failing—but there's no need. You've done what you meant to do——"

He saw the cool, answering shake of the head.

"No, I haven't. That's just it. I couldn't once, because I thought I hadn't the right. I wasn't free. I'm free now."

"You can't go," Earnshaw reiterated dully.

"Why not? What is there to prevent me——?"

He had come back. It seemed to Earnshaw that he saw nothing but those inflamed, demanding eyes burning into his. He did not know whether it was a second or an eternity that elapsed before he answered.

"This."

He held out a crumpled strip of paper. He watched Harding as he held it to the brazier light. He was calm now—floating on the surface—at peace. A weariness that was like the exhaustion that follows on great physical pain numbed him. His mind detached itself from the present, which seemed to slip away into a misty unreality. Harding was only a shadow. But quite clearly he saw Genifer waving gaily to him from the bend of the road. He saw now that she was crying. He wondered if it was for this.

"Why didn't you give me this before?"

Earnshaw smiled faintly.

"Surely you can understand?"

"Then why did you give it to me now? Why didn't you let me go?"

Earnshaw shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't quite know. Something happened—I don't understand myself—but there it is. You can do what you like I'm outside the pale."

They looked at each other intently, searchingly.

"You've had a bad time," Harding said; "but you played up in the end."

Earnshaw glanced down at the outstretched hand.

"I've done everything I could against you, Harding. I tried to get Lillah from you——"

"Well perhaps that's to the good. For you can go back to her. You can make her happy——"

"It's you who are going back."

"No, I'm going to the Omanhin."

It was like the fall of a lash on Earnshaw's apathy.

"Are you obsessed, Harding? Haven't you under-

stood? It's not only that you've done this big—this enormous thing—there's Lillah herself. I didn't get her from you. I couldn't have done. It was just her hurt pride that made her turn to me. I'm nothing. It's you that matter. Do you think, if she'd loved me, that I should have cared whether you lived or died?"

It was all said now—everything. The sweat of a relaxing fever broke out over his whole body. He saw the agony in Harding's eyes and his own enmity was dead. It had burnt itself out. The ashes of it tasted foul and bitter.

"You say so—you feel you've got to—you know she'd want you to. Anyhow, it doesn't matter—it makes no difference. I wasn't going because I was desperate—or because I'd failed—but because I'm free—to do what I wanted to do then——"

He turned back to the door. Earnshaw set himself in his way.

"If you do then you don't care for her—you're only thinking of yourself—you don't love her—you lied when you said you did."

He flinched before the ferocity which suddenly blazed up in the other's face.

"What do you know of loving, Earnshaw? You think you love Lillah, but you're all flare and smoke; there's no heart to you—no furnace—a lot of dry sticks flaming in the wind! You don't even know who she is. She's beautiful. That's all you ever saw—all you knew. You don't understand what I did to her. You call it hurt pride. My God, man, if it was only that! But I—I got what I wanted—and then—then I spat in her face—on her love for me—it was her love I struck at—and killed. You're not consciously lying to me. You're only a blind fool—a romantic boy, playing with big things he doesn't understand."

He tried to thrust Earnshaw on one side. They closed. For a long minute their strength was equal. They might have been bronze statues cast in one mould, they were so still—so silent. But in that desperate encounter their antagonism passed wholly and for ever. They fought each other, eye to eye, body against body, pity against pity. Their hold upon one another became almost an embrace, as though suddenly virtue had recognised herself in both of them.

But now Earnshaw was the stronger man. He forced

his opponent back. He was fighting, not to kill, but to save—for his own redemption, as a man fights who has been branded coward.

"Harding—listen to reason, man—for pity's sake——!"

With a smothered gasp Harding tore himself free. But he did not come back to the attack. He stood panting by the brazier, his red, congested eyes fixed upon Earnshaw with a look of bitter amusement.

"You've got back your muscle all right," he said thickly. "You've beaten me—in a way. But you can't stop me. You won't try to. You've a sense of fitness—you know I've got to go—and that all this is hysterical fooling——"

Earnshaw held his ground.

"Perhaps—perhaps I do know you've got to go. I only ask you to show some reason. A white party is on the way—they may be here any moment, that native fellow said before sunrise. Wait for them. Give things over into their hands. You've no right to clear out until you know what you're leaving behind you. Personally I refuse to take on the responsibility."

"What! Are *you* playing the coward?"

"You can put it that way if you like. I deserve something of that sort from you. In any case—I *do* refuse. Or, rather, I make it a condition of acceptance that you wait here till they come. Then go if you must——"

Harding smiled ironically.

"Thank you." He stretched out his right arm and rubbed it where Earnshaw's grip had held him. "Well, you've earned a sort of right to consideration. I suppose I'd have to shoot you—and, somehow or other, that idea doesn't appeal to me. You've suggested a compromise, and I accept it. I'll wait."

Earnshaw made him a little formal bow.

"That is all I ask," he said

III

They did not speak to each other again. They scarcely moved, but held their positions on either side of the brazier and waited. As the night wore on the tension between them became almost physical, as though they still grappled with one another. And now it was Earnshaw who lost ground. Once Harding looked up at him and smiled.

There was an odd, whimsical triumph in that smile. It was as though a man who had yielded to the puny tantrums of a child was now slowly putting forth his strength.

And time was going. Earnshaw had bargained for time. He had believed in it. He had believed in its efficacy. He had believed that, given time, love and life and fame would have been too strong for Harding. But there was a confidence and conviction in that big, uncouth figure, an impregnable dignity of purpose that daunted him. He began to weaken, and what was stranger still, he began to be ashamed. He felt contemptible. In a subtle way he had tried to tempt this man. He had offered him the world in exchange for his soul. And he had failed. He had wanted to redeem himself at the price of another's salvation. It was as though the evil that he had fostered within himself had grown to a monstrous power that had let him escape its claws for the joy of dragging him back into its slime.

The sweat of self-disgust and despair broke out of him. Again he met Harding's eyes, and now it seemed that in their red, exhausted depths there was pity. He tried to speak but could not. He knew that it was useless. He would have said "Go—I was wrong to stop you." But that, too, was beyond his power. Something bigger than his own will was gathering up the threads of destiny.

It drew towards morning. A dim, spectral clarity crept between the half-drawn hangings of the door, and mingled palely with the firelight. Sounds began to awake out of the stillness—a soft, distant thudding like the pulse of the returning day, foot-falls, and the hum of voices. They came nearer. The two men standing on either side of the brazier glanced up at each other. In the sinking glow their faces looked wan and fallow, as though, with the fire, life had burnt itself out. Earnshaw's lips moved. He wanted to say "Forgive me," but that was too pitiable. And in that moment of bitterest humiliation—suddenly—their hands met.

The voices were quite close now. There was an English voice—imperturbable and cool and cheerful. And, even as they turned to meet it, the hangings were pulled aside and an English figure loomed up in the open doorway. For a moment the stranger paused, blinking, as though the red glow blinded him. He held his topee under one arm and mopped the wet mist from his face.

"Harding, by any chance?"

"Yes—I'm Harding."

"Good. I thought I recognised you. But you're changed a bit. Do I need to introduce myself—or do you remember me?"

"Jeffries, isn't it?"

"Right—first shot. Jeffries, Advance Guard, and Cook's Guide all rolled into one. Well, I must say I'm glad you're alive, for I thought I'd undertaken the maddest, silliest job of my young life." He stood aside, with a little enigmatic smile on his sallow face. "You see—I've brought your wife, Harding," he said.

IV

Jeffries had slipped quietly out again into the twilight.

It was Earnshaw who broke the long silence. He made a fumbling, groping movement towards her, like that of a man who has been dragged back from calamity and is still dazed and drunken with the vision.

"I told him," he said thickly, "I told him, Lillah. You didn't trust me, but I did tell him—in the end——"

That was all he could think of—that she was there, because she knew the man he was, that it might easily have been too late for all of them, but that at the very end he had saved himself.

She turned vaguely in his direction.

"I don't understand, Keith, what you mean——"

"Carrington's cable—I got it at Sekondi—here——" He picked up the scrap of paper from the floor where Harding had let it fall and gave it to her. "Surely you knew——"

Harding, still standing by the brazier, had given no sign. His upright body threw an immense black shadow on the opposite wall. She lifted her tired eyes to him, and it seemed to Earnshaw as though in that motionless, wordless encounter they laid hold of one another, and all that there had ever been between them of sorrow or misunderstanding was forgotten—blotted out. There was something splendid and elemental in that greeting—a mating of wind and sea.

"No, I didn't know," she said at last in her clear voice, "I didn't know, Peter. It wasn't for that I came. I

came because I knew that, after all, that night was the truth. And if you were living I meant to find you—and if you were dead I prayed and prayed that I might die too." She held out her hand to him. "Peter—I have come so far to find you."

They came together then—quietly, as though held in awe by the power that possessed them. They clung to one another in a deepening silence.

Earnshaw knew that they had forgotten him. He stood outside their lives. His own passion was like a burning cloak which he had torn from him and stamped underfoot to a grey and formless thing. But he could not have gone away and left them. Dimly he knew that this, too, was a part of his own salvation.

At last he saw her lift her face to Harding's. The wan care and weariness that had veiled her had been brushed away. On the Cornish cliffs in the gay west wind he had seen her as she was now—radiantly, splendidly living.

But it was as though he had seen Harding for the first time.

"This is the end of all our journeyings, Peter——"

"The beginning—the beginning!" he answered with a subdued exultancy.

"But there'll be no more parting between us——"

"One more."

"One more?—You won't leave me again?"

"Quite soon—now——"

"Is it for long?"

"It may be."

"You will come back, Peter?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know. An epidemic has broken out among the people we are fighting. I've got to do what I can——"

"Then you will take me with you?"

He made his first gesture—a movement of quiet protest.

"You can't go where I am going——"

"We began as partners," she interrupted steadily. "We have become lovers, but we shall be partners right to the end. I am going with you, Peter. I am strong and capable. I should not hinder you. We are not afraid of dying, either of us. I shall know when and how to die—I've borne the heat and burden of the day with you, Peter. You can't cheat me of my share in the glory."

She smiled faintly. "How should I face Cornwall again without you?"

They looked at each other unflinchingly. There was no other explanation—no other protest—no outcry. It came to Earnshaw suddenly that this final, crowning sacrifice had been made long since—that they had known of it and waited for it, and now that it had come they met it gladly and proudly. It was the seal set on their birthright—on that bond of fraternity which bound them to their race and to each other. They, too, were to fight and bleed at last in their own bodies.

They kissed each other, and her hands slipped from his shoulders.

"We must go, Peter——"

"There is nothing to prevent us now," he answered. "We've earned our freedom—the right to go——"

Earnshaw watched them incredulously. They had become unreal to him—two mythical figures of a dawning era, of a new world and a new race and a new law. His love for Lillah seemed a childish dream that was fading fast in the broad, clear daylight. He was conscious of an immense pride in her and in all women and in all his people. He would not—even if he could—have held her back.

But at the door they themselves stopped. For Kwayo barred their way. His frenzied exultation had died down. He looked at Harding and his companion with awe and fear.

"Omanhin him come again to Kese-Fo," he said brokenly. "Him bring message and greeting to Mbuiri. Him say 'Mbuiri, come, save my people. You great Fetish Man. Me no fit for fight against you more. Bring peace to us, Mbuiri.'"

Harding lifted his head.

"Tell the Omanhin that Mbuiri was coming to him. Tell him Mbuiri and his consort Nzambi come now to him to bring peace and healing to his people."

He looked back at Earnshaw with a boyish laugh of triumph. "That's a win for us, Earnshaw. Those Waffs will have a fine picnic. A clean win out!"

"For you!"

"For us!" Harding answered.

They regarded each other loyally and with that recognition of a common purpose, of an issue vaster than

their individual lives; the last barrier between them was broken down.

"You'll keep things going—you and Jeffries?"

"Yes, we'll manage; don't you worry about that—we'll carry on."

He had not looked at Lillah. She came to him. He felt, rather than saw, the outstretched hand. For the vision of all that he had nearly lost blinded him.

"So perhaps we shall come back after all!"

"Yes—you will come back now." Her hand clasped his. He tried to free himself, but her hold was firm and strong. "Lillah," he muttered. "Lillah—I nearly didn't tell him—I nearly let him go——"

"But you did tell him. That's what matters." She paused and then added quickly: "And Genifer sent a message. You were to remember your bargain—something queer that I didn't understand about tiger-skins and camp-fires."

He smiled.

"I understand. And I have never really forgotten."

He watched them till they had vanished into the pale mists of the morning. Then he went back and drew Harding's wooden stool up to the brazier. He was tired and cold and a little drowsy. As he sat there he thought he felt Genifer's hands on his face and her quick warm kiss.

"That's to take with you. And of nights—when you're feeling a bit tired and down you'll say to yourself—'Well, I've got a good pal over there, anyhow.' And perhaps, at the same moment, I shall be imagining what you are doing, and thinking of all the good times I shall have when *my* good pal comes home——

"If ever you want to—come back!"

He held his hands over the glowing fire, thinking of her.

FINIS

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